

TOGETHER

TRUE WAY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ENGLISH CONGREGATION

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What is intergenerational trust, how do you build it?

by Lee Chung Horn

May 1984. San Francisco. I had come to the U.S. city's Golden Gate Park, on my own.

I'd just finished medical school. I was a young adult. I was exploring the U.S. My world was expanding.

I had, of course, read all about flower power, and this was why I was here. In the park, a little way in, I found a crowd of young people. Some of the young men had long hair. Some of the young women were dancing. The heady music made my heart beat faster. I knew about the youth counterculture of the late 1960s, and how it criticized consumerism, rejected the American Dream, yearned for individualism, and worked for world peace.

I think I knew the young people dancing in San Francisco that day weren't the original hippies whose power gathered force as the Vietnam War escalated. It's possible the crowd there hadn't even heard of Timothy Leary's "Turn on, tune in, drop out." They were in the park for a human experience: meet friends, hear the bands, dance, get stoned, make out.

Though I'd never taken part in protests, I was a rebel in



In the late 60s, San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district became a hotspot for tens of thousands of youths. The Summer of Love became a prominent movement. It repudiated the establishment, in the process, influencing many future generations. Photo by Lee Chung Horn

university, a sympathizer watching on the sidelines. I knew all the issues because I'd read all the news and arguments.

It impressed me that what the establishment calls callowness or rebellion may be called other things, too. Like curiosity, or hope.

That afternoon, the sight of a young congregation at Golden Gate made me see again that generations are, well, different from each other. There are going to be rifts, some of them deep.

I remember wondering why nobody I knew in Singapore, my family, my teachers, or my

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church seemed to care about the U.S.-Vietnam War, or poverty, or corporate greed.

Writing this piece now, I find myself thinking: I wasn't ever a part of the U.S. counterculture, any association I had with it was emotion, and laughably remote. Why did the ideals of America's disillusioned youth move me so powerfully?

Simplistically I could tell myself, and I wouldn't be wrong: this is the experience of youth, the experience that acknowledges the importance of rites of passage, and the strong belief that the world could get better, must get better. Young people are like paper. Not too much yet has been written on their lives. They are enormously affected by the world they live in. They aren't sure yet who they are, and they want to be formed.

Talking about your generation

Last July, when some 75 True Wayans were invited to join visionary groups to discuss the state of the church, we asked them a series of questions about generations, and intergenerational trust.

At its simplest, intergenerational trust is the confidence that one generation has in another generation. If the group you're considering has many generations, church, for example, has many generations, it's the confidence and belief that one generation has in the other generations.

We gave the participants a set of articles to read before they came. One of the



On San Francisco's Powell Street, a self-styled preacher shares an unorthodox message about sex. The first cases of what would later become known as AIDS were reported in the U.S. in 1981. In the summer of 1984, when this photo was taken, scientists, doctors and the church were still trying to understand what it was all about. Photo by Lee Chung Horn

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articles addressed religious affiliation in Singapore. A 2020 national census had shown that the number of Singaporeans reporting that they had no religion had gone up. When age groups were compared, the highest jump of 6.1% was found in people aged 25 to 34, of whom more than 1 in 4 said they had no religion.

The number of Christians fell in university graduates, diploma holders, and people with post-secondary education.

A few of our participants were alarmed by the report, and grew anxious when they heard our quick summary. They had not been aware of this trend before. But after a few moments, they realised very quickly that this was not only plausible, and consistent with their own perceptions.

Most congregations in Singapore are composed of four to five generations. We wanted to examine all our generations, how they thought and behaved, whether or not they had any insight into the idea of intergenerational trust, and, to what degree, they were willing to participate in solutions, if there were indeed solutions.

So we asked our participants—late Gen Zs, millennials, Gen Xs, boomers—these questions: Do you know people in church who are of a different generation? Take a look at people who are younger than you in the church. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? Now look at people who are older than you in the church. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses?

A group of women in their 60s and 70s reacted strongly. Yes, they chorused, of course, we know people of a different generation, but these relationships have been lost. Some of the women taught

Sunday school. They knew the children there, wiped their noses, dried their tears, sang songs with them. They loved them. But these kids have grown up, one cohort after another, and the affection did not survive.

Not kids anymore, the children who are now teens and young adults don't seem to care very much about their old teachers anymore. There are no smiles of acknowledgment, it's as if a relationship had never existed.

Their hurt in the air, you could cut it with a knife.

Of course, you might say the courageous aunties were overly sensitive. But what they have expressed so viscerally was their personal experience of a loss of intergenerational affection. Perhaps it wasn't cool for a 17 year-old to say hello to an older woman. The aunties, if they didn't know it at the meeting, will realise that their wounding leads on to

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other points of pain: when the children they taught take the reins of the church, if indeed they will, would the aunts entrust the church to them?

We asked about strengths and weaknesses. These were extremely sensitive questions but we felt they needed to be asked. Even if the answers were tenuous or vague, and better sooner than later.

Some participants didn't grasp what we were after. Simplistically, many participants said: young people are strong in their IT and tech skills. And the weakness of the older folks? Why, it's their inability to work a computer.

When we explained that the strengths we were interested in were qualities like faithfulness, humility, tenacity, being redeemed through adversity, and self-sacrifice, and that impatience, pride, unwillingness to receive criticism, a lack of resilience or resolve might be weaknesses, people sat back, nodded and took a few moments. But nobody was very keen to jump in. The questions were prickly, nobody was keen to sound like a moaner.

The truth is: everybody in church – teen, new mom, young adult, men in their 50s – has an opinion or two about people younger than they, and older.

The gap

All our parents in church and ministry leaders know the great responsibility of teaching the next generation. We know it's in the Bible.

But we also know it's no easy task, and the old ways don't work anymore.

The project leaders had many conversations when the groups ended. I had one with Koh Ee Wee.

Ee Wee is a new church deacon. He's in his 50s and I am 61. We both have young adult children. We work with young adults in church. We know the territory. We know the rueful wisdom that goes "young people don't listen, you could offer advice or words, but they will decide for themselves. The world has changed!"

We both know that statement is an unhappy complaint over a loss of intergenerational trust. The older person is saying: Young people don't listen because they don't trust that I know better. I'm upset and I worry that they'll just get into trouble, and I don't trust them now."

Ee Wee says: "Young people in Singapore grow up in circumstances that are vastly different from ours. We old folks are who we are because we grew up in post-war Singapore. All of us studied hard. It was important to us to find jobs quickly. We stayed in our jobs.

"We had to. We knew from the sacrifices our parents made that food doesn't appear by magic on the table. Somebody has to put it there, and that person might be us."

We shared our conversation with the other project leaders. There was agreement. Our young people

Young people don't listen, you could offer advice or words, but they will decide for themselves. The world has changed!



Like many countries, Singapore has young people who are different from their seniors. Political and church leaders need to understand what inspires young people in order not to lose them.

in church do not grow up the way we did. They grow up in greater comfort. They may be forced by their parents to go into tertiary education, but they don't, by and large, need to support their parents or siblings financially. This is not their reality. In our time, we took the bus, but mom was their chauffeur, and now they drive dad's car.

These discussions touch a screaming nerve, but they're not statements of judgment. They are not made to assign blame. They're not even terribly shocking observations because sociologists and politicians have narrated them over and over again.

Young hearts, young dreams

If we're interested in local politics, we might also know that our 4G political leaders have acknowledged a need to work with younger voters. This new generation who're never disconnected for long from social media, who consume a healthy diet of alternate voices: will they turn against the ruling party? How do we inspire them, earn their trust? What must we do not to lose them? In time to come, will they lead the nation?

In church, we're not always aware of these realities.

The visionary groups didn't only comprise older church members. We sliced the church into decades, and so we met many young people, too. We saw that each decade was different from the next. The gulf was widest between the youngest slice and the oldest slice, their preferences, prejudices and viewpoints were starkly different. Thankfully, we have many middle layers in church, and even if the prejudices and viewpoints of the oldest slice are starkly different from those of the youngest, we can work through the middle, interstitial layers, where it may be easier to build bridges and consortiums.

One young adult in her 20s shared: "We find it quite hard to talk to older adults. For example, we want to ask 'Can a Christian date a non-Christian?' But why bother? The answer is just no."

In her plainspoken way, this young woman identified a no-fly zone. You don't fly your plane through a no-fly zone. Some topics are taboo, some discussions will crash. Do older adults and leaders see that our reflexive postures

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reduce the trust of our young people?

Young people don't have the experience of their seniors. This is a truth. But this is not their fault or a failing, and you can't call it a weakness.

I see in our young people many strengths. This is my list. They are often better educated than us. Their parents gave them opportunities that they never had. As a result, young people grasp new ideas more quickly than their elders. They are unafraid to ask questions—if you won't answer their question, or don't know how, well, they will go ask somebody else. They will not settle.

We heard several good suggestions from our participants. Could we have more church camps and church retreats? The last retreat was a success. When we get people to meet across the generations in an unforced fashion, trust grows. When people work together, they become confident of each other's steadfastness. If somehow, people find themselves in a crisis where they make sacrifices for each other, the acts of love transcend mere words, and the affections and bonds will not shake.

Still, the solutions are not easy. It can be a very hard thing to engineer conversations. In church, we have men in their 70s who have no reason to be chatting to a 21 year old student who can't wait to join his peers for lunch or a movie. On any given Sunday, people can be hard to push, and we have seen many of our strategies fail.

I also think for the sake of building trust, older folks, especially church leaders, need to be better-read. Young people can see the holes in our fumbling answers. How will we build trust if we don't seem to have the foggiest about social justice, creation care, culture wars, or woke? We also need to become more familiar with difference and complexity. We need to go out the doors of our church and see and hear and smell the world outside. When we return to our safe sanctuary, we will be shattered by how complex the world has become while we weren't paying attention. Encountering difference, nuance, and ambiguity is good. If we're only meeting things that are predictable and safe, or don't realise many people have beliefs or desires that differ greatly from ours, we end up believing the world is uncomplex. This is fatal. We must plan better, love better, and serve our younger generations better.

When we bring our younger generations into ministry roles, we shore up trust. Nothing spells distrust more powerfully than a closed door. If you're not sure that the younger person will do a good job, take the time to show him the ropes. If people mess up, it's good to remember who doesn't?

Young people are not homogeneous. Unmarried just-grads, often the most energetic and idealistic group, are interested in bible study and hot topics and questions about why prostitution is legal in Singapore. When they enter working life, they exchange cooing professors, long lunches and only four lectures a week for hostile colleagues, scowling supervisors, 7am alarms, and sales targets. They might appreciate an older Christian who could help them re-calibrate. And here's something we saw from the visionary groups, young mothers are comforted by the

This may be when people leave and join other churches. This may be when driven, young people, with heads full of steam, decide to start their own churches, where they can break free of the eyes of their cautious seniors.

presence of old mothers who know a hug feels better than ten words of advice.

If churches are aware that their people are often held apart by generational differences, they can wisely help members understand the commonality of their human experience. Older generations may be nudged to realize that their younger friends are, in many ways, just like them. Love, sorrow, disappointment, laughter and tears are all common to the human experience, whether you grew up in the 60s or noughties. The human heart is the same.

Passing the baton

Not everyone is always aware there are batons in churches, and that they are passed from one person to the next, one generation to the next. Our flower arrangers do it, so do our librarians and DG leaders.

Intergenerational trust reaches its sharpest point when one ponders leadership, and leadership transfer.

What if our would-be successors are not terribly interested in accepting our batons? What if they want to take just half a baton? What if they repudiate our system, requesting a different organisational structure, or replace old tenets with new precepts? What if the emerging church grows

tired of what they feel is stodginess, ossification or worse, irrelevance to a new world?

This may be when people leave and join other churches. This may be when driven, young people, with heads full of steam, decide to start their own churches, where they can break free of the eyes of their cautious seniors. Will this be the reforming that strengthens everyone?

I've also come to realise that leaders become aware of the baton in different ways. If you're a new or young leader, you may not think of it very often. You've just started, you just received the baton. If you're mid-career, you're still trying to refine your serve, and you're convinced that God has work for you to do. But if you're sensitive to your responsibility to the church, not just when you're a leader today but tomorrow when you must pass your mantle, the thinking about succession should always begin, well, a bit earlier.

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One of our young deacons said at a leaders' retreat. "You're all talking about passing the baton. We want to be worthy of the baton. Could I ask that you don't be in a rush about it?"

He was saying that he understood, that there was trust inside the baton. It was a symbol, and weighty, and nobody of his generation would ever want to drop it. So stay with us longer, he was saying, till we can do it. ■

Lee Chung Horn is a medical doctor and a church elder.

Inside the whale

by Lee Chung Horn

The story of this year's vacation bible school reads like a lab experiment that could have gone up in a poof of fumes; or the opposite way, a classroom of excited teacher and kids, and a pile of gleaming crystals on a dish.

As it turned out, *Science through Jonah's adventure* was neither – little was left to serendipity, and its success went beyond just a well-run program.

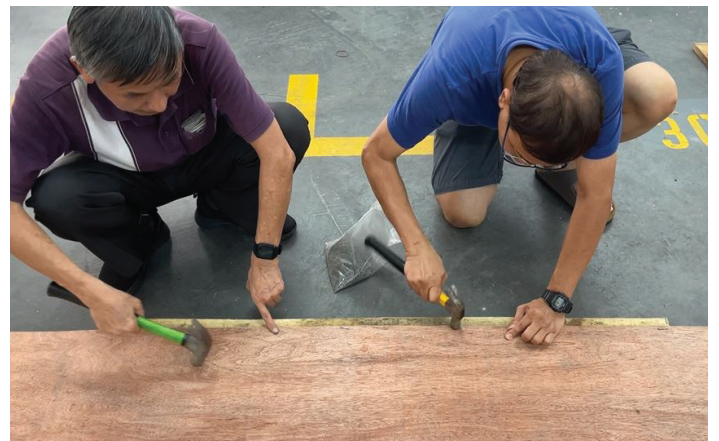
Tan Yi Ling, *Jonah's* lead planner, says: "This was our first vacation bible school in four years. We're thankful to God that everything came together, and that the children enjoyed the day."

Four years is a long time. It meant that an enormous amount of preparatory work had to be done. To do this, a large group of church volunteers put their heads together over five months. They planned budgets, bought supplies, and attended to logistics. They wrote teaching material. Sunday school teachers signed up, and on the day of the school, the kids came.

"Pastor Chan Suet Fong and I had planned to hold VBS in 2020. But COVID-19 came, so everything had to shut down. Later, Suet Fong left U12. But I've been very blessed with a very experienced U12 core group who supported me and gave me advice every step of the way.

"The team includes Elder Chong Yoke Fooi, Susan Ng, Daphne Lim and Sharon Ang. And very recently, Pastor Stanley."

Traditionally, vacation bible school in True Way is a smorgasbord of games, singing, science lessons, and outdoors sports. One



For three days, the church's events hall became a workshop and art studio. Volunteers worked, ate and prayed. Jimmy Ang paints the whale (top).

element never changes – the sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ with the children.

Planning for a group of kids aged 6 to twelve years isn't easy. For a church coming out of lockdown, one question had to be asked: really, who was coming?

But this year's VBS had a thrilling highpoint for everyone – Jonah's big fish.

Jonah was an Old Testament prophet who ran away when God asked him to go preach to an evil city. He sneaked on board a ship but that didn't

One element never changes – the sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ with the children.

stop God from hurling a fearsome storm on the sea. Jonah landed inside the belly of a big fish, but survived, and learned a few important lessons in the process.

Says Chong Yoke Fooi, 71, who took charge of delivering a whale for the day: "Our bible story was Jonah who ran away. There was a fish in the story. We could build

the whale ourselves, and I thought of Jimmy, who's a painter, and Hock Beng, who's a carpenter."

Yoke Fooi is a veteran with camp kids but this was only the second time Jimmy Ang, 65, took part in VBS.

Jimmy says: "My first time was the adventure camp in 2015. I remember the excitement of the children as they rode the zip line and climbed the rock wall. But this July, Elder Yoke Fooi asked if I would help paint the whale."

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Inside the whale

Yoke Fooi: "Some church folks know Jimmy's a painter. He has exhibited before. He does big paintings."

"He didn't want to just have the children walk through a classroom with the lights turned off," Jimmy says. "Yoke Fooi wanted a more realistic and 'scary' experience for the children."

The whale turned out to be Jimmy's biggest canvas ever. The body of the fish stretched 4.4m by 2.4m. Its powerful tail took up another 1.2 m by 1.6m. To the small children who tiptoed into its 'belly', the fish was a monster to respect.

"I faithfully followed a design made by Beng Choo. But I had to blow up my sketch 13 times before I started to paint it."

Jimmy's art was plastered over the whale's body. To create the latter, Yoke Fooi recruited Tan Hock Beng.

Hock Beng, 66, a member of True Way for some forty years, has been practising carpentry as a hobby for more than ten years. His love of carpentry has led him to slowly build a self-styled workshop inside his home.

"Over the years, I bought saws, drills, nails, hammers, plenty of tools," Hock Beng confesses. "I've built tables, chairs, cupboards, all kinds of things."

"I guess I wanted to help Yoke Fooi. I took two days' leave. I wanted to serve God."

For two full days before the children trooped in, Jimmy, Hock Beng and a talented team of church uncles and a few youths worked non-stop at the church's events hall. The carpenters sawed wood, fashioned joints, banged nails into panels, and pitched a scaffolding of steel rods that



became the whale's body. Jimmy painted.

It was sight to behold. The men talked little. They understood and respected each other. They just worked.

At the VBS, the children were organised into groups where they met teachers and volunteers who took them through games, lessons and singing.

"We had a total of 52 children this year," reports Yi Ling. "The kids enjoyed the hands-on science activities. They saw how this related to the story of Jonah. They were taught a new song. They were organized into teams and got to compete against each other."

There was a 15-minute shadow puppet show that explained the gospel to the children.

Twenty of the children were not related to True Way.

Yoke Fooi has been serving in U12 and VBS for some

We want to continue to share the gospel of Jesus Christ to the children. This is our constant.



40 years. "Holding VBS and children's events was easier in the past. The children of twenty years ago didn't have so many distractions, like today."

Indeed, what existed in the past is now gone. Twenty years ago, parents saw VBS as a low-cost way to occupy their kids during the year-end holidays. Today, parents have an unending palette of options, and because they have more disposable income, overseas holidays are often annual family plans.

There's other local competition, too, in the form of slick family attractions and tantalizing children's enrichment programs.

Seven years ago, the adventure camp of 2015 was attended by 121 kids.

"Well, we'd had to shorten our VBS," recounts Yoke Fooi.

We must think hard what kind of program must we create to keep parents and kids interested?

"In the old days, we had five-day camps. Later, we changed tack. We stopped calling our program a camp. We found a new name, VBS. VBS was just three days, then two days and finally one day, like Jonah."

These realities will propel new thinking. Says Yoke Fooi: "We want to continue to share the gospel of Jesus Christ to the children. This is our constant. But we must think hard: what kind of program must we create to keep parents and kids interested?" ■

U12 is True Way Presbyterian Church English Congregation's Sunday school. It serves children up to 12 years of age. Lee Chung Horn is a medical doctor and a church elder. He took the photos for this article.

In short

by Lee Chung Horn



Samuel Liu and Jovan.

Jovan, new church pianist

From August, you might have seen him at the church piano, or singing with the tenors in the Shabach choir.

Meet Paul Jovan Chitakkarottu.

Jovan, using the name he goes by, is 29 and hails from Dehradun, the capital of Uttarakhand, India. He is a third-year student at Singapore Bible College where he's pursuing a master's degree in worship music.

He has come to True Way because field education is a course requirement for seminary students. For field work, seminary students are asked to join a local church to hone their skills.

"I would like to serve in True Way for about fifteen months," says Jovan, "if the church will have me."

Well, the young pianist has made many friends in all of six months.

Before flying to Singapore, Jovan worked as a music teacher at a bible college in Dehradun, a city north of New Delhi. Dehradun is not

far from the Punjab and the India-Pakistan border.

Singapore was a culture shock. At first, it wasn't easy getting used to food here. Jovan says: "Much of the food here has a sweet taste that I'm not used to. Also, I've never experienced some of the smells before."

Like many fellow foreign students, the bachelor lives in the SBC dorm. Students have access to a common kitchen.

"I only cook on the weekend. That's when the canteen closes down. Sometimes I eat out and mala is one of my favourite foods in Singapore!"

Mala is a spicy seasoning made from Sichuan peppercorn and chili. Many recipes recommend turning mala into a sauce by simmering it in hot oil.

Before he came, Jovan taught piano, music history and music theory. "I'm in Singapore on a scholarship provided by my home bible college. When I graduate in 2024, I shall go home and serve there again."

Church music in India is a rich brew of traditional

Hindustani and Carnati music mixed with the Western music brought by British missionaries. Jovan says church musicians in India play tabla, dholak, sitar, conga, and pullanguzhal, an Indian flute.

"I started playing piano at age 12."

Congregants with a sharp ear for piano have described Jovan's style as tensile and rhythmic. Veteran church pianist Samuel Liu agrees: "Jovan is very taut. He's very crisp. I really like his articulation of notes. And there're often nice chord substitutions and inversions, too!"

Jovan says he loves black gospel and blues. "Gospel is connected to the black community, their history and experience of slavery, and their suffering. Gospel longs deeply for God's deliverance. It's honest. I love the harmonies and syncopated rhythms!"

Jovan listens to Billy Preston, Andrae Crouch, Kirk Franklin and Cory Henry.

Cory Henry? That's jazz funk, no?

Jovan grins: "Yes. So much energy, so much life!"

Elections in church

This year, the English congregation elected several servants of the Lord into office. On November 13, preacher Loliro Sani was elected as associate minister. Loli first joined True Way Presbyterian Church in 2014, serving as worship director.

On May 15, Elder Lee Chung Horn was re-elected as ruling elder. This was his third election. Additionally



Koh Ee Wee, Koh Siew Peng, Grace Koh.

four new deacons were elected: Grace Koh, Koh Siew Peng, Koh Ee Wee and John Chia. John Chia worships and serves with the Thai congregation. Elders and deacons serve three-year terms, ministers four-year terms.

A new journal

To help the church prepare to celebrate her 30th anniversary on November 5, church members and worshippers received a specially written, 30-day thanksgiving journal. Fashioned as a devotional, its theme was thanksgiving.

Said writer Soh Lay Bin: "There are four sections that investigate our bonds with God, earthly relations, our spiritual family and what we understand to be the ends of the earth."

The work began in June this year.

Reverend Edwin Wong led the project. "Our aim was to come up with a meaningful spiritual exercise that everyone in True Way could take part in. Also we wanted people to see the journal

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as a personal challenge. Thirty continuous days can be challenging! We hope our people will see what God has been doing over the years. May their hearts be filled with thanksgiving, may the journal spur them on as disciples!"

The team also included Michelle Cheong and Jakin Heng.

Interviewing our people

Thirty people were invited to be filmed ahead of the church's 30th anniversary celebrations on November 5. They were asked to give answers on camera to questions like "As we celebrate our anniversary, what is something you'd like to give thanks to God for?" and "How has church changed?"

There were people from all ages. The youngest interviewee was five, and the oldest, 84.

Three seven-minute short films were produced. The responses were many things: spontaneous, careful, reflective and sidesplittingly funny. But all were heartwarming, said many in

the audience, when the films were screened.

What was shared was telling. Several interviewees didn't just look back, but also forwards. As they talked about the shift of societal trends, it was clear that they understood how the church would need to change to keep its witness to the world.

Film-maker Neo Beng Poh, 46, said: "While things like composition and framing are important, what's crucial is a relaxed interviewee. I tell the people I'm filming to imagine that we are just having a casual conversation."

Beng Poh, who came to True Way some thirty years ago, works at Our Daily Bread Ministries. "I'm a video producer there. It was really nice to shoot the three short



films for church. And no, nobody had to do a re-take for me!"

Christmas baptisms

At Christmas, five adults came to the waters of baptism, while six others became new communicant members through transfer of membership.

Thomas Chai, 62, requested transfer of membership to True Way. Thomas was born and grew up in Kuching, Sarawak, but later moved to Singapore after university. From 1994, he began attending services at True Way with his wife Penny. Both he and Penny, 60, have been baptized in other churches.

While they saw True Way as their home, they also felt disconnected, not being communicant members.

"I saw that True Way was run by very capable people,"

Thomas said. "What would I be able to contribute?"

When his homemaker wife developed cancer in early 2022, they felt a stirring in their hearts. Penny: "We were very touched by the support the church gave us. What's stopping us from becoming members and belonging to this church?"

Yang Hai Kun, 25, became a Christian in 2017. He came to True Way in March 2022. He and his girlfriend Gracia Seo, also 25, have been attending Abundant Grace Presbyterian Church where she grew up, but decided to visit True Way this year. Hai Kun was baptized at Christmas, while Gracia transferred her membership.

"I'm still a young Christian and I don't know the Bible as well as the other people in my DG. But everybody starts somewhere, and I have decided to give my life to Jesus." ■



(From clockwise) Alvin Chia appears before the camera, Yang Hai Kun and Ezra Goh are baptised, Neo Beng Poh films thirty interviews.

A Cuppa

with Rev Stanley Soh

A Cuppa is a column of candid conversations on personal faith, current issues in the True Way church family, and the church at large.

Kevin Chua for Together: As an introduction, what has your faith journey been like, in a nutshell?

Reverend Stanley Soh:

I grew up in a broken and dysfunctional family, and could have ended up a street kid – angry, hopeless, and bitter. But thanks be to God, He rescued me, and opened my heart to know Him.

When I was eight years old, my neighbour asked my parents if she could bring my younger sister and me to her church's Sunday school. My parents said yes – and that was how I started hearing stories about a man named Jesus who loved children. I looked forward to each Sunday, as attending church then was my only escape from my troubled home. I loved the stories from the Bible and the refreshments after the lessons – they served nice *paus*, and I'd queue up for second helpings. This went on for about a year and a half before my family moved, and I stopped attending.

However, church left me with an interest to know more about Jesus. My neighbour's name was Aunty Grace, so I could say that "Grace" found me!

It was only in Secondary 1 when I asked Jesus to come into my life. My parents were having a big fight at home, and I was hiding in the room. I remembered the man Jesus, and how He loved children, and how we could talk to Him. I spoke to Jesus, and asked Him to save me and come into my life. There was a sense of peace in my heart.

However, life wasn't smooth



sailing after that. The marriage between my dad and my stepmom broke down. I had no motivation to study, mixed with the wrong company, and ended up failing my Secondary 3 and 'O' level exams.

What happened to that troubled youth?

When I was young, I wanted to follow in my dad's footsteps to be an army officer, but that didn't happen as I didn't do well for my 'O' levels.

After much prayers and deliberation, I decided to sign up with the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) under their Learn-As-You-Earn scheme. Back then, it was a scheme to allow those who did badly for their 'N' Levels or 'O' Levels to retake their exams while serving as a regular army serviceman. The months that followed were really trying, as I tried to study and undergo the tough training.

I became a signals specialist. Two years later, due to

an injury, I wasn't able to continue in a combat vocation. So I changed my vocation to a weapons specialist.

Did you nonetheless have any meaningful experiences in the army?

I had a hard time adjusting to army life. The only reason I signed on was because it was the only way for me to redo my 'O' levels and earn an income. Many times, I wanted to give up but God would send Christian instructors and fellow soldiers to encourage me. I struggled with my Christian faith and stopped attending church for about two years. Yet, the Lord was faithful even when I drifted away. He would send church friends to remind me of God's love and care. In His mysterious ways, He even sent Pastor

My neighbour's name was Aunty Grace, so I could say that "Grace" found me!

Kien Seng to remind me to go back to church when we somehow met each other during his reservist training. These memories of God's faithfulness remain in my heart to this day.

How did you eventually end up in full-time ministry?

I was always interested in advertising, marketing communications, and even wanted to be a radio DJ. So when my army contract ended after seven years, I decided to leave to pursue my other 'dreams'.

Over the next five years, God allowed me to realise some of my 'dreams'. I became a staff writer in an advertising firm, did marketing communications for a local AV firm, and was in a printing company doing marketing and sales. But I eventually became assistant church manager of my home church in 2000. My home church is Living Praise Presbyterian Church.

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That's a really colourful history.

A year after I joined as an assistant church manager, my senior pastor told me that he saw I had a heart for young people.

And this led to your involvement in the Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade (BBGB) ministries?

He shared this with my church leaders, and they decided to 'change my vocation' to a youth ministry staff assisting my youth pastor in the church's youth ministry, BBGB, and chaplaincy ministry of the two Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Schools.

Later, with nudging from my youth pastor, I attended the BB officer training, to be better equipped.

At the time, Living Praise was the sponsoring church of four BBGB companies in the Kuo Chuan schools. I started out as an officer with the junior BB company of the primary school for a few years, before leaving for my theological training. After coming back from my theological training, I was given the opportunity to serve as a school chaplain of both Kuo Chuan schools, as well as chaplain to the BBGB companies.

In your time there, have you seen many youths comes to Christ through the BBGB ministry?

The BBGB ministry is an encouraging ministry to be involved in. It gives you many opportunities to be a friend to the students, sowing the

seeds of the gospel. I have seen many students give their lives to Christ, not always during their time in BBGB, but later on in life. I've also seen many BBGB boys and girls joining the youth ministry in church, staying on, eventually serving in various ministries, and also becoming deacons and elders.

I recall a young adult in my previous church who joined BB when he was in primary school. He eventually joined the air force. One Sunday, he came back. He'd accepted Christ a few years ago, but stopped attending church. Somehow, he remembered there was a church in his primary school, and so he came back. He remained in that church for a season – growing and serving, before moving on to another church with his wife.

What motivates you to serve in the children and youth ministry?

I came from a broken home – my parents divorced when I was five years old, and in the years after that, I grew up being rebellious and bitter. I got into trouble when I was in secondary school, mixed with the wrong company, and was almost sent to a Boy's Home.

Looking back at my painful past, I now see God's hand and sovereign plans for me – allowing me to go through suffering so that I could better understand and comfort those who go through similar struggles and pain. My life would have ended in a mess if it weren't for God's hands reaching out to me.

I know that God will use all that I've experienced in the past, and use me to reach out to others, especially children

and youths – to care, love, and guide them to know Jesus.

Have you encountered any difficult or discouraging situations in the course of serving in the children and youth ministry?

I think ministry is always difficult, if not impossible. But we also see God's hand in our lives, as well as those we're ministering to.

There was a youth whom I was trying to help. Like me, he too came from a difficult family, so we kind of clicked. He was serving as a youth leader in BB. However, due to something he did, we had to counsel him for his actions. This upset him, and strained our friendship. This greatly affected me. Little did I realise that God was still at work in both our lives. Years later, we grew in our maturity in Christ, and even served together as pastor and deacon for a season. Seeing how God works in both the bad and the good brings me joy.

Last thing about work – what's your working style?

I work best in a team. We are all different – we think and do things differently, but God has given each of us different gifts so that we can all serve together with the gifts He has given us. Ultimately, we serve the Lord, and as we serve together, I think that it's important that we see each other as fellow children of God – to learn to let the love of Christ abound in all that we do as we serve together.

I also believe in giving people opportunities to try and learn, even when they make mistakes along the way. That's how I was

I also believe in giving people opportunities to try and learn, even when they make mistakes along the way.

encouraged in my teenage years. I wasn't perfect, but my church leaders gave me opportunities to learn and grow.

Outside of work, where are we likely to find you?

I enjoy coffee, so you might see me at a café, attempting to read one of the many books that I've started but never finished. I enjoy good food. Sometimes I will go for long bicycle rides or walks in the park. I try to keep plants, but mostly end up killing them. Oh, I love going on travel adventures with my wife!

Ah, you mentioned food – that piques our interest! What's your favourite hawker fare?

I eat anything – but I guess my comfort food is fishball noodles. My late grandfather used to bring me to eat fishball noodles, so the dish always reminds me of the time he spent with me.

Lastly, what are some first impressions and observations that you have of True Way?

After my wife and I were introduced at both services, we met many warm and friendly True Wayans who came by to welcome us and say hello. Our hearts were truly warmed. ■

