

# DIOCESE OF WEST MALAYSIA

## 2019 DIOCESAN SYNOD

### PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

## BE A SENDING CHURCH

### 1. Hazy days

The annual recurrent of haze has caused great discomfort and disruption to businesses and schools and the nation. We are so casual and indifferent that in general, most of us do not take the haze hazard as an issue at all. We only start to look for masks when necessary. There is hardly any kept at home for emergency usage. This 'take for granted' attitude is commonly known as 'tidak apa' attitude.

The rhetoric of racial and religious hate speeches<sup>1</sup> is so frequent that the vast majority only grumble among themselves but with no action i.e. 'tiada aksi'. Most probably many do not know what and how to deal with these. There is also the fear of repercussion coupled with the minority insecurity syndrome.

The inequitable and unjust distribution of wealth and power has also become nightmares for the citizens for many years under the former government. Initially there was great hope with the new government but such 'apparent hopelessness' is like a deflated balloon which rear its ugly head again i.e. 'tiada harapan'.

A closer look at the church in Malaysia, especially the Anglican Church in West Malaysia, we can see similar desperations as the 'tidak apa', 'tiada aksi' and 'tiada harapan' attitudes. Because we are still very much in the 'maintenance' mode and have not moved beyond very much. We hate to compare with other churches, especially those which are growing fast and large. Each time as we tried very hard to argue, we often pride ourselves that many of the leaders and pastors of other denominations were former Anglicans (though we did not ask ourselves why they left us).

### 2. What can we learn from the Early Church?

In the first 300 years of the Early Church, the churches then were passionate for the Gospel of Christ. They were in a Survival mode because of the persecution. They truly believed in the Word of God, seriously investing themselves and leading others into the Kingdom of God, lest they

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<sup>1</sup> The directive to ban muslim and non muslim praying together. (4 September 2019) The accusation of Christianization of Malaysia over the sharing at Mega Methodist Church Kota Damansara by YB Steven Sim the usage of the 'Kingdom of God'. (18 September 2019) The stern warning of the Methodist Girls School in Penang allowing of Christian prayer recital. (29 September 2019)

perish.<sup>2</sup> They went all out to preach Christ in season and out of season, truly obeyed the Word of God so that the people could be saved and able to meet with God personally. Such actions have resulted in a report by a Roman Governor in Bithynia, Pliny the Younger, to his Emperor Trajan expressing his concern and complaining about the spread of Christianity to the whole Roman Empire at the beginning of the second century AD:<sup>3</sup>

*'For the matter seemed to me well worth referring to you – especially considering the numbers endangered. Persons of all ranks and ages, and of both sexes are, and will be, involved in the prosecution. For this contagious superstition is not confined to cities only but has spread through the villages and rural districts.'*

The Early Church took up Christ's Great Commission seriously amidst hardship and persecution. In those days of intense suffering and challenges, we can see the bold contributions of many great leaders and apologists such as Quadratus, Aristides of Athens, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius of Corinth, Hippolytus, Athanasius, Ignatius of Antioch, Theodoret of Cyrus, Irenaeus and many others.<sup>4</sup> They were the leaders of the *'Unrecognized Sending Church'* – the Church that was not recognized by the Empire, instead in many occasions they were treated as enemies of the Empire, yet fervently sent their adherents to reach out to others. They are truly A Sending Church.

The Church became a *'Recognized Sending Church'* in the third century after the Edict of Milan in 313AD.<sup>5</sup> She was growing and expanding for the subsequent 3 centuries which saw many church plants all over the new regions in the empire – Germanic kingdoms, Roman Britain, Ireland, Celtic Christianity unified with Roman Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

The following centuries saw the Church identifying herself with the Crown and became an *'Established Maintenance Church'*.<sup>7</sup> This sets the tone of complacency, self-contained, inward looking, tradition as more important than the teaching of Christ, prideful, wealthy and powerful. The beginning of the 'slide' of the Western Church started when her moral and biblical authority was compromised. It became the catalyst for the Reformation in the 16th century. During the same period, economic and political competitions have propelled a search for new lands and territories which eventually ended up as colonies of the European masters. The Gospel usually went together with guns and weapons to the new-found land. This has brought about much pain and struggles with serious implication for the indigenous Church in the colonized lands.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:27; Philippians 3:8 'I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.'

<sup>3</sup> Michael J Kruger, *Christianity At the Cross-Roads – How the second century shaped the future of the Church*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2018, p.11.

<sup>4</sup> Michael J Kruger, *op.cit.*

<sup>5</sup> [https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict\\_of\\_Milan](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict_of_Milan)

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Christianity#Western\\_missionary\\_expansion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Christianity#Western_missionary_expansion)

<sup>7</sup> Charlemagne the Great was crowned by Pope Leo III in 800AD. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlemagne>

### **3. The Story of DWM**

#### **3.1 The Beginning**

In the first 150 years of the coming of Anglicanism to this part of the world from 1805 to 1960 i.e. South East Asia, we were very much a chaplaincy church. The churches then were built to serve the traders. During the time when we were part of the Diocese of Singapore, we were still very much a *'Receiving Church'*. The missionaries brought money, funds, materials and people, and built schools, hospitals, social care centres and churches in this land, Malaya. After the missionaries left, local leadership took the helm, but one thing did not change much up till this day – our mentality still remains in the 'Receiving mode' i.e. we still wish others to do the work and bring the funds for us to enjoy. I wish to refer this as *'Maintenance Church'*. How long shall we stay in such position? When will and can we move away from the 'Maintenance Church' to be a *'Sending Church'* – the Church that our Lord Jesus commanded us to be in the Great Commission?

#### **3.2 The Diocese**

50 years ago, the Diocese of West Malaysia was born on 8 April 1970. It was a humble beginning with few local priests and majority foreign missionaries manning the 30 plus churches throughout the new diocese. Bishop Roland Koh, our first Bishop, worked very hard trying to raise local leadership to replace the departing foreign missionaries. In order to raise more local leadership, he needed to look for money and funds to support them and for training purposes. For a new diocese, the training and stipend of local priests was a costly affair. Bishop Savarimuthu, our second Bishop, thus did the same. During his tenure, more missionaries were required to leave due to governmental policies. Despite all these challenges, he started the Kolej Theoloji Malaysia (KTM) in 1974 and later Seminari Theoloji Malaysia (STM) in 1979, together with the Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malaysia. It was during his tenure that many young people were trained in STM. Bishop Lim Cheng Ean, our third Bishop, continued in the same process of balancing the books and making sure enough clergy for the parishes. I am the fourth Bishop where I am thankful and grateful to God for my predecessors who have paved the way and made it easier for us.

#### **3.3 A Sending Church**

We must learn from the Early Church where in the midst of tribulation, she continued to strive forward to preach the Gospel and plant churches so that the Church would survive, souls were saved, the Kingdom of God established, God glorified, Jesus Christ magnified, and Holy Spirit electrified. The circumstance and situation of our Church in Malaysia today does not differ much from that of the Early Church. On the political level, Christianity is seen as a threat to the major religion and the nation. The sight of the increase in Christian politicians is viewed as subversive and incites their displeasure. Christian activities within mission schools and churches often invite criticisms and rumours of gross violation of the rule of law. There are at least few things we can

and must learn from the Early Church to survive in the midst of a hostile culture where any meaningful influence or power is lacking.<sup>8</sup>

- **GO** – to heed to the Great Commission aspect of **SENDING**. This involves preaching, sharing, evangelizing, telling stories, reaching out, accommodating, etc. By staying put in churches and asking people to come is a passive move. Thus, intentionally planting churches in new areas, starting cell groups, Alpha Course for new people, Christianity Explored series to reach new groups, mission local and abroad, social care for the needy, migrants and refugees are the end goal. This is a number game. In order to survive and to make meaningful impact and contribution to nation building, our Church must grow faster than the nation's birth rate.
- **MAKE Disciples and Baptise** – to sync with the Great Commission aspect of **PASTORING**. This involves leading, nurturing, be-ing, walking along side, counseling, advising, mentoring, journeying with them, assurance, providing, listening, discipling, etc. to enhance good and proper behavior with fair and equitable treatment of each other and neighbours. This is a character-building and transformation game. Biblically moral uprightness and integrity is the chief weapon in evangelism and soul saving. Intentionally journeying in discipleship training is the dynamite of spiritual formation.
- **TEACH** – to emulate the Great Commission aspect of **TRAINING**. All Christians need to be built with good fundamental foundation of the faith. Some will require to be equipped with proper theological, philosophical, biblical and intellectual excellence and thinking to answer the critics and to defend the faith, as well as to grow reasonable faith. We require many good scholars who are biblically orthodox and intellectually persuasive in seminars and the production of writings and books for the general public, the Church and in the learned arenas.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Firstly, we, the Church today, need to learn again how to be a prophetic voice in the midst of a hostile world where we lack substantial influence and authority. We cannot stay indifferent anymore. Proper preparation is utmost crucial for survival's sake. We must take positive action to GO and make disciples of all nations. Evangelism, church and diocese planting is surely the way forward. We cannot afford to stay stagnant. Stagnation is slow death.

Secondly, Christianity is a basically a 'book religion'. Our focus is Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who is described and expressed in the Scripture, the written Word of God. We need to share our stories authentically and theologically. We also need to express indigenously and contextually in the defense of our faith and belief.<sup>9</sup> It is quite sad to see that after all these years we are still struggling to produce and write our own stories and literary works, including liturgies.<sup>10</sup> A church that does not emphasize in TEACHing and TRAINing her members is preparing to downsize and eventually dies.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael J Kruger, *op.cit.*, p.228.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Bell, *Gospel for Muslims – Learning to read the Bible through eastern eyes*, Authentic Media, Milton Keynes, UK, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Tad de Bordenave, ed.; *Shadows from Light Unapproachable*, Anglican Frontier Missions (1993 – 2018), Northumberland Historical Press, Healthsville, Virginia, 2018. Chapter 15.

Thirdly, we are reminded that Christians, regardless of the exterior pressures and challenges, should always keep to one simple thing i.e. worshipping Jesus. We must work towards becoming Christlikeness, in that, our lives – lifestyle, habits, behavior, attitude and ethics should align to the teachings of the Scripture. Intentional Discipleship and DISCIPLE-MAKING is the ultimate channel of the Kingdom of God. ‘Discipleship takes place when individuals and communities intentionally, sacrificially, and consistently live every aspect of their daily life in commitment to following Jesus.’<sup>11</sup> This what the Anglican Communion Mission department refers this as Jesus Shaped Life.

The future of the Church in West Malaysia lies on the prophetic charge to be a Sending Church i.e. Go – Make Disciples – Teach. Be it one diocese or many dioceses, the task entrusted to us is the same. Our next two generations desperately depend on our kingdom-wise vision – to see the unreached and unchurched areas as God’s harvest field, sincere obedience – to live an uncompromised life fully of integrity and moral uprightness, wholehearted commitment – to have an unreserved and undoubtful focus upon Jesus, and sacrificial willingness – to adopt a servanthood attitude where Christ increases and us decreases. Our God is a promise-keeper. He will surely make his promise come to pass, only if we hold to our part of the deal. His promise is full of mercy and goodness.

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## Websites links

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9. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlemagne>
10. <https://anglicannews.org>

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<sup>11</sup> John Kafwanka and Mark Oxbrow, ed., *Intentional Discipleship and Disciple-Making: An Anglican Guide for Christian Life and Formation*, Anglican Consultative Council, London, 2016, back cover.