



You Will Be My Witnesses

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Acts 1:8*



Introduction

It has been about two and half years since I have been consecrated as the Bishop of the Diocese of West Malaysia, and I have another two and half years left, God willing.

We have journeyed through tumultuous times; COVID, financial crisis, religious, political, and economic challenges. The Anglican Communion is facing a crisis of historical proportion. Our financial situation has improved, though we are not out of the woods. Our ministries have rebounded and, in some instances, have grown, post COVID era. On a personal note, I have journeyed with Multiple Myeloma Cancer since June 2022, and have been declared that I am in remission in January 2023. God has seen us through this season and taught us many valuable lessons. ***God, our Ebenezer, has seen us through, and will continue to see us through.***

The vision of the Diocese for the next ten years (2021-2031) is divided into three Seasons.¹ We are at the end of the ***Season of Preparation (2021-2023)***. The operation goals for this season are; (1) Human capital development, (2) Explore, identify, target encourage, and equip members through discipleship and equipping them for church planting. In this Season of Preparation, we are focusing on gathering data and responding to this data on the key focus areas as much as we can. The DSIC has been tasked with ***modulating the KPI (Key Performing Index) to MOO (Ministry Operation Objectives)***. This is important to let us evaluate, and plan the way forward in our ***four key focus areas; Discipleship, Church Planting, Leadership Development, and Social Ministry***. These and the lessons learned since 2021, has sharpened my plans during my episcopacy. These plans will be further elaborated.

I have deliberately chosen the theme, ***“You will be my witnesses” as it embodies the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), and the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40)***. As we move from the Season of Preparation, towards the Season of Propagation; we are challenged to start from our own Jerusalem, and reach out to Judea, Samaria, and to the end of earth. Witness as mission is very appropriate to our context. ***Central to all this is the Gospel of Jesus Christ***. We do not want to have numbers without a firmly rooted believer, who is unwaveringly accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We want our members to be so compelled by God’s saving grace that they will share the Gospel and bear witness to Jesus Christ. Jesus promises us His presence, and empowers us, through the Holy Spirit. I look forward to the next season, the Season of Propagation (2024-2026).

¹ Please refer to the document, “Launch of Diocesan Theme on 2.3.2021: Key Components”, which is available on our Diocesan website, for further information.

I have purposed to envision goals and vision that is so big and preposterous that we can only achieve it with God's help. If we do not, then we know it is not His will. These preposterous goals are based on Scripture, Tradition and Reason.

Discipleship

WE are thankful that there is more attention to intentional discipleship across the board in our churches. This has resulted in more small groups focusing on the Gospel, and more young people drawn in to these groups. More of such groups need to be formed. The intentional identifying, equipping, and development of young people to know Christ and to make Him known is crucial. I am happy to note that churches with BM speaking congregations have used the SaRang Model to make more disciples, especially in Ipoh, Gopeng and Kampar. This has produced new leaders and proliferation of small groups. Here is a report I received as a sample of what is happening on the ground, *"The current update on The Discipleship program in Bahasa Malaysia. We stand at 52 groups. Program involves Sarawakians, Sabahans, Orang Asal and others."*

We are grateful for the intentional outreach to ***students in colleges and universities and the small group discipleship formation*** taking place. We have vibrant small groups in institutions of higher learning in Perak; especially in Universiti Teknologi Petronas in Bandar Seri Iskandar, and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris in Tanjung Malim. Local churches clergy, Archdeacons are working across boundaries to focus on discipleship, not just pastoral care. We are targeting for leaders to emerge from among them to reach out to these campuses.

We have 14 Anglican Mission Schools in our Diocese; 5 secondary schools and 9 primary schools. We are thankful to churches who and members who have come alongside the School Boards to uphold the Christian ethos in the school. They provide opportunities for disciple making in small groups. ***We have doubled our budget to support our Christian Fellowships (CF) in our Mission Schools so that the CFs will be enabled to invest in discipling them to know Christ as their Lord and Saviour; in addition to funds for a full-time Youth Chaplain to specifically strengthen these mission fields. WE aim to do this in 2024.***

With the planned move into our new Headquarters to Wisma Anglican, our current DWM office in Jalan Pahang will be repurposed as East Malaysian Anglican Centre (EMAC). ***EMAC will become a hub to strengthen our intentional discipleship equipping, and planning to reach out specifically to East Malaysians in our Diocese. A major focus will be the youths studying and working in the Peninsular. WE have set aside funds to support an EMAC Chaplain for this ministry.*** There is much work to do and we are already in contact with the Diocese of Kuching (DOK) to work on better information sharing and working together more creatively. It is our intention to have our Youth Chaplain, and EMAC Chaplain, to liaise with the Youth Chaplain of the DOK. We are excited with the prospects of the Youth Chaplain and the EMAC Chaplain working together. We are confident our youth ministry will flourish.

Baptism and Confirmation are the basic initiation rites, and ready-made discipleship classes for our churches. The materials to mentor the candidates for Baptism and Confirmation



needs updating and reviewing. We need to ask if all the adults who are Baptized and Confirmed really know the Gospel and accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. We need to know if the godparents to the children who are baptized are discipling the children; leading those who they are godparenting, to know Christ as their Lord and Savior. We are challenging our people to be more discerning in following up with the baptized, especially focusing on the equipping of the Godparents to the ministry in which they have vowed to God at the baptism service. I urge, make a call, that Godparents be equipped to be disciple makers to their godchildren. ***We are redeploying one of our Deaconesses, and forming a task force, to develop these areas of equipping and training materials for Baptism and Confirmation, and for Godparents.***

Church Planting

I am calling the Diocese to plant 1,200 churches in the next ten years; 120 churches every year. *Preposterous?* Precisely, for we cannot achieve it, if it is not God's will.

The Anglican Communion Commission on Evangelism and Discipleship (ACCOEnD) has envisioned to plant 1 million churches in 10 years (2023 - 2033). There are 834 official dioceses in the 42 Provinces but there are about 2000 bishops (including suffragan bishops and assistant bishops). Some dioceses have a couple of suffragan bishops in their area diocese. The ACCOEnD took the 2000 bishops as the starting point. Each Province and Diocese and Area Diocese is to adopt a target to help realize the goal. This is not a compulsion rather, an encouragement.

Gospel City Network (GCN) has researched data related to church planting in cities. They have analyzed data from the official Malaysian portal of the Department of Statistics. Their studies reveal that to maintain the current evangelical Christian population at 3% in Klang valley alone, we will need to plant 3 new churches every month, 36 churches every year. ***To grow, plant churches at a nominal pace, from 3% to 5%, we will need to plant 11 new churches every month, 132 churches every year, IN KLANG VALLEY ALONE!*** We will be sending our people to learn from GCN how to effectively plant and grow churches in urban areas.

One major concern in planting churches is the finances required to acquire/rent a building. However, at its basic concept, a church is gathering of people in Jesus' name. A small group, or a separate congregation in the same church, can all be classified as a church. A new outreach is a church in this definition. I propose to recognize small groups of twelve; who are not part of an existing church set-up, and set up to reach out to seekers, the unchurched, and new believers, to be recognized as an outreach church. To qualify as a Missionary District (MDs), you will need thirty people. Three such small groups of twelve, in the same locality, will have thirty-six members. They can be merged to form a Missionary District. These concepts can be studied to facilitate church planting in the Orang Asal ministry. Both the outreach church and MDs do not need a building of their own. We need to tweak our physical definition of church so that it will be more flexible and facilitative for church planting. Thus our 35 Orang Asal kampongs can be considered as 35 outreach churches. Likewise, our small groups in the colleges, institution of higher learning. The target of 120

churches every year may not seem so daunting when we approach our church planting goals from this perspective.

The Chinese Board has set a target to plant 100 churches in ten years. They have set in place church plants targeting specifically young people in Klang Valley. We note that the urban poor in Klang Valley is responding to the witness of our churches in meeting their needs. This connectivity has given us opportunity to share the Gospel to those who are open and willing to listen. The Tamil Board (BOTAW) is working out a strategy to witness to the urban poor more effectively. They have embarked on a pilot study on urban poor targeting five urban churches. BOTAW is also working with ALPHA Malaysia and HTTB, to pioneer church planting through Tamil ALPHA in Klang Valley. We have trained and set aside our full-time worker to spearhead this effort. Our East Malaysian congregations in Klang Valley are focusing on reaching out to the students, civil service personal, and other working adults. The HTTB model and its success with the ALPHA program in discipleship, leadership development, and reaching out to young people, especially in the urban setting, has attracted the Diocese of Kuching. We will be signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between DWM and Diocese of Kuching (DoK) regarding collaboration in church planting using HTBB model in Kuching on 2nd August 2023.

We have revived the Mission and Evangelism Committee (M&E), and we believe this will be a shot-in-the-arm for our church planting endeavors. We have set the M&E some broad guidelines; (a) analyze the data from the MOO/KPI and propose appropriate strategies to the Diocesan Strategic Implementation Commission (DSIC), (b) collaborate with our Province's Mission and Services Committee (PROSEAMS) in church planting within our Province, specifically in Sumatera, (c) raise mission awareness through annual/biannual missions roundtable gatherings, (d) to monitor and develop urban church planting in Klang Valley, and among the Urban Poor, (e) To monitor the development of and migrant ministries. They will report to the DSIC where all our ministry leaders will discuss these matters. I am calling to our churches to adopt our church plants in Medan and Palembang.

Leadership Development

HTBB's model built around ALPHA and SPTC (St. Paul's Theological College) has in a relatively short time produced many leaders and attracted young people. We are seeing more people from this channel in the Ordination track. We hope that together with SaRang, and EQUIP model; our churches who do not have their own indigenous model, will be inspired to pick one, learn, and run with this. ***The Orang Asal School of Discipleship is a good example where the SaRang model is adapted to contextualize to our indigenous people group, resulting in an emerging indigenous discipleship model, producing young indigenous leaders.*** These models have the following factors in common; focus on discipleship, a good biblical/theological syllabus, apprenticeship/mentorship program, greater focus on practical ministry skills, a more learner friendly time-line and syllabus. ***This has resulted in attracting many young people for leadership development.***

The Malaysian Indigenous Clinical Pastoral Education (MICPE) is already established as a bonafide Chaplaincy training institution. This Chaplaincy training program has already



produced Chaplains for the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital in Penang. MICPE is a vehicle to develop and equip Chaplains for our ministries; Youth Ministry, Student Ministry, Homes, and Social Ministry. **We need to develop six Chaplains.** We would like to assure our people that the Diocese is very serious in its goal to develop a Chaplaincy Department. The new Diocesan Headquarters, Wisma Anglican, will house this department. Clergy will be redeployed for this ministry.

The pandemic has highlighted the need to minister to the depressed, those with mental illness, and suicide ideation. There has been an upsurge in request for prayer, healing, and deliverance since then. The need to develop, equip, and train our people in this area became apparent. We have identified Raphah Ministry Malaysia to train our people. It's leader, Rev. Vincent Lau, was a Priest in our Diocese. He has been involved in this ministry for twenty years. We are collaborating with them and are organizing a two-week intensive, "Train the Trainers" Program this year; 25-29 September, 2-6 October 2023. **We plan to develop a pool of people in the ministry of Prayer, Healing, and Deliverance (PHD).** The Wisma Anglican with its Chapel, and roof-top prayer space will enhance our Diocesan Prayer Ministry. Working in tandem with the Anglican Revival fire Ministry, and the Spiritual Formation Platform, I am looking forward to a prayer drenched Wisma Anglican supporting the Diocese.

The surge during pandemic among our people enrolling for courses in theological education, and biblical studies; and the success of our discipleship and other equipping courses, has produced a big pool of people, who are now discovering that God is calling them to serve full-time. Our Clergy and seminarians are also looking forward to develop their skills for ministry and academically; to develop their teaching ministry. **We have now decided to establish a Theological Education Department (TED) to systematically develop our Clergy and Laity in this area.** I have decided to redeploy the Rev Dr Lim Kar Yong from STM, to lead this TED in January 2024. With our Wisma Anglican equipped with an archive, a library, an auditorium, and proper recording and multi-media facilities, the possibilities are exciting. This will provide room for our people with post grad theological qualifications to expand their teaching ministries; and the development of research and publications in our Diocese.

With the **growing number of young people** rising from our discipleship groups, and theological education, we must **provide avenues for them so that we can fan into flames the gifts of ministry that God has given them. I am calling all churches to intentionally include young people in their PCCs/MDCs as special representatives upon the Diocesan Bishop's request (at least one representative).** This is over and above the ones that are elected. I have taken the first move by inviting **five young people, nominated to me through the Diocesan Youth Council (DYC), as observers in the Synod this year, and, for as long as I am the Diocesan Bishop.** We want to give room and space and affirm our commitment to our young people. I have instructed **the DYC to get in touch with all the youth Synod representatives, and form a think tank group for the Bishop, Synod, and the DSIC,** on matters that are urgent and important for the life of our Church and Nation. Their first task can be organizing a Youth Synod next year. I am calling the **DYC to plan for Regional Youth Synods** early next year, with representations from every church to come up with a youth development charter for the consideration of the Diocesan Bishop. We do have a draft youth

charter at our disposal, but we are convinced that it best come from the youths themselves. We want to hear their voices, ideas, and visions.

Social Ministry

I would like to highlight the development of ministry amongst migrants in our Diocese. We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with an NGO, El-Shaddai Centre Berhad; to establish a Refugee Learning Centre for the children from the Champa/Cambodia community. This involves the repurposing of the use of our Tadika Block in St. Martin's Church, Kota Bharu, as a Refugee Learning Centre. This ministry is recognized by UNHCR Malaysia. We have St. Mary's Agape Mission School, ministering to Myanmar children. St. Barnabas Church, Klang works in tandem with Klang Valley Migrant Ministries to minister to Myanmar community. I applaud these churches and thank them. ***Please persevere and encourage these ministries among the migrants.*** Remember, "Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 10:19)

Three Dioceses

A small group is formed under the leadership of Bishop Dr. Jason Selvaraj to study on the way forward for the formation of three Dioceses from the existing Diocese of West Malaysia. They will present to the Synod their findings when they are ready.

We have made two pro Cathedrals; the Pro Cathedral of St. George's, Penang, and the Pro Cathedral of Christ Church, Melaka. This is to empower the two regions to build on the Regional Protem Standing Committees, and the Regional Gatherings, under the leadership of the Suffragan Bishop's in their region. Thus as we await for the breakthrough in the legal outworking of the three Dioceses we will begin to function for ministry purposes as three Dioceses. All decision making and legal boundaries existing under the current form will still operate.

Conclusion

May God our Ebenezer continue to guide us in the preposterous goals and visions put forth in this address.

Veni Sancte Spiritus,



The Rt. Rev. Dr. D. Steven Abbarow
Bishop of West Malaysia