

1. Thanksgiving

1.1 First and foremost I would like to thank God for His grace that has sustained and strengthened me throughout yet another year.

1.2 In God's goodness as in the past, many people have walked alongside me. I want to thank God especially for the following:

1.2.1 Bishop Dr Ong Hwai Teik for his invaluable guidance.

1.2.2 The Substantive Members of the Executive Board for teamwork.

1.2.3 The Conference Officers, Administrative Boards, and Programme Boards, who performed their duties with diligence to help our Annual Conference realize our vision.

2. Statistics

2.1 At this 40th Session I wish to recall where we have come from and how the Lord has led us thus far.

2.1.1 The Christian presence in Malaysia dates back possibly to 7th Century with the Nestorians settling in the North Western part of the peninsula. However, the Portuguese occupation of Malacca in 1511 brought a wider Christian influence.¹

2.1.2 The Methodist work began in Singapore and Malaysia in 1885 with the arrival of William F. Oldham and James M. Thoburn in Singapore on February 8, 1885.

2.1.3 In 1888 the Methodist work in the peninsula, with the adjacent territory and islands in which the Malay language was spoken, became a Mission under the administration of the Missionary Society and separated from the South India Conference.

2.1.4 The work of the Methodist Mission grew linguistically in English, Tamil, Chinese, and Malay, and geographically up the peninsula.

2.1.5 The Methodist Church in Malaysia was constituted on December 4, 1976 by the component Annual Conferences.

2.1.6 The First Session of the Trinity Annual Conference (TRAC) was held in Kuala Lumpur on December 1-3, 1976. Rev Denis C. Dutton was elected President of TRAC.

2.1.7 The Conference began with 26 churches and 4228 members, who were served by 18 Pastors.

2.1.8 By 1980, the figures had grown to 27 churches, 4817 members, 22 Ordained Pastors and 6 Approved Supply Pastors.

2.1.9 In 1988 there were 32 churches with a membership of 6521 members and 35 Elders, Deacons, Diaconal Ministers, and Ministers-on-Trial.

¹ Goh, Robbie B H., *Sparks of Grace: The Story of Methodism in Asia*, (Singapore: The Methodist Church in Malaysia, 2003) p. 111.

2.1.10 Today we have in TRAC 43 churches, 2 Preaching Points, 48 Pastors, and 13 retired Elders and retired Supply Pastors, and 2 retired Diaconal Ministers.

2.1.11 From having been predominantly English speaking churches, we now have 28 non-English speaking worship services in our Conference.

2.1.12 We also have Persidangan Misi Sengoi Methodist under our care with ministries in 60 villages, 49 chapels, a membership of 4415 members, 27 Elders, Deacons and Guru Injil. It is hoped that by the end of the year 2020 PMSM can be a Provisional Annual Conference.

2.2 As I pointed out last year, according to a UMC report, “New members brought in by profession of faith are an important indicator of vitality.” It is apparent therefore, that we should continue to track baptisms as I did last year in my Presidential Address.

2.2.1 The following numbers show the **actual baptisms** that took place in our TRAC churches in the year 2012, 2013, 2014, and the first half of 2015.

		Baptisms of infants and children under 12 years				Baptisms of Youths & Adults above 12 years			
	EASTERN DISTRICT	Dec 12	Dec 13	Dec 14	June 15	Dec 12	Dec 13	Dec 14	June 15
1	Christ Bentong	-	-	-		-	-	-	
2	WMC K Lipis	-	-	-		-	-	-	
3	WMC Kuantan	1	1	3		8	1	8	
4	WMC Raub	-	-	-		-	-	-	
	NORTHERN								
5	TMC Pg	4	12	4		15	8	6	3
6	WMC AS	-	-	-		5	1	8	
7	WMC B'worth	-	1	-		-	-	-	
8	WMC Kulim	7	6	-		-	2	-	
9	WMC PB	-	-	-		-	-	-	1
10	WMC Pg	5	4	1	2	9	13	7	1
11	WMC SP	-	-	-		-	-	-	
	PERAK								
12	Bercham Ipoh	-	-	2		-	-	4	
13	CGMC Ipoh	11	9	9		22	15	15	12
14	GMC Ipoh	-	2	-		-	3	2	
15	LFMC	n/a	n/a	n/a	-	n/a	n/a	n/a	2
16	WMC Ipoh	2	-	2	1	7	6	18	6
17	WMC Kampar	-	2	1		2	6	2	1
18	WMC Sitiawan	2	10	-		16	13	17	5
19	WMC Taiping	-	-	-		-	12	9	5
20	WMC TI	-	2	-		4	1	1	
	SELANGOR								
21	DUMC PJ	-	-	-		115	100	103	40
22	EMC PJ	3	6	-		20	8	7	3
23	SMC	-	-	-		-	4	4	

24	SSMC	-	-	-		40	18	18	11
25	TMC PJ	16	4	15	8	-	29	40	12
26	TMC Sg Buloh	-	2	-		5	2	-	
27	W'pering Hope	-	1	1		-	-	3	
28	WMC Klang	-	2	1	1	6	12	3	
	SOUTHERN								
29	TAMC Melaka	-	-	-		4	8	-	
30	TUMC S'ban	-	-	-		-	8	2	1
31	WMC JB	6	5	5		7	2	18	1
32	WMC Melaka	2	-	5		5	5	-	
33	Nusajaya	n/a	n/a	n/a	-	n/a	n/a	n/a	-
34	WMC Segamat	-	-	1		-	-	4	
35	WMC S'ban	2	4	-	3	-	-	4	1
	WILAYAH								
36	Christ Ampang	-	1	-		-	1	5	
37	Faith Cheras	-	1	1		4	1	1	
38	Grace Sentul	1	-	2	1	2	4	2	
39	Life Puchong	3	1	2		2	1	3	
40	WMC Kepong	2	3	-	1	3	4	-	
41	WMC KL	18	12	9	4	1	21	21	10
	TOTAL	85	91	64	21	302	309	335	115

2.2.2 The figures above show that the number of youth and adult baptisms increased in 2014 compared to 2013 while the number of infant baptisms dropped.

2.2.3 If we want to see more baptism in our churches, we need to remain an outwardly focused missional Church which I spoke about two years ago.

2.3 For the year 2014, **average attendance** was 12,566. At the end of June 2015 we recorded 12,756 in average attendance. Going by the average attendance, the first six months of this year we attained 1.51% increase.

2.4 We ended the year 2014 with a **membership** of 16,369. At the end of June 2015 we recorded a membership of 16,379. Going by membership, in the first six months of this year we attained 0.06% increase.

2.4.1 While the percentage of membership growth may appear small, we want to take note that in actual fact 633 persons were included to the membership roll in 2014, out of which 363 were through confession of faith.

2.4.2 We also need to take note that in the year 2014, 423 persons were removed from membership for various reasons. In the first six months of the year 2015, 310 people were removed for various reasons.

2.5 In the year 2014, 27 persons withdrew their membership and 206 persons were removed through Local Conference Action. By June 30 this year 39 persons withdrew their membership and 122 were removed through Local Conference Action.

2.5.1 It appears to me that more churches are trying hard to remove members from their membership roll with the view to narrow the gap between the average attendance

and church membership, and also possibly to contribute less in Conference Commitments and Sengoi Commitments.

2.5.2 While there is a need to update membership from time to time, I caution churches from quickly seeking to remove members from membership roll by quoting parts of the Methodist Book of Discipline (MBOD). While church attendance must be taken seriously, removing members from the membership roll need to be done pastorally. People should be encouraged to attend a Bible-teaching church of their choice and then be encouraged to transfer their membership. As far as possible removal through Local Conference Action should be minimal and as a last resort when we cannot locate the people at all after we have tried hard to do so.

2.5.3 For churches who are seeking to narrow the gap between membership and attendance may I suggest the gap be narrowed through an increase in attendance, rather than through a decrease in membership. This could possibly be achieved through regular show of concern for them and solid Bible teaching/preaching. As for churches who are trying to cut down on Conference Commitments, please be reminded that Conference Commitments are used for the purpose of carrying out ministries just as you do in the local churches.

3. Church Planting

3.1 We are thankful that four out of six preaching points were constituted as Local Conferences this year (i.e. Nusajaya MC, Living Faith MC, Living Stone MC, and Living Hope MC). One of the preaching points received members from about 12 churches in order to be constituted as a Local Conference. This shows that churches can work together and form preaching points, and this is a workable model that should be imitated.

3.2 We must plant English speaking churches (even though it cannot be planted everywhere) without neglecting BM, Chinese and migrant ministries. I am glad that we are growing our churches, through English, Chinese, BM, Tamil and migrant ministries. The migrant ministry must be taken seriously as it is said that 8.6% of the population in Malaysia are made up of foreigners.

3.3 We need to continue in our efforts to plant churches. A number of places were identified at the last Executive Board retreat early this year and they ought to be pursued. In January we will be seeing a new preaching point emerge.

3.4 When we plant churches we also see a need for buildings for church usage. We begin by renting and eventually, we may need to purchase properties. There is no doubt that we will need new buildings. However, I feel a need to remind ourselves about buying too many properties, or doing renovations to existing premises, or erecting extra buildings. With our connectional system it would be easy to add properties but the real challenge is in maintaining them. Additional properties would mean too much of church money is going to be spent on maintaining the building and paying utility bills rather than using the money directly on ministry. As far as possible we need to see how we can maximise the usage of the church building, and how we can double up the usage.

3.4.1 Before we undertake the purchase of the next property, renovate the existing property or erect an extra building, we need to ask one another what our priorities are and what our roles are as stewards and leaders in the church lest our intentions be misunderstood. Moberly said, "Those who do not rightly understand their

responsibilities.... indulge in prestige building projects so as to enhance the image of their authority.”² I hope when we get into building projects, we will do so for the right reasons!

4. **Pastors**

4.1 In the next couple of years, we will have students with undergraduate and graduate degrees join us as pastors. At the same time we will also have pastors retiring. So we will be facing the shortage of pastors continually.

4.2 More people will be awarded LPL certificates this year. We pray that some of the LPL holders will consider becoming part-time pastors (or bi-vocational pastors). Not everyone needs to be fulltime immediately. At the same time, not everyone needs to come into the itinerant ministry; one can choose to be a local pastor.

4.3 While we are on the search for pastors allow me to quote Soren Kierkegaard as to the kind of Pastors we need.

4.3.1 “Pastors who can split up the crowd and turn it into individuals. Pastors who are not too much occupied with study and have no desire whatever to dominate. Pastors who, though able to speak, will be no less able to keep silent and be patient. Pastors who, though they know people’s hearts, have no less learned temperance in judgment and condemnation. Pastors who understand how to exercise authority, through the act of sacrifice. Pastors who have been prepared, trained, and educated in obedience and suffering so that they will be able to correct, admonish, edify, move, and also constrain not by force, anything but that, but rather through their own obedience; and above all will be able to put up with all the rudeness of the sick person without letting it upset him any more than a physician allows himself to be disturbed by the curses and kicks of a patient during an operation.”

4.4 Although we are short of pastors, I wish to emphasize that we are not desperate for pastors to the extent that those who have no calling or have lost their calling be taken in or kept in circulation. Bishop Wee Boon Hup from Singapore in his last Presidential Address in the year 2012, said it well and I quote:

4.4.1 “There are those who for all kinds of reasons (not all of their own making) seem to be trudging on in ministry because they have seen the pastoral ministry as their iron rice-bowl. Needless to say the church they are pastoring suffers or is short-changed for what they should receive from their pastors but does not. But what is more damaging is the life of the pastor himself/herself as well as the family. Such pastors (as well as any lay leader) should be taken out of circulation for a while. The pastor should be given time to be counselled. If recovery of the reality of the calling is not possible, then this pastor should be let out to graze with the rest of the sheep that he/she once used to pastor.”

4.5 I am thankful for Pastors who are effectively shepherding local churches and some who are efficiently shepherding more than one church at a time. Some have tirelessly shepherded more than one church for many years now. Taking care of two churches has never meant being paid double salary. Some Pastors who are shepherding churches are also doubling up as DSs, Board Chairmen and School/BB/GB Chaplains. I am thankful to God for all of them.

²Moberly, R. W., *Prophecy and Discernment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p 65.

4.6 I thank our Pastors who have worked hard. In spite of such hard work we may remain unappreciated, or taken for granted, or even opposed. I wish to remind you what the Rev John Wesley said and hope it will be an encouragement to you: “Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing!”

4.7 We are thankful for retired pastors and diaconal ministers. Though they are retired from the administration of the local church, they are not retired from the ministry of the word and sacrament. They continue to be a source of blessing to our churches through their presence and ministry in our local churches. I humbly ask our local churches to welcome, embrace, involve our retired pastors/diaconal ministers in the local churches where they regularly worship, and take care of their needs.

4.8 I offer to God the following prayer of consecration for all of us pastors. This is a prayer that the Rev John Wesley prayed after his heart warming experience:

“O grant that nothing in my soul
May dwell, but Thy pure love alone!
My joy, my treasure, and my crown;
Strange fires far from my heart remove:
My every act, word, thought, be love!”

5. Lifelong Discipleship– Following Christ, Becoming Like Christ

5.1 This is the first of the Four Essentials of TRAC. The Executive Board at its retreat in January 2013 decided that we will continue to emphasise these Four Essentials as they have been emphasised for only one quadrennium earlier. Hence we are emphasising them a second round as they need to be seriously pursued in our local churches. Emphasis on these four essentials do not in any way prevent the local churches from pursuing other emphases. However, at the TRAC level we would like to ensure that these four essentials are not neglected by the local churches.

5.2 The Conference Statistician tells us that there were 745 small groups in the year 2013, 778 in 2014, and 790 in 2015. This steady growth is encouraging. If we could strengthen this ministry by emphasizing the study of the word and prayer to take place without neglecting time for praise and fellowship, we will see our members grow as true disciples of our Lord.

5.3 While we are glad that more small groups have been started, I want to remind ourselves for the need to meet the needs of specific groups, in particular the needs of men and the needs of women in a more specific way. I would like to suggest that churches consider looking into the possibilities of creating separate avenues for men and women to talk, share, pray and to fellowship with the view of meeting specific needs that each gender has.

5.3.1 This is not an alien or even a new thought. It is rooted in Methodism. It was called a “band.” Unlike the class meeting, the band was a “homogenous grouping, not only by sex, but also by age and marital status; the married men met together, the single women, and so on. The bands were voluntary cells of people who professed a clear Christian commitment and who desired to grow in love, holiness, and purity of intention. The group environment was one of ruthless honesty and frank openness, in which its members sought to improve their attitudes, emotions, feelings, intentions,

and affections. It could be said metaphorically that the society aimed for the head, the class meeting for the hands, and the band for the heart.”³

5.3.2 Holiness was the main emphasis of Methodism. Wesley believed that this doctrine was entrusted to Methodists. As such the societies taught holiness, the class meetings helped change lifestyles, while “the bands facilitated the cultivation of inner purity and the purging of the attitudes.”⁴

5.3.3 I believe by helping create bands once again we may provide an avenue for men and women to grow in inner holiness by sharing one another’s deepest struggles, and coming alongside each other to spur one another on toward right thinking and righteous acts. For far too long in the name of respecting people’s privacy we have almost allowed one another to languish in sin. This trend must be reversed for those who sincerely seek to follow Christ but are struggling.

5.3.4 The band will be for those who want to grow in inner purity but owing to time constraints, we may not want to impose a weekly gathering since we are all in small groups already. I would suggest for a start we create an avenue for such bands to gather at least once a month, without neglecting the weekly small group gatherings.

5.4 In 2013 there were 108 prayer groups, in 2014 there were 109, and in 2015 there are 110 such groups. While we rejoice at the existence of so many prayer groups, we also note that five churches are without prayer groups for reasons known only to them.

5.4.1 All of us in the church need to realize that we can, we should and we have to pray. “The ministry of preaching is open to few; but the ministry of prayer – the highest ministry of all human offices – is open to everyone.” Leonard Ravenhill

5.5 Rev Dr Chew Tow Yow recommended to many of us a book on prayer by Timothy Keller entitled *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*. Then a good number of people have received from me the book entitled *Prayer* by Brother Andrew and Al Janssen. I believe these books will challenge us to pray and organize prayer sessions especially as we live in very testing and trying times in this country. Prayer will help us see clearly the will of God when He chooses to reveal them to us. When we are on our knees, either alone or with others in prayer, God will clarify our vision and give us His grace to submit to His will. Then when we stand on our feet our lives would be transformed – the church and nation will be transformed too as a result.

6. Wholesome Families – Growing Strong Families for Christ

6.1 I am encouraged by the fact that many of our local churches have picked up this second Essential that we emphasized at last year’s 39th Session. Church camps, renewal meetings, leaders’ discussion groups, small group studies, and pulpit ministries have all seriously focused on this family theme.

³ Henderson, D Michael, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, (Indiana: Francis Asbury Press, 1997) p 112.

⁴Henderson, D Michael, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, (Indiana: Francis Asbury Press, 1997) p 115.

6.2 It is my prayer that we will pursue this Essential further in our church and not forsake it after a year of emphasis. The wholesome family theme needs emphasis yearly in our churches.

6.3 All over the world the focus is on families. The reason being, unless we come alongside families to equip them and work alongside them, we will see very little results in the life of individuals.

6.4 TRAC Board of Christian Education at the request of the TRAC Executive Board early this year, has come up with a Family Ministry Growth Strategy Project (FMGSP) which describes the family life cycle from pre-married stage to post-career empty nest stage. If used well this material can help us know what the families' needs are at different stages and how we may be able to minister to them at their point of need. The FMGSP also directs us to resources that are available to help carry out effective ministry to equip individuals and families.

6.4.1 We thank the Board of Christian Education for completing this project. We pray the material will be sent to local churches soon, for it will be of invaluable help.

7. A Voice to our Nation – Seeking Our Nation's Welfare in Christ

7.1 For the coming year our focus will be on this third Essential. Psalm 94:16 calls the people of God to "rise up" against the wicked and "take a stand for God" against evil doers. As a people of God, we do need to take a stand and voice our concerns. We must rise up and make a stand without being "rude, accusatory, threatening" as our Bishop Dr Ong puts it in a different context.

7.2 According to Rev John Wesley, the church is "a body of men compacted together, in order, first, to save each his own soul; then to assist each other in working out their salvation; and afterwards, as far as in them lies, to save all men from present and future misery."⁵ Thus the church must be united "to oppose the devil and all his works, and to wage war against the world and the flesh."⁶

7.3 We must be a Christian voice to the nation in an organized way. In 1 Corinthians 1:10 we read, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." The church needs to be united and speak as one voice to the nation.

7.4 Albert Einstein was quoted in Time Magazine on 23rd December, 1940 as saying: "Being a lover of freedom, when the revolution came in Germany, I looked to the universities to defend it, knowing that they had always boasted of their devotion to the cause of truth; but, no, the universities immediately were silenced. Then I looked to the great editors of the newspapers whose flaming editorials in days gone by had proclaimed their love of freedom; but they, like the universities, were silenced in a few short weeks....Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing truth. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration because the Church alone has had the courage and persistence to stand for intellectual truth and moral freedom. I am forced thus to confess that what I once despised I now praise unreservedly." May the last two sentences be true of the Church in Malaysia!

⁵ John Wesley, *The Reformation of Manners*

⁶ John Wesley, *The Reformation of Manners*

7.5 The church cannot sit still and not speak up in the rise of so much of wickedness around us. Not only wickedness in high places but also so much of blatant evil like the ones committed towards the refugees; they were murdered by the hundreds in our country where they came seeking shelter and protection.

7.6 The church must also give a helping hand to those who are poor. The poor are increasing. The number of people needing BR1M help shows that the needy persons and families are increasing. As we see more students come applying for scholarship from the Methodist Education Foundation we realize many families are in need of financial help.

7.7 Our Lord Jesus said, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” When has the church in Malaysia done all this to our Lord? When we did it to the least of Malaysians, and the least of migrants here, we have done it to Christ.

7.8 I commend our churches for meeting the needs of the needy in various ways. Below are some examples of seeking the people’s welfare in Christ.

Wesley Butterworth’s Community English Class
Wesley Penang’s usage of sign language for the hearing impaired
Wesley TI’s cooking for sixty poor people monthly
Bercham Ipoh’s health care clinic
CGMC’s haemodialysis ministry
Wesley Kampar’s tuition program for OA children
Trinity PJ’s street feeding program
DUMC’s Community Excel services
GMC Sentul’s provisions for the poor
Wesley Klang’s feeding of the poor
EMC’s Learning Centre for special children
Living Stone’s free-tuition classes to foreign students
Wesley KL’s home for the elderly
Christ Ampang’s medical/legal advisory services
Trinity Sg. Buloh’s concern for Myanmarese children
SSMC’s support for the flood victims early this year
SMC’s financial support for indigenous work
Wesley Seremban’s ministry to the Myanmarese
Wesley Melaka’s ability to embrace the Myanmarese and Nepalese
Wesley JB’s scholarship for primary school students

7.9 The church needs to lend her voice in the area of corruption. We have a duty to speak up in the face of corruption. And we need to ensure that the church is free of corruption. Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index has placed Malaysia at 52 on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

7.10 Racism has reared its ugly head wearing red t-shirts this year. Racism has come to us in many colours in this nation. The church must not pretend that there is no racism amongst us. I have personally experienced the ugly head of racism at least twice – once when I was in Form Three (in a non-Christian situation) and another when I was in the seminary. Racism does not only wear red t-shirts. Sometimes racism hides behind the cross and carries a Bible

to appear religious. If Christians are racists (a *Christian racist* is an oxymoron) then how can we be a voice to this nation and save this nation from racism?

7.11 While we have sought the welfare of our nation in many ways, it seems to me that Christians can do more in the whole area of ecology. Our Methodist Book of Discipline under Social Principles have elaborately spelt out the environmental issues and challenges. Yet it appears to me that we have not voiced this concern and done enough as a church in this area. I do commend our sisters in TRAC Methodist Women who are helping the environment in some ways. They need our support. We need to work alongside them to save the environment in any small way that we can.

7.11.1 As Pope Francis said in his recent *Encyclical Letter on Care for our Common Home*, the earth “cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use of the goods with which God has endowed her. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.” All of us need to repent of our sins against God’s creation, and do everything in our individual and communal capacity to save the earth. In this way, we too are seeking the welfare of our nation and God’s larger creation – the earth.

7.12 When the church speaks and acts against injustice it should not be construed as interference in politics. While the church must be nonpartisan, we must not be seen as unconcerned about justice and righteousness. We have Scriptural mandate to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly before our God (Micah 6:8).

7.12.1 Referring to the evangelicals whom God used to bring about the Great Awakening, the theologian Carl Henry said, “their evangelical movement was spiritually and morally vital because it strove for justice and also invited humanity for regeneration, forgiveness and power for righteousness. If the Church preaches only divine forgiveness and does not affirm justice she implies that God treats immorality and sin lightly.... we should be equally troubled that we lag in championing justice and fulfilling our evangelical mandate.” There can be no revival in this nation if there is no interest in justice at the same time.

7.13 The church enjoys a certain freedom and privilege in this country. As a result we are sometimes afraid to speak up, for fear that we may lose those privileges. In being a voice to our nation we need to be fearless but at the same time wise in our critical assessment of issues in this country. We need to be faithful to God in being agents of justice and by the Spirit of God who indwells us to work towards the release of the oppressed.

7.13.1 Christians must realize that “God has not given us a Spirit of timidity but a Spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:6-7). We overcome fear through the Spirit of God who indwells us.

7.14 If the people of God who are to be the voice to our nation remain silent then the darkness of evil will become darker, the poor will become poorer, justice will be trampled upon, and righteousness will not have a future.

7.14.1 Martin Niemöller, said the following about his seven years imprisonment in the concentration camps by the Nazis: “First they came for the Socialists, and I did not

speaking out because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.” This could happen to the church if we are voiceless now.

7.15 There are also Christians who seem to think that we must blindly submit to the governing authorities without differentiating between evil and good, just and unjust, and between right and wrong. Their favorite passage is Romans 13. However, John Calvin who wrestled through seriously about unjust governments in the light of Romans 13 has this to say to us: “In that obedience which we have shown to be due the authority of rulers, we are always to make this exception, indeed, to observe it as primary, that such obedience is never to lead us away from obedience to HIM, to whose decrees all their commands ought to yield, to whose majesty their scepters must bow. And how absurd would it be that in satisfying men you should incur the displeasure of HIM for whose sake you obey men themselves! The Lord, therefore, is the King of Kings, who, when HE has opened HIS sacred mouth, must alone be heard, before all and above all men; next to HIM we are subject to those men who are in authority over us, but only in HIM. If they command anything against HIM, let it go un-esteemed.”⁷

7.15.1 Francis Schaeffer says, “The state is to be an agent of justice to restrain evil by punishing the wrong doer, and to protect the good in society. When it does the reverse it has no proper authority. It is then a usurped authority and as such it becomes lawless and is tyranny.”⁸

7.15.2 John Stott puts it thus: “How, then, can it be shown that Paul’s demand for submission is not absolute? If the state commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands, then our plain Christian duty is to resist, not to submit, to disobey the State in order to obey God... To trespass and organize a sit-in may also in some instances be justified.... Whenever laws are enacted which contradict God’s law, civil disobedience becomes Christian duty.”⁹

7.16 I take this opportunity to remind us of the Social Creed in our Methodist Book of Discipline. Paragraph 90 originated (and altered many times) from the early Methodist’s outrage over the miserable lives of the countless number of workers in factories, mines, mills, residences and company towns:

We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God’s gifts, and we repent of our sins in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God’s handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

⁷ Calvin, John, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559.

⁸ Schaeffer, Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview* (Leicester: Crossway Books, 1988), p 468.

⁹ Stott, John, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), p 342.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the seniors, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.

We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.

8. A Vision for the World – Embracing Local and Global Mission for Christ

8.1 This fourth Essential will be emphasized at next year's Conference Session. But for the time being I will leave the following quotation with you to ponder over.

8.1.1 "Missions flows from the heart of a people who have been transformed by the Holy Spirit and who leave all to follow Christ."¹⁰

9. PMSM and Indigenous Church Ministries

9.1 We continue to strengthen the ten pillars (sepuluh tiang) in Persidangan Misi Sengoi Methodist (PMSM). The ten pillars are: Church Planting, Discipleship, Tithing, Children Education, Cooperative/ Entrepreneurship, Land Titles, Pastor's Image, Prayer Focus, Functional Church, Breaking Subsidy Mentality.

9.2 This year we have contributed a number of vans to PMSM. We are thankful to the local churches that gave generously to purchase new vans and refurbish the existing ones.

9.3 We are also thankful to the other Annual Conferences in our Methodist Church in Malaysia who are continuing in their support of the work of PMSM. With them as our partners this year and next year we are increasing the salaries of all our PMSM pastors and workers.

9.4 This year on the 7th of October a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Methodist Church in Malaysia (MCM) and Methodist Church in Korea (MCK). This MOU will help PMSM receive continuous help from MCK and it will help MCK be aware of the help rendered by their pastors here.

9.4.1 Through the help of MCK pastors we have been able to build several churches in PMSM villages in the last few years. But the help was given through TRAC and not directly extended to the villagers.

9.4.2 We are looking forward to greater partnership in other areas of ministries as we work together with the MCK pastors. However we remind our Korean brothers and sisters of the sensitive nature of this ministry and the need to respect the culture and

¹⁰ Engel, James, F., & William A. Dryness, *Changing the Mind of Missions – Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Illinois: IVP, 2000), p 36.

leadership of the indigenous Christians, not forgetting the Wawasan Berdikari 2020 that we are working towards.

9.5 We are thankful for all the help given to PMSM villages and other Orang Asli villages that were affected by flood early this year. As a result several villages where we have not established our work have asked us to consider bringing them under our fold.

9.6 The hostel project in Raub is taking shape. We are looking to take this project to the next level by asking PMSM to release one of their Pastors to lead this ministry. And we are looking to partnership with others who can help us financially.

9.7 We are grateful to Chinese Annual Conference for allowing us to use a piece of land in the outskirts of Raub for the purpose of training our OA brothers and sisters in animal husbandry. A tripartite agreement between CAC, PMSM and TRAC was signed in October. We will be able to use the said land for a maximum of twenty years.

9.8 I am very encouraged that many churches and individuals have come forward to help the ongoing and growing ministry at PMSM. Please note that if you would like to continue contributing financially or offer your services (i.e. training), please do so through the PMSM and TRAC offices. This is to ensure that all PMSM villages are blessed and not only the same few.

9.9 I wish to record a word of thanks to the members of the Indigenous Ministry Task Force of the Methodist Church in Malaysia for their labour of love in looking after the Indigenous Christians' needs. Highlighting their plight to the church at large have enabled us to work hand in hand to meet the spiritual, educational, and social needs of our brother and sisters.

10. General Concerns

10.1 In the month of October a few of us met with Rev Dr Chew Tow Yow and shared a common concern. The concern is that we need to help men be men, as men tend to operate very much alone out of fear and pride and are neglecting the need for deepening spirituality, neglecting their families and their roles as men generally. From all of these concerns arose a suggestion that we need to address the issues by bringing about a church-wide consciousness from the pulpit and through a Conference for men in 2017. In order to concretize our thoughts and in order to have a clear view of what we hope to achieve through the Conference and to map out the way forward after the Conference, we are going to bring a group of people to have a discussion called "Conversation on Men." It is hoped that from that conversation will arise a think-tank that could be a catalyst to birth the Conference and take us further into the next phase. It is also my hope and prayer that Rev Dr Chew will continue to tutor us in this discussion.

10.2 I am glad that MSF continues to expand its wings with 18 chapters so far and more importantly in the area of missions, and its willingness to support the Emanuel Lifespring ministry to the seniors. Their desire to partner with the Indigenous Ministry Task Force and Board of Missions' projects are commendable.

10.2.1 Even as we benefit so much from the ministry of the seniors in our midst we realize that the seniors have not lost their usefulness in ministry in their own homes and in the church and society. As such, instead of thinking that the seniors are a

burden or have outlived their usefulness, we need to esteem them and value them not only for their usefulness but simply because they too are children of God.

10.2.2 As Pope John Paul II in his Letter to the Elderly (1999) says, “There is an urgent need to recover a correct perspective of life as a whole. The correct perspective is that of eternity, for which life at every phase is a meaningful preparation. Old age too has a proper role to play in this gradual process of maturing along the path to eternity. And this process of maturing cannot but benefit the larger society of which the elderly person is a part of.”

10.3 The Methodist Women has eight local societies with 397 members. The MW President at the 40th Session TRAC MW held in Penang has exhorted senior women to participate in discipling and mentoring younger women to fulfil their God-given roles. There must be a strategy to achieve this. And just like men need to be helped to become mature men, women need help to become mature women. It is my hope that just like the Men’s Conference there could be a Women’s Conference spearheaded by our sisters in Methodist Women.

10.4 Ministry to young adults should remain an agenda in our churches. There is an increased interest in some of our churches to intentionally engage with the young adults and offer a listening ear to them. More churches need to do this with the aim to minister to them in a manner that is suited to young adults.

10.5 Children and youth need to be embraced by our church community through various ministries and especially by equipping their parents to disciple them. We need to release sufficient resources into children and youth ministries if we are serious in touching the lives of these younger ones and helping them be rooted in the word of God.

10.5.1 One more thing about ministry to the younger ones. We need to teach them the Bible from an early age. If our children only know a few Bible stories that will not be sufficient to see them through tough times in life or when their faith in Christ is challenged. They need to know the whole Bible and not just know something about the Bible, or a few stories. Just entertaining our children by contemporizing Bible stories will not help. They need to be taught the content and the authenticity of the Bible. They need to be taught to live out the Bible and we need to model to them a life based on Scriptural teaching.

10.6 As in the past we need to help The Methodist Education Foundation to increase its funds to help more needy students achieve their dreams to further their studies. I thank the churches who have given regularly and again this year.

10.7 Veterans of the Cross Fund is used to give Christmas gifts and pay for the insurance coverage for pastors and help retired pastors. Continuous giving to this fund will help us attain our goals to help our retired pastors even though minimally.

10.8 Our involvement in Schools is absolutely necessary. If we are not involved others will exert their influences on the lives of the children as well as on the administration of our schools. Being Methodists and being a voice to our nation should translate into action in our own Methodist Schools first and engaging in other schools as they open their doors to us. No Methodist Church or Methodist pastor should be disinterested in our schools.

10.9 We thank God for the General Conference Pastors' School that was held this year in Port Dickson Methodist Centre in the month of April which was attended by about 500 Pastors. It was a great time of learning, praying and interacting with one another.

11. **Personal Remarks**

11.1 As an Annual Conference our concern is for church growth. In the last thirty nine years the Lord has sustained us and kept us moving forward. If we keep our eyes focused on Him, are clear of our calling to be a set-apart people, not lose sight of what we must do as a church, and keep doing them well, we will see further growth.

11.2 This year is the 130th year of Methodism in Malaysia. It is also the 40th Session of TRAC. In many parts of the world a two-year program to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in the year 2017 is already underway. What should all this mean to us in terms of mission, evangelism, and in terms of being the church after God's own heart? Are we dependent on the power of the Spirit of God as the early Methodists who came to Malaysia did, or are we now relying in the strength of our flesh as we move forward as a church in Malaysia?

11.3 The following churches' efforts caught my attention this year:

Wesley Kuala Lipis' ministry in a teachers' training college
Wesley Raub's change of worship service time in order to be relevant
Wesley Penang's usage of sign language for the hearing impaired
Whispering Hope's young adults' active involvement in ministries
Living Hope's community music 'jamming' session
Wesley Seremban's archive centre
TUMC's bridging ministries with women in the community
Wesley Segamat's Praise Dance classes
Nusajaya's adoption scheme of tertiary students

11.4 As an Annual Conference we thank God for CFM, CCM (especially Rev Dr Hermen Shastri), NECF and others who have stood up in these trying times and spoken up for the Church in Malaysia. Those involved in these ministries need our continuous prayer support.

11.5 I praise God for every sacrifice that everyone makes to ensure that TRAC churches and our ministries continue to flourish.

11.6 I thank everyone who prayed for me, encouraged me and laboured with me. Please continue to journey with me.

11.7 This year my prayer for TRAC is based on Isaiah 58:11-12 which says:

The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.
Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

Te Deum laudamus!

Rev. Dr. T. Jeyakumar
President
Trinity Annual Conference
Methodist Church in Malaysia