

# MOSAIC

@ HOLLAND VILLAGE METHODIST CHURCH

Where loving God and loving others matter

LIVING OUT YOUR  
AUTUMN YEARS

COME TOGETHER  
HVMC'S FIRST  
VIRTUAL CAMP

*She will give birth to a son,  
and you are to give him the name Jesus,  
because he will save his people from their sins.  
(Matthew 1:21)*

SEEING BEAUTY  
IN THE TIME OF  
A PANDEMIC

EMMANUEL  
GOD WITH US

November 2021

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# CHRISTMAS AMIDST CHALLENGING TIMES

We live amidst challenging times. To date, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken approximately 4.5 million lives and infected 219 million people worldwide. People are losing their jobs and businesses are closing. Many are wondering when we can go back to life before the pandemic struck our world.

With Christmas coming around the corner, I know many are hoping for a Christmas celebration that can be like the ones we had in 2018 or 2019. But I am afraid that there are no guarantees on this, as the pandemic can intensify at any moment.

When I examine the first Christmas – whereby Mary and Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, in order to register for the census – I observe that it was a difficult Christmas as well. They had to travel, riding on a donkey, with Mary being heavily pregnant too. When they got to Bethlehem, Mary began to experience labour pains, and there was no proper place for her to give birth! She had to give birth in a place where animals were all around her!

But despite their difficulties, Mary and Joseph ended up with front row seats for a history-

making event: to witness the arrival of the Messiah! When we tell the Christmas story, we talk about the Magi and the shepherds – but we forget that Mary and Joseph were the first witnesses!

So, what challenges are you facing this Christmas? I pray that you will still keep your eyes upon God - He can, and will, still make it a special Christmas for you this year! Mark 4:38-40 tells us the disciples were in a boat with Jesus, and caught in a storm. They find Jesus asleep, and ask him, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to drown?" You see, they had thought that since they were with Jesus, they would not encounter storms in their journey.

Although Jesus did not promise that there would be no difficulties in life, He promised that we could bring our burdens to Him. A wise pastor once said to me, "If Jesus is taking a nap in your boat amidst the storm, it means you can take a nap too". This Christmas, come to Jesus; He promises peace for you, amidst the ongoing storm.

Pastor Joel Yong



HVMC

WELCOMES

# PASTOR JEREMY ONG

From the age of 17, HVMC's newest Pastor, Jeremy Ong, had wanted to be in full-time vocational ministry. But God told him to wait 10 years. So he did.

He went the well-trodden route of going to university and working. He spent five years in Perth, Western Australia, first doing an undergraduate degree in commerce and then working for a supermarket chain.

But, all the while, he never lost sight of his passion, and spent a year studying at a Baptist seminary, while working full-time concurrently. When he started seminary training, he posted on his wall in large bold print, the words of Paul the Apostle to the church of Corinth: "When I come to you brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). For Pastor Jeremy, these verses were significant in his calling as a pastor.

"When I started out in my pastoral ministry a little over eight years ago, I asked God to reveal what would characterise my ministry. He led me to these verses, and till today, they continue to serve as an encouragement and



reminder to me that my ministry should never be characterised by eloquence or giftedness, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of (God's) power," said Pastor Jeremy, who is passionate about helping people worship God fervently and unashamedly.

He did his theological training at Trinity Theological College and started serving at Wesley Methodist Church, where he stayed for three years before being appointed to Barker Road Methodist Church in 2016. "Wesley was my home church and I've been worshipping there since I was four years old," he said.

In August 2021, Pastor Jeremy started serving at HVMC. He has been assigned to oversee the Youth Ministry and Life Groups at HVMC. He hopes to see the youth and young adults develop into a vibrant and exciting community, where they can help each other follow Jesus authentically and serve him passionately.

The 39-year-old pastor is married to Jolene, a doctor, and the couple have two children, Nathan, 3, and Natalie, 1. He and Jolene got to know each other when he was a new first-year pastor at Wesley, and eventually tied the knot five years ago. With two young children, he does not get much time for hobbies. When he does get some time off, he enjoys reading and drinking coffee. He also likes playing with new gadgets, especially cameras and other photographic equipment.

**Ng Wan Ching**



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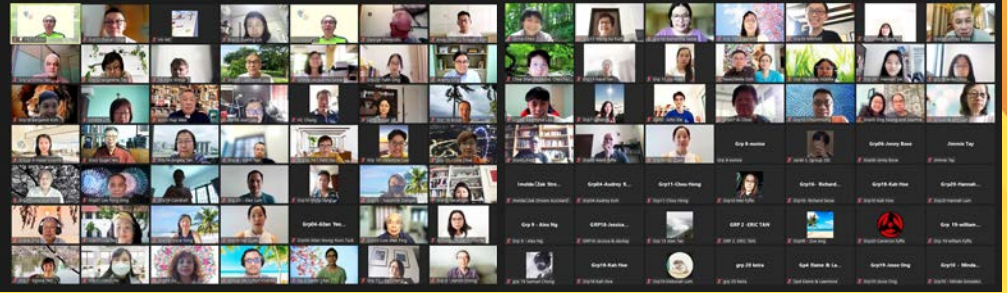


**DANIEL CHUA**

Finance

# EVENTFUL

# COME TOGETHER



The HVMC “Come Together” virtual church camp on 4 September 2021, was thoroughly enjoyable and enlightening. This first church wide event on Zoom, attended by 148 adults and children, brought us together in ways we never thought possible, considering the current COVID pandemic.

Our keynote speaker, Bishop Emeritus Dr Wee Boon Hup’s message to us was clear. We ought to love our friends, family and even people we do not know, because Jesus first loved us. It is this posture of love in our hearts for our fellow humans and community, that we, as believers in Christ must have, especially when sharing the good news of God’s love with others.

Dr Wee reminded us that times have changed; gone are the days when Christians would go into the streets and spread the good news to strangers. Instead of hard-hitting evangelism, we should now approach it with gentleness and kindness, accompanied by good works, blessing the needy, the poor and the sick with our time and resources, just as God Himself has blessed us. With guidance from the Holy Spirit, He will then show us the appropriate time and place to evangelise. At the same time, we must be mindful and respectful of other people’s beliefs and practices, in order to live in peace with them. As it is written in 1 Peter 3:15, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect”.

During the breakout sessions, we were divided into 20 groups, and engaged in exploring the webinar event’s theme of “Building Up and Reaching Out”. My fellow group mates were

very insightful, giving me new perspectives and views. I imagine, and hope, that when normalcy resumes, this fellowship with other church members will continue to grow and strengthen.

I would like to thank the organizing committee for their perseverance and dedication in bringing the congregation together. Thank God that the team was able to utilise technology for such a retreat, which would otherwise not have been possible in these challenging times.

“Dr Wee’s talk was excellent, practical and relevant to how one must do ministry and evangelise in the new world of today.”

**Lee Tang Yin**

“The youths had some lively discussion sessions, sharing our reflections on the message and how we can apply what we have learnt in our lives. We also had the chance to hear some of the adults’ takeaways from the message, which allowed us to see things from another perspective and helped us to understand the message better. Overall, it was an enriching and fruitful experience, and I am eagerly looking forward to when we can hold church events in person again!”

**Elliot Pan**

“The Scripture Union children’s programme, “Inside Out”, guided by Auntie Janine and the SU teachers was very fun. The food that was delivered to our home was very yummy too!”

**Owen Yeo**

**Yeo Eng Seang**



## Women IN ACTION



As the pandemic wore on, the Women's Society of Christian Service (WSCS) in HVMC, adapted quickly to draw women together within the permitted constraints.

At the local church level, we joined forces with Barker Road Methodist Church to run a virtual cooking lesson, "One Pot Wonder", in January 2021 for more than 80 ladies. After watching Linda Kwok demonstrate two recipes online, some of them gathered in small groups to cook together.

WSCS Sunday was one of the few physical services which was allowed in 2021, and Dr Cheah Fung Fong was invited to preach on "The Divine Order in God's Family". Participants received a lovely door gift of a fan and a devotional book written by the ladies.

In July, at the local chapter level, "Women Connect" enabled 18 ladies to hear live testimonies from Audrey Cheong and Margaret Vijay, on Zoom. During the fellowship, others were inspired to share spontaneously. As we could not serve refreshments, ice cream vouchers were mailed to the attendees.

To help parents manage the toll that the pandemic has on the mental state of our young, WSCS ran an interactive talk jointly with the Children Ministry, featuring Jason Wong, on "Raising Resilient Children", on 11 September 2021.

Fellowship continued amongst the women at WSCS, and the two bible study groups

supported each other with weekly meetings and prayer. The pandemic has brought them closer and we praise God for their efforts to reach out to each other.

But not everything was about fellowship. We reached out to the MWS Methodist Girls' Residence by custom making two videos for their exercises in the morning. Caureen Too, our Outreach and Social Concerns coordinator, arranged ice cream vouchers to be sent to the girls and the staff as a treat. We also managed to donate funds for an oven in their new premises.

At the national level, WSCS participated in the TRAC and General Conference programmes, like Thanksgiving services and Holy Week observance. "Be Still", an innovative nature walk cum retreat in Botanic Gardens, was well attended over two weekends. The "Power in this VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) World" Conference in July, attracted over 500 women, and our President Imelda Fyffe, smoothly facilitated the whole-day programme with her team. Many were moved as we listened to testimonies by six women of their spiritually rewarding journeys, the common thread being how Christ redeemed them and remained their hope and trust despite crisis moments.

We are glad that God continues to use WSCS in small and meaningful ways for nurturing, fellowship and outreach. We encourage more women to join us, by emailing us at [hvmcwomen@gmail.com](mailto:hvmcwomen@gmail.com).

**Eunice Yeo**

## Living Out YOUR AUTUMN YEARS

I think I was one of the earliest to sign up for the "Living Out Your Autumn Years" Zoom webinar held on Saturday 14 August 2021 from 9.30am to 12.00pm. After all, the speaker was Bishop Emeritus Dr Robert Solomon, known for his calm, clear and precise style and in 2019 had written the book, *Growing Old Gracefully*, on which the talk would be based. The webinar comprised two sessions. The first focused on **Ageing as a Spiritual Journey**, with some of the key considerations being knowing your destination, keeping your motives clear and not losing your passion, while focussing on Jesus and becoming more like Him in wisdom and in love.

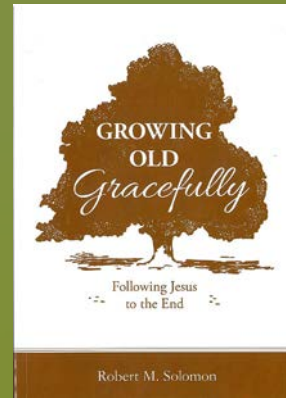
Dr Solomon said that as Christians, our journey should not be filled with sadness or hopelessness – instead, we must keep in mind that we are going to meet our Creator when we reach our final destination.



As Mun Kwok On, a fellow participant, aptly put it, when sharing his views on the webinar, "Always remember that your present situation is not your final destination."

Being at age 65 now and having followed Christ for the last 40 to 50 years, I found the talk very relevant as Dr Solomon encouraged us to stay the course, and not lose our passion to help others; consequently, helping ourselves, in this final stretch of our earthly journey. The Apostle Paul's words, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith," (2 Timothy 4:7) resonated in my mind.

Session 2 explored **Health and Frailties in the Senior Years**, as Dr Solomon discussed how to stay healthy, and, conversely, how to cope with declining health, bereavement, depression and the fear of losing one's memory and finally, death.



I could identify with all these, especially declining health, having to cope with diabetes and other related issues. I have often questioned God and asked why He has allowed us to suffer poor health. Dealing with bereavement and depression are real issues which every person has to go through, whether we are Christians or not. This is especially so with the passing away of one's spouse or loved ones. Fear of losing our memory and dealing with dementia and Alzheimer's Disease were topics of particular concern to our more senior listeners, but were also relevant to those coping with ageing parents and grandparents.

I found great comfort as Dr Solomon assured us that we are not alone in facing and coping with these issues. God is with us in our journey. These are also temporal issues, for in our Eternal Home we will be clothed in a "new body" free from all these worries and anxieties. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, yet our inner self is being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal glory that is far beyond comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:16, 17).

**Lee Fong King**

*Those who missed the webinar might like to pick up a copy of Robert M. Solomon's book, "Growing Old Gracefully", published by Discovery House, Our Daily Bread Ministries.*



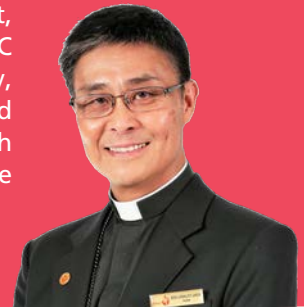


## NINE YEARS LATER...

HVMC celebrated its 9th Anniversary on 4 July 2021, with an online service on Facebook and Youtube. It was the second year running that we could not meet to celebrate physically as a church, since the COVID outbreak here in early 2020.

Pastor Joel asked us to reflect on the year that had passed, giving thanks and looking to God with hope for our tomorrows. He also reminded us of our new vision, "Nourished to Flourish" for the years ahead. This was followed by Pam Vas' sermonette to the little ones at HVMC, where she presented a pictorial journey tracing the growth of our church.

The guest speaker for our anniversary service was TRAC President, Reverend Stanley Chua. He began his sermon by congratulating HVMC on its growth, but reminded us that although we have come a long way, we should not rest on our laurels. A vision of growth was what started HVMC nine years ago, and it is his prayer for our anniversary, that each and every one of us will adopt this theme of growth...to grow until the theme of our lives is, "To Him be the glory both now and forever".



**May Oon**

## Planning For THE FUTURE

With the goal of preparing our sisters for life back in the Philippines when they eventually return home, HVMC's Filipino Fellowship (FF) engaged ASKI Global to conduct a Basic Entrepreneurship course in April this year. Classes were in person, by local ASKI teachers or via Zoom, with ASKI leaders and staff teaching from the Philippines. Some of the sisters were attending the course from Norway, Japan and the Philippines.

The course covered topics like the basic Principles of Entrepreneurship, Finance, Business Planning and Operations, Human Resource, Marketing and Networking.

At the end of the course, our FF sisters submitted their business plans on Food and Beverage, Clothes, Groceries and Wholesale, Livestock, Waterworks and Construction work.



Indeed, we are encouraged and proud of the 25 sisters who graduated in September - their perseverance and hard work finally paid off and we rejoice with them! To God be all the glory!

**Sapphire Wee Daogas**

## NOURISHED TO FLOURISH : Building bridges to our church and to Christ

*One of the key aspects within HVMC's vision "Nourished to Flourish", is that of reaching out to others. In line with this, our various church ministries have sought to continue to reach out to our congregation, to newcomers and to our neighbouring community during the pandemic, when social distancing and non-physical contact or gatherings have become the norm.*

# Virtual Welcome to HVMC



At the invitation of my ex-colleague Su Kuin, I started attending the weekly service at HVMC from December 2020. The COVID-19 restrictions in place had meant that while we were able to attend church, social interactions were kept to a minimum. This, coupled with the fact that I am an introvert by nature, meant that I didn't get to meet many people, even after being a regular attendee at HVMC for more than six months.

So, it was really with a feeling of warmth and appreciation, when I accepted the invite from Zoe to attend the Coffee@Zoom session on 5 July 2021, organized especially for newcomers to HVMC.

Prior to the event, our preferred drink orders were taken and hand delivered to our doorstep by Ark Coffee just before the start of the Zoom session. The drink was accompanied by the most decadent-looking double chocolate chip cookie I had ever seen.

I had been looking forward to the event, and it was great to see 16 smiling faces (no masks!) peering out eagerly at each other on my screen. With eight church members and

staff and eight new visitors, the Zoom session started off with a round of introductions. We shared about our backgrounds and how life had brought us together at HVMC during this poignant point in time.

The highlight of the session was an interactive quiz with ten questions on the history and various ministries of HVMC. It was a test of speed and knowledge and by the end of the game, the newcomers had gotten to know the church a little better, in addition to making 15 new friends.

When COVID-19 broke out in February last year, I had assumed the mayhem would all end quickly with the virus contained, and life returning to normal. The events of the last 18 months have shown how naïve I was and how we need to be prepared for the new challenges ahead. The importance of staying connected with the church and growing the relationship in this new era of social distancing is something that HVMC holds dear, and the new visitors can see the efforts being put in to achieve this. We look forward to having more of such programmes in the future, to build stronger relationships within the HVMC community.



Feedback from some of the new visitors:

“

It was very nice of HVMC to organize a welcome session for newcomers. The session helped me to better understand the history and the ministries in HVMC. The leaders also helped us to connect with the church more, informing and inviting us to join fellowship and church events.

- Meredith Lam

“

It is always good, especially for a new worshipper, to get to know more people and to remain in contact with someone in the church as this will help us to integrate better into HVMC.

- Eric Tan

Chan Pei Cheng

**NOURISHED TO FLOURISH : Building bridges to our church and to Christ**

## Pivoting to Online

# HOLY COMMUNION SERVICE



Celebrating Holy Communion is an important sacrament for Christians. We remember the Last Supper, Jesus's final meal with His disciples, before His betrayal and His sacrifice on the cross.

*The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).*

The COVID pandemic has disrupted our usual on-site Holy Communion services. In June and July this year, HVMC conducted online Holy Communion services, by making the elements available the week before the actual online service. Members could just drop by at the church on specific Saturday and Sunday mornings, and pick up the elements which were neatly packed into a small plastic bag. On the following Sunday, members would then access the Youtube link to participate in the Communion service together as a church family.

Lee Fong King

# GETTING REAL

## The harshness of life up close



Pay cuts, job losses, home-based learning (HBL) with space limitations. These worrying thoughts echo in this COVID pandemic. They are especially acute for low-income families like the ones our church helps to support. Here are two very real accounts of their struggles.

N and Y live with their five children, aged 1½ to 15 years old, in a two-room HDB flat (one bedroom, one hallway). HVMC provides them with monthly grocery vouchers and pocket money for the two youngest children.

As with all Singapore school children, they have to use HBL: remote school lessons that expect them to be independent, disciplined and computer-literate. However, with limited physical space and a toddler at home, it was difficult for N's children to concentrate on their lessons. They had to squeeze and make space at their small table and on the floor. N, with only primary school education, felt stressed, as she couldn't help her children with their schoolwork. She also struggled to manage her toddler while creating a conducive environment for the older children to study.

Y, who works as a cleaner, was happy at work with older co-workers and a good work environment. But his company lost the cleaning contract and he was redeployed. This resulted in reduced overtime hours and a 25% drop in his salary. When suggestions were made for alternative employment with better pay, he was very apprehensive. This stemmed from the fear of being exposed to people who might lead him back to earlier bad habits.

Silva works as a cleaner and lives alone. His wife had gone to India to visit her elderly parents and was stranded there due to the pandemic.

Silva had been financially independent until January 2021. Plagued with severe painful varicose veins in both legs, he underwent two surgeries in four months. With medical leave of six months for each surgery, he is likely to lose his job. Making matters worse, he tore a tendon in his right shoulder, so, yet another surgery has been scheduled for later this year. Three surgeries in a space of nine months, involving the limbs he needs to keep any blue-collar job: what a serious blow to Silva!

With meagre savings, individuals like Silva do not have a buffer for a rainy day. HVMC has stepped in to assist Silva financially. He recently told us, "I love HVMC. The church does not look at my race or religion; they help me and love me."



Such stories remind us that harsh realities prevail in these pandemic times. These are truly hard times at home and work for many families. HVMC is in a privileged place to show God's love to those in our immediate neighbourhood who have the least. They are the genuine needy, and we live out our faith by blessing them unconditionally. In so doing, "we honour God" (Proverbs 14:31).



# BEING THERE

## God's unfailing love



They were the darkest of days. Decades of Roman oppression of the Jewish people, and now Caesar's decree for a census. Apart from the uncertain purpose behind the latest census, lives were disrupted by the need to report at hometowns, often requiring long periods of travelling.

A carpenter and his heavily pregnant young wife embarked on the arduous journey that would take almost a week to complete. This untimely demand of travel, fraught with danger and uncertainty, was sustained by one thing in their hearts: that God was with Joseph and Mary. Indeed, it was the divine presence of God that was carried in her womb.

So on that first Christmas, the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 would be fulfilled. Emmanuel was established as truly "God with us." And even in the ensuing darkness of barbaric acts of child murder, God continued to be with Joseph and Mary as He guided them to safety in Egypt with the baby Jesus. Herod's murderous love of power could not extinguish the power of love: God's amazing and unfailing love.

Now more than 2,000 years later, we encounter dark times in our second Christmas under COVID pandemic conditions. For many, the journey has been one of great uncertainty, affecting jobs and livelihood. Around the world, there is unprecedented suffering and loss of life. In Singapore, there are the continuing changes to our social, work, school, and family lives.

But even as we, individually, and as a church, struggle with the growing fatigue of these changes, deep in our Christian hearts, we

know that one thing will never change: we must believe it when we sing "Emmanuel... God (is) with us."

This Christmas gives us the time to reflect on the foundation of our faith, and how the birth of Jesus in those earlier dark times has brought light to our world. In remembering God's love to us through His Son, our hearts may reach up to God by the opportunities to reach out to others whose plight is worse than ours. This is a time where loving others really does matter; a time of just being there for them.

In spite of our personal challenges, our faith in action can lead us to be Godly witnesses, as people who stay positive and uncomplaining about the times, or circumstances which frustrate or curtail our lives. Even when WFH (Work From Home) remains a current norm that may keep us apart, we can remain united as a church in spite of the limitations and anxieties of congregating physically. We can continue to "Worship From Home", keeping alive the flame of hope that our church life will be restored fully in the days ahead.

So, as we set aside time for those nearest to us this Christmas, let's extend some time and prayers further afield. No arduous physical travelling needed; just hearts of compassion that are "rooted and established in love" and certain that He is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3: 17, 20). By believing that this Christmas, all can join the psalmist to say, "I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever" (Psalm 52:8).

**Low Wye Mun**



# SEEING BEAUTY

## In the time of a pandemic



When the clock struck midnight on 31 December 2020, I sent a thankful prayer for God's providence throughout what seemed to have been a truly extraordinary year, and yet another prayer, radiating positivity and optimism, for 2021.

After all, the development of effective vaccines and the international coordination for the vaccination rollout plan for end 2020 were seen as key indicators of the possible ability to resume our pre-COVID lives; where the ease of international leisure and business travel, economic recovery and activities without masks could once again prevail.

However, as we now know in 2021, the posture of the international community is that the pandemic is to be endemic; and that the virus will still be with us in the foreseeable future.

For me, and my family, this COVID season has been the best of times, and the worst of times, in equal measures. As a member of the sandwich generation, there were many moments of hand wringing, due to insecurities about jobs and livelihood and worrying for elderly parents (in Singapore and India) and our young children's well-being, which did not help my own mental health. We also had to cope with two deaths in the family.

As a time-bound mortal, I keenly felt the relentless marching of time; the milestone targets I had hoped to achieve during this season of my life were thrown off balance by the pandemic. As such, I felt despondent that I was not utilizing the "extra" time the pandemic offered, nor was I effectively fulfilling the purpose God planned me for.

Nonetheless, through it all, I felt God's loving kindness, patience and providence, with

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13, a salve through many a sleepless night:

- Trust in Him for the Uncontrollable
- Act in Faith for the Intentional choices we have to make
- Prepare for Eternity in the Present

As such, although fatigued by news of virus variants, racial attacks and shocking violence on schoolgrounds, I adjusted my focus on the appreciation of good health, family harmony and enjoyment of life; of hugging my children and cooking up international cuisine-themed Sunday dinners for parents to enjoy in lieu of travel.

With WFH (Work From Home) and reduced projects, there was more time to be spent with family, going to parks and open spaces; witnessing God's handiwork in Nature and appreciation of Singapore's leadership for planning our City in a Garden.

With more couple time, my husband and I decided to "invest" in our partnership, by taking up an Alpha Marriage course, which proved to be both refreshing and enriching.

It was also through this season that my church circle widened. Janine Boon had reached out and connected with me, and I joined HVMC's Tuesday Life Group and a couple of other social and fellowship gatherings, from which I have been richly blessed with conversations over wine and coffee.

So, at times when I feel insecure, and the longing for the "old life" overwhelms me, I just have to remind myself that I have to adjust my ways and to continually Trust in Him, Act in Faith and Prepare for Eternity, for "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

**Lisa Teo**



# Emmanuel **GOD WITH US**



The start of 2021 saw me packing my bags and preparing to travel to Namibia for medical missions. How could I have known in late 2019 that this simple commitment would lead to an adventure that would start at the height of a global pandemic and travel restrictions? Not only was I taking a 90% pay cut while travelling to an unfamiliar country, but I was also doing so in the middle of a worldwide crisis. In addition, if I did catch the virus during travel, I would have limited access to vaccine and emergency care.

It did not make sense to many that I would forge ahead and remain faithful to the call. I can imagine that it must have made even less sense for Mary, a virgin engaged to be married, to respond to her divine assignment to carry the son of God before her wedding, with "... be it unto me according to your word..." (Luke 1:38). And yet, God was with us.

Once on the continent, I made plans to travel to Malawi to visit a dear friend. Ordinarily, two flights should have gotten me to Malawi within 24 hours, that is, until the connecting flight was postponed at the very last minute, to a week later. Feeling brave, I decided to travel on the bus. A 30-hour trip across three African land borders turned into five days on the bus, a trip prolonged by engine breakdowns, corrupt road police asking for bribes, bus conductors demanding money for fuel and border officials attempting to extort money. A chance friendship with a fellow passenger, who was a former child soldier from Congo, helped me navigate the nuances of crossing borders as a foreigner. Other passengers extended grace

and fellowship, lending peace and assurance as I traversed foreign terrain. This is but a shadow, compared to Mary, who braved a long and uncomfortable trip to Bethlehem atop an animal when she was heavily pregnant. God was with us.

Namibia saw relatively low numbers of COVID in the early days of the pandemic, due to being sparsely populated. However, their numbers spiked suddenly with severe cases causing death, a day before I was to depart. I was suddenly barred from connecting to Singapore, via Dubai, as all travellers from Namibia became red-flagged. I found this out on the day of travel. Through the airline support services, I managed to get on the same flight, but to Malaysia. There, immigration officials exempted me from a repeat swab test and a quarantine notice (as would have been required), before travelling onwards to Singapore, as my flight was on the same day, in three hours. I was personally escorted to the domestic airport, wherein, after much discussion with the team in Singapore, I was allowed to embark on the final leg of my journey home.

The birth of Jesus came when the world was in a constant flux of political instability, and racial oppression was rife. Christmas is a time to remember how God can weave His redemption within a world constantly beset with changes and unpredictability. God is truly with us and will be "till the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

**Michelle Ting**

# FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I Have For You



At the first Christmas, it must have been very hard for Mary and Joseph to accept the demands placed upon them by the Roman census as it disrupted their lives and brought hardship. For our family, it wasn't a Roman census; our challenge started at my workplace earlier this year. A company-wide townhall meeting was held on the eve of Chinese New Year, and all employees were informed of a potential closure of the business, with a final decision to be announced at the end of March. Having spent 15 years with the company, the news came as a big shock, and I knew that the weeks ahead would be very difficult for us as a family, as well as for my colleagues and friends in the business.

Having overcome the first reactions of panic and fear of what might lay ahead, it was the calming words and prayers of my wife, Imelda, that guided me through those first few days. We made the immediate decision to bless the company and pray for the leaders involved in the decision-making. I took strength from God's Word in Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

I faced days when praying for the company leaders and blessing them were very challenging, especially once it was clear that the final decision would be the closure of the company and retrenchment of all staff. It was during those days when I faced unpleasant situations of conflict and confrontation, that I struggled to understand, and to humbly accept that God was ordering my steps and that He was present with me during the chaos. However, despite the obstacles, we

took our inspiration and courage as a family from Romans 8:26-27, asking the Holy Spirit to intercede for us, and continued to pray daily for those involved.

James 5:16 prompted us to find a Christian friend and pray for one another. Through sharing, confession and prayer in our Life Group, I realised that I was not alone facing challenges in the "new normal". Many others were in far worse situations. With continued encouragement from family, friends and our Life Group, I was able to honour God in my work, until the last day of my employment with the company.

Exactly one month after receiving the news about the company closure, God directed my steps towards a new opportunity. Through a mutual friend in the industry, I was introduced to a company in the UK looking for someone with my experience to establish their business operations in Singapore and the interview process began. From the initial phone call and introduction, all the way through until securing the new job, I knew this was God's work in my life.

Just as Mary and Joseph were guided on their journey to Bethlehem and beyond by angels and by God, we knew as a family that God had directed people into my life and planned my steps during those challenging times. "He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure" (Isaiah 33:6).

**Mark Fyffe**



# HELP... Let Me Out Of Here!

The wheels struck the tarmac at 4am - I was finally home after 18 hours in the air. But, this was the first time that returning to Singapore was not an event I looked forward to – in fact, I was filled with trepidation, as this was travel in the time of a pandemic.

After being led through the immigration lanes, we were shepherded into various holding areas by staff in full PPE; it had a surreal feel to it, as though I had landed in a sci-fi movie set where we, the passengers, were inflicted with some virulent disease and had to be isolated.

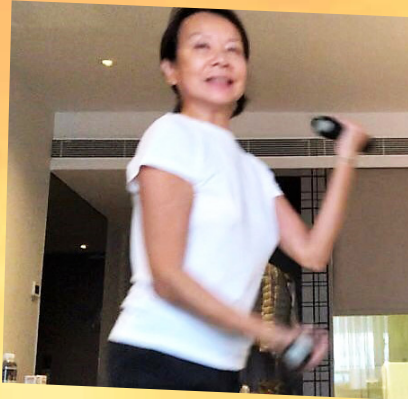
The buses then took us to our designated hotels for the two-week SHN (Stay Home Notice). It took more than three hours from the time we landed till the time we were ensconced in our rooms – what a palaver!

Once the door was shut, reality hit me. I asked myself, how am I going to survive this two-week 'incarceration' in a 'hermetically-sealed' room. I took a deep breath and told myself not to panic, as feelings akin to claustrophobia slowly began to invade my sanity.

Thankfully, things started to improve when I got myself into a routine of sorts and this is my tongue-in-cheek playbook on HOW TO SURVIVE SHN! And I tell you, it's all about Hydrate, Hydrate and Hydrate! Remember, you're in an air-conditioned room all day and all night, so just guzzle down that water and slap on that moisturizer!

Then push yourself to adopt a daily exercise regime – otherwise you'll be sitting on that chair either working, reading, eating, or watching Netflix – to get your blood flowing. Not only would it release more dopamine, the 'feel good hormone', but it would also help to prevent tossing and turning in bed counting sheep, when you're simply not tired enough!

I followed various walking exercises on Youtube (to get more variety) and worked up quite a sweat every day for 30 minutes. Alternatively you can pace the floor which can be quite a bore!! Also, you need to move to



burn those calories, especially when friends drop off all sorts of delectable victuals and you find yourself demolishing them out of gratitude...and boredom.

Okay, enough of the fun stuff...on a more serious note, I'd like to get down to what, or rather, who really sustained me during this period of isolation. GOD. My trip to New York City was to hug my daughter, whom I hadn't seen in more than a year, and to celebrate the latest milestone in her academic journey. We were blessed with wonderful sharing and bonding. My heart was filled with gratitude for the Lord's provision, and I was led by the Holy Spirit to make use of this time as a spiritual retreat.

Never was I so committed to reading, learning, and engaging, in His Word. There were Zoom bible studies, preparatory work before the meetings, and also, editing articles for the forthcoming issue of Mosaic. I must also add that I was grateful for the many friends who sent their love gifts of delicious food. The two weeks did not seem as interminable as I thought they'd be.

Although I must confess that I wouldn't exactly be rushing off to do another stint of SHN, it's taught me that there's no situation so unbearable, so oppressive, if you have God on your side, lifting your spirits, cheering you on and making each moment count. Without Him in my life, I might have taken up...knitting?

**May Oon**



# CHRISTMAS SHERRY TRIFLE

Simple yummy idiot-proof recipe for non-cooks



1

Butter cake (any brand) – Use about an inch of butter cake to fully line the bottom of your glass bowl.

2

Alcohol - Sweet liquors to soak the butter cake at least 1 day earlier. I usually use Sweet Sherry, Cointreau, Grand Marnier or Drambuie. Can replace with whatever you prefer and amount depends on you. Can also dilute with the juice of the canned peaches to be used.



3

Add a layer of canned peaches, mandarin oranges and pitted dark cherries. Drain out the juices before use.



4

Then add a layer of custard - about 1-inch thick – I usually use Bird's Custard Powder and follow the instructions on how to make it.



5

Make jelly separately - Any red coloured ones, eg strawberry or raspberry. I buy the 'Tortally' brand but use half the water stated, so that the jelly is firmer.



6

Before serving, add fresh cream, e.g. President brand. Whip it till stiff and top the trifle with it - about 1/2 inch deep.



7

Then decorate with toppings – you can use strawberries, canned dark pitted cherries, peaches and mandarin oranges. Finish with a sprinkling of toasted almond flakes. Serve immediately.

