



# AGST-MST UPDATE

A NEWSLETTER OF AGST-MST FOR INFORMED PRAYER | JUNE 2009

*Archbishop Temple is reported as saying, in effect, 'When people stop praying, coincidences stop.' In my experience, the words can also be reversed: 'When people keep on praying, "coincidences" become significant.'* - John Laird

**AGST-MST Update** contains news about our ministry in Asian post-graduate theological education. It is published three times per year in English.

**Asia Graduate School of Theology (Malaysia/Singapore/Thailand)** is a theological training venture offering post-graduate programs for church leaders and theological/Bible college faculty who are seeking to be better equipped for ministry and mission that will enhance God's kingdom in Asia. AGST-MST was established in 2004.

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## NEWS & UPDATES

### First AGST-MST PhD graduate

**A**pril 28 was a notable milestone day for AGST-MST: we marked the graduation of our first PhD student.

Dr Rosalind Lim-Tan, director of the Holistic Child Development Institute at the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary (MBTS) in Penang, Malaysia, graduated with the degree of a Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

The graduation ceremony took place in a MBTS chapel service, at which friends of Rosalind joined the seminary community to celebrate her achievement. Following the graduation, a short symposium was held at which Rosalind summarised her research and interacted on the practical implications with interested seminary faculty, students and friends.

The focus of Dr Lim-Tan's doctoral research is the faith formation of children in Malaysian Baptist English-speaking congregations, with special reference to the framework of Russian educationist Lev Vygotsky. Three international scholars examined Dr Lim-Tan's dissertation, and all commended the quality of the work. One of the examiners noted, "[it] represents a very ambitious attempt to pull together a number of different disciplines and apply them ... in a real-world situation."



Dr Rosalind Lim-Tan (center) receives her PhD(Ed) hood from AGST-MST Dean, Dr Allan Harkness (left), assisted by MBTS President Dr John Ong (right).

- Praise God for this AGST-MST milestone.
- Commit Rosalind's ongoing ministry to God, especially that this qualification will enhance her leadership.
- Pray for the other eight PhD(Ed) and PhD(Theology) candidates, at different stages in their research and writing – for perseverance and good time management especially.

## Middle East partnership



*Allan Harkness at the signing of the MOU, with Dr Bishara Awad (Chairman, MEATE Executive Committee), and Drs Paul Sanders and Camille Melki (MEATE Executive Directors)*

A regional partnership in postgraduate theological education was cemented in May, when AGST-MST Dean Allan Harkness met colleagues from the Middle East Association for Theological Education (MEATE) in Lebanon and Jordan, and completed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two consortia.

For some time, MEATE has seen the need for postgraduate training in their North Africa/Middle East theological colleges, but has recognised that for now they are unable to sustain an independent programme. They considered the style and format of the AGST-MST programs as suitable for their context, and so initiated an approach to partner with AGST-MST.

Initially, students from MEATE colleges will participate in existing AGST-MST programs, and special effort will be made to provide support for the students from their region. But both the AGST-MST and MEATE leaders look forward to an autonomous Middle East postgraduate program in due course.

AGST-MST has been humbled by this development, and we look forward to sharing our resources in this particular way.

- *Thank God for the opportunity for AGST-MST to share its programs and experience with MEATE. Pray for smooth administrative logistics in this strategic partnership.*
- *Pray for potential MEATE students to be identified, freed from ministry responsibilities to undergo further equipping, and find adequate financial resources to undertake the program.*

## Annual meeting time again

A key event for AGST-MST is the annual meeting of the Governing Board. Representatives from each of the eight member colleges of the AGST-MST consortium gather to review the past year and to make decisions on the future developments.

On Saturday 11 July, the Governing Board will be hosted by Phnom Penh Bible School for its 2009 meeting. Especially significant on the agenda this year is the recommitment of member colleges to a renewed consortium agreement (due every five years). Also, the Governing Board needs to elect office-holders for the next period, recommend new programs (and tweak existing ones), and review the finances of AGST-MST.

Less formal interaction between the board members, especially over meals, is strategic also to build a sense of collegiality among this widespread group of people who communicate with each other mainly by e-mail and occasional phone calls.

- *Thank God for AGST-MST's achievements over the past year and significant growth since our inception in 2004.*
- *Ask God to give clear perspectives and priorities for AGST-MST's future, in the coming year and beyond.*
- *Thank God for the commitment of Dr Eddy Ho (Chairman) and Rev Wendy Ching (Treasurer); and pray for the right people to take on these roles for the next two years.*

## Facelift for MTh(Ed) in 2010

AGST-MST's MTh(Education) program will have a facelift when it commences its third cycle in early 2010.

The change in focus is reflected in the program's new title: **Master of Theology (Education) in Spiritual Formation and Discipleship**. In response to an expressed need for the program to more effectively 'equip the equippers' of churches and Christian organisations, elements of spiritual formation and discipleship will be more intentionally included to complement the current focus on Church educational ministries.

Students who want to explore these areas but without necessarily going through the whole MTh(Ed) program will now have an option to complete a **Post Graduate Diploma in Education, Spiritual Formation and Discipleship**. A senior pastor in a Singapore church suggests that this program could be ideal for church leaders looking for ministry upgrading and enrichment opportunities.

Elective modules will be offered alongside three core modules. The program continues to be non-residential, with intensive 4-7 day on-campus sessions being held 3-4 times a year. Students taking the course modules consecutively consider the program to be equivalent to about 50% of a typical full-time seminary program, and could complete it in less than three years.

See [www.agst-mst.org](http://www.agst-mst.org) for further details about the AGST-MST MTh(Ed)/ Postgrad Dip Ed program – as well as our ongoing PhD programs and MTh (Theology). (Email [registrar@agst-mst.org](mailto:registrar@agst-mst.org).) The best publicity is word-of-mouth – who could you encourage to consider this program?

- *Pray that potential students will hear about this program in good time, and be able to commit themselves to participating.*
- *Pray for Allan Harkness (wearing his 'Education Programs Director hat) and the AGST-MST Education Programs Committee, overseeing the administrative detail of the program.*
- *Thank God for a pool of potential module facilitators. Pray for a number currently thinking about whether they can commit themselves to teach a module in 2010-2011.*
- *Ms Michelle Seetoh (Singapore) is acting as AGST-MST Registrar. Pray for her as she handles requests and applications from potential students in both the education and theology programs.*



Meals are an essential component of MTh program modules. (Dr Keith White – far right)

## Meanwhile, in the MTh(Theology)...

Modules in the MTh(Theology) program continue, with 6-12 participants.

In March, Dr Ng Kam Weng (Director of the Kairos Institute, Malaysia) facilitated a particularly stretching module, *Theology, philosophy and worldviews*.

Just completed in Bangkok, in early June, was the on-campus component of *Theology and society*, with Dr Keith White, sociologist and theologian from the UK. We appreciate the input of people like Dr White, who comments: 'I have derived much of my theology from and in Asia, and remain committed long term to AGST and seminaries in the region.'

- *A downside to non-residential programs like AGST-MST's is that most students 'struggle to juggle' their studies alongside the demands of ongoing responsibilities in their home settings. Pray for good time management, and the ability to gracefully say 'no' to non-priority demands.*
- *Pray for Dr David Singh (facilitator) and students in the forthcoming Theology of religions module, with the on-campus sessions 24-28 August, at MBTS (Penang).*

## PROJECTS FOR PRAYER & PROVISION

### Accounting software

AGST-MST has its long-awaited accounting software package 'up and running' – and we are on target to be able to generate our first set of complete, auditable annual accounts. We are especially grateful to accountant Ms Chit Moi (Johor Bahru) who is overseeing this development most competently, and Ms Siau Hoi Ching (Klang) in the role of part-time AGST-MST accounts clerk.

- *Pray for the initial set of accounts being compiled for the AGST-MST Governing Board meeting on 11 July, and then for them to be firmed up and presented for audit.*

### Website development

The redevelopment of our AGST-MST website becomes increasingly urgent, and we are in contact with a Malaysian developer for this. Part of the development is for 'typical' web site functions – program information and promotion, etc – but we are also exploring having an interactive student/faculty space ('learning management system') and a centralised, secure administrative centre. We are aiming to have this in place by the end of 2009 – and it would be a bonus to have gifts specifically earmarked for this project (up to RM5000/SG\$2100/US\$1500).

### On-line theological resources

Increasingly we are aware of the need for ready access by our students and faculty of the AGST-MST consortium institutions to some of the key specialised internet-based resources for theological research. We are exploring ways ahead – but will need a generous sponsor for both the initial licence and annual fees.

### Money matters – in general

God has continued to provide for AGST-MST's ongoing operating expenses, and we continue to trust him to do so as we head into a new financial year (from July).

We are especially grateful that MEANS USA is willing to be a 'financial bridge' between donors in the USA and AGST-MST. We look forward to a mutually beneficial partnership. Details may be found at [www.meansusa.org](http://www.meansusa.org).

- *Thank God for his 'stamp of approval' on the ministry of AGST-MST by appropriate financial provision. Pray that he may continue to do so, from the sources of his choice.*
- *Pray for a successful financial audit later in 2009.*

*If you can suggest anyone we may be able to speak to about these projects, please contact AGST-MST Dean Dr Allan Harkness (email: [dean@agst-mst.org](mailto:dean@agst-mst.org); tel: 65-6778-5141.)*

### For donors

- AGST-MST bank account details for direct credit are available from [admin@agst-mst.org](mailto:admin@agst-mst.org).
- Please make RM/SG\$/US\$ cheques payable to 'AGST Alliance Sdn Bhd'; and Thai Baht cheques payable to 'Bangkok Bible Seminary'.
- USA donors may send tax-deductible financial gifts for AGST-MST to MEANS USA <[www.meansusa.org](http://www.meansusa.org)>.
- AGST-MST address: VBox 886642, Singapore 919191, Tell/Fax: (65) 67785141



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