



Attuned

A NEWSLETTER OF AGST ALLIANCE FOR INFORMED PRAYER | APRIL 2010

'Almighty God, give us wisdom to perceive you, intellect to understand you, diligence to seek you, patience to wait for you, eyes to behold you, a heart to meditate upon you and life to proclaim you, through the power of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.' – Benedict

AGST Alliance (formerly known as AGST-MST) is a training venture offering post-graduate theological programs for church leaders and theological/Bible college faculty, to equip them for ministry that will enhance God's mission in Asia.

The AGST Alliance consortium comprises:

Bangkok Bible Seminary
Bible College of Malaysia
East Asia School of Theology (Singapore)
Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary
Malaysia Bible Seminary
Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School
of Theology
Phnom Penh Bible School
Thailand Pentecostal Bible Seminary

AGST Alliance was established in 2004.
Its programs are validated by
the Asia Theological Association.

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www.agst-mst.org

Accreditation achieved!

With much joy and gratitude to our heavenly Father we are able to report that the Asia Theological Association (ATA) accreditation process with AGST Alliance in early March has resulted in a positive outcome for us.

The visiting evaluation team – comprising Drs Narendra John (ATA Accreditation Secretary), Brian Wintle (ATA Associate and Regional Secretary) and Jeannette Shubert – reviewed the administration/governance and academic standards of our programs; and interviewed students, graduates and Governing Board members. They recommended that our MTh(Ed), PhD(Ed), and MTh(Theol) programs be validated. (The validation of our PhD(Theology) will be completed after we have a graduate in that program.) [Note: 'validation' is used rather than accreditation, but the intent is the same as 'accreditation'.]

An interesting dynamic of the three-day process was that it was similar to a 'travelling roadshow', with meetings in Singapore, Malacca (where the on-campus sessions of a MTh(Theol) module were in progress) and Kuala Lumpur... a natural expression, of course, of being a multi-national venture!

This outcome is the result of a good deal of hard, focused work by many people over the five-plus years of our existence, and a pleasing confirmation of our direction and standards. Over the next few months we will work to address the recommendations made by the accreditation team.



The accreditation team members with members of the Governing Board and Allan Harkness (Dean).

- Thank God for the positive outcome to the accreditation process.
- Pray for the Governing Board, Allan Harkness (Dean) and the program committees as they discuss and implement the recommendations from the accreditation report

In the PhD programs

PhD(Ed) study centre sojourn

A bonus in the research process for AGST Alliance PhD candidates is the opportunity to spend extended, focused time at a well-equipped study centre. In the final quarter of 2009 two of our PhD(Ed) candidates, the husband and wife team of Casey Ng and Davina Soh, headed from Singapore to Northern Ireland for a sojourn at the Centre for Theological Education (part of Belfast Bible College).



Casey and Davina with their peers at CTE.

At CTE Casey completed a Post-Graduate Certificate in Theological Education. His peers represented a mini United Nations: with theological educators from Brazil, Ghana, India, Israel, Kenya, Nigeria, Myanmar, Togo, and United Kingdom, the multicultural classroom allowed for engaging and enriching discussion on theological education and practice. Davina was also able to attend the classes; and both delved into the library facilities offered by the college and nearby Queen's University.

Davina and Casey returned to Singapore having had productive interaction with the CTE Director Dr. Graham Cheesman (their main supervisor), and with their research proposals virtually ready to submit. All in all, the sojourn was a great boost for the progress of their doctoral research.

PhD(Ed) candidates gather

Completing a PhD is daunting at any time – but more so when candidates are doing their research based in their home setting rather than residing on a campus and with only limited contact with their supervisor and other candidates.

To address this concern, a meeting of the PhD(Ed) candidates was held in mid-March. Five of the six current candidates attended, coming to Singapore from as far as Bandung (Indonesia) and Penang (Malaysia). Each candidate had an opportunity to share their area of research and personal concerns, and to pray for one another.

Their verdict on the value of the gathering was unanimous: "A most worthwhile time; let's aim to meet again in October."

- *The PhD(Ed) candidates are all at different stages of their programs. Pray that they will be encouraged to persevere and 'finish well'.*
- *Accessibility of resources is a continuing challenge for original PhD research – pray for the candidates as they track down suitable material.*
- *Thank God for the willing, competent supervisors of our PhD candidates – they serve in this capacity with many other commitments.*

In the MTh(Theology) program

Context adds value



Dr Steve Taylor and MTh(Theol) students in Malacca.

The intensive on-campus sessions of the MTh modules are usually held on the campus of one of our member seminaries. However, the sessions for the recent MTh(Theol) module, *Contemporary Asian Theologies*, took place in the Cheng Ho Cultural Museum, in Malacca, Malaysia.

Malacca is where Christianity first came into Malaysia (in the 16th century), and where the first Chinese Bible was printed and then given to the Korean Emperor. One floor of the Cheng Ho museum is given over to an exhibition on the life and ministry of Robert Morrison, the early Protestant missionary to China. Near the museum is the oldest Chinese temple in the world outside of China, and a famous Muslim mosque.

Dr Steve Taylor, module facilitator, comments: "What a privilege it was to spend the week discussing Asian theology with such an interactive and bright group of students and in

this historic setting. The days flew past as we explored theologies and issues relevant to the Asian context, all interspersed with a lot of laughter!"

Next MTh(Theol) module

The final module in the current cycle of the MTh(Theology) program takes place on the MBTS campus in Penang, 24-28 May. *Theological Anthropology* will be facilitated by Dr John Massey, of Baptist Theological Seminary, Singapore.

The on-campus sessions of this MTh(Theol) module and an MTh(Ed) one are concurrent; and this will enable the students in the two AGST Alliance programs to interact with each other.

New cycle of MTh(Theol) - 2011

The modules for a new cycle of the MTh(Theol) program are being shaped up by Dr Sunny Tan (Theology Programs Director) and his committee. We anticipate the program will commence in early 2011.

- Pray for effective publicity for the new cycle of the MTh(Theol), so that church leaders who will benefit from participating will get to hear about it in good time.
- Pray for Dr Sunny Tan, who juggles his AGST Alliance responsibilities with heavy commitments as Academic Dean in his own seminary, MBTS.
- MTh(Theol) students in the first cycle need to plan their thesis topics, and we need to appoint suitable supervisors. Pray that both aspects will come together well.

In the MTh(Education) program

New MTh(Ed) cycle underway

The new cycle of the *Master of Theology (Education) in Spiritual formation and Discipleship* started in January. Three students – two from East Malaysia and one from Sudan – were joined by a DMin student for the on-campus sessions of their introductory module, held at EAST (Singapore) in late February.



Winnie Chan (East Malaysia) acting as scribe.

Thomas Hoth, Principal of Nile Theological College in Khartoum (Sudan) is the first student to come into our programs under the special partnership arrangement between AGST Alliance and the Middle East Association for Theological Education (MEATE).

Next MTh(Ed) module

The second module of the MTh(Ed) program takes place on the MBTS campus in Penang, 24-28 May, facilitated by our first AGST Alliance PhD(Ed) graduate Dr Rosalind Lim-Tan. The topic is *Growing and Developing in Christian Faith Communities*.

MTh(Ed) students welcome!

Participants may join the MTh(Ed) program at any module. Details about the coming modules are on www.agst-mst.org. The present small batch of students would appreciate several more colleagues to interact with!

- Students in both the theology and education programs need to be able to free themselves from other responsibilities in order to do justice to their study program. Pray for understanding and practical steps to achieve this on the part of their institutions/churches.
- Pray for news about our programs in Education, Spiritual Formation and Discipleship to reach the people who would benefit from them.

Biblical studies program?

A sobering observation of seminaries in our region is that there is usually a stated emphasis on the importance of giving students a good grounding in the Bible and the skills to interpret and use it effectively – but the number of qualified faculty is very small. This is especially marked in smaller seminaries.

Several faculty from AGST Alliance seminaries met in mid-April to discuss the viability of developing a post-graduate program in biblical studies, to address this desperate need to build faculty strength. We recognised that there will be significant challenges in offering such a program, and so further research will be done over the next few months.

- Pray for this research and recommendations about a creative way ahead for the Governing Board to consider.

PROJECTS FOR PRAYER & PROVISION

Several fairly major 'infrastructure' projects are in progress.

1. **Updating our corporate visual entity**

Our updated visual entity is almost ready to be launched – the redeveloped logo looks great (but is still under wraps, sorry).

Progress continues to be frustratingly slow on these following projects:

2. **Redeveloping our AGST Alliance website**

3. **Establishing a centralised data base**

We have had continuing difficulties finding the right professionals to quote and then take on these two projects. Fortunately, these developments may be done by a competent person virtually anywhere, and we are currently in consultation with a web designer in New Zealand.

4. **On-line theological resources**

We are awaiting a quotation from the vendor of a key specialised internet-based database for theological research. Keep praying with us that, when the quotation comes, it will be affordable. (This will be an ideal project for a generous sponsor.)

5. **Research officer**

Prompted by the recommendations of the recent accreditation process, we are more actively looking for a suitable person to take up the role of Research Officer – to build a database of databases/resource facilities for our students and faculty to be able to access readily. (A person who was lined up for this role has, regrettably, declined to commence it.)

- *Please keep praying with us for progress in these areas in God's time.*

Ear-marked finance for any of these projects would encourage us. If you are able to sponsor one or other of them, please contact AGST Alliance Dean, Dr Allan Harkness (email: dean@agst-mst.org).

Personnel changes

Unfortunately, the couple who took on the role of accounts staff in late 2009 had to relinquish it after only several months. But God provided a replacement promptly for this small but very important role – Ms Priscilla Oon. Living in Johor Bahru, Priscilla is quickly familiarising herself with the role, and especially the specialised accounting software we are using.

- *Thank God for Priscilla's availability. Pray that she will soon be conversant with the financial processes, and so enhance our administrative efficiency.*

FOR DONORS

- AGST Alliance bank account details for direct credit are available from 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 Alliance to MEANS USA (<http://www.meansusa.org>).
- AGST Alliance postal address: c/ VBox 886642, Singapore 919191. Tel./Fax: (65) 6778-5141

Attuned is published three times per year in English. Please email admin@agst-mst.org to request to receive this update. We will appreciate your partnership.

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