



AGST
ALLIANCE

Attuned

A NEWSLETTER OF AGST ALLIANCE FOR INFORMED PRAYER | AUGUST 2011

'The essence of prayer is not so much what we do as what God does in us.' – David Benner

Our MTh programs – equipping 'resident theologians'

AGST Alliance (formerly known as AGST-MST) is a theological training venture offering specialised post-graduate theological programs for church leaders and theological/Bible college faculty in S E Asia, to equip them for more effective Christian ministry and mission.

AGST Alliance – part of the network of Asia Graduate School of Theology consortia – comprises these colleges:

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

*Associate Members.

The Middle East Association for Theological Education consortium (MEATE) is also an associate member of AGST Alliance.

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

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What makes our AGST Alliance programs worthwhile, as we 'prepare scholars and leaders for the Church and society in Asia'?

In the recent MTh(Theol) module *Theology and Church*, facilitator Dr Sunny Tan (Theology Programs Director and Chair of our AGST Alliance Governing Board) suggested that our main strategic task is to help our students become effective 'resident theologians' in their place of ministry/mission.

Sunny expounded that theology, as an academic field, is the reflection and study of God and *everything* that is 'connected' to God. God's people – the Church – are called to live and work out everything according to God's perspective. Thus every local community of faith (congregation, or group of Christians with a distinctive focus) is a 'theological community', facing opportunities and challenges to "do its theology" in its unique context, for pastoral care (building up its members), ministry and mission.

Informed guides are essential for this process to be effective. Thus it is helpful for each faith community to have at least one 'set aside' member with the mind and the skill to guide and facilitate the theologising



Dr Sunny Tan (right) during the recent MTh(Theol) module with 'resident theologians in training' Jennifer Mok and Leona Boey.



Other participants, Ken Davis and Lan Yong Xing.

process. This set aside person(s) becomes the 'resident theologian' of the faith community: one of its members, but with the brief to ensure the community does its theology well.

Our MTh(Theol) students are being prepared for this role. It is also the reason we offer an MTh(Education) rather than, say, a Master of Education program. Our MTh(Ed) in

Spiritual Formation and Discipleship aims to produce 'academically competent educational practitioners' – leaders who demonstrate that they can integrate sound theology with the perspectives of education and the social sciences within (and beyond) their faith communities. So our MTh(Ed) graduates may also undertake key applied aspects of the role of 'resident theologian'.

- *Thank God for our MTh(Theol) and MTh(Ed) students. Pray that each will be motivated and equipped to be a more effective 'resident theologian' in their diverse ministry and mission settings.*
- *Pray that our faculty will continue to be sensitive to God and to the students, so as to be able to inspire the students to ongoing holistic transformation in the context of their academic studies.*
- *We have numerous enquiries from potential students. Pray for those who need clearer guidance about whether to enter one of our programs, and for those who need to find sources of finance before they commence.*

IN OUR PROGRAMS

EdD launched

AGST Alliance has recently added a Doctor of Education (EdD) as a strategic element in our line-up of education programs.

The EdD is aimed at senior leaders or trainers in their church, denomination or organisation who would like an advanced qualification to enhance their practice of ministry.

AGST Alliance Education Programs Director (and Dean) Dr Allan Harkness comments on the rationale behind the introduction of the EdD: "We realise there has been a significant gap between our MTh(Ed) and PhD(Ed) programs. We envisage that our EdD will have a special niche in meeting the re-equipping needs and expectations of Christian leaders in our region, especially those looking for a doctorate rather than an MTh."

The new program is drawing immediate interest. One applicant to our PhD(Ed) has already requested a transfer to the EdD, recognising its value to helping him in due course develop an inclusive multi-ethnic faith community.

The EdD program comprises coursework, a critical engagement project and an integrative dissertation related to the candidates' professional practice. The program may be completed in less than four years of part-time study.

The table (*right*) indicates who may benefit from our education programs, and key features of the graduate profiles.

See further details about our EdD program on our website www.agstalliance.org.

MTh(Education) in Spiritual Formation & Discipleship	Doctor of Education	PhD(Ed)
FOR THOSE WHO...		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... have significant equipping responsibilities in their church/denomination/organisation. ... (or) are teaching applied courses in a seminary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... are senior leaders/trainers in their church, denomination or organisation. ... (or) are teaching applied courses and/or are responsible for field education programs in a seminary. ... (and) are seeking an advanced qualification to enhance their practice of ministry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... are giving significant educational/ formational leadership in their church, denomination or organisation. ... (or) are in a seminary teaching CE/formation courses. ... (and) are seeking an advanced qualification based on scholarly research.
GRADUATES ARE PERSONS WHO...		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... are academically competent educational practitioners. ... can integrate sound academic ability and theological reflection with practical competence for creative educational leadership. ... may be invited to teach applied courses in seminaries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... can integrate sound educational, social science and spiritual formation theory with their professional practice, so as to enhance informed practice in their organisations. ... may be invited to teach applied courses in seminaries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... are qualified as a theologically reflective research specialist in CE/spiritual formation. ... are better equipped to provide significant educational leadership in the wider Asian Christian community. ... are likely to undertake post-graduate teaching and research supervision.

Coming MTh modules

MTh(Theology)

Theology and Contextualisation

- Oct–Dec 2011
- On-campus 21-26 Nov, 2011
- Location: MBTS, Penang, Malaysia
- Facilitators: Dr David & Mrs Rosemary Harley (UK)

Theology and Worldviews

- Jan–April 2012
- On-campus Feb 2012 (TBC)
- Location: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Facilitator: Dr Ng Kam Weng (Malaysia)

MTh(Education)/EdD

Spirituality and Faith Development

- Aug–Nov 2011
- On-campus 12-20 Sept 2011
- Location: EAST, Singapore
- Facilitator: Dr George Capaque (Singapore)

Research Methods in Christian Faith Communities

- Oct–Dec 2011
- On campus 28 Nov-2 Dec 2011
- Location: MBTS, Penang, Malaysia
- Facilitators: Drs Jeanie Shim (Malaysia) and Allan Harkness (Singapore)

- *Pray that 'the right people' will hear about our programs – both the new ones like our EdD and our ongoing MTh and PhD choices.*
- *Our MTh students need effective time management in order to prepare adequately for the on-campus sessions of their modules. Pray for understanding and practical support by the stakeholders in their programs – family, work/ministry colleagues and their church leaders – to encourage the students to 'finish well'.*
- *Our PhD(Theol) and PhD(Ed) candidates often feel very much alone as they read, think and write section by section, chapter by chapter. Pray that they too will have encouragement, from their supervisors and stakeholders.*



The participants in the MTh(Ed) module, *Approaches to Discipleship*, earlier this year.

Module facilitator, Dr Sylvia Collinson (Australia)



FOR DONORS

Typical of Asian theological institutions, student fees contribute only a proportion of the total operating cost of AGST Alliance. Further finance is needed for administrative and staff support, program development and to build up our research resource capacity. We welcome financial support as occasional or regular gifts.

- AGST Alliance bank account details for direct credit and telegraphic transfers are available from admin@agstalliance.org, or on our website (click Support us – Financial Support – How to give financial support).
- 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>).

Administration audit completed

Since we launched our first program in 2004, much of AGST Alliance's administration has been undertaken by our dean, **Dr Allan Harkness**, complemented by the **Theology Program Director and part-time help from several other people in Malaysia and Singapore**. As AGST Alliance has grown, this has become an increasingly frustrating bottleneck for administrative efficiency and effectiveness – and will become increasingly so as we introduce new program areas.

Hence the AGST Alliance Governing Board recently invited **Dr Cheah Foo Seong** to undertake a corporate administrative audit of AGST Alliance, with a view to recommending a viable way forward. Foo Seong, the chief technical officer for a corporate services company in Malaysia was able to interact with the AGST Alliance office-holders and part-time staff before making his recommendations.

Foo Seong provided valuable insights on our 'extraordinary online-cum-contact type of seminary... a very original and creative 'business' model.' The Governing Board will consider his recommendations, as it makes decisions for an amended administrative structure.

- *Thank God for professionals like Foo Seong, who offer their services generously to enhance our organisational effectiveness.*
- *Pray for us as we use Foo Seong's recommendations as a starting point to guide decisions on AGST Alliance's administrative structures, and for effective implementation.*

Governing Board annual meeting – 24 September

Representatives of the member seminaries of the AGST Alliance consortium meet in Yangon (Myanmar) on 24 September for the annual Governing Board meeting. This year's meeting is hosted by our member seminary Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (MEGST). This meeting is an opportunity to review progress over the past year, and to carefully and prayerfully make policy decisions for our ongoing development.

One of the challenges each year is the turn-over of representatives, and we need to take care to ensure that new members are helped to contribute to the decision-making process. A key to the meeting's success is that members discuss the agenda issues with their own faculty colleagues in early September, so that they are comfortable to speak on behalf of their seminary during the meeting.

Issues on the agenda for this year's Governing Board meeting include:

- Exploring and confirming new program areas, including those offered in languages other than English.
- Re-shaping our administrative structure.
- Building our academic resource capacity.
- Better collaboration among our member seminaries and others in our region.
- The (re-) appointment of AGST Alliance office-holders.

- *Thank God for the reps. attending this year's meeting (see p.1 for a list of the seminaries). Pray for safe and stress-free travel into Myanmar.*
- *Pray that we will listen carefully for God's perspective on the agenda items – with an openness to his surprises.*
- *Pray especially for alertness by Sunny Tan (chairman) and Allan Harkness (providing detailed information on the agenda items).*

'IF ONE PART HURTS, EVERY OTHER PART HURTS...'

Recently, seminaries in Malaysia – including those in our AGST Alliance consortium – have been facing heightened challenges relating to their official status. Concurrently, restrictions have been placed on international faculty members and students.

We stand with our colleagues in Malaysia as they work through these issues, keeping in mind the apostle Paul's words: 'If one part [of the body] hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance' (1 Cor. 12: 26, *The Message*).

- *Pray for clear vision, increased collegiality, and wise and courageous decision-making by the leaders of Malaysian seminaries as they work towards a good outcome.*

PROJECTS/PERSONNEL FOR PRAYER & PROVISION

STAFF PROVIDED

Change of accounts staff: Ms Priscilla Oon, our part-time accounts staff person for the past 18 months, is relinquishing her position after guiding our annual accounts through the audit process. We are grateful that Priscilla has ensured our accounting system is operational after we made a transition to new accounting software. Thanks, Priscilla!



A replacement for Priscilla has been found quickly. **Mr See Teck Hui** (*pictured left with his grandson*), the general manager/director of a Japanese manufacturing company based in Johor, Malaysia, has taken on the accounts staff role as a ministry opportunity. We sense God's hand in Teck Hui's availability: Just before he was approached about this role, he heard that he was no longer required for two somewhat similar roles. We look forward to his professional partnership with us, to bring our accounts system to the next level of excellence. Welcome, Teck Hui!

Web administrator appointed: In the last issue of *Attuned* we highlighted our need for a web administrator, to maintain our redeveloped website. **Mr Kok Chik Bu** has been appointed to that part-time role. Chik Bu is an MDiv student and staff member in the Holistic Child Development Institute at Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary in Penang. He also designs *Attuned*, which continues to draw positive comments from readers for its clean, creative style.

- *Thank God for Priscilla's services as our accounts staff; and for Teck Hui's and Chik Bu's availability.*
- *Pray for Teck Hui, learning the accounting software and setting up a regular reporting system.*
- *Thank God for churches which support AGST Alliance. Priscilla, Teck Hui and Ms Chit Moi (our honorary accountant) are all members of Holy Light Presbyterian Church (English) in Johor Bahru (Malaysia) – in which our first MTh(Ed) graduate Dr Chuah Seong Peng serves as pastor.*

ONGOING PROJECT/PERSONNEL NEEDS

1. **Research officer:** We continue to look for a research officer, tasked to collate resource lists in our member consortium libraries and to build a database of databases/resource availability. Keep praying!
2. **Academic administrator:** We have discovered a person who seems well-qualified for this position, but have held off making the appointment while our corporate administration audit has been in process. We look forward to shaping up the role description, and moving to make the appointment.
3. **Theological resources:** The proposed pilot venture for theological education institutions like AGST Alliance and our member seminaries in the majority world to get an affordable subscription to one of the major theological databases has stalled. Pray that we may find alternative ways ahead in this area, so that our students have enhanced access to the specialised resources they need for deeper and broader study.

For further details, please contact AGST Alliance Dean, Dr Allan Harkness (dean@agstalliance.org).

These projects/personnel needs have financial implications. Ear-marked finance would encourage us greatly.

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

AGST Alliance

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www.agstalliance.org