



# Attuned

A NEWSLETTER OF AGST ALLIANCE FOR INFORMED PRAYER | MAY 2012

'If we learn prayer, pondering [Jesus'] example, then we will bring him our needs; we will not badger him with our proposals; we will rest in the certainty that our needs will be met in the perfect outworking of his will.' – Alec Motyer

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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## New programs in biblical studies & transformational development from 2013

FROM 2013, AGST Alliance will be offering two new program areas: *Master of Theology* and *Doctor of Philosophy in Biblical Studies* and *Masters in Transformational Development*. We are excited about these developments, as further specialised programs for fulfilling our mission: *preparing scholars and leaders for the Church and society in Asia*.

### MTh(Bib. Studies) & PhD(Bib. Studies)

A disturbing observation among our AGST Alliance member seminaries is that only a handful of faculty members hold higher qualifications in biblical studies. This is ironical, given that all our member seminaries are evangelical institutions holding the belief that the Bible is our ultimate authority and governs the way we live and act in our world.

AGST Alliance is seeking to bring about a change in this state of affairs, with its new programs in biblical studies. These programs are aimed at building the faculty capacity in both our – and other – theological education institutions in our region, as well as offering a further re-equipping option for Christian leaders.

- Our *PhD(Bib. Studies)* is a dissertation-based research program.
- Our *MTh(Bib. Studies)* is a modular program. Students will be able to major in the New or Old Testament, or have a more general focus. The coursework modules are scheduled to begin in early 2013.

In common with our other program areas (Theology; and Education, Spiritual Formation and Discipleship), our Biblical Studies programs will be non-residential, so students will have no need for major ministry or family upheavals.

Visit our website [www.agstalliance.org](http://www.agstalliance.org) for further details.

- Pray for Drs Keith Shubert (programs director) and Paul Barker (committee member) as they work on the logistics for getting these programs 'up and running'. We would like to find another two committee members to join them.
- We are currently approaching module facilitators/teachers – a heightened challenge as each year we need up to 10 different people: 4 specialists for each Testament, plus 2 to teach non-text based modules. Thank God with us that almost all we have approached have expressed interest.
- News about the *MTh(Bib. Studies)* program needs to reach potential students very soon, so that they can apply and start preparing – especially to refresh their biblical languages.

## Masters in Transformational Development

Introducing the first Asia-based Master's program to integrate development practice and Christian theology... From early 2013 AGST Alliance, in partnership with Malaysian Care and Tabor College Victoria (Australia), will offer an Asia-based cycle of Tabor Victoria's *Master of Arts in Vocational Practice (Aid and Development)* program.



This three year, part time program is designed for those working in our region in the fields of advocacy, aid and development and social welfare, in both Christian and 'secular' organisations/ NGOs – professionals not normally catered for in traditional theological educational programs.

Graduates will be awarded an Australian-government recognised degree, a widely acceptable and portable qualification.



A participant in the present cycle of the program in Australia has commented on its value: '[The program] has been a catalyst for demolishing the false divide between my faith and work, between correct theology and secular

practice, and has brought Scripture to bear on every part of life.' We anticipate the same sort of response from those who enter the Asia-based cycle.

This is a novel partnership arrangement for AGST Alliance, especially linking with Malaysian Care, a leading and highly respected Christian organisation serving the poor and needy in a number of innovative ways. We echo the words of Mr Pax Tan, Senior Director of Malaysian Care: 'We look forward to the budding of the program.'

Visit our website [www.agstalliance.org](http://www.agstalliance.org) for further details.

- Thank God for the opportunities provided by this program. Pray that the right people will hear about it, and be encouraged/supported by their organisations to participate.
- Pax Tan is our Asia program director, working closely with Steve Bradbury (the Tabor Victoria program director). They, along with committee members Lee Chee Loi and Philip Fountain, have plenty to coordinate in the lead-up to the first unit in early 2013.
- We are searching for significant scholarship/subsidy finance to enable the program to be affordable for all who would benefit from participating. Pray that the trusts/foundations we approach will see the potential and give generously.

## IN OUR PROGRAMS

### Largest MTh(Ed)/EdD cohort starts out

THE ON-CAMPUS sessions of the first module of the fourth cycle of our MTh(Ed)/EdD program took place on the EAST campus in Singapore in March, with 13 participants – our largest cohort to date.

Preceded by two days of orientation, the sessions were worthwhile, though tiring, for both the students and module facilitator Dr Allan Harkness. A good foundation was laid for those starting out on their study venture in education, spiritual formation and discipleship.

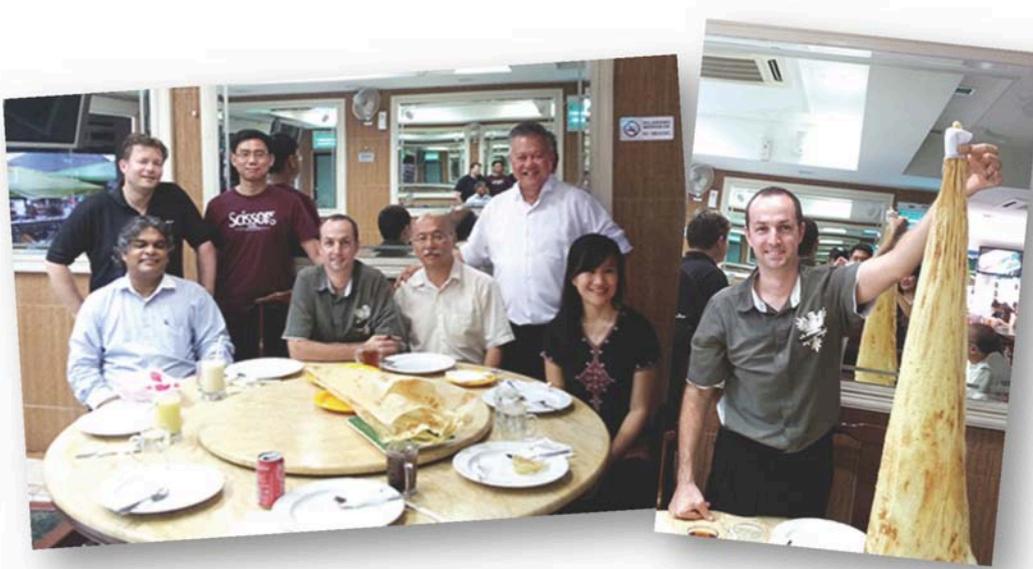


The 13 MTh(Ed)/EdD participants represented five nationalities. All were using computers – but felt pens, newsprint and blutak still have an important role in the learning process.

## Food & theology

MEALS FEATURE in all our MTh modules as great opportunities for relaxed interaction. The recent MTh(Ed)/EdD 'dining in the dark' lunch at the local association for the visually-handicapped was an intriguing educational experience.

Intriguing on another count ☺: we wonder what deep theological principle lies behind our MTh(Theol) students checking the height of their tissue prata before eating it, during the recent on-campus sessions of their *Theology and Worldviews* module, facilitated by Dr Ng Kam Weng.



- Thank God for the camaraderie that builds up among the cohorts of students in our MTh programs. Pray for plenty of collegial interaction (by email, Facebook, etc.) to encourage one another between modules, too.
- We've requested you to pray for this often before – and we ask again: for effective time management for all our students. Our new students (e.g. in the MTh(Ed)/EdD program) are facing this head on with their first module; while it is a constant struggle for students further on in their programs.
- More of our MTh(Ed)/EdD and MTh(Theol) students are in – or soon to move into – the thesis/dissertation research phase of their program. For that, we need to locate suitable supervisors – but the local pool of potential supervisors in both disciplines is limited. Pray that we will be led to competent people willing to serve as supervisors.

## Doctoral colloquium

IN LATE May most of our AGST Alliance PhD candidates gather in Kuala Lumpur for what we anticipate will become an annual event: a 3-day doctoral colloquium.

The purpose of the colloquium is to provide a setting to encourage our candidates to 'keep on keeping on,' and so bring their research to a successful conclusion sooner rather than later.

A key element of the event is the opportunity for each candidate to introduce their research ideas and progress to their peers and faculty in a congenial environment, as well as to obtain constructive feedback. Skills training to enhance their research ability will also feature – for example, Mrs Barbara Terry, Library Consultant for MBTS, will conduct interactive sessions to enhance the candidates' library/electronic/internet research skills.

- We have 10 PhD/EdD candidates at various points in their research process; and two others completing MTh-level coursework prior to commencing their doctoral research. Like most of us, they appreciate knowing that they are remembered in prayer!
- Pray that the stimulation of the doctoral colloquium will motivate the participants to keep focused when they get back to their relatively isolated home settings.
- Annual progress reviews for many of our doctoral candidates come up in June/July. Pray that the required reflection process between candidates and their supervisors will be honest and helpful.

## Coming MTh/EdD modules

### MTh(Theology)

#### THEOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY

- May-August 2012; on-campus 23-27 July
- *Location:* Batam, Indonesia
- *Facilitator:* Dr Kwa Kiem Kiok (Singapore)

#### THEOLOGY & HERMENEUTICS

- Sept-Dec 2012; On-campus 5-9 Nov
- *Location:* Bangkok Bible Seminary, Thailand
- *Facilitator:* Dr Natee Tanchonpongs (Thailand)

### MTh(Education)/EdD

#### GROWING & DEVELOPING IN CHRISTIAN FAITH COMMUNITIES

- Jun-Aug 2012; On-campus: 16-20 July
- *Location:* Bible College of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.
- *Facilitator:* Dr Rosalind Lim-Tan (Malaysia)

#### CURRICULUM DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT IN CHRISTIAN FAITH COMMUNITIES

- Aug-Nov 2012; On-campus: 27 Sept-5 Oct
- *Location:* Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, Penang
- *Facilitator:* Dr Jeanie Shim (Malaysia)

Further details from our website, [www.agstalliance.org](http://www.agstalliance.org). These modules are open to both credit and audit students – suitable as refresher options for seminary faculty and church leaders.

## 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](mailto: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>).

## MEATE/AGST Alliance links enhanced

IN 2008 the Middle East Association for Theological Education (MEATE) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with AGST Alliance, for AGST Alliance to help build MEATE's capacity for post-graduate training in their region. In April, AGST Alliance Dean Allan Harkness attended the general assembly of MEATE to strengthen this link.

Representatives from more than 15 seminaries participated in the assembly, which also marked the 20th anniversary of MEATE's founding. Many encouragements were shared over the three days, but the realities of the role of theological education in that volatile region were brought home starkly with the news that two days before the assembly began, one of the member seminaries (in Sudan) had been burned, destroyed and looted. (For details, type 'Gereif Bible School' in your favourite online search engine.)

Dr Camille Melki (MEATE Executive Director) wrote after Allan's visit, 'I look forward to greater involvement and partnership between our two institutions.'

In a similar vein, Allan reported: 'It was a privilege and challenge to be among our Middle East/North Africa colleagues; and I am sure that there will be mutual enrichment from this strengthening of our relationship.'

- *Thank God for the opportunity for regional partnership expressed between MEATE/AGST Alliance.*
- *Pray for the dynamics for MEATE-approved students to participate in our programs – and for sources of adequate and stable finance to enable these students to complete their study through us.*

meate



Camille Melki presenting his report at the assembly.

# PERSONNEL/PROJECTS

## PERSONNEL

1. Administration Development Officer: Ms May Lim Seow Geok, who was appointed to the part-time position of Administration Development Officer in late 2011, has relinquished her role. We're grateful for the start she has made to design, set up and initially administer a more effective administration/registration system. Now, we need to find a suitable replacement for May, especially someone able to design a system which is pre-dominantly on-line and user-friendly for our faculty and staff around the region.

- *Pray with us for the right person(s) to become available to help us develop in this area. With the introduction of our new program areas, this need is increasingly urgent.*

2. Health concerns: Apart from 'run of the mill' colds and 'flu experienced by our students and Governing Board members, others are contending with more serious health issues.

- *Dr Eddy Ho (Governing Board treasurer) was scheduled for heart surgery in mid-May but the operation was cancelled, and instead he is undergoing medical therapy. Pray for his speedy return to good health.*

3. Committee members: AGST Alliance programs are designed to fill a niche where no adequate program exists and/or there are not enough appropriately qualified faculty – and thus our programs are all the more necessary to break the spiral. But the lack of faculty also means it can be difficult to find competent people willing to commit themselves to participate on our programs committees.

- *Pray that we will be able to strengthen our program committees: initially with 1-2 more members for each of our Theology Programs and Biblical Studies committees.*
- *Thank God for the committed work of our current program directors: Sunny Tan (Theology), Keith Shubert (Biblical Studies) and Allan Harkness (Education). Pray for their energy levels and ability to prioritise well.*

## PROJECTS

1. Theological resources: In our quest for an affordable way to get ready access for our students to key specialised theological electronic databases which require subscriptions, we are in discussion with a non-Asian seminary which is most willing to assist us if the logistics can be worked out.

2. Student management system: We are having difficulty finding a suitable – and affordable – internet-based student management system. The data-base for student records is crucial for us because even though we are a small venture, our regional spread and increasing number of programs means our requirements are more complex than for, say, a single campus-based theological education venture. To date, affordable software we've found is not adequate for our needs, and likely-suitable software is highly-priced.

- *These are practical concerns, but important for the efficiency of our administration. Please keep praying for discernment and clear direction in both areas above.*

For further details about our various projects, contact AGST Alliance Dean, Dr Allan Harkness <[dean@agstalliance.org](mailto:dean@agstalliance.org)>. These projects and our 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](mailto:admin@agstalliance.org) to request to receive this update regularly. We appreciate your partnership.

AGST Alliance

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