



Attuned

A NEWSLETTER OF AGST ALLIANCE FOR INFORMED PRAYER | NOVEMBER 2015

"Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder." – Paul (Romans 12:11-12. *The Message*)

AGST Alliance is a theological training venture offering specialised post-graduate theological programs for church leaders and theological/Bible college faculty in SE 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 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 accredited by the Asia Theological Association.

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www.agstalliance.org

AGST Alliance leadership transition

At the end of 2015 the founding dean of AGST Alliance, Dr Allan Harkness, steps down from his role as Dean. He has held this position since AGST Alliance was established in 2004.

Allan's contribution to AGST Alliance was recognised at a dinner in his honour in Kuala Lumpur in August. Dr Sunny Tan, Chair of the Governing Board, commented *'Dr Harkness and his wife Marven have contributed much to the Church in SE Asia through the ministry of theological education. Since 2004 he has laid the foundation, provided the administrative structure, and developed an academic process for AGST Alliance to be a viable and well-recognised post-graduate theological school. He has positively impacted many of us who have either been his students or his colleagues.'*

Allan's response included these thoughts: *'It's been an incredible privilege – and responsibility – to start and develop AGST Alliance. The learning curve has been steep, but it is quite thrilling to have been able to erect the scaffolding for this strategic ministry... This has certainly been the highlight of my years if ministry.'*

Allan and Marven, who have served in SE Asia as members of OMF International since 1988, will be relocating to their home country, New Zealand.

A video to honour Allan's service with AGST Alliance was shown at the dinner. It may be viewed [here](#) on Dropbox, in mp4 format.

- *Thank God for bringing AGST Alliance to its present niche in SE Asian postgraduate theological education, and for Allan's facilitation of its growth.*
- *Pray for Allan and Marven's re-adjustment to life in New Zealand, and as they seek God's direction for new ministry opportunities there and further afield.*
- *Pray that AGST Alliance will continue to be 'an alert servant of the Master, cheerfully expectant.'*



A special cake to mark the occasion was cut



Allan and Marven with Sunny Tan

Academic Dean appointed

We welcome Dr Tan Sooi Ling as our first Academic Dean. Sooi Ling, from Penang (Malaysia), completed her PhD in intercultural studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, and her interests lie in world religions (particularly Chinese religions), worship in context, and intercultural communication. Sooi Ling was commissioned with prayer at the dinner to honour Allan Harkness.

As well as giving academic oversight of our AGST Alliance programs, Sooi Ling is Director of the Doctor of Ministry in Leadership program. With her appointment, the office functions of AGST Alliance are relocating to Penang.



Dr Tan Sooi Ling



Dr Tan Jin Huat praying for Sooi Ling

Allan Harkness has been appointed as Advisory Director, and is continuing as Director of the Education, Spiritual Formation and Discipleship programs, to ensure students in those programs finish well. We are actively seeking to make a part-time appointment of a principal, someone who will ensure the overall integration and promotion of AGST Alliance and its programs.

- *Pray for a smooth transition of leadership responsibilities.*
- *Thank God for Sooi Ling's willing availability. Pray especially for wisdom for her as she moves into the detail of her role, and establishes AGST Alliance's administrative centre in Penang.*
- *Ask God to provide a suitable person soon for the principal's role. Meanwhile, Governing Board Chair Dr Sunny Tan needs wisdom and grace to coordinate so much until the appointment is made.*
- *With the leadership relocation, we need to adapt elements of our finance management processes. Pray for Mr See Teck Hui, our Finance Manager in Johor Bahru (Malaysia), who will bear the brunt of ensuring the revised system works well.*

Coming MTh/EdD/DMin Coursework Modules

MTh(THEOLOGY)

- **ASIAN THEOLOGIES**
Feb-May 2016; on-campus 14-18 March
On-campus location: TBC
Facilitator: Dr Steve Taylor

EdD(CHILD & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT)

- **LEADERSHIP & ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
Feb-May 2016; on-campus 3-8 April
On-campus location: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Facilitator: TBC

DMin (LEADERSHIP)

- **KINGDOM, CHURCH & SOCIETY**
Feb-May 2016; on-campus 7-12 April
On-campus location: To be confirmed
Facilitator: Dr David Morgan

These modules may be suitable as refresher options for Christian leaders and seminary faculty – for audit or credit. They may also provide cross-credit options for students in programs of other seminaries.

AROUND OUR PROGRAMS

Graduation encouragements

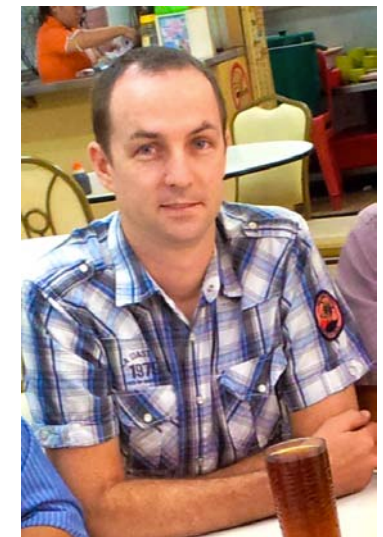
In October-November, the achievements of four AGST Alliance students were recognised at joyful ceremonies among their colleagues, church members, families and friends. It is most encouraging to witness these outcomes, which represent a good many years of diligent, part-time study.

Hiew Hoong Cheong is the first full AGST Alliance MTh(Theology) graduate. He was awarded his degree in a Sunday morning service at Doulos Presbyterian Church, Kuala Lumpur, where he serves as pastor. His thesis title is *'The significance of a theology of place in the Malaysian emigration debate'*.

The first person to complete our full Doctor of Education program is **Winnie Chan Sin Ming**, who was awarded her degree during the annual graduation service of Methodist Theological School, Sibul (Sarawak, E. Malaysia). Winnie's dissertation title is *'Appropriate parental participation in faith nurture of primary school aged children in urban Chinese families of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Malaysia.'*

The degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education was awarded to **Davina Soh Hui Leng** and **Casey Ng Kong Chiew** at the ACTS College (Singapore) graduation ceremony. It is very special indeed to have a husband and wife graduating with the same qualification at the same ceremony. Davina was awarded PhD(Ed) with Distinction, and her impressive dissertation is already being published for international readership.

Also completing his MTh(Theology) program is **Kenneth Davies**, an Australian missionary who has been serving in Chiang Mai, Thailand. His thesis research was on the theology of suffering in the biblical wisdom literature as a starting point for the presentation of the gospel to Thai Buddhists.



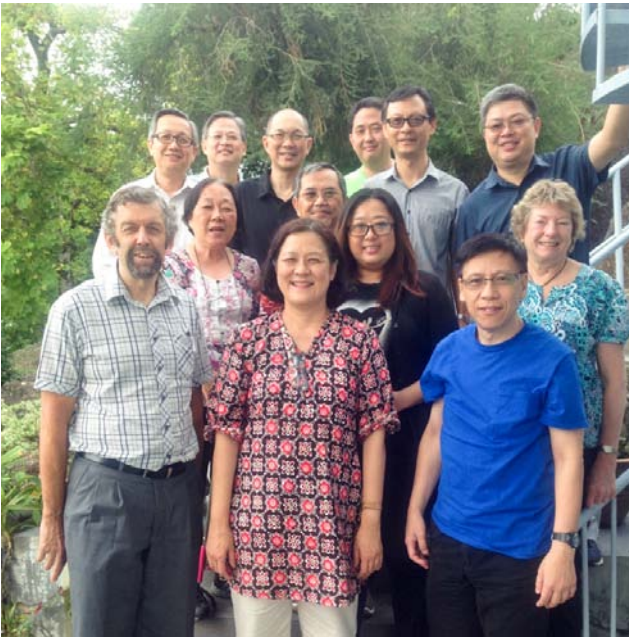
Clockwise from top left: Hiew Hoong Cheong with Dr Ong Meng Chai (his thesis supervisor), his family and Allan Harkness | Winnie Chan with her husband, Dr Tie King Tai (Principal of MTS) and Allan Harkness | Ken Davies | Casey Ng and Davina Soh.

Details of Davina and Casey's dissertation topics are on p. 5, along with a link to our website where information on all our AGST Alliance theses/dissertation is available.

DMin gets underway

The first module of our Doctor of Ministry in Leadership program has recently finished, with twelve students in the initial cohort. The module, *Christian thinking and ministry practice*, was facilitated by Dr Jennifer Turner (Perth, Australia).

As a partnership between AGST Alliance, Bible College of Malaysia and Malaysia Bible Seminary, this DMin program has special dynamics. The students represent a wide range of theological backgrounds and so all enrich the learning process by their varied experiences and insights.



The DMin students with Allan Harkness (front left), Program Director Tan Sooi Ling (front centre), and Jennifer Turner (far right)

MTh(Theol) students wrestle with research skills

Dr Brainerd Prince (India) facilitated the recent MTh(Theol) module, *Approaches to theological research*. This module is designed to help students appreciate the dynamics of sound research – something not intuitive for many of them – and so to encourage them to move more confidently into their coming thesis research process. It seems to have achieved its purpose: as one participant commented, this was ‘*a timely module that provides the encouragement to take up the research challenge.*’



Brainerd Prince

- *Thank God for his resources that enabled our graduates to complete their programs. Pray that their lives and ministries will be enriched by their studies, and so enhancing their areas of strategic service.*
- *Pray for perseverance, encouragement and good time management for our students in various other AGST Alliance programs – it's not easy to study part-time. Thank God for supportive stake-holders (families and church/organisation leaders).*
- *Pray that students moving into the thesis/dissertation phase of their programs will apply the research skills they have been developing.*
- *Coursework module facilitators often struggle to complete the assignment assessments in good time. Pray that they will allocate sufficient time to provide helpful comments on the assignments.*



MTh(Theol) students grappling with research concepts.

PhD dissertations focus

Davina Soh's PhD(Ed) dissertation title is ***The motif of hospitality in theological education: A critical appraisal with implications for application in theological education.***

Her dissertation is a comprehensive, deep and useful investigation of the motif of hospitality as a marker and model for good theological education. It successfully traces the motif from its inception, through higher and theological education scholars and then presents a carefully constructed biblical exposition as a conversation partner to her historical material and as a base for her critique. Her subsequent discussion and application to practice, with an eye to the South East Asian situation, will be vital for contemporary practitioners and future scholars – in this region of the world and also for theological educators globally. She has advanced scholarship in the subject of theological education and modelled best practice.

Casey Ng's PhD(Ed) dissertation title is ***Contextualising theological education: An emic study of practical contextualisation of theological education in Singapore.***

His dissertation combines clear and systematic knowledge of the subject area of contextualisation with a careful and wide ranging investigation of four theological education institutions in Singapore. He uncovers how these institutions understand contextualisation, how it is worked out in the institutions, the difficulties they struggle with and the degree of success they have achieved in this area. Casey then offers valuable advice for enhancing contextualisation in these settings. This dissertation is therefore especially useful to theological educators in Singapore, South East Asia and elsewhere across the world who are seeking to be relevant and effective in their context.

The supervisors for both Davina and Casey's research were Drs Graham Cheesman (N. Ireland) and Allan Harkness (Singapore).

Further details of these dissertations – and others – may be found on our AGST Alliance website <www.agstalliance.org> at [Resources – Theses & Dissertations](#).

AGST ALLIANCE DEVELOPMENTS

Governing Board annual meeting

Not surprisingly, the annual meeting of our Governing Board on 10 August was focused on the present leadership transition and associated administrative and executive re-structuring. Despite some uncertainties about how all the administrative roles will be filled after Allan Harkness steps down as Dean, the Board expressed confidence in AGST Alliance's future as they highlighted new program areas to be explored.

The present Governing Board officers agreed to serve for a further year:

- Chair: Dr Sunny Tan (MBTS)
- Secretary: Rev. Wendy Ching (BCM)
- Treasurer: Dr Keith Shubert (EAST)



Governing Board members in session at the annual meeting

- *Thank God for the confidence he is giving the Governing Board for creative and wise envisioning. Pray for awareness of his continuing grace into 2016.*
- *Pray for Sunny Tan, Wendy Ching, Steve Taylor and Allan Harkness, directors of our legal entity AGST Alliance Sdn. Bhd. They are often called on for various administrative decisions, and it is a special challenge to get documents signed by them, so widely spread geographically.*

FOR DONORS

Financial matters

We believe that "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply" (Hudson Taylor). 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.

Are you able to be an agent of God's supply? Financial support is welcome, whether as regular or occasional 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 MYR/SGD/USD 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 (www.meansusa.org).

- *Thank God for his continuing gracious and faithful provision for AGST Alliance's financial needs.*
- *Pray that generous donors – individuals, churches, and trusts/ foundations – will come forward, especially to support our revised leadership structure.*

Apply for 2016 AGST Alliance programs

Applications are invited from leaders looking for ministry (re-)equipping from early 2016 through one of our AGST Alliance programs:

- **Master of Theology (in Theology)** – *start in Feb 2016*
For leaders seeking to understand and present Christian truth in ways that are dynamically appropriate for Asian contexts.
- **Master in Transformational Development** – *start in Feb 2016*
For practitioners in advocacy, aid and development, and social welfare organisations wishing to integrate developmental practice and Christian faith.
- **Doctor of Ministry in Leadership** – *start in mid-2016*
For pastors and leaders in Christian ministries to enhance their professional development.

Who could you encourage to apply?

Check our AGST Alliance website for details and application papers.

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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Visit our website

www.agstalliance.org