



Attuned

AN E-NEWSLETTER OF THE AGST ALLIANCE FOR INFORMED PRAYER AND ACTION



As we step into a new year and a new decade, we are grateful for God's provision and faithfulness over the past year, and we look forward with hopeful anticipation for the year(s) ahead.

A recent PhD graduate from Oxford reminded me of his perilous PhD journey where after experiencing acute moments of inadequacy and a paralyzing writer's block, he wanted to put everything aside. Perhaps that is our experience too. Along our journey, we could have been chided, "This work is not scholarly enough," and that immediately sends us into a mire of self-doubt. We sputter to a stop due to the triad ills of isolation, perfectionism and procrastination. Perhaps there are too many unknowns in this journey, and it has become too uncomfortable to not be in control. Does this sound familiar? Let us encourage ourselves this year with two insights from Paul's advice to the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 2:1-10.

First, Paul firmly reminds the Corinthian church that their faith, which is all of life, work and ministry, rests solely on the power of God and not on human abilities and skills. Paul addresses a church plagued by factions, driven by personality cults and enamored by the shine of human charisma. By contrast, Paul chose to bring God's truths not by flaunting any oratory skills but in fear and trembling, recognizing most poignantly that deep change rests on God's transformative power. Our faith must always return to this anchor.

Today, it is easy to rest on the vast sea of knowledge made available by advancements in science, technology and education. Our research is made much easier with the availability of communication and digital resources. We

are able to build on the splendid work done by past biblical-theological, ministry and educational scholars. Admittedly, we still have the grinding task of doing due diligence to our academic research, but at some point there is a need to acknowledge that all acquired knowledge is limited.

Second, Paul urges the church to seek the wisdom of God. He describes this wisdom as a "mystery," hidden, not known by the world's wisdom, but revealed to the mature by the Spirit. He further explains that this wisdom is "what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard and what no human mind has conceived." It is the wisdom of God that we seek as we set out to know God more, as we grapple with life and ministry issues and as we engage our research questions.

So if you are exhausted, discouraged, facing all kinds of blocks, this is perhaps the time to pause, recognize our human limitations, surrender and wait on God. In this space, the Holy Spirit reveals the immeasurable wisdom of God, transforms and brings things to fruition.

Let me close with an image from "The Little Prince" (by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry) that has stayed with me over the last year. I pray that it will encourage us.

"What makes the desert beautiful," says the little prince, "is that somewhere it hides a well."



Image Vally

AROUND OUR PROGRAMS

Integrated Module: Church and Society

AGST Alliance offers occasional integrated modules for students from three programs: Theology, Doctor of Ministry and Education. Church and Society held in 2019 was one such module. During the on-campus portion of the module, students came together to discuss, present, listen to one another, learn from each other and it was a thoroughly enriching experience. We learned to agree to disagree, to work together despite our various styles and personalities, and to build relationships despite our differences. Dr Peter Rowan's input on the issues surrounding the Church or the Christian community's responsibilities and

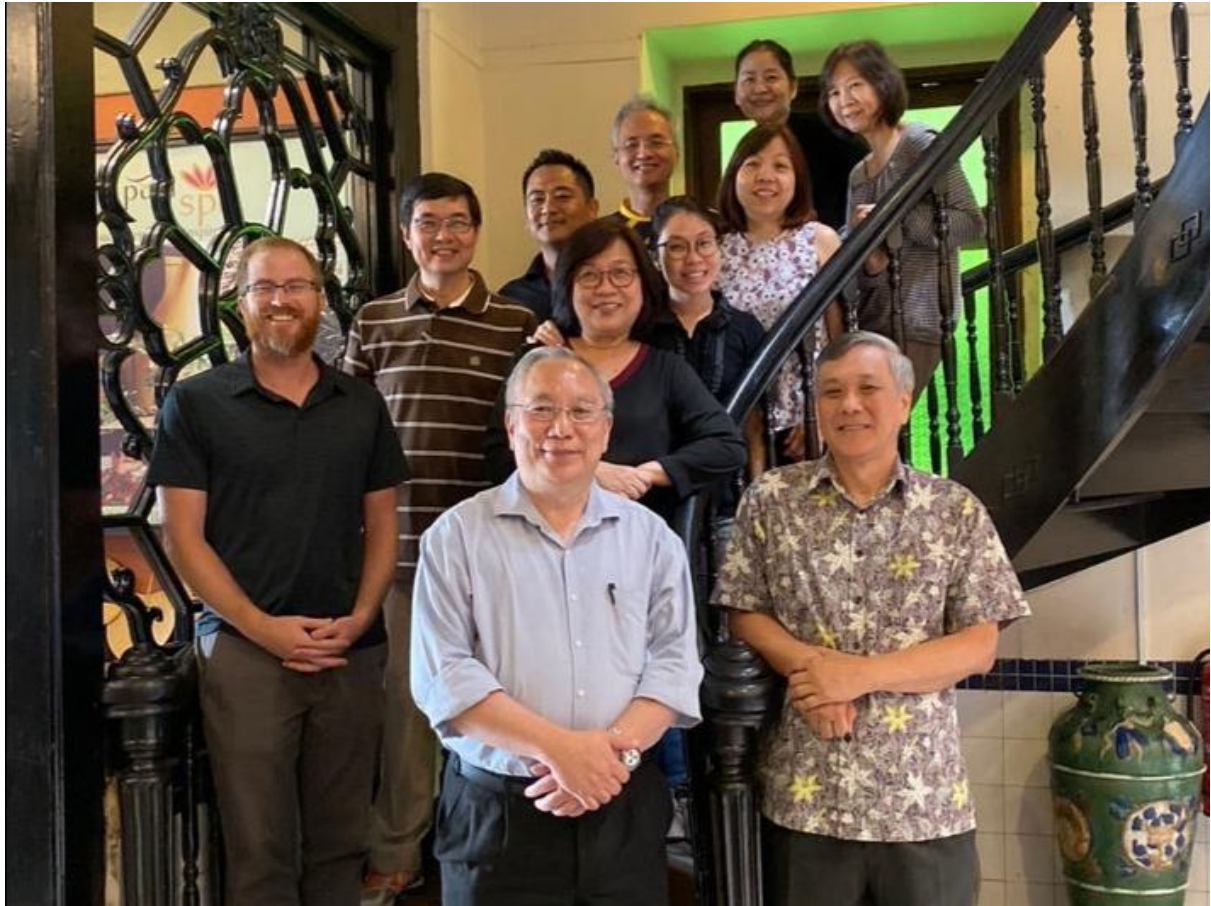
response to societal issues was invaluable. As the director of OMF and having spent many years in Asia, he enabled the students to engage with salient issues such as disability, economic and social inequality, political and religious discrimination globally as well as locally.



Education Program

In November 2019, Dr Alex Tang, who is also an EdD Committee member led a module on *Education, Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*. As practice, the students went for a one-day silent retreat at the *Sanctuary*, Malacca. For some of us, learning to be quiet is tough work, but very rewarding as we re-tuned our “frequencies” and learned to listen to the sounds of nature and to the silent Voice that speaks.

We concluded the 2019 academic year with a total of 19 doctoral students working at different levels of completion. We thank the facilitators and research supervisors who tirelessly worked towards making the doctoral education studies meaningful for the students.



Participants at the *Education, Discipleship and Spiritual Formation* module with Dr Alex Tang in Malacca



Fellow students in dialogue and contemplation.



Food (and fellowship) is an important aspect of our AGST Alliance's learning process.



Doctoral Colloquium 2019



MTH 5-3: Divine Providence
A Biblical-Theological-Historical-Pastoral
Perspective (Dr Ong Meng Chai)



DMin Students together with Dr Jeff Pugh
for the DMin module: Ministry Leadership:
Issues and Challenges in Malacca in
September 2019.



The fully online Graduate Diploma in
Transformational Development program
kicked off with 8 students in January 2020.
This is a partnership program with World
Vision International.

FEATURING A RECENT GRADUATE

LIANNE LEE, MTH(THEOL)

Congratulations to Lianne Lee who graduated with a MTh(Theol) on April 2019!

Her thesis title is: Rethinking
attractational worship: A theological
evaluation from the perspective of



the church as the community of the Kingdom of God.

Here are some of her reflections.

1. About who I am and my background

I am Lianne Lee, currently Assistant Director of Training at Damansara Utama Methodist Church, PJ. Beginning this year, 2020, I am also partly seconded to Seminari Theoloji Malaysia (STM) as TEE Director (English Department). STM is an established theological seminary located in Seremban. Its TEE Office is based in STM-KL Centre, Wisma Methodist, KL. (TEE stands for "Theological Education by Extension," offering part-time degree programs for working people and others interested in a flexible program of study.

2. About my thesis

My thesis examines the "attractional" approach to church corporate worship which aims to attract "seekers" (potential converts) whilst functioning as entertaining worship services for current church members. I call this the "Seeker-Sensitive/Attractional Worship" (SSAW).

Originating from church growth principles and methods, SSAW strategies are pragmatic – leveraging on the contemporary culture of marketing, consumerism and self-fulfilment. My thesis evaluates the theological soundness of the SSAW style from the perspective of the church as the community of the Kingdom of God.

3. What have I learnt during this MTh journey

I have learned the importance of critical thinking and theological reflection, and how these skills ought to be employed based on a sound biblical foundation. In these days of internet connectivity, the church is exposed to values and practices marketed to us the world over. However, uncritical adoption of ideas and methods runs the risk of the church becoming unfaithful to her true nature and to biblical teaching, thereby compromising her ministry and witness to the world. My studies at AGST Alliance have exposed me to issues at the cutting edge of theological thinking.

4. Encouragement for those who are currently trying to complete their programs

In order to complete our programs successfully, we have to invest time and effort. This means cutting down our involvement in other tasks and activities, and spending the time necessary to do all the readings and preparation for each course. Preparing well for a course gives us the full benefit of the on-campus interaction with our module facilitator and fellow students. It is also important to hone our skills of critical thinking and writing as we complete each module because this will certainly prepare us for writing our thesis in future. More importantly, these skills are invaluable for life and ministry. I wish you all the best!

ANNOUNCING OUR NEW WEBSITE



To better position AGST Alliance for the future, we recently revamped our website. We curated content, added more photos, and streamlined web navigation to serve and engage our students, alumni and potential students more effectively. Let us know what you think, email us at registrar@agstalliance.org. Help us promote the website to inspire more leaders to deepen their walk with God in 2020.

We want to thank Mr Gary Goh for his good (and often tedious) work in redesigning this website. Thank you very much!

PRAYER AND THANKSGIVING POINTS

With sincere appreciation to Ogle Christian Trust

We are very grateful to Ogle Christian Trust for their generous gift that will fund AGST Alliance's subscription of several major online databases for the year 2020.

Their gift enables AGST Alliance students and faculty within the consortium to continue to have access to the ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials, the Religion and Philosophy Collection, and ERIC (an education resource database). All three databases provide full-text facilities, and are a welcome resource addition for our students who are working on their thesis, dissertation and research papers.

UPCOMING MODULES

**MTH5-4: Theology,
Contextualization and Asian
Theologies**

Facilitator: Dr Steve Taylor
February to April 2020
On-campus: March 2- 6 2020
On-campus Location: Bangkok Bible
Seminary, Bangkok, Thailand

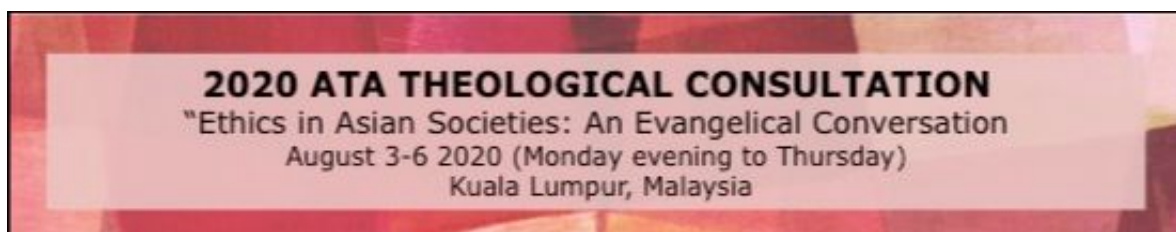
**Approaches and Practices of
Research**

*Integrated Module (for Theology,
Education, DMin programs)*

Facilitators: Dr Brainerd Prince, Dr
Tan Sooi Ling, Dr Rosalind Lim-Tan
and others
February to July 2020
On campus: 11-15 May (M-F)
On-Campus Location: MBTS, Penang

Email registrar@agstalliance.org to sign up.

KEEP THESE DATES FREE!





AGST ALLIANCE DOCTORAL COLLOQUIUM

August 7-8 2020 (Friday, Saturday)
Kuala Lumpur

APPLY

Christian Education

- [Master of Theology\(Education\)](#)
- [Doctor of Education \(Spiritual Formation and Discipleship\)](#)
- [Doctor of Education \(Child and Family Development\)](#)

Theology

- [Master of Theology](#)
- [PhD\(Theology\)](#)

Biblical Studies

- [PhD\(Biblical Studies\)](#)

[Doctor of Ministry](#)

Transformational Development

- [Master of Transformational Development](#)
 - [Graduate Diploma in Transformational Development](#)
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Since 2004, AGST Alliance has been offering quality post-graduate programs for church leaders and seminary or Bible college faculty in mainland South East Asia, to equip them for more effective Christian ministry and mission. See <http://www.agstalliance.org> for more information.

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. 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](#).
 - Please make MYR/SGD/USD cheques payable to 'AGST Alliance Sdn Bhd'; and Thai Baht cheques payable to 'Bangkok Bible Seminary'.
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