perspective

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Faith, Courage and Compassion

Special Report: FES National Conference

Thank You ... Like A Boss

Welcoming Freshmen

Faith, Courage and Compassion

by Bishop Dr Robert Solomon

The stories below have something to say about how we respond to the challenges in our everyday world. We want to look at these stories to help us think further and be challenged as far as our Christian faith is concerned as we engage with the context that we find ourselves in.

A Story from the New Testament

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."
(Lk. 10:25-37 ESV)

In the familiar New Testament passage recorded for us in Luke 10:25-37, Jesus tells a subversive story that challenges us. Jesus is an expert in subversive stories. He tells stories to help us to listen and when the story does its work in us, it challenges our assumptions and the conventional way we think, decide or act. This story of the Good Samaritan is located in the Travel Narrative found in Luke's gospel (Lk.9:51-19:44) which records what took place – what he did and said when he was travelling from Galilee (ministry) to Jerusalem (martyrdom). Jesus chose to go through Samaria, a place which was looked down by the Jews. The Jews had terrible misconceptions and prejudices against the Samaritans but yet Jesus brings the disciples into Samaria.

In many ways, Samaria represents the everyday world that we dwell in between our Sundays. We go to church on Sundays and then we go into our 'Samarias' from Mondays to Saturdays. What we read in this Travel Narrative provides worldviews and perspectives to help us live in this world between our Sundays. The stories of Jesus challenge our worldviews, values, lifestyles, and relationships even as Jesus sends us into the world to engage with our 'Samarias'.

The Challenge

It was dangerous to travel on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho as there were robbers on this stretch of the road. A wounded man was left half dead on the road. Three men walk by, showing different responses. What can we learn from their responses?

The Poor Response

The priest and Levite were professionals. They are supposed to be people good in piety and the religious life. One would have expected them to be the heroes of the story. But both the priest and the Levite *saw* (Lk.10:32,33) the victim and avoided him for some reason. They could have been in a hurry or they were worried about the consequences if they stopped to help. In passing by the other way, they displayed lack of courage and compassion.

> ... at the bottom of what we do and who we are, is being with God and with others. This is the heart of our identity.

The Courageous Response

The Samaritan *saw,* and having seen, took pity, and acted compassionately (Lk.10:33). The listeners to this story would have thought that the story could only get worse when the Samaritan entered the story. But how Jesus surprises us! This is not the point where the story turns bad. In fact it is the Samaritan, who was looked down upon by the Jews, who *is good*, *does good* and *pleases God.*

The spirituality of doing good is such that you do good not simply to earn merit, but you do good because you are good. What we are determines what we do. What we are depends on who we are with. *Being with Jesus, Being Good and Doing Good* – in that order. Psalm 119 verse 68 states that "You are good and you do good" (ESV). The biblical way challenges both the modern pragmatic philosophy (doing) and the ancient Greek philosophy (being). This is a particular challenge to us – In our modern church, we are victims of the philosophy of 'doing' without reference to 'being'.

Even more basic to 'being' is 'being with'. In Philippians chapter 1, Paul says that he is torn – whether to die now and be with God or to carry on and be with God's people. Paul conceives of his life as being with God and with others. This is a more basic and fundamental principle for our life – at the bottom of what we do and who we are, is *being with God* and *with others*. This is the heart of our identity.

The Samaritan responded with compassion. It was an interruption to his journey but nevertheless he stopped, took care of the man and helped him.

One of the things responsible for compassion, besides the Holy Spirit giving us compassion, is also our own experience. The Samaritan was probably a frequent traveller on dangerous roads. It is likely that he was a victim before and knew what it was like to have been left there to bleed away, helpless and to have everything taken from him. His heart went out to the injured man probably because he knew what it felt like to be in that kind of situation. His character was shaped by his own experiences, especially the painful ones.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in

all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ" (2 Cor. 1:3-5 NIV). We see from these verses that our past wounds become the very means by which we can comfort others in similar circumstances. Our troubles and pain are not really wasted in God's economy.

The Samaritan's character is further shown in the way he seemed to have carried a 'first aid kit'. He had a habit of helping victims and the needy. Ministry was a lifestyle for him, not just a programme. He was prepared to assist anytime and anywhere. He personally went to the man, bandaged his wounds after pouring oil and wine (medicinal), and putting the man on the donkey and brought him to an inn. There, he did something that is often overlooked. He "took care of him" (Lk.10:34). He did not retire to the room, but personally cared for the victim. The character of the man shines through.

The character of the man is further seen in the way he gave the innkeeper two silver coins, and then told him he would reimburse for any additional expenses. The innkeeper trusted him and probably knew him well as the Good Samaritan.

On the other hand the priest and the Levite, in a private encounter, did not show any compassion.

Private, personal compassion is at the heart of doing good. How do we measure up in our private acts of good? We can give thousands of dollars to a crisis overseas and yet not give way to an ambulance (carrying a dying man in his own personal crisis) on a Singapore road. We can try to bargain 20 cents out of a poor woman selling handicrafts in a third world country. We can pass by needy persons when we are not observed. Our religion then becomes only a show. It does not go deep.

The church is only as strong as what we are inside, and what we are in private. Holiness must reside in us. As a church, as long as the good we all do in private is more than the collective good we do as an organisation, we are fine. When the balance tilts, we are in trouble.

What kind of neighbour are you to others?

The Outcome

Jesus demonstrates the whole question about loving our neighbour by reversing the question. The question is not 'Who is my neighbour?' but '*Are you a neighbour to others?*' What kind of neighbour are you to others, especially to those you despise?

A Story from the Old Testament

In Judges 4 and 5, the story has a different context. Israel was in a desperate situation, being tormented and bullied by the powers around. Nobody seemed to be lifting a finger to do something about it. Will anyone stand up to be counted?

The Challenge

The Canaanite king Jabin and his general Sisera, with their 900 iron chariots (using the latest warfare technology), bullied Israel at will (Jud. 4:3) for many years. There were empty roads and abandoned villages (Jud. 5:6,7) in Israel, making it too dangerous to live in the open country. Hence the people moved to the walled cities but even the cities were no longer safe (Jud. 5:8). The Israelite army could not do anything about it as it was outnumbered and poorly armed (not a shield or spear). It was a desperate situation for the nation that had boasted

that it had God on their side. The enemy had free entry into that nation. Israel was at a loss.

The Poor Response

As a general in the army, Barak should know what to do. But God used a woman, Deborah, to speak to Barak about God's plans.

Barak was to take 10,000 men up to Mt. Tabor on the plains of Esdraelon where Sisera was based. God will lure Sisera out to meet them on the dry riverbed of Kishon (a plain – the worst terrain to combat fast and mobile iron chariots) where the Israelites were to fight them.

To Barak, this seemed like a bad plan – the Israelites were out-numbered, out-supplied, and out-manoeuvred. *Does God know what He is doing?* Having doubts about the strategy, Barak said to Deborah, "If you go with me I will go …" (Jud.4:8). This showed his lack of faith.

> A strategic place is also a vulnerable place where you may possibly lose your life.

Nevertheless, he still gathered volunteers. But he encountered disinterested tribes.

1. **Reuben (Jud. 5:15b-16)**
   In Reuben, there was a lot of procrastination and lack of action. It is possible for us to fall into this rut – we are good in the language but we have no action. What that is required is our responsibility in word and deed.
2. **Gilead (Jud. 5:17)**
   Gilead never crossed Jordan but settled on the east bank. There was lack of involvement in this tribe. Over time, due to lack of fellowship with fellow believers, it will inevitably lead to a lack of enthusiasm for God's work.
3. **Dan (Jud. 5:17)**
   Dan was the tribe that mastered the art of taking the easy way out. The Amorites forced them up the mountain country. Dan did not obey God and became weak. They were the first to go into apostasy.
4. **Asher (Jud. 5:17b)**
   Asher settled on the Phoenician coast. They did well economically and enjoyed materialistic pursuits. However, they were inward looking and had no biblical vision of life. Their vision was narrow and materialistic. So when the need arose for them to respond, and say 'Here I am, here we are', they did not. Instead, they opted out and showed *lack of concern*.

The above story shows to us the list of tribes that represent for us non-involvement. They did not care about what was happening to the nation and there was no willingness to step forward to volunteer themselves for the occasion. But thankfully there were some good responses.

The Courageous Response

In the situation Israel was in, one would have thought that the key leader would be a man since this called for a military solution. But God called a woman, Deborah, who was a prophetess and a judge (Jud. 4:4) – a religious and civil leader. She spoke to Barak and challenged him.

Three other tribes were mentioned in particular:

1. Issachar (Jud. 5:15) was faithful to Barak and rushed into battle with

Barak. Barak's nightmare would have been to rush into the valley *alone*. But we find enthusiasm here as he went down to the valley with his men (Jud. 4:14).

2. Zebulun (Jud. 5:18) risked their very lives and gave their best.
3. Naphtali (Jud. 5:18) too, risked their lives on the heights of the field, which is the most strategic and yet, most vulnerable place in a war. If a battle is taking place and you are standing on the heights of the field, you can spot the enemy easily and take them out. But a strategic place is also a vulnerable place where you may possibly lose your life.
4. It is the same in the kingdom of God. Our strategic places can be the marketplace, the sciences, the universities, the church, society and politics. Those of us who are placed in these strategic places and who stand up to be counted – to say something or to do something – we may also suffer because we will be attacked. That is why we need courage and faith to stand and respond.

Often it requires courage, compassion and a willingness to stand on the heights of the fields to be counted, so that we may speak God's words and do God's deeds.

The Outcome

Sisera's entire army, including the much feared iron chariots, had been routed (Jud. 4:15). He eventually abandoned his chariot and fled on foot. Many of the others would have done the same thing. *What had happened?*

As they were running into battle, the thunderclouds formed and it rained heavily (Jud. 5:20,21). This would have caused the ground to turn muddy and soggy. The chariots would have been stuck and rendered useless. Eventually the river Kishon swept the iron chariots away.

God's methods are quite different. We think that in a military situation, we need a military solution. But God's ways are far higher and far better. When we worry so much about our problems, God's methods surprise us. He provided a way and gave victory to Israel in a way that showed that our job is to obey Him and respond to Him favourably. God will continue to be faithful to us.

Courage and compassion is certainly needed. When you graduate, the temptation is to be satisfied with the status quo and live a safe, comfortable and secure life The good life is often an enemy of the best life. You will be tempted with all kinds of versions of the good life. But God does not promise the good life. God's promises have to do with the best life. We must be sure that the good life is not the enemy of the best life in our lives. Often it requires courage, compassion and a willingness to stand on the heights of the fields to be counted, so that we may speak God's words and do God's deeds.

(The above Bible exposition was first presented at the FES National Conference 2012 held from 25-27 November.)

Bishop Dr Robert Solomon is the Bishop of the Methodist Church in Singapore (2000 to December 2012). He has served as a Vice-President of FES for many years.

This was the theme for the biennial FES National Conference 2012 (NC2012) held from 25 to 27 October at Salvation Army Praisehaven, Upper Bukit Timah Road. Approximately 302 participants – comprising students, staff and some graduates – attended this conference. Among those present were 28 foreign delegates from IFES member movements in Cambodia, Korea and Thailand.

The conference had three theme talks which explored true Christian engagement with society from the student's perspective, whether it is in the public sphere, or in our private conversations. To further promote dialogue, each theme speaker only shared for about 20 minutes and the rest of the time was used for question-and-answer sessions (Q & A). Instead of the traditional workshops, a novel conference format, *EnGauge*, was introduced to challenge participants to ask questions and to form opinions. An *EnGauge* session consists of the first part – "Entice" – which exposed all participants to a broad range of short 10-minute presentations by various speakers. This was followed by the second part when each participant chose two "Enquire" sessions to further interact with the respective "Entice" speakers, in informal 60-minute conversational sessions. A total of 12 EnGauge sessions were held at this conference. The following pages give you a glimpse of what took place at NC2012.

Theme Talks

What is Christian Engagement?

Dr Kwa Kiem Kiok, Mr Sin Boon Ann

During the first theme talk, the speakers set the tone for the conference as they both laid down the foundations of 'what is', 'why' and 'how to do' Christian Engagement. (Please turn to page 17 to read Dr Kwa's talk)

In his talk, Mr Sin Boon Ann pointed out that there are usually two responses towards social engagement: to evade or to engage. As Christians our rightful response should be that of concern and active engagement as commanded by our Lord in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. The five perspectives of Christian social engagement are:

Dr Kwa Kiem Kiok and Mr Sin Boon Ann

- of God – God, as the creator of the entire universe, is the God of all nations as

well as His covenant people. He is also the God of justice who hates oppression (Ps. 146:7-9).

- of man – Human beings are made as divine creations in His image. As Christians we therefore have a greater basis for serving our fellow humans.
- of Christ – Just as Christ the Servant King came to serve, so we should go and do likewise.
- of Salvation – There is no separation in the Kingdom of God. We have not been called to only reach out to our loved ones (family and friends) but to the whole world.
- of the Church – As a "holy people" set apart for God, we are at the same time still people in the world renouncing "otherworldliness" by serving and witnessing to those in the world.

Mr Sin then expounded on the issue of whether we should get involved in social service and social action, the former

Mary-Ruth (first from left) with her group

While there are many areas that Christians can engage the society, the Q & A session brings forward the reality that may be hard to accept for many Christians. The speakers emphasised that we may need to "make our hands dirty" in our engagement. While this phrase may need to be defined further, it leads me to think about the difficulties faced by Christians who work in a system which may be looked upon as corrupted by other Christians. Though they make every effort to maintain

The opening night of the conference

involving bringing relief and ministering to the needy, while the latter being more the quest for justice among the larger entrenched structures of society. Some examples of areas in society that we should be engaging include serving the elderly, the poor and needy in our community, participating in grassroots movements, civic organisations and policy discussion groups. He also stressed the need for us to think about our role in the world of social media and to be a Christ-like voice even among the diverse range of opinions and views that exist in our society today. Subsequently, the speaker touched upon the need for sensitivity and wisdom in our pluralist society as Christians engage those around us. Mr Sin then ended with a reminder of the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 23:31-46 – *At the end of the day, what kind of life and of what significance is our servitude towards our Lord Jesus Christ?*

Mary-Ruth Low
NUS, Life Sciences, Year 4

Small group discussion time after the talks — Victor is seated second from the right.

integrity and the truth, these Christians may still be seen as compromisers of the faith. They are demanded by the others to be unblemished and blameless Christians who maintain the purity of the system according to the Christian faith. While everyone can acknowledge that every Christian may have his or her imperfections in his service to God in the society, it seems to me that fellow Christians tend to be less tolerant to the imperfections of those in higher office, be it in politics, economics etc. It is truly a lonely journey which only God can sustain.

Victor Wibowo
FES Senior Staffworker

Mealtime conversations

Spot the Blind Spots

Bishop Dr Robert Solomon, Dr Vinoth Ramachandra

To me, blind spots in Christian living can be categorised into two sets: blind spots within one's personal life and blind spots in the external system, though they always intersect with a causal relationship that reinforces each other.

Bishop Dr Robert Solomon & Dr Vinoth Ramachandra

The former refers to micro-level disobedience within an individual's life where one refuses to submit to God's principles. It can go unnoticed and remain as a habit. Over time, it becomes a stubborn blind spot compartmentalised from other areas of Christian living and blocks any light of correction from shining in. It does not only contribute to the macro-level system flaws, but is also influenced and reinforced by the system culture, creating huge domains of blind spots in our society. A few examples we explored are: the greed and self-interest of wealthy individuals fueled a culture of materialism and in return, consumerism widens the income gap and causes systematic economic injustice; a meritocracy culture speeds up the pace of life to an unhealthy level that reduces relationships and human worth in terms of efficiency and monetary values; lack of understanding and respect for the minority groups, foreigners and other religions creates barriers and discrimination which further leads to destructive marginalisation within the society, etc.

This session challenged us with a Christian response to expose these blind spots, with God's light of truth, by returning to His Word and reaching out to our neighbours. The holistic gospel calls for reconciliation both on a personal and societal level where all aspects of one's life have to be integrated with God's values to carry out the integral mission in our daily lives. By His grace, may our light shine brightly to witness the dawn of Heaven on earth.

Tian Yalin
NTU, Accountancy Year 3

Yalin (front row, first from right) with her small group.

Our Personal and Corporate Response

Mr Gabriel Koh, Ms Kuik Shiao-Yin, Dr Peter Jacobs

From left to right: Mr Peter Jacobs, Ms Kuik Shiao-Yin and Mr Gabriel Koh

In the third theme talk, the first speaker, Mr Gabriel Koh, weaved in the paradox of loneliness and community as he described the life of a Christian who seeks to be involved in sustainable social engagement. Every Christian must learn to walk alone with God, in joy, to deepen his calling and conviction and to connect to his inner world. The Christian also recognises that he is not alone because God has put a Christian community with which he should walk together. During the journey, he may unconsciously fall to the idolatries of arrogance, popularity or even covetousness. Again, this may be due to an inability to see the reality from God's point of view.

As the three speakers share their messages which are drawn from their experiences, I see in them, examples of imperfect Christians on their journey to follow the Lord. The journey has not ended yet and there will still be struggles in the days ahead. Nonetheless, their stories bring encouragement and inspiration to me personally.

Victor Wibowo

EnGauge Sessions

Busyness in Student culture and Student ministry

I chose this particular session due to the needs within my campus CF. Indeed, school hours has increased tremendously over the years, but how do we engage the members more? Patrick Ang, a secondary school teacher, brought the notion of 'Teach Less, Learn More' and modified it to 'Do Less, Live More'. But how does one achieve that? Will that not lead to a decrease in CF membership? Well, this session was certainly an eye-opener to many of us who coincidentally, are part of the Exco in our respective CFs. We began by sharing what we do as a CF on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis, and then considered some things that we may reduce or change in order to better engage the members! One must also remember that we are not here on campus just to 'pull' people to attend CF, but to better engage them so that the message of freedom in Christ will mean a lot more to us!

Crystal (front row, first from the left) with her small group

"You cannot get second things by putting them first. You get second things only by putting first things first." – C.S. Lewis in *God in the Dock*

Crystal Tang Jieyi
James Cook University Singapore
Psychology, Year 2

Economic Injustice & Subverting Social Stratification

Local, regional and global socioeconomic issues have interested me for quite some time. The speaker, Mr David Gregg, broke us up into six groups to focus on specific issues pertinent to economic justice and subverting stratification. My group (the Arts students) was "singled" out to tackle the question on freedom of information and its relation to economic justice. Dr Vinoth Ramachandra, one of the theme speakers, joined our group and we had a vibrant discussion on freedom of information and other economic justice issues.

Yong Lin, getting a 'lift' from a group member

On the issue of subverting stratification, the speaker reminded us about the importance of building deep and meaningful relationships with people of different social classes and ethnic backgrounds. Such relationships that transcends social boundaries describes exactly the kind of interactions Jesus had with sinners, tax collectors and alleged prostitutes during his three years of ministry on earth.

After this session, my burden for the welfare of the poor just got heavier. As I am going to graduate by the end of this year, I have been praying to God for a clear direction on what I should devote my life on. The answer has been there throughout my years undergoing tertiary education, and it has just become clearer. I am going to champion the economic rights of the poor in whichever field I choose in the near future.

Teo Yong Lin
SIM, Sociology, Year 3

Meritocracy and Pragmatism

This issue was given a hands-on treatment during the *EnGauge* session. Using four different case studies, we looked at how merit and practicality were not the only values to consider when making decisions, but many other surrounding circumstances influence the final outcome as well.

The first case study involved the care of an elderly mother and who should be responsible: the children, elderly home, or to hire a caregiver. The second case study centered on church planning and who the leadership should listen to when deciding the direction for the church. The third case study was about government spending and deciding how and who to budget for when a surplus in funds was discovered. The final case study was about hiring a CEO for a charitable non-profit organisation and who might be the most suitable: an experienced CEO from a big, profitable company, a retired government official with experience in management, or a passionate man with a degree in Social Work. Each case study dealt with real issues and were complex enough to not afford a straightforward, singular answer, as with everyday life.

The EnGauge session on 'ITE students'

Jeremiah Goh
FES staffworker

LGBTQ

This session focused on engagement with the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Questioning) Community. We watched a video of reactions given by everyday people on the street with regard to the lifestyles of this community and then had an open 'Question & Answer' session.

Stephen (first from right) with fellow participants

Despite my numerous discussions in the past few years with friends on issues regarding LGBTQ in Singapore, I still could not shake the conflicted feelings I had. Somehow, while I continue to be clear about it being a sin, there was something about the way LGBTQ relationships have come to be portrayed that touched a raw nerve within me. What impacted me the most, however, was how all of us tended to refer to this community as if they were some foreign, abstracted entity. When talking about them as the "LGBTQ Community" it became easier to dehumanize them, to reduce them into "issues".

The LGBTQ EnGauge session

I think attending this session gave me a deeper conviction to remember that these are people who go through intense emotional struggles and conflicts. It revealed my own lack of compassion and inability to empathise. I pray that as a fellowship we will learn not to stay in our bubble, reducing people to "issues" but to get out there and engage with people, messy though it may be.

Stephen Yeo
NUS, Law Year 4

Engaging Pop Culture

The speaker encouraged us to critically assess pop culture from the Christian perspective rather than blindly consuming or condemning it. Lyrics and video in pop music can plant some principles that can lead us astray from biblical principles. During the session, we discussed a music video, *I am the Best* by *2NE1* (pronounced *To Anyone* or *Twenty One*), a South Korean girl pop group, and assessed its content. The speaker pointed out that the lyrics and video can subtly influence us with worldly principles and values. We could be persuaded to go after what the culture around us value and prize, while ignoring the standard and values God has revealed to us in the Bible. However, some music videos have positive points to it – for example, the *Gangnam Style* video tries to deliver a satire that laments over social injustice by pointing to a small wealthy neighborhood in Seoul.

Hwakyong (first from left), staffworker with Korea IVF and the speaker for the session on 'Engaging Pop Culture', with some of the KIVF students who attended NC2012

Tiffany (first from left) with some of her

Faith & the Arts

When integrating art in the church setting, it should be used creatively but with caution. When integrating elements of art, like using ballet to illustrate what is recited during Bible reading, it is important to take note if the focus of the worship is the dance instead of the meaning of the verse. The true use of art in church should help the congregation to appreciate and understand the Word of God more wholly rather than to be distracted by the art form. Beyond the church setting, we were reminded of the importance of drawing lines between what is principally right and wrong. There should not be any blind use of certain moves, for example sexually arousing moves in hip-hop, even if it is for entertainment.

We live in a fallen world but we are not of this world. Observing and enjoying the arts and culture can bring us a step closer to understanding the lifestyle and attitude of today's society, including our campus community. It is not difficult to engage in conversation about our interests and preferences in art and culture with our campus friends. Let us show and witness, directly or indirectly, what we as Christians value in the domain of interest and appreciation of art.

Tiffany Febrin Lie
NUS, Economics, Year 3

Engaging a minority student group on campus

The speaker helped us develop a better understanding of the community's predominant religious beliefs. We also learnt that certain groups within the community are generally more open to listen to what we have to share about our faith. This helped to ease the anxieties we may have regarding engaging with this community.

Coming from the background of a Chinese-speaking CF, this session reminded me of how often we tend to neglect the beliefs and cultural norms of those whom we seek to reach out to. Besides getting to know them, we need to find effective channels and bridging points to share our faith with them.

We also need to be properly equipped in knowing the Bible and be fully convicted of its teachings. Most, if not all Christians construct their worldview based on biblical revelations. It is helpful to further compare alternative worldviews to challenge our pre-conceived biblical notions and put our Christian faith through rigorous mental and experiential exercises. As we fully utilise the faculty of the mind that the Lord gave us, it will, hopefully, lead us to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Having a firm conviction of what we profess to believe in plays an extremely pivotal role in us becoming sturdy signboards pointing others to Christ. More importantly, it is through this that we can live a life worthy of the Lord and pleasing Him in every way (Col.1:10).

Students at one of the EnGauge sessions

Jackson Lum Guan Ting
FES staffworker

Crystal (centre, facing camera) facilitating discussion in her small group

The entire conference was excellent, so much that it impacted me enough to want to bring the values and notions picked up during NC back into my campus and daily life! If I had to funnel one aspect, I felt that devotion on Day 3 was empowering. I felt insufficiently prepared due to exhaustion and fell asleep while preparing. That night, my friend commented: 'why must you prepare? Just ask them questions!' But I explained that glorifying God through facilitating this group (I was a small group leader) properly was primary. With that, I committed it to God and slipped into dreamland. The next morning, the strong presence of God was extremely prominent as He led His child to facilitate the group in a really different manner and spirit like never before! This experience has deeply etched the lesson of relying and committing things to God more than just reading about it.

Indeed, Psalms 127:1 summarises the experience and lesson: 'unless the Lord builds the house, we labor in vain'. Let us all not forget the many lessons we have absorbed through the conference, and continue to shine like stars wherever we set foot on!

Crystal Tang Jieyi
James Cook University Singapore
Psychology, Year 2

Hao Guang (centre) with his small group

The student council discussions were an interesting feature of NC; I was not too sure how they might fit in with the theme of engagement, because they seemed to be an (nonetheless legitimate) exercise in looking inwards as a community of believers. Because of our various positions within FES — local and foreign students and staffworkers — we come with different perspectives and thus decided that FES could benefit from more inter-ministry activity. The tension between outward and inward engagement was the most interesting take-away from the council discussions.

Tse Hao Guang
NUS, English Literature Year 4

I went to NC2012 without even knowing what the theme was (I did not bother to find out). All along, I have never dreamt of doing something 'big' nor had much interest in anything except just getting by in my university life. Though I went without any expectations or goals, what I heard from the speakers literally blew my mind. The theme talks and *EnGauge* sessions gave me new resolutions, insights and knowledge. Now, I find that I can dream 'big'. And not to just dream, but to be real, get out and engage this world as true Christians. My prayer is that every one of us who was at NC, will be salt and light of this world.

Adhi Prasetya
NTU, Bioengineering Year 2

Amos (back row centre) and Adhi (back row first right) with their group.

Discussion groups at an EnGauge session

Station Games on the second day ... NINJA WARRIOR

As part of the logistics committee, I did not have enough time to spend with my group due to the schedule. However, I did manage to get to know my group members on the first night and hear about their expectations for the camp and their thoughts on engagement. On the second day, we had games together, and it was really great to see that everyone was enjoying themselves. However, what I really got from NC was that we should really step out of our comfort zones to engage those around us, as sometimes we might really be caught up in our own safe bubble, and neglect the pressing issues or problems currently happening. May God guide and lead us.

Amos Tay
Amos graduated from Ngee Ann Polytechnic (Marine & Offshore Engineering) in 2012

... SPEED DATING

... RUNNING MAN

... Doing a forfeit

Scotoma is the medical term for blindspots and as the title suggests, this interactive art exhibition was crafted to encourage individual self-reflection. The exhibition occupied a suite of rooms at the Salvation Army and allowed visitors to step into the devoutly Christian, Ang household. Here we could walk through the rooms and lives of a Christian family and understand their individual and familial difficulties while looking through their household items, diaries, photographs and toys. Alternatively the audience could interact with the lively Mrs. Ang (played by Elaine) who would give us insights into the two teenagers, one intellectually rebellious and another absent, a painfully shy child of 5, an ailing grandmother and an absent father. The exhibition called us to look at our own lives, the cracks and chasms between who we want to be and who we are. And it invited us to look honestly at the darkness, or blind spots, in our own lives that we sometimes hide in an attempt to "be Christian". On the final day of the exhibition we see evidence that the youngest child has emerged and written simple notes of encouragement and love to her older family members. As the exhibition proposed "Mei Mei, in stepping out of her tent, has become a heartfelt and earnest model of engagement. She witnesses the frailties and sufferings of her family and makes the decision to step out of her tent and shelter, to embrace and invite them into her "world." Moving from acknowledging our blindspots we are encouraged to embrace those around us in honesty and love, as we step back into our families, our campuses and the world around us.

The living room of the Ang family

Mrs Ang takes a break from cleaning the house

Students observing Mei Mei's tent after she has stepped out

Mei Mei's note to her mother on the final day of the exhibition.

Amitha Pagolu
Amitha graduated from NUS in English Literature (Honours) in July 2012.

What Is Christian Engagement?

by Dr Kwa Kiem Kiok

There is a little ditty that was once usually sung to make fun of someone on their birthday: "O, why were you born so beautiful, O why were you born at all…?"

This simple song asks one of the big questions about life, that is, why was one even born? Why are we here? Specifically, *what are we, as Christians, supposed to be doing and being, right here and now?* Some might think that our purpose here is merely for the sake of our own salvation and we are just waiting till we get to heaven; that would have been missing the point of being Christians.

The Scripture is clear that Christians have a role and responsibility in the wider community. After all, God created the world, and He is Lord and the Sustainer of the whole universe, and His kingdom was inaugurated by the coming of Christ. The perspective of the Bible is universal, not individualistic. In the light of this, the role of Christians on earth could be explored in relation to three simple questions about Christian engagement: **Do what? Why? How?**

Do What? Do Good.

What are Christians called to do in the wider society? The concept of being salt and light is familiar to many Christians. In one way, to be the salt in society is to be a presence in the community that makes the surroundings more pleasant, and preserve the vestiges of goodness that already exist in the community. On the flip side, to be the light in society is to be a contrasting or a counter-cultural influence in it. As the prayer attributed to St Francis of Assisi goes, *"Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is despair, hope."*

Our roles as salt and light in society is aptly illustrated in a passage in the book of Jeremiah, which was written for a group of people who were exiled in Babylon for a term of 70 years as punishment for their disobedience. As the exile could be considered a temporary placement, it would be a natural response for the people to sit idly by and wait the years out. However, this was not God's intention; rather, He was very clear about what they were to do.

> … are students merely to aim to study hard, graduate well with degree in hand, and then move on to the working world, where "real" life starts?

Similarly, students remain on campus for a relatively short period of time of three to five years. Given the limited time, are students merely to aim to study hard, graduate well with degree in hand, and then move on to the working world, where "real" life starts? Like the Israelites of old, there is a call even for students with their short campus life to get involved with the community around them.

In Jeremiah 29:4-7, the Lord commanded the Israelites to "build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce." They are to marry and have children, to give their children in marriage and to increase in numbers. All these are everyday rituals and practices

of life; aspects of life involving us in the very fabric of society. Building or buying property means investing in the land that we are on. Planting gardens and eating their produce mean not only cultivating crops, but also staying long enough to harvest them and adapting to the local food produce. In a sense these are 'good things' which we could be involved in.

While these aspects of life may not yet be applicable to students, nevertheless, there are equivalent situations. A student's life greatly encompasses studying, writing papers, and doing group projects. As a student, are you a team player and helpful towards others?

Note that in verse 7, Jeremiah wrote, "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city." In other words, in addition to being involved in the everyday aspects of life in their new city, the Israelites were also to seek the general peace and prosperity of the city. Jeremiah encouraged the Israelites to pray to the Lord for their new city. Likewise, are we as students praying for our campus as a whole? In order to know how to and what to pray for, students need to know the current affairs and issues on campus in order to pray intelligently.

Just as the Israelites were instructed to seek the peace and prosperity of the city they are in, Christians students are similarly instructed to seek the peace and prosperity of the campuses they study in. There are many areas for students to promote peace and prosperity on the campus. Take a good look around. Is your campus a place where everyone, regardless of rank and post, is treated with dignity? Is the campus environment a welcoming place where various and different voices are heard, and not only the loud, the smart or the beautiful? If your campus is not full of shalom (peace), can you (individually and collectively) do something to make it so?

Why do Good?

Why do we need to be involved in the community? According to God's word through Jeremiah, when the city you are in prospers, you too will prosper.

Simply put, when the environment you are in is just, peaceful and gracious, it is not only Christians who will benefit, but everyone else as well. When one's classroom, campus and general environment is clean and pleasant, welcoming of others, and treats people with respect, everyone benefits from it.

For Christians, moreover, in the broader scheme of the community, involvement and contribution enables one to look at the whole picture. This is possible because God's worldview, and by extension, the Christian worldview, is very broad, encompassing the world and everyone in it. Besides that, Christians are in a good position to demonstrate God's characteristics of compassion, grace and mercy; all these are values that viewed as important in the Singapore society.

Doing good is to be light in a dark place – to be countercultural.

Christian involvement also encompasses doing good, and promoting the peace and welfare of the communities that we are in. Doing good is to be light in a dark place – to be countercultural. However, we should be prepared that this stance is not always popular nor well-received by others. Nevertheless, issues will arise because "doing good" means different things to different people. Whose good are we talking about? Doing good for one group

may puts us in tension or opposition with another group. For example, there was a recent national issue that has generated discussions on whether a plot of land should be used as a children's playground or converted into a senior activity centre. At other times, as Christians, we may feel compelled to champion the rights of the underdog at the risk of putting ourselves in direct opposition to higher authorities. Are we then willing to suffer for doing what we feel is right and just? The challenge for Christians is going beyond our self-interests and instead looking toward the interests of others within the community.

How to do Good?

Two characters from the Old Testament, Shiprah and Puah, demonstrate for us an example of doing good in the community.

Shiprah and Puah are the two Israelite midwives who lived during the time of Pharaoh in Exodus 1. This was the period when the Egyptians oppressed and worked the Israelites ruthlessly. Despite the harsh treatment, the Israelite population continued to multiply and became increasingly numerous. Worried over the Israelites' increasing population, Pharaoh called the midwives and asked them to kill all the baby boys being born, but to let the baby girls live. This was a devious way of curbing and weakening the Israelite population; lineage is tracked through the male family line, and soldiers and rebels were typically men.

In spite of the harsh oppression under the Egyptians, Shiprah and Puah had developed a strong faith in God; they feared God more than the Pharaoh, which gave them the courage to make their stand. When he subsequently questioned them on the persistent survival of the Israelite baby boys, they gave a marvellous answer filled with wisdom and tact. "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive", they said (Ex. 1:19). Not only were they not disrespectful to the King, they were also honest and maintained their fear of God.

Shiprah and Puah's response to Pharaoh provides us with guidance on how we can engage in the public square today. First, even though our thoughts, ideas and worldview are informed by our Christian conviction, we should use language and concepts that are understandable to all. We need to speak and act in ways that those who have different worldviews can still understand; whether they agree with us or not is beside the point.

Second, like the two Israelite midwives, we should always act with gentleness and respect to others, whether we are in a superior or a subordinate position. When facing a difficult situation or issue, with wisdom from the Holy Spirit, we can always state our case politely and firmly with gentleness and respect. If you are able to, take the time to gather others, pray with them, and seek the collective wisdom of others to know what to say.

In summary, why are we here? To do good, to get involved and to seek the shalom of the campus in all ways. Moreover, do all these with wisdom, tact, gentleness and respect, because when our society and community prospers, we too will prosper.

Dr Kwa Kiem Kiok was a VCFer during her student days at NUS. She practised law for two years before joining Graduates' Christian Fellowship as a staff for six years. She has also worked in her home church. Currently, she lectures at East Asia School of Theology in missions-related subjects.

On 7 August 2012, Polytechnic Christian Fellowship (PCF) held its outreach event, *'Thank You ... Like A Boss'* in Singapore Polytechnic (SP) outside one of the campus food courts. The main purpose of this outreach event was to create an awareness of the presence of PCF in SP, as well as to organise an event where PCF could contribute to the SP community and allow students to get to know PCF in an interactive way.

When students came to the event booth, they were each given a balloon and a marker. They were supposed to write their 'Thank You' messages on the balloon and give the balloon to anyone they were appreciative of. The balloons had two uses: it was a direct way to show one's appreciation to another, and helped generate publicity through curiosity when that person walked around campus with his or her balloon.

In the end, the event was a success! All the helium was used up after about 200 balloons were given away.

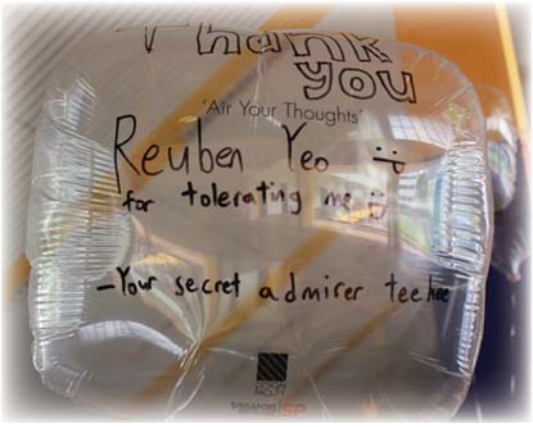
Reflections

Being in the organising committee for the *'Thank You ... Like A Boss'* event, I feel a sense of achievement and pride that PCF pulled off this event without any major hitches, and that our event was a success! I was initially nervous, as we only managed to put up the posters a few days before the outreach. But, God works in wonderful ways. I kept praying for people to come and they did. It was by God's grace that a continuous stream of people came up to our booth throughout the morning and early afternoon.

In the end, due to high demand for the balloons, we ran out of helium after lunchtime and had to end the

outreach event. The response from the '*Thank You ... Like A Boss*' outreach event encourages me to always have faith. I always fear that our events will not be very successful and people will not be receptive to our attempts to reach out to the SP community. However, God has kept showing us His grace and now I can say for sure that with Him, we can do anything!

Claire Tan
Diploma in Business Administration, Year 2



Well, as a whole, the 'Balloon Event' held in SP was really interesting. Kudos to the organising team and to the one who thought of such an ingenious idea! Looking closely at all the people crowding at the stall, each one wanting to write "Thank You's" atop each balloon, I felt really touched by their actions. After that day, what struck me is the importance of living out the Gospel as actions speak louder than words. Moreover, people can respond to and open up faster to the Gospel because, to use an engineering analogy (as an engineering student), light travels faster than sound.

Cavin Sng
Diploma in Aeronautical Engineering, Year 1

During the outreach programme when we gave out balloons to the students, I realised that many of the students do not know about PCF. It was a great opportunity for me to experience how to interact with non-CFers through this event and I learned an extra skill on how to operate the booth and of course, the helium tank! It was also an opportunity for the students to express their gratitude to people that they are really thankful for. If there are more events like this in the future, I would definitely want to participate in them!

Tricia Tay
Diploma in Business Administration, Year 1

Welcoming Freshmen to the New Academic Year

VCF Freshmen Orientation Camp 17 - 20 July 2012

CVCF Welcome Tea 16 August 2012

NUS ISCF Welcome Tea 13 August 2012

NTU - ECF & CCF Freshmen Orientation Camp 23 - 25 July 2012

NTU ISCF Welcome Tea 15 August 2012

SIM SCF Freshmen Orientation Camp 2 - 4 August 2012

SIM ISCF Welcome Tea 28 September 2012

SKETCH CF

One day, God moved a student from the NUS Indonesian Students' Christian Fellowship (ISCF), who have friends studying in the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) and LASALLE College of the Arts, to invite some FES staffworkers to meet up with these students to explore the possibility of pioneering a combined Christian Fellowship (CF) for both NAFA and LASALLE.

They met in a quiet corner at *Sim Lim Kopitiam*. Three students representing both institutions came but were, initially, totally at a loss as to what to discuss. After everyone had introduced themselves, the students shared about the uniqueness of the lifestyle and background of a NAFA or LASALLE student. Then, the FES staff shared briefly on the work of FES, in particular, the FES Indonesian Ministry. Then came the most crucial question: what do they do next? After some discussion, they decided to start their first CF meeting in two weeks' time.

Voila! The time came. It was 25 September 2012, 1.00 p.m. There were eight students gathered. They worshipped God, listened to a short sermon to straighten their goal and purpose in this CF, and then moved into the meeting. The meeting went well; it was fun, random – in an almost unstructured and slightly abstract way – colourful and creative. Finally, after three hours of thinking and discussing, they settled on a few things.

They decided on a name for their CF – SKETCH. In arts terms, a sketch is the very first step in design. They hope that this name can continually remind them that they are the image of God, and thus they should live like Him.

They also decided on a mission. Their mission statement is taken from Romans 8: 29, *"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."* From this verse, they acknowledged that all of us were first created in the image of God, but then sin damaged us. People are going further away from the Creator, and have failed to be His icon on earth. SKETCH CF, with the guidance of God, seeks to bring

those around them back to their Maker. As a CF, they long to repair God's image on earth, and bring their friends back to glorify Him. Also, they want to grow in their faith together, and to polish and repair themselves to be become more like God.

A schedule was also determined during the meeting. For now, SKETCH gathers on the second and fourth Friday of the month, at 7.00 p.m. Please pray for them and for the staffworkers attached to the CF – that they may be able to maintain this CF during its infancy stage. Let the glory of God fill every single part of their campuses!

Joanna Christie
LASALLE School of the Arts, Product Design Year 3

The Kingdom of God

A team, comprising three students from Ngee Ann Polytechnic Chinese CF, two polytechnic alumni and two staffworkers from FES Chinese Work, attended a missions conference organised by FES Hong Kong from 17 to 20 June 2012.

Praise be to God for the wonderful opportunity given to the team to attend the conference. Even though it only lasted a short five days, it deeply enriched our understanding of Christianity and put us in a place where new friendships were forged aplenty.

On four of the five mornings, Dr. Stephen Lee, a faculty member of China Graduate School of Theology, spoke on the Kingdom of God. Using the Lord's Prayer as an analogy, he illustrated that the Kingdom of God is where God's name is to be hallowed, where God's will is to be done on earth as it is in Heaven. The common pre-conceived notion is that the Kingdom of God is just a faraway place where we will be with the Lord after we cross into the afterlife. But in reality the Kingdom is near and it is beckoning us to let God enter and be enthroned as King of our hearts. However, this is merely a God's Kingdom concept. What is critical is whether we are sincerely willing to repent and make changes to the way we live our lives to reflect more of His image, as a response to the immense love of the Father. In the midst of repentance, are we willing to endure trials of faith, acknowledge Him in every aspect of our lives and allow Him to fulfill His purpose through us as a process of accomplishing the mission God has already entrusted to us?

Through the Bible Study on *The Sermon on the Mount*, I also got the chance to participate in discussions on various topics. I was reminded of the essentiality of practical faith through the testimonies of the speaker and students alike. Our surroundings often abound with Biblical teaching, but as a Christian in today's society, *have we made it a point to demonstrate love and care for the world God has so meticulously and wonderfully created?* Being stewards of God, *have we managed the talents and resources given to us well?* Or have we been sucked into the trap of simply living comfortable lives and taking our God-given resources for granted? A practical illustration would be our day-to-day attitudes toward seemingly mundane issues such as fair trade, recycling, social justice and corporate social responsibility. Even a small action and slight change in attitude can have a profound impact on the world.

Front row (L-R): Amos Tay (NP alumni), Jolene Tan Yi Shuen (NP Year 1), Becky Ng Pei Shan (NP Year 2), Yong Lee Fong (FES staffworker); Back row (L-R): Kopen (HK), Joyce Sune (FES staffworer),Tang Sie Min (NP Year 3), Ting Yu (SP alumni), Cang Ling Yee (Malaysia)

Together with the sharing of my reflection, let me challenge each and every one of you as readers to embrace God's purpose for your lives and let the Kingdom of God reign in your hearts, wholeheartedly living a life that will change the world for the better. Let us partake in the work of the Kingdom today!

Joyce Sune
FES staffworker

Yvonne Choo *serves in FES as Associate General Secretary, Head of the English ministry/section and staffworker to VCF at NUS.*

I took a 30% pay cut to join FES as a full-time staff in February 1997. It has been a tumultuous and rewarding journey in many ways. The length of time has allowed me to see how FES ministry has and continues to change the lives of students and graduates, who in turn impact the church and society. It has not been a personal sacrifice at all for me to serve in this ministry. In fact, I have received so much more than what I imagined myself to have given to this ministry. There have been no regrets. No doubts. No looking back to wonder what it might have been. None.

Until recently. Until I was told of the differing costs of the different chemotherapy medications for my father. It suddenly dawned upon me that one's finances can actually be the limiting factor on the quality of healthcare one receives. Will my family be asked to bear the cost of my decision to be content with drawing a staffworker's pay? Suddenly, 'counting the cost' took on a more ominous note. I have never considered it a 'sacrifice' until someone I love may be asked to pay the price.

My father's health is now in the clear after three surgeries and six courses of chemotherapy. May I continue to run with endurance and enthusiasm, the race that is set before me. May that also be an encouragement to those who come behind me.

. . . in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving

Pray for:

Yvonne, conducting the 'Speed Dating' game at the recent FES National Conference.

- my father's health.
- more people to be challenged to join the FES staff team.
- the students who will be attending VCF's Annual Teach-In Conference from 26-31December, that they will remember and live out the lessons learnt during the camp. As they learn what it means for the Word to be in the world, may they desire to be like the Word made flesh, bringing the good news to the world.
- the January outreach seminar, that it will help the students think more about outreach, what outreach is and how that can be done sensitively in their current context, with boldness and gentleness.
- the halls of residences, as they will be having inter-hall games in the beginning of the year. Pray for the Christians to be good testimonies to their neighbours and opponents. Pray that in the midst of tension and competitiveness, they will find opportunities to show Christian character, gentleness and self-control.
- the CFers, that they may find life partners while they are still undergraduates, as they work together in various campus-wide ministries and events.

Gabriel Jiang Qing Quan *joined FES in March this year. He serves together with Fuji in the FES pioneering ministry (English section).*

Pioneering work is a very exciting ministry. The task of establishing Christian Fellowships (CFs) on new ground helps me think, not only about the existing groups, but also about the future and the continuation of the student movement. This brings me a sense of joyful expectation that God will preserve the student movement, beyond what I can see; I am glad to be part of these new CFs.

let your requests be made known to God.

One of the important lessons that I have learnt is that student ministry belongs to God, and that I should rely on God instead of my own competencies. I have witnessed how God has drawn people to CFs with seemingly little effort on our part. Having said that, it does not mean that we sit back and relax; what we should do is to consistently build up competencies so as to use them as a form of worship to God. When I think of competencies, I do not think only of the skills of working with students and strategic planning, but also about growing deep into the Word and my faith in Christ. Growing in these areas has been a humbling experience for me.

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:14–17, ESV); these were the words of advice given to me by an IFES staff when I started my journey in FES. Our life on earth is short, yet our actions are of eternal consequence. That leaves very little time for pride or arrogance in us if we want to be fruitful. Yet often, we fail Him in this area. I feel very privileged to be working in the exciting field of pioneering work among students, and know that God can work through us in spite of our shortcomings.

Gabriel (second from left) with Fuji and students from Informatics CF.

Pray for:

- the students of *Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts* as they strive to be salt and light in a pressurising campus environment;
- the continuity of *Informatics CF* as most of them have reached their final year in studies;
- the Hostel ministry of *East Asia Institute of Management*. All the students are foreigners and a high percentage of them are nonbelievers. Pray for opportunities to do disciplemaking and follow up ;
- my family, especially my parents as they are still working although they are in their sixties. Ask for God's grace to be upon their health, spiritually and physically.

With students from NAFA

Chan Sook Ching *served in FES Chinese Work (CW) from 1991 to 1994 and 2000 to 2005. She re-joined FES in January 2012 as a staffworker (part-time), serving with the CW Alumni and Temasek Polytechnic campus ministry .*

Sook Ching (standing) with students from Temasek Polytechnic.

During my student days in NUS, the Chinese VCF was the Fellowship which nurtured me in my faith, especially in my understanding of God's Word and my walk with Christ. One of the distinctives of the student ministry – Mission-mindedness – challenged me to look beyond my comfort zone and respond to His call. I thank God for this formative background, which led me to serve in pastoral ministry and mission work in a church in Hong Kong for about 10 years.

When I was in Hong Kong, God gave me the opportunity to serve among working-adults. I saw how God empowered and equipped them to bear witness for Christ in the marketplace. Some started prayer groups and Evangelistic Bible Study groups in their offices. I witnessed what true church growth is when I saw brothers- and sisters-in-Christ living out their beliefs, and being true 'Light and Salt' where they are.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding

The Alumni Bible study group

Being involved in student ministry calls us to train and care for students during their years on campus. Serving among the graduates is to encourage and empower them to live out their lives and reach out to their fellow colleagues in their work places. All these will complement the evangelism ministries of our local churches.

Pray for:

- me to be able to balance my responsibilities in the ministry and in my family.
- opportunities to reach out to fellow-Chinese speaking students. Thank God for committed first year students in Temasek Polytechnic.
- the bi-monthly Alumni Bible Study – that these meetings will serve to challenge and equip our graduates to be witnesses for Christ in their work places. Thank God for the regular attendance of about 40 polytechnic and university graduates at these meetings.
- us and all our students and graduates, that God will lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil.

Chong Yun Mei *had previously worked for nine years with FES in campus and literature ministry. She re-joined FES on a part-time basis in 2005, overseeing the communications and resource ministry.*

"What is the thing that I like and dislike most in my work?"

I like to read the articles that students write for *Perspective*. Reading their reflections on what they have learnt and how they have grown through the student ministry encourages me and helps me to 'forget' about the things I dislike about my work, for example, chasing people to meet deadlines, trying to choose the 'best' photo ...

I like being involved in literature ministry. One of the things I do is select relevant books for booktables to support FES or CF events. Usually I do not get any feedback about the books I have selected other than whether it was sold or not. But I am thankful that once in a blue moon, someone shares with me that one of the books I had selected helped to shape his or her thinking on a particular issue.

Pray with me that students will make the effort to read books, whether printed or electronic, to broaden and deepen their perspective on issues relating to their faith and witness on campus.

Pray for me to press on, with joy, in this ministry of building people for the kingdom of God through my work in FES.

will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

Philippians 4:6,7

Rika Widjaja *serves as Senior Administrative Assistant (part-time) with the FES Indonesian Ministry (FES IM).*

I joined FES immediately after I graduated from NUS in 2002. It has been almost 10 years now in this work. I do not think I have a specific calling to administrative work. I just enjoy doing the mundane and repetitive tasks that come with the job. These tasks are seemingly 'small' things, but they play a significant role in supporting the main work of serving the students on campus. The following verses have been a constant guide to me as I serve Him in the ministry:

> *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor. 12:4-7).*

Besides, the administrative work I do for FES IM, I am also involved in a ministry to the Indonesian Domestic Workers in Singapore.

Pray that God will continue to lead me in the journey ahead and that I will walk in obedience and love for Him all the way.

KIVF NAIL Conference

FES staffworkers, Hilda Ng, Adrian Nugroho and Gabriel Jiang, together with three students from Singapore, attended the Korea National Assembly of Leaders (NAIL) 2012 conference organised by Korea Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (KIVF) from 9 to 13 July. NAIL, a leadership conference, had around 800 participants in all and was held at the Korea Theological Seminary, Kosin University, Cheonan, South Korea. Adrian, Garbriel and Hilda share with us some of their learning points from different aspects of the conference.

God is working through and moving students in the whole world today through the IFES movement, for the expansion of His Kingdom on earth. As I reflected upon the theme of the conference, *'Whole Truth, Whole World, Whole Community',* as well as Daniel Bourdanné's (the IFES General Secretary) theme talks on the holistic Gospel for the world through the community (very much the concern of most IFES movements today), I realised that God is actually moving the whole IFES movement into one direction: that is, to recalibrate the extreme swing of Christianity in the past few centuries from a dualistic, gnostic-like Gospel back to the reality of a holistic Gospel that encompasses reconciliation of all realities and aspects of life to God through Christ, as presented almost everywhere in the Bible. I am encouraged, elated, and also thankful that God let me see the reality that He is in fact involving me in this global work of His on earth.

Adrian Nugroho

The conference participants from Singapore (L-R): Caleb Chin (NTU CF), Adrian, Shermaine Ang (NUS VCF), Hilda, Leo Fu (NUS VCF) and Gabriel.

As this was my first time attending a Korean conference, I was relieved to find that they placed a local Korean who spoke fluent English in my small group. Small group sessions immediately became intimate as group members shared about their family backgrounds, testimonies of their conversion, how KIVF helped them become serious in their walk with Christ, and how they struggle with family, studies and faith. Their openness to share and their willingness to relate was unique compared to most of the small groups I have experienced in other conferences. The spirit of community and unity in Christ was a very rare and precious experience in this largely globalised but individualistic culture.

Gabriel Jiang

One aspect of the conference that I found unique is the *Market On* and *Music Festival*. This is a two-hour time slot in the afternoons that we can opt to attend. *Market On* is an outdoor carnival where students set up stalls and sell all sorts of things. Each campus has a missions fund where the money is saved to finance the mission work that the campus supports. Thus, the sale proceeds go to the mission fund of their campus.

The *Music Festival* is an initiative by the media department of KIVF. Since the pop culture in Korea is very strong, KIVF encourage their students to compose Christian songs and submit it for competition. All KIVF students will get to vote for the pieces they like. At the *Music Festival*, they showcased the top six pieces that they have selected and out of the six, one winner was picked. The winning piece and band then performed at the closing ceremony of the conference.

Hilda Ng

Hilda (second from right) with her small group

Farewell

Joni Boh, who was staffworker in charge of postgraduate ministry, left FES at the end of June. During her time with FES, she met with postgraduate students from NUS for Bible studies, discussions and outings. She also coordinated the host family programme for international students studying at NUS and NTU. After two years with FES, Joni decided to return to the teaching profession.

Dr Stephen Lim and his wife, **Chieng Wei Shieng,** left for the United Kingdom in mid-September to pursue theological studies for two years. Stephen and Wei Shieng had been effectually working as part-time staffworkers on an Associate Staffworker basis for the past four to five years. They committed themselves to working two days per week in FES and the other three days in their 'secular' jobs. Wei Shieng served primarily with NUS VCF, while Stephen worked with NTU CF. Stephen and Wei Shieng are enrolled at King's College, London and they will be doing an MA in Religion in Contemporary Society and a graduate diploma in Christian Studies respectively during their first year.

Thomas Ng Cheng How left FES at the end of September after a long service with the FES Chinese Work. Thomas served in FES from 1991 to 1995 and then from 1998 onwards, doing student and graduate ministry. He took on the role of Head of Chinese Work from 2005 to 2011. For the rest of this year, besides taking a rest, Thomas will be completing some course work at Alliance Bible Seminary in Hong Kong. Next year, he plans to serve in a local church.

Thomas (left) with Lisman

We thank Joni, Stephen, Wei Shieng and Thomas for their faithful service with FES and pray for God to continue to bless and enrich their lives as they move on to new paths of service.

Welcome!

Joyce Sune Lee Qin is a 2012 graduate in Financial Informatics from Ngee Ann Polytechnic. During her student days, Joyce was an active member of the Ngee Ann Polytechnic Chinese CF, having served in various roles including as chairperson for the 2011/2012 academic year.

After graduating in May, Joyce spent about three months exploring the possibility of serving in FES student ministry. We are glad that Joyce made the decision to invest deeper into the lives of students by joining FES on a full-time basis on 1 September. Joyce is assigned to work with Chinese-speaking students at Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Temasek Polytechnic. She is also helping to develop a publicity video on the FES Chinese Work (FES CW). Joyce worships and serves in Faith Methodist Church, Johor, Malaysia.

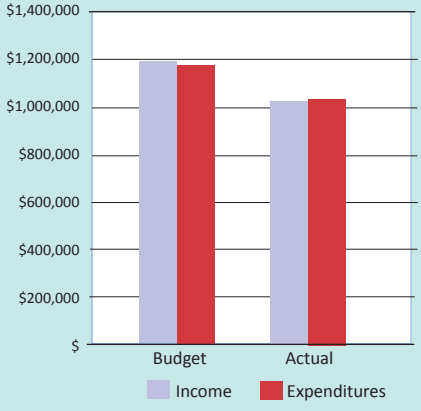
Jackson Lum Guan Ting graduated in Computer Engineering from Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in 2009. During his final year at NTU, he served as chairperson of the NTU Chinese CF. Upon graduation, Jackson worked as a Research Engineer at the Institute for Infocomm Research. During that time, he also served as an Associate Staffworker with FES CW.

When asked why he decided to join FES as a full-time staffworker, Jackson expressed his desire to grow in personal discipleship and enable students to do likewise, taking Ephesians 4:14–15 and Colossians 1:10 as his guiding principles. At FES, Jackson is assigned to work with the Chinese VCF at NUS.

Jackson and his wife, Grace, worship at St Andrew's Cathedral. He serves as a Sunday School teacher and is the Chinese representative at the Parochial Church Council.

$ & Sense

FES Income and Expenditures 2012 (Jan-Oct)



	Budget	Actual
Income	$1,197,510.83	$1,018,031.76
Expenditures	$1,193,215.00	$1,048,819.26
Surplus/(Deficit)	$4,295.83	$(30,787.50)

Notes:

- Breaking it down, the English Section and Indonesian Ministry is in the black ($20K and $2K surplus respectively).
- However, the Chinese Work and Military Christian Fellowship are facing a rather rough financial situation ($36K and $17K deficit respectively).
- We need to raise around $75K for the Annual Wages Supplement (AWS) of the staff. This will likely be distributed in the beginning of 2013.

Same Calling, Different Actions

The FES Chinese Work held their annual *Big Family Gathering* on 19 October at St James Church. Approximately 120 people, comprising alumni, students and staff, attended this event. The programme for the evening included a sharing by two graduates on God's guidance in their life as they serve Him in the marketplace. Besides catching up with each other, the gathering also provided an opportunity for the students to interact with the graduates as well as give updates on the ministry on campus.

A Franciscan Benediction

"May God bless us with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may seek truth boldly and love deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among people.

May God bless us with the gift of tears to shed with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that we may reach out our hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

May God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we really can make a difference in this world, so that we are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done."

(Quoted from *The Hole in the Gospel* by Richard Stearns, p.292, with the word "you/'your" changed to "we/us")

During this **Advent** *season and in the coming* **New Year**, *may our words and deeds be living answers to this prayer.*

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the prerequisites. Vinoth Ramachandra, a speaker for the NC2012 plenary talks, in one of such talks echoed Paul's urgency when he also lamented on one of our blind spots as Christians: the existence of divisiveness within the church. How far we are still from the goal contained in the Lord's Prayer in John 17:21, which is "that [we] all may be one."

To the apostle Paul, the key to like-mindedness among Christians is to have the mind of Christ and to look to Christ, who is the ultimate example of humility. As Paul declared in Philippians 2:8 (ESV), "[Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death". He then goes on to provide two practical examples of living in humility: to "count others more significant than yourselves and look out not only to our own interests, but also to the interest of others" (Phil. 2:3-4, ESV).

Togetherness and Humility

As I mentioned in the beginning, *"Getting real and getting out"* is a journey and indeed, a long one. As an African proverb goes, "If you want to travel fast, travel alone. If you want to travel far, travel together." Hence, it is inevitable that we, the FES family, are to do this work of engagement *together in this journey.*

FES comprises many different varsity campuses with different student cultures and backgrounds. We have three language sections with a diverse heritage. Our students are also multi-ethnic and multi-national. Although each CF may have different ways of doing things, face unique challenges, and have a range of ministry approaches, we can continue to uphold all these, yet with a spirit of continuous learning from one another, knowing that whatever we did before is never perfect. We also need to continue to have deep conversations beyond our own sections and CF, and put the needs and interests of others before our own, whether section or CF.

Hence, Paul's exhortation to the Philippians "to count others more significant than yourselves" is ever relevant for us than before.

Similarly, in Galatians 6:2 Paul urges us to bear one another's burdens as doing so fulfils the law of Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has once said that "*The brother is a burden to the Christian, precisely because he is a Christian. And it is only when he is a burden, that he is really a brother, and not merely an object to be manipulated.*" We should not pretend that there is no burden or sweep it under the carpet. We are burdens to one another because we are brothers and sisters in Christ. Moreover, we are asked to bear or carry each other's burdens. Once we have truly begun to do this, only then can I envision the FES community travelling far in this journey of engagement and fulfilling our aim together of shining like stars in this world.

All of you, whether we have big dreams or just starting out with baby steps, concerted actions or simple efforts – count yourself in this journey whether you are English, Chinese or Bahasa Indonesian-speaking, a local or a foreign student; from a large CF or a new CF, study in a university or a polytechnic; have graduated from a public or a private school, or come from various academic disciplines and cultural backgrounds, and the list can go on. I remember how Daniel Bourdanné, the General Secretary of IFES, illustrated what it feels like to lead IFES – it is like moving a millipede forward together. A millipede has a range of 36 to 200 pairs of legs and all of them must walk in tandem to move the whole body together. Similarly, in FES, no one is insignificant. No one is meaningless. No one will be left behind.

Let us embark on this journey together.

Get Real! And Get Out – Now!

Lisman Komaladi
General Secretary

On Being Like-Minded

Journeying in Togetherness and Humility

The FES National Conference 2012 (NC2012) just ended a few weeks ago. The conference was for us to relook and refresh the way we, Christian students, engage the world – our campus and the society for Christ. It was not just a matter of listening to good talks, making goals for the student councils, discussing sensitive or cutting-edge topics, or even fellowshipping with other campuses or ministries. Those were crucial elements of this conference but if we do not fulfil the NC2012 tagline – ***Get Real. Get Out!*** – all of those will come to nothing.

The Aim of Our Journey

Although the conference has ended, it is just the beginning of a lifelong journey of getting real as Christ's disciples and getting out to engage the world while holding fast to the "Word of Life" (Phil. 2:16). This journey is an imperative, not an option.

Having known its necessity, the next big question is how we can carry out this great and urgent work of engaging the world as a community, especially in the context of the FES family, where the student groups are quite diverse in nature. I think there is no better passage to inspire us on this journey together than Philippians 2:1–18.

As Paul had exhorted the Philippians, the aim of our engagement journey is to be the "children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation" so that we can "shine like stars in the universe" (Phil. 2:15, NIV). This is similar to how Jesus has described one main characteristics of the people of the Kingdom, which is that they "let [their] light shine before others" (Matt. 5:16).

Therefore, our efforts in engaging the world and the society should not be just for the sake of engagement or because it is "cool" to do so, but because it is closely linked to our identity as witnesses and ambassadors of Christ. We will not waver an inch on this point.

The Prerequisites of Our Journey

Interestingly, before the Philippians could shine as stars in the world, Paul urges in the preceding verses the necessity of like-mindedness or unity among them as

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