



By Dr. Joseph. Shao

Ministering in a Changing Global Village: Challenges of the Chinese-Filipino Churches

We are living in a constantly changing global village. The changes are increasingly evident in all areas of our lives. Social scientists are analyzing the issues and ideas that may reshape our daily lives and communities. Economists are predicting trends and patterns that will make an impact on our economic livelihood. Even in sports, we see a globalization trend, witnessed by the growing significance of the Asian basketball player where sports slang like “linsanity,” now appears in Western media covering the saga of Jeremy Lin, rising Chinese star in the NBA. Unquestionably, we are living in a changing global village, which will command fresh ministry responses from the Asian churches.

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Evangelical Christianity has been rooted in the Philippines for more than a century. Despite their limited numbers, the Chinese-Filipino churches historically have made a significant impact, not only on our own context in the Philippines, but regionally on other Asian churches, and globally on the international church community. With the present shift of Evangelical Christianity to the global south from global north, the Chinese-Filipino churches need to document their ministry contributions.

We see significant contributions of the Chinese-Filipino churches in pioneering the cause of missions. For example, the Davao Evangelical Church in her founding stage, through her pastor Rev. Wesley K. Shao, supported the first Chinese missionary to Regina, Canada in the 1960s. Back then there was no mission organization, nor was any support system developed, but the said mission action had blessed the Regina

Christian Missionary and Alliance Church. Through Rev. Augustus Chao, many Canadian Christian and Missionary Alliance Churches were planted and established.

Secondly, the United Evangelical Church of the Philippines, through its home mission movement, established mother-daughter church relationships by planting many churches as long as there were Chinese in the cities. This, indeed, became a model for Chinese churches around the world during the 1970s and 1980s.

Thirdly, Grace Gospel Church, through Rev. Cheng Kor and Elder Henry Co See Cho (one of the founders of BSOP), spearheaded the overseas mission movement. The Chinese churches around the world can trace their beginning of mission to lessons learned from Grace Gospel Church. Many churches in the East and West would name Rev. Cheng Kor as the “Father of the Chinese Mission Movement.”

Fourthly, with the freedom of religion in the Philippines, many of our first-generation Christian leaders established Christian schools in the major cities of the Philippines. The sharing of the Gospel through Christian schools is a significant force in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. Many present-day Chinese-Filipino pastors and leaders are products of these Christian schools.

The world is changing fast and so are the challenges facing the Chinese-Filipino churches. To minister relevantly in a changing global village, and particularly in the Philippines, consider the following suggestions:

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Innovative Ministerial Plan

In the founding stage of most, if not all of the Chinese-Filipino churches, the Hokkien (in early times known as Amoy) language served as the natural medium of communication since the members were first-generation Chinese settlers in the Philippines, having migrated from the Fujian province. Moreover, Hokkien has become the lingua-franca for the Philippine Chinese, since almost 90% are from the Fujian province. Worshiping at the Chinese churches came easily, since everyone spoke the same language.

Chinese access to Philippine citizenship under the Marcos Regime in the 1970s served as an important milestone in the changing landscape of the churches, blurring the lines of cultural identity. Not only did local Chinese become holders of Philippine passports, but second and third generation Chinese became ethnically unique, communicating with ease in Filipino dialects, yet also conversant in their Hokkien tongue.

Presently, “individuality” has come of age. Worshiping at the churches of their parents may not necessarily be the choice of all the family members. Living in the 21st century means everyone is busy and often prefers personal choices and convenience. The fast pace of life also reflects a mobile society. Consequently, ministering to the Chinese-Filipinos requires innovative approaches.

For example, while many churches have used the bilingual translation approach in the pulpit, to accommodate the old and the young ones, other churches conduct multiple Sunday worship services, with English as the medium in one of the services. The leaders of the Chinese-Filipino churches should evaluate their needs and devise a ministerial outlook focused on member care, since people come to church to be ministered to and to minister to others. Innovative strategic plans need to be laid out. Along with prayer, churches may need to have short-term and long-term goals, with annual evaluation of their plans. Mentoring and coaching are responses tailored for the younger generation.

With recent global migration of our younger generation, we may need to use the “i-Approach,” using iPhone, iPodcasting, or even social networks such as Facebook or Twitter to tweet our younger generation. If Paul were ministering to our generation, he undoubtedly would have written his letters electronically, emailing them to the Christians in our global village. He may have even used Facebook to touch base with the i-generation. The i-generation is very much different from the Generation-X or Generation-Y of previous decades.

Integrated Educational Learning

Ministering to the “netizens” (people using internet) may not be easy. The World Wide Web is creating information overload with many voices seeking one’s attention. We need to offer appealing content and approaches that can address the needs of young believers who may crave for individual attention. We need to return to basic transferable concepts or training that should be integrated within our existing programs. Our delivery approaches might include webinars, videoconferencing, and interactive, online training classes that are currently capturing the attention of netizens eager to extend their learning curves.

In the Chinese-Filipino churches, we are bombarded by so many new programs. Before one program can be implemented, another exciting program could be introduced to us. The best way to face this challenge of program diversity is to sit down for two to three days of retreat to listen and reflect, asking the pastor(s) and key leaders to evaluate our own existing, *proven* programs. Usually, there are core values in our existing programs that we could reuse and reshape, as we innovate with newer programs. All the programs in our churches should aim at integrating the learning of our members and potential members.

The landscape of the Chinese-Filipino churches is changing. The multi-cultural needs will remain. The use of “fellowship” group to care for different people groups can still be employed, as long as we have an integrated educational learning system. Phasing out obsolete groupings or exploring fresh group combinations may be required. Small group Bible studies can care for the needs of spiritual growth and provide accountability for its members.

The key is an integrated approach wherein we plan, evaluate, and shape. The focus should be clear. The key leaders, if not all the members of the church, should know the direction of the church in terms of its vision and mission. The integrated educational learning should include a 3-5 year growth plan for each member, so that they will be productive and groomed to become a small “shepherd” in God’s kingdom.

Intentional Pastoral Care

Jesus said that there are still lost sheep that need His Gospel. With the existing structures of the Chinese churches, we may have become satisfied with simply caring for existing Christians. Ample exposure to the Gospel messages in our Christian schools should be matched with a concern for the needs of the ordinary people in the community.

Pastoral care in the 21st century needs to be intentional. With the new shift of Christianity from the global

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north to the global south, we need to look at the changes in the global village. There are now 300,000 new immigrants and students from China. There are now many West Asians, and people from the 10/40 window who come to the Philippines to study. With budget fare airlines, the Koreans and other nationalities are coming to settle in the Philippines. We need to embrace other nationalities. Multi-services in our churches may help to address the growing ethnic diversity at our doorstep. Becoming an ethnic friendly church will surely advance the cause of reaching lost souls for Christ!

Intentionality of church members' Gospel witness in the marketplace will also advance the Kingdom. In the Chinese-Filipino community, we have already seen many businessmen who have come to know the Lord.

Conclusion

God has blessed the Chinese-Filipino churches throughout these years. We are thankful to the Lord for the many committed pastors who have gone before us, faithfully serving and shepherding God's flock in the Philippines. Today, in a changing global village, the Chinese-Filipino churches face new challenges to be more effective . . . a call to be innovative, integrated and intentional in our pastoral care. May God continue to raise up more pastors and leaders to serve the Chinese-Filipino churches, undaunted by the realities of our global village! Maranatha!

← p. 5, Irish Lopez

the potential of dedicated men and women working together in their respective churches, who love the Lord and want to take part in advancing His Kingdom. God is truly at work!

As I leave BSOP, I know that more challenges await me. God has shown over and over that it never was, and never will be, about me, but about Him. In every stage of my life, it has always been the Lord's work, His sovereign will, and His purpose. I rest in the truth that He is with me in every part of my journey. I may at times, perhaps have to reroute, detour, or slow down because I will never be perfect, but I am assured of one thing: I am in Christ, and He is faithful to bring me to my ultimate destination, by His grace alone! "For from Him, and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever." (Rom. 11:36)



NEWS AND EVENTS

- Dr. Joseph Shao will be taping his "Studies on II Samuel" lectures at the Good News TV in Taiwan on April 5-9, 2012. He had previously taped "Studies on Malachi" and "Studies on I Samuel." On April 18-20, he will speak on "The Needs of the Chinese Church Today" during the 10th World Anglican Chinese Clergy Fellowship Conference which will be held in Manila from April 17-20, 2012. On May 26 to June 1, he will represent BSOP and attend the Lausanne Consultation on Global Theological Education held in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A.
- On May 23-26, 2012, Dr. Tan Chiu Eng will be a member of the ATA Visiting Evaluation Team evaluating the Logos Evangelical Seminary in Taiwan.
- Dr. Rosa Shao is one of the speakers at the Summer Conference of Bacolod Trinity Christian Church on April 4-8, 2012. On May 6 to 18, she will handle a module on Spiritual Formation at the European Chinese Seminary in Barcelona, Spain.
- Dr. Jean Uayan represented BSOP and attended the ALAM (Advances in Libraries, Archives, and Museums) 2012 Conference on March 7-9, 2012 in Cagayan de Oro City. She also gave a lecture "Introducing Islam: History, Faith, Practices" on February 8, 2012 at the United Evangelical Church of Greenhills, and also on March 9, 2012 at the Cagayan Gospel Church.
- Rev. Philip Co and his wife Prof. Joyce Co will represent BSOP at the OCI meeting in Hong Kong from April 16-20, 2012.
- Dr. Tan Chiu Eng, Dr. Jean Uayan Dr. Jane Chuaansu and Dr. Michael Malessa will attend the Gate Seminar in Tagaytay City on April 16-18, 2012.
- The construction of 5 additional classrooms on the 4th floor of the Academic-Administrative Building will cost 7 million pesos, while interior furnishing is budgeted at 1.5 million pesos. Please pray for the Lord's provision for this need. Should anyone be moved to assist this project, kindly contact the Business Office at 632-2926795.
- To meet the need for future expansion and development, the Seminary plans to purchase a lot beside the Annex compound that will be used for construction projects. Please pray with us regarding this matter.
- One of the programs offered by the Asia Graduate School of Theology, the Doctor of Philosophy in Intercultural Studies, of which BSOP is the Host School with Dr. Tan Chiu Eng as Program Director, formally started its first school year last July 2011. The degree has been recognized by the Commission on Higher Education in November 2011. Students in this program come from Korea, Myanmar and the Philippines.