

PARTNERSHIP

Mission
is not
ours;
mission is
God's

2025 Sep Issue



Cultivating Missional Pastors,
Equipping Lay Ministers to
Strategically Engage Asia's Harvest

Published by
Baptist Theological Seminary
1023 Upper Serangoon Road
#01-01 Baptist Centre
Singapore 534761
Tel: +65 6472 0091
www.bts.edu.sg

Editor-in-Chief: Dr Ho Chiao Ek
Executive Editor (English): Rachel Wong
Executive Editor (Chinese): Lie Seok Hua
Project in charge: Irene Ng-Chia
Layout Design: Wayne Leung

CONTENTS

- 03 Mission is not ours;
mission is God's
Dr Ho Chiao Ek, President
- 05 How the Church Brings Life
to the Community
Dr Fong Choon Sam,
AIM Senior Director
- 11 Alumnus Testimony:
Call from Myanmar
Pastor Gam Htun & Seng Ja
- 14 Alumna Testimony:
United but Distinct: Seeking Common
Ground while Respecting Differences
Xiao Juan
- 17 Philippines Mission Trip 2025
Reported by Bounty

Dear Friends of BTS:

“Certainly, the mission of God is the prior reality out of which flows any mission that we get involved in... it is not so much the case that God has a mission for His church in the world but that God has a church for His mission in the world.”

~ Christopher J.H. Wright,
The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative
(Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), p. 62.

This edition of our Partnership newsletter comprises a contribution from BTS's Senior Director of AIM, Dr Fong Choon Sam, as well as the testimonies of our current students and alumni. The testimonies of our students and alumni personify the spirit of cross-cultural mission as a gift of God to His church to participate in what God is already doing in the world, according to Chris Wright (see above). We are merely participating in God's mission. The apostle Paul underscores this when he quotes Isaiah 49:6 in Acts 13:47:

‘For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,
“I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation
to the ends of the earth.”’

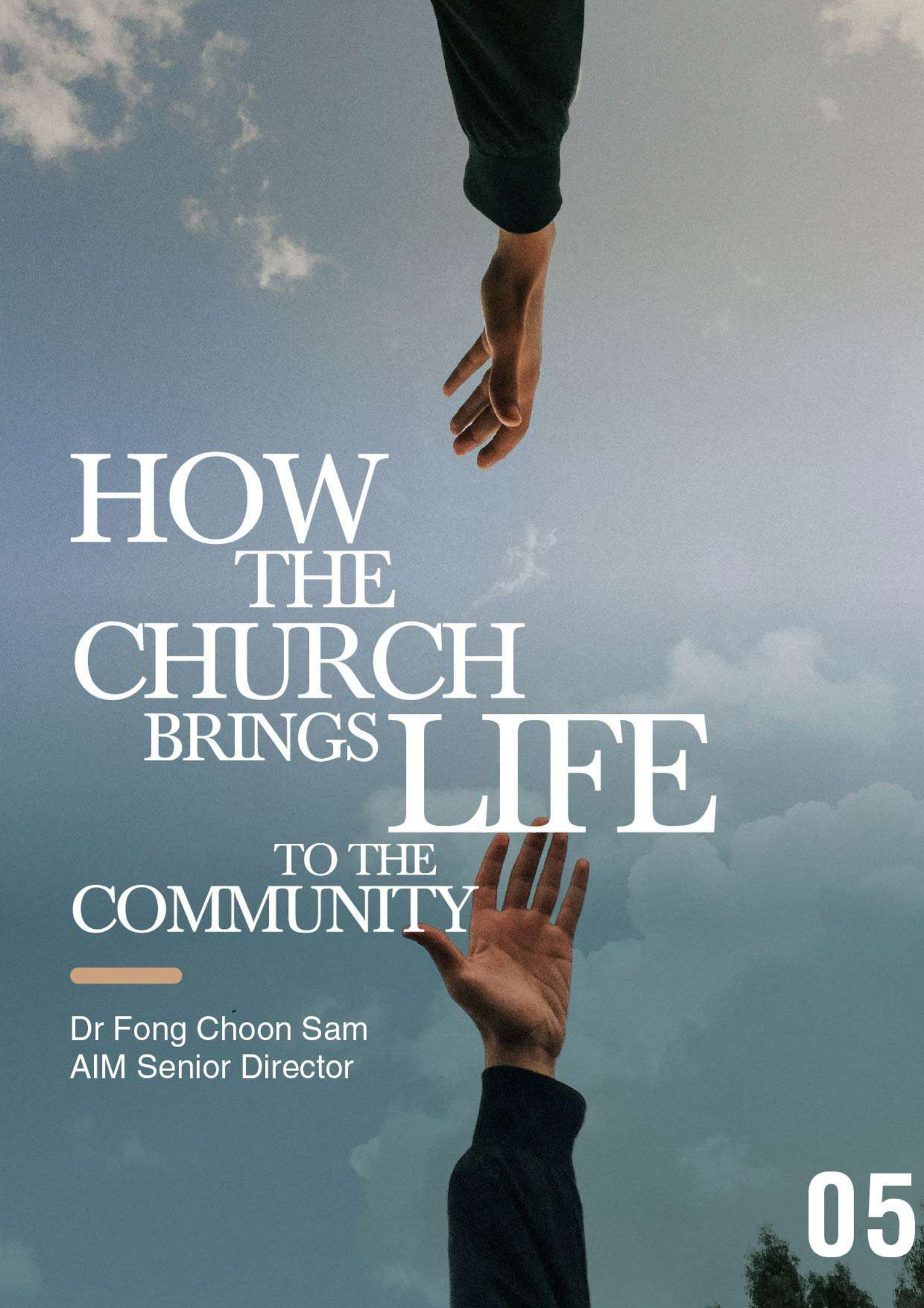
The participants of the mission trip to the Philippines concluded their “exhausting” but “spiritually refreshing” cross-cultural experience this way: “We returned home with our hearts full, more eager than ever to be part of God's ongoing work in the world. This experience has inspired us to step out in faith, serve boldly, and love without limits, knowing that the work God has called us to is always worth it.”

Pastor Gam Htun and his wife, Seng Ja (alumni who graduated from BTS in 2012 and 2015, respectively), faced life-threatening physical dangers and lost precious personal belongings. Yet, they had the joy of seeing God bless their church-planting efforts in the face of these dangers and sacrifices. Our other alumna learnt precious lessons of submission to God and trusting Him in the face of intense relational challenges. Her experience on the mission field crystallised her resolve to seek unity and common ground while respecting differences in the community.

Dr Fong's contribution, "How the Church Brings Life to the Community," reminds us that the earliest believers in the Acts of the Apostles were not just involved in individual conversions but in societal transformation. This is where seminaries like BTS can partner with local churches to facilitate this important work more effectively.

Dr Ho Chiao Ek

President



HOW THE CHURCH BRINGS LIFE TO THE COMMUNITY

Dr Fong Choon Sam
AIM Senior Director

When the church first preached the gospel, distinct spiritual communities quickly emerged within established ones. Sometimes this happened one person at a time. More often, families and groups responded together to the gospel and coalesced into communities characterised by grace.

Today, we are more likely to try to reach people individually and then induct them into a social and spiritual group that we call a church. This is perhaps typical of the times, but it can also cause us to forget that the preaching of the gospel is meant to result not only in changed lives, but also directly in transformed communities that will together express the fullness of God's kingdom.

It is worth revisiting the story of the early church in Acts 5 to remind us of the effect of the church's proclamation on social transformation. This was when it first made its presence felt in the broader community. While in the earlier chapters we read about the transformation of individual lives (such as the healing of the lame beggar in Acts 3), here we learn how the believers interacted with the wider society.

The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

Acts 5:12-16, NIV

A New Group Joins the Community

This account in Acts 5 features a diverse range of characters: apostles, believers, crowds, the sick, the demon-possessed, priests, and temple guards. How interesting is that? In other words, we are given a view of a cross-section of Jerusalem society. A lively society, but dominated by oppressive human and demonic powers, had the gospel of hope declared upon it, and a new community appeared to contest these powers' hold over people.

The disciples gathered in a public area called Solomon's Colonnade, a sheltered space with ceilings supported by numerous columns. This was where the apostle Peter had earlier preached to the crowd, and where he and John were taken away by the temple guards and imprisoned. Why did they come back to meet in the same place, knowing they could get into trouble with the temple authorities again? Perhaps it was because this was where the people were, where worshippers gathered and where crowds assembled to listen to public speakers. This was a public space and the church, now present in public life, would be visible. A new group had joined the society of Jerusalem!

How the Public Responded

We are told that all the believers met together at the colonnade, "but no one else dared to join them... nonetheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number" (vv. 13 & 14). This sounds like a contradiction, but only apparently so. Perhaps, while people were hesitant to be seen with them in Solomon's temple, especially since Peter and John had been arrested by the temple guards there, they observed the group's activities from a distance, heard the apostles' teaching, witnessed the healing, and were drawn to them. And possibly in a private space, they confessed their belief in Christ. So the number of believers increased!

The disciples saw how people responded to the gospel in different ways in a public setting. When He was with them, Jesus had told His disciples the Parable of the Sower. Now, they could see for themselves how different soils responded to the sowing of the seed. Some kept away from them. Others, the 'early adopters', believed and joined them. And yet others responded tentatively. These individuals were interested in and wanted to benefit from the new movement but were not yet ready to fully believe and commit themselves to the message. We find here a compassionate note that underscores the common person's need for help - they

sought healing in a way that they knew how to do by bringing their sick out to the street in the hope that Peter's shadow would heal them. The gospel writer Luke does not tell us if they were healed in this way, that is, by Peter's shadow. Nevertheless, we read that as the believers ministered to them, they were healed!

Social Change by Witness and Works

God's people bring healing to society by their proclamation and compassion. In Acts 5, much of this was physical healing and deliverance from demonic oppression. The healing that a community needs, then and today, is not only this. Today, we find in every place animosity between groups, addictions of many kinds, crippling anxiety about the future, burn-out from work or social pressure, debt bondage, social alienation, homelessness, and a paralysing realisation that life has lost its purpose. All kinds of healing are urgently needed. Above all, people are alienated from God and desperately need to be reconciled with Him. Can the church today bring life and healing to the whole community? Do we have good news for everyone?

In the early Christian experience, apart from encountering evil spirits, believers faced resistance and heavy opposition, not least from the religious establishment. The strongest opposition to the people of this new way did not come from the Roman conquerors, but from the religious elite. Persecution took place because Christ's followers' message and vision of life challenged the established religious traditions and norms. Today, this has not changed. The church's presence in the neighbourhood serves both to affirm the best things that contribute to human flourishing and to critique and challenge all that is malevolent, dehumanising and oppressive. Just as when the church was first planted in society, our efforts at integral mission today (mission that seeks to integrate mission and social responsibility) will also need to engage with both social and spiritual realities and confront the forces of institutional and supernatural evil.

The fledgling church had to proclaim and work from a position of seeming disadvantage in relation to the human powers that be. Its members did not have political or religious power, and few means to protect themselves from harm or injustice. Despite this, their witness was empowered by authoritative divine demonstrations – miracles of healing and deliverance, an angel opening prison doors, and people opening their hearts to the message. From here, the Christian message would in time undermine institutional evils such as slavery, racism and misogyny.



Partnering with God in Social Engagement

The account of the church in Acts 5 is not meant to be a blueprint for community transformation. Society today is undoubtedly more complex and multilayered, but this wonderful story shows how, like a seed planted in a garden, a church planted in a community can become part of its ecosystem and change it fundamentally.

The church was created to bring life to the community. God did not transport us to heaven the moment we were saved. He reintroduced us to life and society to accomplish two important things. First, we continue in our sanctification, becoming more like Christ, not only as individuals but also in society. We are gradually changed into His likeness while living with others. Second, of course, is that we become carriers of Christ's Good News into the world. God has called a people out from the world to belong to Him. Then He takes them with Him back into the world to change it.

Theological Training and Social Engagement

Seminaries and colleges are increasingly concerned with how theological training can prepare ministers to lead their churches into social engagement. This has not always been a priority of theological education. What are the traditional

priorities? Nathan Finn, in a series of lectures he gave at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2024, supplied three terms that describe traditional Christian higher education well:

- The Great Commandments – to inspire in men and women a deeper love for God and each other,
- The Great Tradition – to build on and pass on the Christian intellectual tradition of the last two thousand years; and
- The Great Commission – the biblical mandate to proclaim the gospel and make disciples.¹

These great priorities are commitments that must not be set aside. The question is, how do we actively engage with the social and cultural landscape while pursuing these goals? Hopefully, we can do this without bifurcating the gospel into primary (evangelism) and secondary (compassion and justice) concerns.

Training institutions are preoccupied with a host of other concerns, including students' biblical literacy, the integration of various disciplines, producing scholars of the faith, and attending to the responsibilities of denominational and other affiliations, among others. These notwithstanding, the need to prepare and train pastors and lay leaders to engage with development challenges in their communities, and the need to empower local churches to be agents of community change, are goals that are consistent with biblical truth. We should see them as priority work that can no longer be postponed. We have a Christian imperative to work towards the transformation of society, and as a seminary, we must help the church discover the legitimate avenues for doing so.

¹ Nathan Finn is Professor of Faith and Culture and Executive Director of the Institute for Transformational Leadership at North Greenville University. He presented his lectures on "Three 'Great' Priorities for Christ-Centered Higher Education" at the Fourth Annual IACE Faculty Development Conference at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 22-24, 2024.
<https://iace.education/blog/three-great-priorities-for-christ-centered-higher-education-part-2>

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a rural landscape in Myanmar. It features several traditional huts with thatched roofs, surrounded by dense green trees and vegetation. In the foreground, there are tall green plants, possibly rice seedlings, growing in a field. The sky is a clear, light blue with some wispy clouds.

CALLER FROM MYANMAR

Alumnus Testimony:

By Pastor Gam Htun and Seng Ja

My wife Seng Ja and I graduated from BTS in 2015 and 2012, respectively. We have two children and served with Kachin Baptist Church in Singapore for more than 10 years. In 2020, we returned to Myitkyina, our hometown in Myanmar.

Life and Challenges

In the last five years since returning to Myanmar, we have had the opportunity to do mission work near the border with China in a place called Rawt Jat Village, which is in a very remote area. A lot of people there are internally displaced because of the civil war in our country. As a missionary family, we faced numerous difficulties and challenges after leaving behind our comfortable city life, which offered reliable sanitation and good security. A particular challenge was that I needed a motorbike to get around. This was dangerous because the military banned ordinary people from using the official road network. As a result, I had to travel on jungle roads, and there was always the chance of being attacked and killed if one happened to meet troops on the road. I have also had several accidents, but am grateful that, by God's grace, I escaped with only minor injuries.

Recently, my missionary thatch house was burned down due to the villagers' Jhum (slash and burn) cultivation methods. Unfortunately, some sparks blew towards my house, and it caught fire. I lost some of my precious theological books and other belongings. I remembered that when the missionary William Carey went to India, he experienced the same misfortune: his whole library and all the translation work he had done were destroyed in a fire. He worked so hard, but he lost everything. Of course, I cannot compare myself with William Carey, but I humbly thank God for the chance to share in Christ's suffering in a small way.





His Grace

The grace of God is still upon us. We thank God that from a fellowship of 50 members 20 years ago, Rawt Jat Kachin Baptist Church is now an official church under the auspices of the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) with me serving as Senior Pastor and Chairman. The village and the church were abandoned for more than 10 years due to the war, so we had to start again from scratch. We also helped to set up a school and clinic, among other things, and facilitated the start of a preschool early this year. We aim to provide holistic help for the villagers, including spiritual, physical, mental and emotional assistance, after their many years of deprivation. We recently held our Church-Warming Service on 30 April 2025. More than 70 households attended, comprising over 200 church members, most of whom were from different refugee camps.

We are so thankful to God and the BTS alumni community for reaching out to our family even amid all these difficulties and challenges. We have very fond memories of our beloved BTS lecturers and the staff who equipped us with the Word of God. Today, they share in our ministry because of the faithful service they rendered to us in the classroom. May God continue to bless us all with His abundant life.



UNITED BUT DISTINCT: SEEKING COMMON GROUND WHILE RESPECTING DIFFERENCES

Alumna Testimony:

By Xiao Juan

In May 2011, after graduating from the seminary, my husband and I responded to God's calling and began pastoring a church in Yunnan. Half a year later, our child's school started gathering background information about parents. To reduce the pressure on our child, I began praying to God, asking Him to prepare a job for me — one that would not hinder me from serving in church, would allow me to take care of my child in primary school, and would also allow me to gain relevant professional experience in the working world. Three months later, God opened the door for me at Organisation M, and I officially joined them at the end of February 2012.

Upon joining M, I was excited that I could work closely with brothers and sisters from countries like the US, the UK, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore — people from diverse cultural and denominational backgrounds. I would also get to observe firsthand how they worked and served alongside one another. At the same time, I questioned, "Can I integrate into their community?"

With that question, I began my simple, ordinary job as an administrative assistant, while experiencing the challenges and tensions brought about by the clash between Eastern and Western cultures. Having to move from conflict to unity within a faith-based community was a struggle for me.


One of my responsibilities at M was to help foreign co-workers apply for Expert Certificates (later known as work permits) and Residence Permits. Once, while applying for Expert Certificates for an Australian couple, I discovered they had both Hong Kong IDs and 'Home Return Permits', which made things much easier for them in mainland China. Despite that, they insisted on applying for the Expert Certificate, reasoning that as foreign experts, having the certificate would command greater respect from local partners and facilitate their work. I understood and respected their view, and I assisted them with the application. A year later, it was time to renew their documents. By then, they were on home assignment (HA), and M had a new Chief Representative. The new chief communicated with them about their documents, but due to differing views, the couple left the organisation. The new chief explained the reasons to me: M has its own mission and core values. Having the professional knowledge and the passion to serve alone are not enough — what's also required is a clear calling from God, personal commitment, and a spirit of teamwork.

Commitment and teamwork are truly essential; they help reduce complaints and foster deeper unity among co-workers. In mid-December 2022, I accompanied a short-term team member to a county hospital for a medical training project during the COVID-19 outbreak. The very afternoon we arrived, both the team member and I started to have a rise in body temperature. I reported our situation to a local co-worker, who acted promptly and arranged for the partner hospital to send a medical frontliner that night to perform PCR tests at our hotel. We both tested positive; I had a fever of 42°C, while the local temperature was very cold at just a few degrees above freezing.

The co-worker decided to send us to a quarantine hotel, but the ambulance from the hospital took us to a makeshift COVID hospital instead, saying it was with the co-worker's approval. Because of the co-worker's decision, we had to stay ten days in that poorly equipped facility. I submitted a formal complaint to M's headquarters and my team began praying for my health. The President also called me every day to pray with me, and as a result, our team grew more united. "Since this is from God, I will be silent" — that was the word God gave me. After this event, M established emergency safety protocols for similar situations.

In all these years serving at M, personnel changes, project shifts and policy changes from the government have been common. Conflicts and friction among co-workers can happen when facing these changes — none of us are saints. But because of God's love, the original calling we received, and support given by individuals with hearts willing to be shaped by God, most of the co-workers have now served in M for over five years. This kind of service, rooted in love, is very different from duty-driven service.

I thank God for leading me to become a part of this diverse yet united community. Through it all, I've been transformed and disciplined by the Lord, so that we can seek common ground while respecting differences — walking together as fellow pilgrims, united in heart and purpose.



PHILIPPINES MISSION TRIP 2025

Mission Trip Sharing

Reported by Bounty



From June 1 to 9 2025, a group of students from BTS in Singapore had the profound privilege of travelling to the Philippines for a mission trip that touched our hearts in ways we could never have imagined. The week was not just a series of activities, but a season of spiritual growth, community building, and a deepening of our passion for global Christian missions. Our experience began at the International Kingdom Community Development Conference, where we were inspired by stories of perseverance, sacrifice and faith from professionals serving in various mission fields. Their insights into the integration of missions and community development humbled us, reminding us that while the work of God's Kingdom is vast, we are all part of something far greater than ourselves.



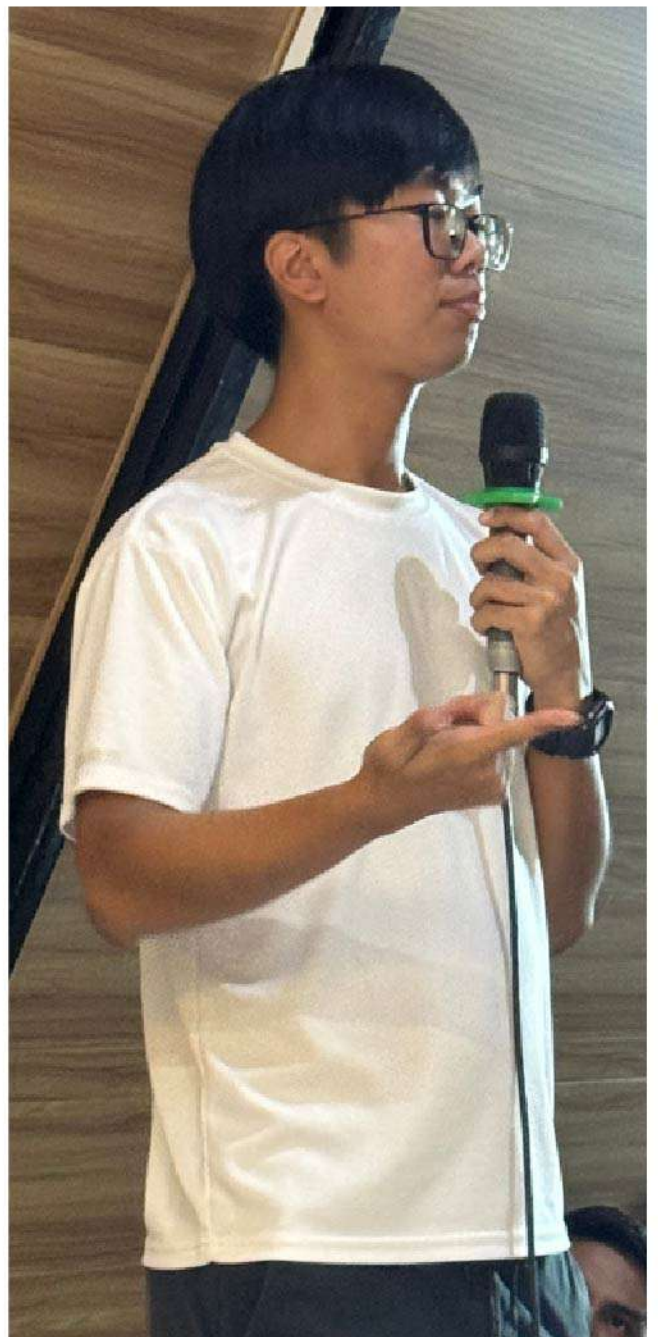
Throughout our time there, we had the chance to live out the very truths we were learning: worshipping together in unity, praying with those in need, providing counsel, and even participating in medical missions. From assisting with registration and ushering to sharing the gospel and taking blood pressure readings, every act felt like a direct expression of God's love.

One of the most beautiful moments was connecting with the children and youth at New Life of Grace Baptist Church, whether through playing games, teaching Sunday School, or simply sharing meals. These encounters reminded us that mission work is not just about what we give, but about the relationships we build along the way: the bonds, laughter, and the visible presence of Christ's love in every moment. We were also privileged to attend a graduation ceremony at the Southwestern Theological Centre for Global Leaders, witnessing the incredible work God is doing to equip the next generation of servant leaders.

While the trip was undeniably exhausting, it was spiritually refreshing, reigniting our passion for mission work and deepening our connections both with the believers in the Philippines and among one another. We returned home with our hearts full, more eager than ever to be part of God's ongoing work in the world. This experience has inspired us to step out in faith, serve boldly, and love without limits, knowing that the work God has called us to is always worth it.

Mission Trip

- ▼ New Life Of Grace Baptist Church (NLGBC)
 - Trece Martires City, Cavite
- ▼ NLGBC Mission Points:
 - Naic, Cavite
 - Pasinaya Mission
 - Molino Mission
- ▼ Carmona, Cavite Mission
- ▼ Silent Retreat - Tagaytay, Cavite
- ▼ Southwestern Theological Centre for Global Leaders (STCGL)
 - 4th Anniversary celebration at Calamba STCGL Center in Laguna



WAYS OF GIVING

PAYNOW UEN OR QR CODE

Transfer via PayNow UEN:

S74SS0032HBTS

PayNow QR Code
(Baptist Theological Seminary).
Please indicate your name and
areas of giving under the
“Bill Reference No”.



BANK TRANSFER

BTS' DBS Current Account No.

028-005061-5

GIVING FROM OVERSEAS TELEGRAPHIC TRANSFER

Account Name

Baptist Theological Seminary

Current Account Number

028-005061-5

Bank Name

DBS Bank Ltd Singapore

Bank Address

12 Marina Boulevard, DBS Asia Central, Marina
Bay, Financial Centre Tower 3, Singapore 018982

Swift Code

DBSSSGSG

Please snapshot and /or email the details to
germaine.tham@bts.org.sg upon completion of the transfer.