

PARTNERSHIP

Becoming Mission-Ready
for the Kingdom:

THEOLOGICAL TRAINING

2026 Sep Issue



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

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Dear Friends of BTS:

Many of us in vocational Christian work have been asked this question at some point in our lives: “Do I need to go to seminary before I go to the mission field?” There are still local churches and mission agencies that insist on their missionary candidates undergoing formal theological training before entering the mission field. More and more local churches, however, are conducting in-house training and sending out missionaries to accomplish their own vision for global mission. Does this mean that formal theological training in Bible schools and seminaries is becoming less relevant?

Global mission today has changed in its expression and operational structures. There are many more pathways for cross-cultural missions: short stints (often targeted at youths and young adults and lasting between six months and two years); tentmaking or bi-vocational missions; short exposure-cum-mission trips lasting a few days to a month; and missions in our home country (the so-called missions ‘at our doorstep’) – all are examples of this new trend. It seems the preparation and sending of missionaries overseas is steadily becoming less formal and less standardised.

Most would agree that responsible missionary endeavour must be holistic if it is to be sustainable and effective. From the screening and selection of missionary candidates, to spiritual preparation, field support (member care) and re-entry, arrangements must be carefully thought through and administered. How much and what kind of spiritual preparation is needed? That depends on the scope and nature of the work. However, without sounding simplistic, some form of theological education is essential. Whether it is a formal accredited programme in a seminary or a non-accredited one, good theological education and Bible training will ensure that missionaries have the tools to spiritually nurture themselves and the people they are reaching. Today we have easy access to biblical and theological knowledge on the Internet. However, formal theological training in a Bible school or seminary will give missionaries the discernment needed to utilise only material that is sound and helpful, and provide the credibility that they need to teach on the mission field.

In this edition of Partnership, we feature the testimonies of Andy C Esguerra (Alumnus, 2014) and Lin Lu (Alumnus, 2018). It is encouraging that they are now training and theologically equipping leaders in their own language and cultural context. This is more cost-efficient and probably more relevant contextually. We get a sense of the challenges they go through in starting and leading these theological institutions. Yet, they see the hand and provision of God and grow in their faith as they depend on Him. They and their schools certainly need our prayers. Then there is a personal piece by Drs Jeff and Rose Waligora on their journey of theological education and missions. They are IMB missionaries who serve as regular adjunct lecturers at BTS. We wrap up this edition of Partnership with a thoughtful reflection from our student reporters Boisy and Endao on our 2026 Malaysia mission trip. Be blessed!

Serving our Lord together with you,

Dr Ho Chiao Ek

President

THEOLOGICAL TRAINING AND

MISSIONS GO ^{HAND} IN HAND

A MISSIONARY COUPLE'S JOURNEY

By Drs Jeff & Rose Waligora

05

The relationship between theological training and Christian missions has always been key for gospel advancement. Throughout church history, God has used men and women who have been deeply shaped by the Word of God to proclaim Christ faithfully across various cultures. While formal theological education is invaluable, theological training extends beyond the classroom as well. It involves a lifelong study of God's Word, dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and practical ministry experience lived out amongst lost peoples. Our own personal journey into missions illustrates how theological formation through God's Word prepared us for a lifetime of missionary service in East Asia and continues to shape our philosophy of missions today.

My (Jeff's) understanding of the importance of practical theological training began during the winter of 1986 while serving as a United States Army Military Police officer in West Germany. As I prepared to complete my military service, I intended to go straight to Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and utilise my US military university benefits to pay for it. However, during the winter before finishing my military service I began reading through the Book of Acts each evening. The more I studied the Book of Acts, the more I became convinced that God was calling me to become a bold witness for Jesus Christ. Acts 1:8 became especially meaningful as I read Jesus' promise that His followers would receive power from the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (New International Version, 2011, Acts 1:8). I was also deeply challenged by Acts 4:13, where Peter and John were recognised as ordinary men who had been with Jesus. These passages showed me that theological formation begins with knowing Christ personally and allowing His Word to transform one's heart.

Rather than attending a Bible college or seminary immediately after my military service (although later I did attend Wheaton College for my Master's in Biblical & Theological Studies and then a PhD in Intercultural Studies at Biola University) I sensed God leading me to attend Michigan State University where I would have daily opportunities to share the gospel with thousands of lost students on that large campus of over 40,000 students. During my university years I became actively involved in evangelism and discipleship, and did ministry with both American and international students, especially students from East Asia. It was at Michigan State University that Rose and I met, fell in love, and did weekly ministry together on campus with international students. It was also during this time that God called both of us to serve as missionaries in East Asia. Looking back over our university and graduate school years (we both graduated from Michigan State University, Wheaton College and Biola University), we recognised that our theological education was taking place not only through formal theological and mission studies at these wonderful Christian institutions, but also through personal Bible study and practical ministry with the lost on a large secular campus.

We have found that a solid theology of missions must be grounded in the grand narrative of Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible reveals God's missionary heart and His plan to redeem sinful humanity through Jesus Christ. Reading works such as Bartholomew and Goheen's *The Drama of Scripture* helped us to understand that every part of the Bible contributes to God's redemptive mission (Bartholomew & Goheen, 2004). Likewise, Christopher Wright argues that the mission of God provides the framework for understanding the entire biblical story (Wright, 2006). Arthur Glasser emphasises that both the Old and New Testaments reveal God's missionary purposes throughout history (Glasser, 2003). This comprehensive understanding of Scripture profoundly shaped our worldview and convinced us that our God is a missionary God, who wants to use His believers in the role of reconciliation.

The Apostle Paul reminds believers in 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 that God has entrusted His people with the ministry of reconciliation. Theological training must therefore equip Christians not simply to gain biblical knowledge but also to participate in God's redemptive work among the nations. A proper understanding of biblical theology motivates believers to move beyond the classroom and engage in evangelism, discipleship, church planting and missions wherever God calls them. Among all the biblical books, the Book of Acts has had the greatest influence on our philosophy of missions. Acts demonstrates how the Holy Spirit empowered ordinary believers to proclaim Christ boldly despite persecution and cultural barriers. Luke records how the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and ultimately to the ends of the earth. This pattern continues to serve as a model for our missionary ministry today.



After joining the International Mission Board as Southern Baptist missionaries, we began serving in East Asia where our ministry focused on evangelism, discipleship, and indigenous church planting. Living in a remote East Asian country often reminded us of the circumstances described in Acts. Foreign and local Christians experienced persecution and there was a daily dependence upon the Holy Spirit for strength, courage and perseverance. During this time, we met with fellow missionaries and regularly trained East Asian believers using Bruce Carlton's Acts 29 church planting curriculum (Carlton, 2001). This training emphasised biblical principles for evangelism, discipleship, leadership development, church multiplication and missions, and helped local believers to be equipped through the Scriptures to become effective Christian leaders within their own communities.

Theological training also shaped our missionary strategy. Roland Allen's classic work *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* demonstrated how Paul intentionally focused on receptive people groups and established indigenous churches that could reproduce themselves (Allen, 1962). These biblical principles directly influenced our mission work among certain people groups within East Asia. As we identified regions where people were more receptive to the gospel, we concentrated our efforts there and witnessed the establishment of numerous churches. Sound theological reflection provided practical guidance for missionary decision-making and our overall missions strategy.

In conclusion, theological training and missions go hand and hand. Both today and in the past, effective missionaries must be grounded in the Word of God, shaped by the grand narrative of God's redemptive mission, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and equipped to make disciples among all nations. Our own personal journey demonstrates that theological education is not confined to the classroom but is also developed through daily study of God's Word, doing practical ministry amongst lost peoples, and obeying God's calling for our lives. As believers grow in their knowledge of Scripture and apply its truths in ministry, they become better equipped to fulfil the Great Commission. Theological training does not exist so much to increase our head knowledge, as to prepare us to proclaim the gospel faithfully until every nation has had the opportunity to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

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CHALLENGES THAT TURNED INTO

OPPORTUNITIES:

My Journey in Establishing STCGL

Andy C Esguerra
2014, MDiv, The Philippines

When I established the Southwestern Theological Center for Global Leaders (STCGL) in June 2021, I knew that the vision of equipping pastors, church leaders and ministry workers would not be accomplished without challenges. Looking back, I can clearly see how God used those challenges to strengthen both the ministry and my personal faith. Much of what helped me persevere came from the theological and ministry training I received at Baptist Theological Seminary, Singapore, where I learned the importance of biblical leadership, sound doctrine, and dependence on God.



One of the greatest challenges was launching a theological training centre during the COVID-19 pandemic. At a time when churches were facing uncertainty and restrictions, starting a new ministry seemed risky. There were moments when I questioned whether it was the right time. However, my theological training reminded me that ministry is ultimately God's work, not ours. This conviction encouraged me to move forward in faith despite the uncertainties.

Financial sustainability was another major challenge. As a new institution, STCGL needed resources for administration, learning materials, technology and facility rental. Many of our students were pastors and church workers from small churches who struggled to pay tuition fees. There were times when I wondered how we would continue operating. Yet, these challenges became opportunities to experience God's provision through generous supporters, partner churches, and individuals who shared our vision for leadership development.

STCGL ONLINE SESSIONS



10 STUDENTS GRADUATED



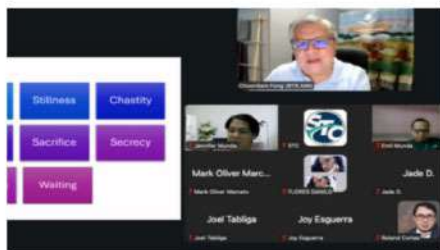
NURTURING SMALL CHURCHES



OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY



BOOK OF RUTH



HISTORY 102, RESEARCH AND WRITING,
SPIRITUAL FORMATION



PASTORAL THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

Another challenge was the shortage of staff. In the early years, a small team handled multiple responsibilities, and I often found myself serving as administrator, coordinator, instructor and mentor all at once. While demanding, this experience taught me valuable lessons about servant leadership, teamwork, and equipping others to share in the ministry.

In the early stage of our operation, securing venues was also difficult. STCGL relied heavily on the generosity of local supporters and ministry partners who assisted with rental costs and operational needs. Through this experience, I learned the importance of partnership in ministry and the value of building relationships with those who believe in the mission of theological education.

Perhaps the most rewarding challenge was encouraging pastors and church leaders to pursue theological training. Many were limited by finances, ministry schedules or lack of confidence. Seeing them grow in biblical knowledge and ministry effectiveness has been one of the greatest blessings of this journey.

STCGL MISSION ACTIVITES



Today, I thank God for His faithfulness. The lessons I learned at Baptist Theological Seminary, Singapore helped prepare me for these challenges and provided a strong foundation for ministry. What began as obstacles became opportunities to trust God, serve others, and equip leaders who will faithfully advance the gospel in the Philippines and beyond for His glory.



BLESSING UPON BLESSING

Lin Lu

(2018, MDiv, East Asia)

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to share with all of you some reflections on my years of ministry. The fact that many of you have been willing to pay the price and commit yourselves to full-time theological studies is truly a tremendous grace. For most Christians, such an experience is not the norm in their journey of faith. What is even more amazing is that, after completing my own period of study, I was given the opportunity to serve in theological education. This is truly a blessing upon blessing beyond what I ever could have imagined.

Looking back over the past eight years, as a result of various difficulties, our ministry has often felt as though it has been lurching from one crisis to another. Whether it is student recruitment for each new academic year, faculty deployment, securing facilities, or obtaining financial resources, we have continually faced significant difficulties. Yet, what is truly remarkable is that God is our Lord. He is also our provider, the true builder of this ministry, and the One who watches over it. Whatever we have needed for the work has always been sufficient, such that, much like the manna in the wilderness, we have never lacked for anything.

Time and again, we have experienced the truth of Psalm 127:1: “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain; unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.” This verse has become the best description and testimony of my years of service.

An even greater blessing has been seeing my own students graduate from my alma mater, BTS, and return to serve in various ministry fields here. God continues to lead us forward.

I am thankful that although what we do may seem small, yet it is pleasing to God and forms a small piece of His great plan. I would like to thank all the churches, individuals and organisations that have supported us over the years. I would also like to express special gratitude to my alma mater, BTS, for its support and partnership. Such encouragement and continuing connection mean a great deal to us and bring immense comfort. It is a blessing to have you as fellow travellers on this journey.

We thank God for continuing to lead us forward as we strive to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to His work.

WALKING TOGETHER IN GOD'S MISSION:

REFLECTIONS FROM THE 2026
MALAYSIA MISSION TRIP

Team Leader: Dr Fong Choon Sam

Date: 6-14 June, 2026

Reporting Students: Boisy & Endao





In June, a team of faculty and students from the Baptist Theological Seminary (BTS) journeyed through four Malaysian cities—Melaka, Kuala Lumpur, Taiping and Penang. Partnering with local churches, theological seminaries and ministries, the team participated in God’s redemptive work while experiencing deep spiritual transformation.

1 HUMBLE SERVICE AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

Serving alongside Straits Baptist Community Church, Pantai Baptist Church, and various congregations, students led youth programmes, shared testimonies, and preached the Word. A striking lesson in humility occurred early in the trip when Dr Fong responded with grace and gentleness after being confronted by an angry member of the public due to a bus misunderstanding. This for Christ-like attitude, along with seeing prominent pastors transition from large English ministries to pioneer Chinese ministries from scratch, highlighted that effective mission begins with absolute humility and relational connection rather than the mere execution of programmes.



2 KINGDOM WORK BEYOND THE LOCAL CHURCH

Visits to unique ministries broadened the team's missional horizon. At Pristine World, a media ministry, they saw how visual storytelling and digital resources are utilised to translate biblical truth for indigenous communities. At the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary (MBTS), meaningful dialogues with Dr John Ong, the faculty and an IMB missionary highlighted the realities of frontline service – marked by sacrifice, ordinary faithfulness over the years, and the critical role of theological education in developing global servant leaders.



3 GENERATIONAL FAITHFULNESS IN HIDDEN PLACES

In the historic town of Taiping, the team encountered a modest, ageing congregation that had faithfully sent numerous members into full-time ministry over fifty years, viewing their sending capacity rather than seating capacity as God's will. Combined with the testimony of a daughter who prayed persistently for fifty years until her 84-year-old mother was baptised, these encounters powerfully challenged contemporary metrics of success, redefining ministry as unwavering faithfulness to God's timing and calling.

4 SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND RENEWED CONVICTIONS

Through intentional nightly debriefs and a silent retreat at Maxwell Hill (Taiping Mountain), daily challenges were reframed as enduring spiritual lessons. The trip bridged classroom theology with practical ministry. As the team returned to Singapore, they brought home renewed convictions about servant leadership, cross-cultural engagement, and a lifelong commitment to advancing the gospel wherever He leads.





DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY & CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

Using AI in Worship Preparation

A hands-on pilot workshop for worship leaders and team members

Learn to use AI as a creative and administrative partner across the full arc of worship preparation — from song selection and service flow, to prayers, slides, and service-day readiness. Grounded in theological reflection, and closing with a hands-on look at AI-assisted songwriting: AI assists, humans lead.

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DAY 2 • Production & Sound

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

- Worship leaders and team members
- Ministers and Seminary students exploring digital technology
- No prior AI experience needed

REMINDER: Please bring your Laptop or Tablet for this workshop



James Fong

James Fong has more than 15 years of experience in adult education, teaching and developing programmes in areas such as business, eCommerce, and digital skills. A long-time member of Hosanna Baptist Church, he has served there as a worship leader, musician, and Christian songwriter. James is interested in how faith, technology, and ministry come together and enjoys equipping Christians to use new technologies wisely, guided by Scripture, while being aware of their challenges.

VENUE

Baptist Theological Seminary
(Advanced Institute of Ministry)
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9:30 - 11:30 AM

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For MAP participants, 2 out of 20 credits will be granted to complete the programme

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