



THE METHODIST CHURCH IN MALAYSIA

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EPISCOPAL PASTORAL LETTER - 24 APRIL 2020

Warm greetings to all in the Methodist Church Family in Malaysia.

We have completed 37 days of the MCO as of yesterday. Last night the Prime minister announced that the **MCO has been further extended to the 12 May 2020** [Phase 4]. In the enduring and empowering words of David in **Ps 23:4**, we are on a formidably challenging undesired route of the “valley of the shadow of death”. But we thank the risen sovereign Good Shepherd Who takes us “**through** the valley of the shadow of death.” It is not the final destination but part of a larger journey in store for His sheep.

Undoubtedly, of our own we would want to avoid this route. But we can thank the Lord that even in a prolonged time of being in the “dark valley”, we have experienced Him as proclaimed in ^{ESV} **Psalm 139:12** - “*even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.*” Moreover, the risen Christ is the Good Shepherd Who does **not** “*when he sees the wolf coming...abandons the sheep and runs away*” [John 10: 11-12]

Our hearts continue to esteem the sacrificial contributions of the frontline care givers and service providers from both the public and private sectors. We see this challenging season eliciting caring, compassionate and generous responses from Malaysians as we meet the needs of “*the last, the least and the lost*”. We thankfully notice the incrementally positive MOH reports that spur us on, to be all the more committed to standing together with the Government and co-operate with the relevant agencies – in overcoming the pandemic. **Together, we do not let our guard down, but press in for the victory that is for all of us.**

“**It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness**” is a tested wise saying of old. By God’s grace, our Methodist churches have taken prompt constructive actions in meeting needs – individually, as local churches, Annual Conferences and also at the General Conference level. The Methodist Crisis Relief and Development [agency of CAC] has been spearheading the generous contributions from the CAC and our Methodist Family constituency of Annual Conferences, agencies and local churches. This has resulted in at least a total of RM 1.2 mil worth of food, medical supplies, equipment and accessories [PPEs etc] being distributed so far. The recipients are the poor that includes the migrant and the OA communities, and multiple hospitals up and down the country in Semenanjung, Sabah and Sarawak. The other initiatives of our churches and Annual Conferences includes joining the efforts of the Council of Churches Malaysia in food distribution to the needy [at times in collaboration with a few MPs].

We are thankful too that the prolonged MCO has compelled us to a greater entry and usage of digital technology in the life and ministry of our churches. The Christian message of the alive, one true Almighty God we worship has **never been more broadcasted and made accessible** to various groups and segments of people. The sincere and diligent efforts by our pastors and church leaders in such productions and in having to carry out pastoral care and administration differently - are acknowledged and appreciated. **Permission to celebrate the Holy Communion on line by**



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authorized ministers and pastors had been granted recently; this must be done with reverence and orderliness as per the instructions of the officiating minister or pastor, in line with our Biblical and Wesleyan tradition. This will only be a temporary measure until we can meet again when social life returns to normal, and mass gatherings allowed. **Our Annual Conferences will continue to suspend mass gatherings/Services in church for the month of May, until further notice.**

We continue to be prepared for more changes in the journey of being transformed, individually and communally, into the image of the risen Christ *“from one degree of glory to another”* by the Holy Spirit [2 Cor 3:18]. This MCO season has forced us to **re-focus and recover our foundational identity as the people of God**. We are *“stripped off the accessories of church life”* so that we are once again reminded of the simplicity of the true substance of being the Body of Christ. Among the essentials that remain through the *“sifting of the MCO”* are the triune God, living out the Gospel message of Christ, the Holy Scriptures, prayer and praise, *“unbreakable”* community, and a Church that cannot be vanquished because we are a *“chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation”* [1 Peter 2:9] that is the Body of the Eternal Christ [Ephesians 5:29-30].

We are forcefully shunted to live, love and look like Christ in our families, neighborhoods, quarantined venues, workplaces, in this country – **24 hours 7 days a week**, not only for a few hours on Sundays when in the church. This season also tests our church membership vows – *“to faithfully participate in its [church’s] ministries by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service”* [It also tests our marriage vows!] It will challenge our *“entitlement spirit”* arising from a pervasive **consumer mindset** of expecting a *“return for my giving”*, that shuns *“giving without getting”*.

Let us remain resolute and united, hopeful, calm and expectant as we confidently trust the unchangingly good Shepherd in this route **through** the *“COVID-19 valley of the shadow of death”*. We remain in a posture of **“watch and pray”**, vigilant to the current situation and be positive faith-filled *“echo chambers”* to one another – that for us, **knowing the future is uncertain but knowing the One Who holds the future is certain!**

^{ESV} **Colossians 1:16** For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

^{NIB} **Isaiah 49: 8, 16** This is what the Lord says.... See, I have **engraved you** on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.

The grace and peace of the preeminent Good Shepherd be with you and your loved ones.

Bishop Ong Hwai Teik

Bishop, The Methodist Church in Malaysia