

REPORT BY LAY LEADER

for Last Local Conference

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by Local Church Executive Committee Lay Leader, Liaw Chun Huan

Our Forefathers

This year, the word “forefathers” have been resonating in my heart and mind. Usually in my report for Last Conference Report, I will write about our church’s past key events. But this time, I ask for your indulgence to write on “Our Forefathers”. If I were to theme it, I will call it “*The Land of our Forefathers*”.

Faith of our fathers

To start off, I am reminded of the Hymn “*Faith of our fathers*” written by Frederick William Faber. It was written in memory of the Catholic Martyrs who were true to God till death. May the faith of our fathers inspire us to press on this mission God has called us to. The chorus has this -

*Faith of our fathers! holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death!*

The Captive years

The Covid years to me was like what Israel faced during captivity. The people were taken away from the church (homeland) and isolated from each other. Circuit breaker was a lockdown or captivity for all. Some even experienced quarantine. It was a time of uncertainty and chaos, very much like prisoners of war in captive. Bringing back to our church context, the regular joy or routine of being able to go to church for service and worship was hindered and disrupted.

Fast forward to today, post pandemic, churches have seen some of its congregation members coming back, but unfortunately, most churches have also seen a decline in attendance as compared to pre-Covid. This is partly due to the convenience of online worship service and partly due to lost sheep that have strayed away or got entangled amongst the thorny bushes and many other reasons.

The Land of our forefathers

*“The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will bring my people Israel
and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their
forefathers to possess,” says the LORD.”*

~ Jeremiah 30:3

God loves us all including every sheep that has gone astray. Like a loving shepherd and father, He will seek and find them out. The Lord has declared that He will bring His people back from captivity and restore them to the lands of their forefathers. It was unimaginable at those times for the Assyrian kings to release and permit Israel to return and rebuild their land and nation. God always works in ways we know not of. He is going to bring His people back to church too.

The Call to Us as Leaders

The key question for us as leaders of the church, are we ready as God brings His people back?

As leaders of Faith Methodist Church, we are like Nehemiah, Ezra, Zechariah, Haggai etc of those ancient times. God has given each of us unique roles in the restoration of the land and our church. In performing our roles, we can expect discouragement, trouble, obstacles and even opposition. Like Nehemiah, we need to be vigilant, rebuilding with one hand and the weapon in the other, sure and steadfast and never let our guard down. Rebuilding is and cannot be a passive job. It will come at a cost to us, time, effort, brainstorming, coordinating, sleepless nights, prayer, etc.

Rebuilding the walls, the gates and the temple

The work of rebuilding and restoration has already begun. After the 3 years of Covid, life is more or less back to normal. Faith is blessed to have around 70-80% of our congregation back. But our work is not done. The building works must continue.

God continues to seek and save the lost. Israel as a nation today continues to call out to the world for its people to come back. We must continue to prepare our church for its people.

What can we do? May I suggest the 3 steps:

1. *Be Intentional in our plans and programs*

The Israelis went back to their lands with the intention to rebuild. Similarly, we must be intentional in preparing our church for God to draw people. The programs, the plans that each ministry decides, do not worry or see them as merely activities. See them with the eyes of Christ, for the purpose of bringing lost souls to Him. Whether it be worship, hospitality, small group, etc, God is definitely going to use every ministry of Faith Methodist Church.

2. *Create personal touch points*

Our theme of *Loving People Genuinely*, means we need to have that personal engagement. Bishop Emeritus Rev Dr Wee Boon Hup also reminded us in our Anniversary sermon that loving others is loving God. Nehemiah and the prophets did not just give instructions from a high office, they came to the ground to interact, to know the issues, to walk with the people. The church is not a building, it is a community of God's people. If we are not having personal touch points in our ministries, we will not truly touch people's lives for Christ and those that come will not stay. There has to be a difference in experience between online and physical service. Personal touch points impact and make the difference.

3. *Pray unceasingly*

We can never cease praying as it shows our dependency on Him. As much as we can plan, it is God who will bring his people back. So, let us gather as often as we can, as a ministry, as a church, to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into the fields. I like to encourage all leaders to join our Corporate House of Prayer and Praise as often as you can attend. How can we encourage others to join us in prayer when we are not together praying?

In closing, I am reminded of another song written by Steve Green "*Find us Faithful*". The lyrics remind me of the role we are all playing now, building on for the next generation. For someday, we will be the guiding forefathers of those who come behind us.

*May the fire of our devotion
Light their way.
May the footprints that we leave,
Lead them to believe,
And the lives we live
Inspire them to obey.
O may all who come behind us
Find us faithful.*

