



**THE DIOCESE OF SINGAPORE
25th SESSION OF SYNOD (3rd MEETING)
15th MAY 2021**

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

SPURRING ONE ANOTHER ON TOWARDS LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS

Good morning brothers and sisters in Christ, and welcome to the 3rd meeting of the 25th session of Synod.

This morning, I wish to acknowledge and welcome our brothers and sisters from our deaneries. Thank you for joining.

We also wish to congratulate and welcome our newly ordained deacons Revd Aaron Cheng, Revd Choo Cheng Leong, Revd Christopher Ho and Revd Brandon Loy.

This is the third Synod meeting that is held online as the world and our nation continue to struggle with containing a pandemic that has disrupted so much of our lives. COVID-19 pressed a reset button that forced us to learn new ways of living life and doing ministry. It made us take stock of what we have been doing as we are reminded that “each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done” (1 Cor 3:13).

Thanksgiving

Despite the challenges brought about by the pandemic, we are thankful for God’s faithfulness and grace upon us as a diocese and as a nation. All of our parishes in Singapore have returned to onsite worship and we thank God that our members, in general, are faithful in meeting the needs of the Lord’s house.

Since baptism and confirmation services resumed in the second half of 2020, the Archdeaconry of Singapore has had close to 500 baptised and 550 confirmed. Despite needing to cancel all confirmation services in our six deaneries due to travel restrictions, we thank God for the 259 believers who declared their faith through baptism. These are encouraging testimonies that prove we are steadfast and are standing shoulder to shoulder for strength and encouragement despite the restrictions on religious gatherings and the challenges faced, particularly by our brothers and sisters in Christ in our deanery countries. Indeed, without the work of the Holy Spirit, these would not have been possible.

We are also thankful to the Lord for His protection and blessings upon our social services and schools. It is our pleasure to announce that under the collaboration of the Ministry of Education and St Andrew’s Mission Hospital, we were awarded a special school project that will provide students with special needs the opportunity to receive national-curriculum primary to secondary school education. This 10th Anglican school will start operations in January 2022 at an interim site with the first intake of about 75 students at Primary 1 and a smaller number of students at Primary 2 and Primary 3 crossing over from other schools. We covet your prayers for this school to fulfil its purpose of bringing hope to many who need a helping hand.

It is an understatement to say that 2020 was a challenging year for our staff serving in Singapore Anglican Community Services and St Andrew's Mission Hospital. The risk of infection is real for our medical frontline staff, but they embraced this courageously and sacrificially as they faithfully provide the much-needed service to the needy and ailing in our hospitals and centres. Their unreserved care and excellent service have received many approvals and accolades. For example, 241 staff received the Singapore Health Quality Service Awards 2020. We thank God for them and pray that God's protection is with them always.

Holding Fast

In my previous Synod Address, I mentioned that vision is about the unchanging goal that lasts for generations, and mission is the task of this current generation to achieve the goals articulated in our vision.

The New Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) spell out the unchanging vision of our diocese. We are to **be disciples** of Jesus, and are commanded to **go and make disciples** of all nations. All our ministries are (and should be) undergirded with the unconditional love of God and our sacrificial love for God.

It is dangerous to de-couple the two. Spreading the gospel to the world without love can breed intolerance and extremism. Spreading love without the gospel is charity without purpose. A closer look at church history would reveal the pitfall of asserting one at the expense of the other. Either way would fail in fulfilling the call to live a life that reflects the New Commandment and Great Commission.

As a diocese with 27 parishes, 6 deaneries, 9 schools, 22 preschools and a wide range of community services, we need to realise that our true purpose and mission is to bring the love **of** God to the lost world out of our love **for** God. To do this, we need to be disciples who have the goal of making disciples for Jesus. It involves building a community of faith and cultivating a church that is rooted in discipleship. Growing as a disciple of Jesus is as much a communal matter as it is a personal affair. We cannot produce a healthy believer if the church is not healthy, and vice versa. The key indicator of personal or collective health is not so much about how well-endowed we are with resources, but how faithful we are in living our lives as disciples like St Paul or St Peter, by bringing the gospel to those around us with the unconditional love of God.

On this note, we need to ask ourselves honestly, as a Christian and as a church, "Am I a healthy and growing disciple for Jesus? Is my congregation, my parish and my diocese healthy and growing in discipleship? Have we invested our time, energy and resources appropriately in the right place and built a solid church?" If we have, press on! If not, let us reset our bearings and get back on the right track. Beyond asking ourselves these questions, everyone here (clergymen, deaconesses and lay leaders) is also responsible for bringing these questions back to your parish. We do this not just out of our duty and responsibility but because of what God has called us to fulfil and become.

It was undoubtedly discouraging to hear the 4 May announcement to roll back to Phase 2 COVID-19 restrictions, although this is needful. The sudden announcement yesterday (14 May) to further tighten restrictions is a clear sign that we are not out of the woods and the situation is urgent. As we adapt our church services and activities to the sudden change, let us not get so caught up or overwhelmed that we lose sight of the purpose of why we are doing all this. We need to hold fast to our vision and mission, and continue to work in unity to build the foundation of our faith. We should be creative and engaging in how we do ministry, as we bring the gospel to everyone, from the young to the old - no one should be left out. We must also strengthen our pastoral care so that our members are well-supported and feel connected to the church.

In times of difficulty and challenge, only the Word of God and the Love of Christ can bring us comfort and strength. Nothing, not even the current pandemic, should stop us from building lives and making disciples for Christ. Remember to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim 4:2).

Forging Ahead

Over the last few months, much work has been done among the clergymen and deaconesses to honestly reflect on where we are as a diocese and how we can move forward. One of the recurring issues we have to address is restoring faith and order. We want to see the diocese return to the “bread and butter” of our vision and mission.

Within the Archdeaconry of Singapore, we are looking at how we can better organise ourselves among the 27 parishes to leverage on one another’s strengths, work closer together and achieve better synergy and support. This may take time and several trials, but we believe it will provide a much-needed boost to our parishes in realising our diocesan vision and mission. We are at an early stage, and we hope to keep the Synod informed of the development in good time.

We are thankful that amidst the challenges posed by COVID-19, God raised indigenous leaders within our deaneries to step up and play a more prominent role in leading the work of the deaneries. This is a positive step for our deaneries’ progress in becoming archdeaconries and dioceses. We also see encouraging developments where our parishes are becoming more intentional and focused in supporting our deanery work. The situations in our deaneries are complex and challenging, with the pandemic further compounding their problems. We need to keep our brothers and sisters in constant prayer and ask for God’s provision, grace and mercy to be sufficient for them. We can claim on the promises of God as stated in Isaiah 43:2, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.”

We thank God for the wonderful work He is doing through our community services. In addition to the excellent medical and counselling support extended to our clients, our chaplaincy ministry is a distinctiveness that sets us apart from other Voluntary Welfare Organisations. Our chaplaincy team and pastoral staff of our anchor churches have done a lot. Many have expressed appreciation for their encouragement and their pastoral care in times of need. To continue improving our chaplaincy ministry, we need to take stock of what has been done and get ourselves ready for challenging moments both now and in the future. Our pastoral work in SACS and SAMH are expressions of God’s unconditional love and channels for us, as Jesus’ disciples, to be the light and salt for the nation. We pray that God will bring in more volunteers and resources so that our mission to bring God’s love to where it is most needed will be fulfilled via this important chaplaincy ministry.

We have also begun critical work in streamlining the diocesan administrative services to better support our parishes and ministries. We welcome Ms Mabel Tan, who has joined the diocese as the Chief Administrative Officer. Some of the upcoming changes that we can expect in the latter part of the year include digitising the diocesan membership database. These changes will lighten the administrative process in the parishes for baptism, confirmation and transfers. Another area of change will involve diocesan communications. This pandemic has taught us that the modes of communication have evolved. We need to leverage technology and relook our methods to be more effective in reaching out to our parishioners.

Despite current COVID-19 challenges, we enter into exciting times, and God is leading us. Let us press on and “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Amen.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Titus Chung" with a stylized flourish underneath.

The Rt Revd Dr Titus Chung
The Bishop of Singapore