

DREAM BIG!

EQUIPPING
THE BODY TO
SERVE GOD
AND OUR
NEIGHBOURS

USE YOUR TALENTS – ASIA!

才干 Ta-lâng қобилиятига قابلیت
재능 TALENT តalent របស់ ខ្ញុំ
Talento தாலந்து Талант 才能 Bakat
योग्यता Talenta سُختسائلقلا

才干 Ta-lâng

نُختسا سلقلا

தேதகௌஸவ்

재능


Talento தாலந்து Талант

қобилиятига قابليت

才能 ทALENT
ของประธาน

Talenta Bakat

योग्यता



Individuals and families have resources; churches have resources; communities and villages have resources; county, prefecture, province and national level governments have resources. Some years ago I learned the meaning of raising awareness about resources as an asset for development. One morning a poor village in Yunnan Province in China was gathered for a workshop. The village was nestled high up in the mountains and it was bitterly cold outside. We gathered in a classroom at the local school and used the floor as our blackboard. The topic for the workshop was: “What resources do you have in this village?” I will never forget that morning. In the beginning people were mostly quiet, but after an hour the floor was fully covered with chalk markings as the villagers together started to discover their resources and assets for development.

We all have resources, assets and talents. “Use Your Talents – Asia” is an exemplary book describing how people became aware of their resources, and how individuals, churches and communities participated and led the development of their communities. When people are mobilised to use their talents they can improve their own lives and the lives of those around them.

I therefore recommend this book as an excellent tool for raising awareness about resources and talents, and for encouraging you to use your talents to bring about change and development to your community.

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THIS BOOK

*brings together inspiring stories and articles from
across Asia, including Thailand, Cambodia, China,
Central Asia, India, Indonesia and Japan.*

Many names and places have been changed to protect people's
anonymity. Some of the photos used in this manual are illustrative and do
not necessarily correspond with the article in question.



INTRODUCTION

What is *Use Your Talents?*

Do you have talents or gifts? God is good, He graciously gives gifts to all! Our God given talents include our abilities, time, property, expertise, passion and money. So, how can we recognize, develop and use the talents that are already present in our community to glorify God and improve the lives of the people around us?

“Use Your Talents”, as presented in this book, is an asset-based approach to church community mobilization based on the parable of the talents found in Matthew 25. One of the main points of the parable is to be good stewards and use the talents entrusted to us by our Creator. Using our talents can be a way to fulfil God’s commandment to love our neighbour – both as individual believers and as a Church.

A BOOK OF TESTIMONIALS

In the following pages, you will find testimonials from people who have used their God-given gifts and talents purposefully in their daily lives. For example Aiza from the Philippines, who shares about how she has gained confidence after being challenged to discover the gifts that God has given her: *“When I was younger, my mum would make all the decisions, and after I got married to my late husband, my mother-in-law made all the decisions. I used to feel that I couldn’t make any decisions nor that I had any kind of voice myself. I also felt so shy and scared of trying new things. However, over the past few years I have become more mature and I can think more about ways I can look after my own family and I can initiate positive change myself”*. It is encouraging to read about how Aiza remembers that she is loved and is a precious daughter of God who gives her strength to do difficult things because He is strong and powerful.

USE YOUR TALENTS

- AN EMPOWERING APPROACH

The “Use Your Talents” approach is empowering. It can be used immediately and does not require external funding. It aims to stimulate and encourage the Church, both as congregations, and as individuals, to use their talents to improve their own lives and the lives of those around them. Rather than starting with areas of need and seeking external help as is usually done, this approach first looks at the gifts and the resources (the assets) God has already given us, as a church, as individuals and as a local community.

OUR AIM

Our aim with this book is to inspire you to recognize your gifts, and to use them to glorify God, help yourself and your neighbours – and to give you the tools to be able to do so. This book provides examples on how people have been using their talents in an urban and rural Asian setting. We hope this can serve as an inspiration for you and your church to serve God and your community.

BENEFITS TO THE INDIVIDUAL

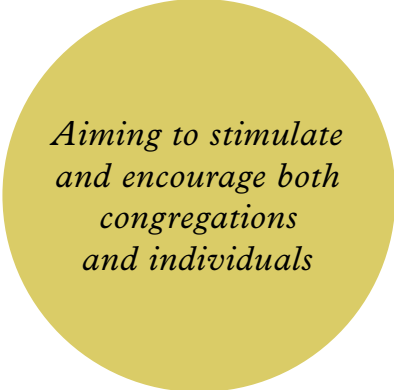
- Gives opportunities to serve God, the church, one’s neighbour and community
- Empowers
- Encourages creativity
- Recognizes God-given gifts
- Improves self-esteem
- Can improve people’s living standards

BENEFITS TO THE CHURCH

- Builds relationships
- Spreads the love of Christ
- Helps identify resources
- Raises the church’s profile
- Enables the church to have a positive influence in their community
- Raises awareness of how to practice the gospel in the community

BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

- It brings people together
- Helps people recognize each other’s abilities and gifts
- Helps the community become self-reliant
- Strengthens ethnic identity and culture
- Can improve living standards as a whole



*Aiming to stimulate
and encourage both
congregations
and individuals*



*The Big Picture:
Saved by faith
alone*

LEARNING AND REFLECTION

We believe that our sins are forgiven and that we are saved from eternal punishment by faith alone.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

There is nothing good enough we could ever do that would wipe out our sin and its consequences. Jesus died taking our sin and its punishment upon Himself and broke the power of sin and hell by coming back to life again. Only the Son of God Himself had the power to do that.

We are saved as we place our faith in Him by recognising our sinful state, our inability to deal with it ourselves, and ask Him to take our sin from us. Being saved, we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus and given eternal life.

At the same time faith in Jesus is based on the recognition that He is the Son of God, that He is God and is, therefore, to be treated as God and obeyed. Jesus said:

“If you love me, keep my commands” (John 14:15)

and His commands were:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your


strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’.” (Luke 10:27)

So, faith will always result in a change to the way in which we live our lives. But if there is no change – there can be no faith.

“Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.” (James 2:17-18)

It is in the light of this truth that the following articles have been written as we seek to understand more of what those changes to our lives should look like.





*Love your neighbour
as yourself*



*Serving the Lord
with our talents*

LEARNING AND REFLECTION

The Lord Jesus requires his disciples to use their talents responsibly for good purposes in this life. Whether they do so or not is a test of their faithfulness and will affect how Jesus judges them when He comes again. In Matthew 25:14-30 Jesus tells the story of the master and his three servants. This parable teaches us, His followers, that we should use our talents.

THE PARABLE OF THE BAGS OF GOLD (MATTHEW 25:14-30):

¹⁴“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ ²¹“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ²²“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’ ²³“His master replied, ‘Well done, good

and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ²⁴“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ ²⁶“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ²⁸“So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

The parable tells the story of a rich man who is going on a long journey. Before leaving, he decides to hand over important financial responsibilities to his servants, expecting them to make profitable use of the money they are entrusted with. This parable portrays the kingdom of God and illustrates how Jesus as the master will, upon his return, hold us accountable for how we have handled the talents that He has left in our care.

WHAT ARE TALENTS?

The key term in the parable is “talent” which was a currency used in the first century. Jesus used the “talents” in the parable to symbolize personal gifts and abilities, e.g. knowledge, skills, wealth, etc. One servant was given five talents, another two talents and the last, one talent. Each servant had some ability and was granted resources accordingly. At that time, one “talent” was a lot of money; it was worth more than twenty years of a day labourer’s wage! This tells us the master was wealthy, but he was also generous with his servants, and he trusted them with great resources. Our Lord Jesus has given all people plenty of resources and abilities. Some may have more and some less, but everyone has been given some and are richly blessed. We are required to use whatever resources we have in the best possible way. Similarly, the apostle Paul also affirms that believers are each given different gifts, so that all can contribute to build the body of Christ (Romans 12:6–8).

THE THREE SERVANTS

After being away for a long time, the master returned and settled the accounts with his servants. How had they used their talents, resources and abilities? Two of them had done very well. The first servant, having received five talents, “went at once and put his money to work”. There was no delay nor unwillingness to use his talents thoughtfully, thus earning another five talents. The second servant worked similarly

and gained two talents. Therefore, the master praised them as “good and faithful servants” (25:21). They had increased the wealth of their master using the talents they were given. Furthermore, the master decided to put them in charge of “many things” because they had been faithful with “a few things”. It has already been noted that the talents the servants were entrusted with in the beginning would be worth a lot of money today, but the master considered it to be only a small amount. In addition to this, the master invited them to “come and share your master’s happiness”. This invitation refers to the time when Jesus returns, and we can rejoice with him. The waiting time for His return can seem very long, and full of challenges, hardships and sorrows for Jesus’ servants. However, the faithful servants who persevere as Jesus requires until He comes again, will be rewarded with the honour of accompanying him and enjoying His blessings.

In contrast, the third servant was judged “wicked and lazy” (25:26) because he was passive and did not make use of his talent. He was self-centred and didn’t recognize the Lordship of his master. He tried to excuse his laziness by putting the blame on the master himself, describing him as a “hard”, or a strict man. He confessed to being afraid and unwilling to take any risks, so he justified his actions by doing what he thought was the safest, but, nevertheless, failed to do what the master

required. The master, in response, asked the servant: if he knew that the master was difficult to please, why did he not choose the safest way of managing the talent – putting it in the bank where the master, upon return, could get the money back with interest? If such effortless investment was accepted, how could the master be a hard man? This servant was then further judged to be “useless”, and hence punished severely and cast out into “darkness where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (25:30). This will be the final condemnation for wicked, lazy and useless servants who do not recognize the Lord as master of their lives.

This is a story about faithful and unfaithful servants, describing how they used the talents given to them and what the results were. The term “servant” describes the role of Jesus’ disciples and may contradict our usual way of thinking about our lives and identity. We often believe we are the masters of our own lives and therefore have the right to determine how to live our lives. We may think self-determination will bring happiness. As Christians, however, we call Jesus Lord of both our lives and the Church. Shall we, as servants, rule over our own lives?

USE YOUR GOD GIVEN RESOURCES

The two servants in the parable who put most effort into serving the Lord by using their talents well, are the ones that end up with most blessings in return. The passive

servant blames his decision on fear of the master’s strictness. The master, however, does not accept his excuse and does not absolve him of the responsibility to act. We know that in the real world all actions involve some faith. In serving the Lord Jesus who has generously blessed us with so many talents, stepping out in faith is what we should be doing and is better than burying our treasures in the ground. So, go out and use the resources God has given you to bless your community, and serve and praise God!







Treasures in the community

BUILDING A BRIDGE

For 50 years the bridge was in a state of disrepair, until the local church decided to do something about it.

50 YEARS OF WAITING

In a remote village there was a wooden bridge which was in a state of disrepair. Villagers had to cross this bridge every day. However, there were no repair funds and the villagers suffered a lot. The broken bridge was the main focus of every yearly election in the village; the candidates promising to repair the bridge if they were elected. However, these promises turned out to be empty words, and the problem remained unsolved for over 50 years.

WHAT IF WE USED LOCAL RESOURCES INSTEAD?

In this village there was also a church. The villagers' view of the believers was that they only sat and worshipped inside the church, not paying attention to what happened outside the building. One day, a worker in the church was pondering how the church could solve the bridge issue. He mobilized the church to discuss the cost of repairment with the village

The villagers' view of the believers was that they only sat and worshipped inside the church, not paying attention to what happened outside the building.






committee. The village committee worked out that to fix the bridge would cost over 7000 USD, which is a large sum of money. The believers studied the budget in detail and found out that if they used local resources such as wood, stones and sand, and if villagers contributed their labour, they could reduce the budget to a more affordable amount. This would also give the villagers a sense of ownership – because by contributing to the building of the bridge they would be more invested in its outcome; it becomes more meaningful to them and they are more likely to look after it in the future. This solution was suggested to the community, and the budget was revised again by the village committee. It turned out they would only need to purchase steel bars and cement, costing approximately 1000 USD, much less than the original budget of 7000 USD. A sponsor agreed to donate the money needed for steel bars and cement.

A NEW WAY OF THINKING

The financial problem was solved, yet a greater challenge was ahead when the construction started. In the area around the bridge there were many big rocks. In order to make room for the repair work and get stones for construction, the rocks first needed to be blown up. Some of the villagers were strongly against this because there was a belief that the rocks brought the village fortune; if they blasted the rocks their wealth would also disappear. Unfortunately, the construction of the bridge could not go ahead if the rocks remained in place. There seemed to be no solution to this problem until a veteran from the



*Now, the church
congregation
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every Sunday and
worships.*

village stood up and claimed that he did not believe the saying about the rocks and the fortune. He explained how he had experienced several explosions in the battlefield without fearing a curse like this. Due to his age and position, no one in the village challenged his authority and the rocks were blasted. Finally, with the joint efforts of the villagers, the new bridge was built and named “Praise Grace Bridge”. The villagers and livestock could now cross the bridge safely.

THE CHURCH IS ABLE TO MOBILIZE VOLUNTEERS

However, the story does not end there – the changes had only just begun. After this event, the brothers and sisters in the village church began to reflect on the mission God has given the church, and how they could care for their community. They decided that instead of celebrating Christmas Eve inside the church, they would set aside every 24th of December as a day when the church would serve the community. The church members volunteered to repair bridges and roads. This impressed the village committee because when they had tried to organize the villagers to do this, there had not been any response, but the church had been able to mobilize volunteers very quickly.

FACILITATING CHANGE WHILE RESPECTING TRADITION

Even though the bridge was now fixed, the villagers were still concerned that their

financial condition would worsen after the removal of the rocks. Shortly after the bridge was built, an herbal medicine company went on a survey trip to the village. Upon seeing that the land was flat and had water supply, they rented 20 acres of land to plant herbal medicines. Later, 3 more companies followed suit. These companies rented 3/4 of the village land area. In addition, they needed laborers to plant the medicinal plants and the age of the workers did not matter as long as they could hoe. The companies paid a set amount per day to some of the elderly villagers even if they could not do a lot of hard work. Honouring the elders was a big part of the village culture, and when the villagers saw the companies respecting this tradition and taking care of the elders – they were also willing to work for the companies. This way, in addition to renting out their lands, the villagers got an opportunity to earn money by working. Instead of cursing the village by removing the rocks, the bridge brought more blessings to the village.

Now, the church congregation no longer just sits inside the church every Sunday and worships. Through actions and mobilizing local resources they live out Integral Mission!

INTEGRAL MISSION

(similar to “diakonia” see page 41):

An understanding of Christian mission that includes both evangelism and social responsibility. As Christians and as a Church, we should communicate the gospel in all we say and do.





SERVING THE MARGINALIZED

Working shoulder to shoulder across denominations

MINISTRY TO THE HOMELESS

Life on the streets in Japan can be rough. One man's calling to serve the homeless developed into an opportunity for volunteers from different church denominations to work together as one body and build relationships with the homeless in their city.

Several years ago, a missionary in one of Japan's largest cities was deeply touched by the homeless in the city. God put these people on his heart, and he wanted to serve them with love, showing them integrity

and respect. He felt drawn to invite them to regular meetings in one of the city's parks, where they would be served food, and he could share his Christian testimony with them.

Life on the streets in Japan can be rough. Access to food is not necessarily the most difficult challenge they face, but the neglect and rough living conditions can be very demanding, and the mortality rate is high. Japan is known for its high expectations of its people. There is a strong sense of communal responsibility, and when you don't

live up to those expectations, the downfall can be very hard. Their self-esteem can hit rock bottom, and their way out of the misery can be long and challenging.

The missionary shared his calling with his own church, and volunteers stepped up to help. Over time, this ministry has expanded, and now people from different church backgrounds in the city join hands to serve the homeless. One house church fellowship takes it upon themselves to organize the ministry, but they get volunteers from many different churches.

POPULAR GATHERINGS

Twice a month invites are given to homeless people for a gathering in a park in the city. The program starts at 4pm, and the homeless must arrive before this to get their “ticket” to take part. Some show up several hours before to secure their spot! There are usually 60 to 70 participants in the program. Most of them would be in their 50’s and 60’s, but there are also much younger people than that among the attendees.

At 4 pm there is a 30-minute church service, when the team shares the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They put heavy emphasis on being evangelizing, and always invite the attendees forward for prayers and to receive Christ as their saviour. The team strongly believes that this ministry is Church to the homeless, and the congregations involved are not competing among themselves who will “run off” with the converts. They have, on many occasions, experienced that the homeless accept









丸衣



善物

下馬



通行 車輛

に付

Jesus Christ into their life as saviour. And, as a consequence of that, they occasionally get to baptize the homeless – in the park!

EATING TOGETHER AND SHARING LIFE STORIES

After the 30-minute service ends, the participants are served a hot obento meal. This lunch box is bought from one of the city's many catering services and is of a high standard. Once a month they also serve muffins, to celebrate those whose had a birthday that month. After eating they spend the remainder of the time talking with the homeless, praying for their needs and listening to their life stories. There is also a nurse on the team, who cares for wounds of different sorts when needed.

DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS AS ONE

The ministry team in this large Japanese city has experienced great blessings from getting involved in the ministry to the homeless. It has brought a special unity among the different denominations, where they learn to love and appreciate each other as One in Christ. Also, the homeless carry so much life wisdom! They have seen and experienced society from angles that the rest of us have no idea about. Sharing their knowledge and life stories helps the ministry team get a broader perspective on life. It is heart-warming to see how the homeless people show their appreciation and gratitude; bringing gifts to the children and showing sympathy when team members go through difficult times.

A TOUCH OF LOVE

Jesus has called us to love our neighbours. He has called us to show compassion to the needy. This team in Japan is an example on how people from different church backgrounds can use their talents and assets to work together for a better society. Volunteers use their time, church-staff use their organizational skills, medical staff use their professional background and churchgoers provide baked goods for birthday celebrations. Diaconal ministry like this should be close to the heart of the Christian Church. But showing care for physical needs without also showing care for spiritual needs is a job half done. The team serving the homeless is providing a touch of family love to the needy by listening to their stories, but they are also drawing them closer to their heavenly home!



A home away from home

DORMITORY IN MENTAWAI

Teenagers from the remote hinterlands of Mentawai, Indonesia, who want to go to high school, will most likely have to find their own accommodation. Offerings collected at the local church make it possible to provide low cost boarding for these students.

If you're a young teenager from the remote hinterlands of Mentawai, Indonesia and want to go to high school, you will most likely have to move away from your parents' home and find your own accommodation closer to your school. This is because this is an area with few schools, and so moving away from home to further your studies is often necessary. A lot of the teenagers who move out only have the opportunity to visit their parents during the school holidays.

PROVIDING LOW COST ACCOMODATION

I am a Pastor in an area with a high school, and it burdens me to see that the teenagers must leave their loved ones behind. I wanted to provide safe, low-cost accommodations for these young adults that were coming to study, somewhere they also could receive teaching from the word of God. Therefore, I initiated a project to build a dormitory. Church members stepped up and provided their time, efforts and material to help build the dormitory. In 1994 the building was finished, ready to accommodate high school students from the hinterlands of Mentawai. We had to rebuild it in 2013 because of damages, but since 1994 until today, this dormitory has facilitated the possibilities of education for many teenagers and youths in Mentawai. Making it easier for them to complete their education because they have a safe







place to live. Offerings collected at the local church makes it possible to provide low-cost boarding for these students. This way, the whole church community can contribute in helping these teenagers on their way to adulthood. We hope to one day be able to provide free boarding for some students who can't afford to pay, and some financial support for their daily expenses.

There is no hired staff at the dormitory, everyone living there is responsible for cooking food, washing their clothes and cleaning the rooms. The pastor's wife is supervising them and aiding if anyone needs help.

SHARING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

In addition to providing a safe physical place for these teenagers to live, I also wanted to teach them about Jesus and the Christian faith. One of the problems in Mentawai is that parents seldom teach

their children about faith, it seems like they do not care whether their children follow Christianity or other religions. To them the most pressing problem is whether their children's bellies are full or not. Therefore, the local church feels burdened for the souls in Mentawai. We as the Church are salt and light of the world and should have a positive impact on our neighbourhood and amongst the people in the community.

The teenagers are easily distracted, and we see a fragile faith in this young generation. Therefore, it is important to plant Christian values in their hearts so they become a generation whose faith is not easily shaken by free education, materialism and all the world may offer. Faith cannot be bought by goods or worldly pleasures. We arrange Bible studies two times a week at the dormitories, and the teenagers pray together every night. The church believes that these teenagers can grow up to be a positive influence in their communities if they are given the right tools and support.

We pray that God will continue to help and open/pave the way for us through our struggles. We pray that He will continue to bless us as we use what He has given us to help those around us. May the name of the Lord be glorified.

All Glory and honour to God.





Empowering women, one thread at a time

LEARNING SUZANI EMBROIDERY





How can a young, uneducated mum make a living and still be able to look after her kids? Could learning traditional embroidery skills be the answer?

I am Saida and I live in a small village in a Central Asian country with my children and husband. Traditionally, all the girls and women in my village spend most of their days at home taking care of daily housework, our children and other family affairs. I have wanted to make my own money ever since I was a child and watched my father go to his job outside the house. But I eventually learned that it was out of the question because there are no jobs available for women like me who never attended school. And as my mum always pointed out whenever I brought up the subject: if I went out for work, who would take care of my responsibilities at home? Who would watch my children?

I grew up, got married, and moved out of my parents' house, but still had a wish to contribute to the household income and learn a skill. One day I heard from one of my Christian neighbours that they had started learning how to make Suzani embroidery. This is an old tradition that was partly abandoned during Soviet times and is a technique of embroidery that was traditionally taught at an early age to girls. They would start working on large pieces of fabric that would compose their dowry when the marrying age arrived. The hand embroidered work can take up to months until the result is achieved: large and

colourful panels displaying different themes such as flowers, almonds, pomegranates, doves and other decorative motives.

**LEARNT A SKILL
- STARTED TEACHING**

I was intrigued after hearing about the opportunity to learn the Suzani technique, maybe this could be a way for me to work on something without having to abandon my house responsibilities? After all, I knew how to work with my hands, and I was eager to learn. I joined the group and developed my embroidery skills, and now I am teaching other girls in my village how to produce beautiful patterns.

INCREASING THE PRODUCTION

This opportunity to learn has awakened a dormant talent and given me the chance to use and develop it and pass it on to other people in my community. I got the opportunity to train two younger girls who have never sewn before, and I started to pay them for their work as they developed their skills. As all of us are developing our skills, we are now able to increase our production capacity as a team because we can produce more in less time. It is very exciting, and the girls help me come up with new ideas for design and patterns that we can use in our sales events.

Learning this technique has brought much needed money to our household, money with which I can buy newer and better sewing machines and produce other things for sale. Additionally, I have made many good friends with women of different ages, and we can freely share struggles and joys together as sisters.





*Serve the world
by using your
talents*

PROTECTING GOD'S CREATION

LEARNING AND REFLECTION

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” ²⁷So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” ²⁹Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

Genesis 1:26-30

¹⁵The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Genesis 2:15.

The creation story of the world and humankind is important as it reveals our responsibility as caretakers of God’s creation. To fulfil this God-given responsibility, we must use our God-given talents. There are several messages that we must grasp and act on.

The first chapter of Genesis tells us that God has created a world in which everything was good. To keep the world in good order, God created human beings. He commanded Adam and Eve to subdue the earth by learning how to use all that God has built into his creation, through discovery, invention, etc. and to rule over all fish, birds and living creatures on earth. God was giving humankind a central role as caretaker of life on the planet. Since the fall, this now includes seeking to put right that which is wrong, by caring for nature and all that God has given us.

Genesis 2:15 further reinforces this command from God. Adam and Eve were put in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Naturally, work must start on a small scale in a localised place before it can be extended to cover the whole world. To enable humans to be effective workers as demanded, the sovereign and gracious God has taken several necessary actions. In the beginning, he created mankind “in his own image and likeness” (Genesis 1:26). A reasonable explanation of this “image and likeness of God” is threefold:

Firstly, it means that man, like God, is a “relational” being. An individual can and should build up relationships with God, other people and with nature. Harmonious relationships are crucial to nurture a beautiful and happy world. Secondly, it means that man has high intellectual

powers that enable him to do many things such as learn, think, reason, investigate, invent, etc. These are God-given talents that are necessary to fulfil the God-given responsibilities mentioned above. Finally, it means that man is the authorized representative of God, having the authority over the world, to implement God's plan therein. Therefore, having been created in the image of God, enables us to be good caretakers of that which He has created.

God then tells humankind to be fruitful – to increase in numbers, and to fill the earth. To do this, God gave them everything necessary for survival and reproduction. He gave us the food we eat, the oxygen we breathe, the water we drink and so much more, so that we may survive and multiply. This was necessary so man could begin to rule over all living creatures. To do so well, human beings need to work together to care for the world.

The message for us today is that we are commanded to take care of the earth and all that is in it – to protect and manage the resources that have been given to us to sustain our lives. As caretakers of God's creation, we need to sustain and improve people's lives. For this important and complex duty, God has given us manifold talents, skills and abilities. If we are not actively engaged in this work, we are wasting the very precious resources and talents provided by God.

This is frequently a forgotten and understated truth of our role as God's servants. Often our emphasis is on preaching the gospel and building up the Church. Of course, these are vital, but they should not be to the exclusion of Christian service, using our talents to bless those around us and care for God's creation. It is of paramount importance to realize that the New Testament has a lot to teach about Christian service, or *Diakonia* (see box).

Indeed, we can find a significant link between the Genesis command and New Testament Christian service. As we have seen, Genesis 2:15 says, "the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it". This was God's arrangement before man sinned and fell. After the fall, we find something similar, except that the location has changed, for Genesis 3:23 says "So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken".

Man must continue to work, not only for survival, but also to maintain his relationship with nature, of which man himself is a part. Most significantly the word "work" in the two Genesis verses above finds an equivalent in the New Testament term "*Diakonia*".

All around us in nature, we can see signs that humans are destroying the wonderfully created world that God provided for

us. Land and seas filled with rubbish, sick and dying animals, bleached coral reefs, and climate change are signs that we as humans have not taken care of creation as we should have. The Bible tells us that we are created in God's image and that we are responsible for caring for creation and those around us.

By using our talents in small and big ways, we can work to protect God's creation and love people in our community that need help and encouragement. By changing habits and finding ways we can safeguard our world, together we can make a big difference in protecting God's creation.

Will you join us in using your God-given talents to carry out Diakonia, protect God's creation and serve the needy people in your community?



WHAT IS DIAKONIA?

Diakonia is often also referred to as “Integral Mission” or showing “Christ’s love in action”.

The term “diakonia” comes from the Greek verb “diakonein” in the Bible, which means “to serve”. Diakonia is thus often referred to as “Christian Service”.

“Diakonia is the caring ministry of the Church. It is the Gospel in action and is expressed through loving your neighbour, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and fighting for justice”. (Church of Norway plan for diakonia, 2007, p. 5)

The Church has a long history of serving their members and their wider communities in many practical ways. Many brothers and sisters who have gone before us, have been faithful servants of God, using their talents to serve the world in many sectors of human and community development by caring for the needy, and looking after the planet.



CREATION CARE

Using our talents to care for God's creation

A CLEAN RIVER

Across China, churches are getting together to clean rivers in obedience to the biblical call to look after God's creation. This story is an example of how a church has done this and has worked parallel with the government to take better care of the environment.

In Hunan province, over 100 churches have collected more than 50 tonnes of rubbish from Xiang River. In Dali in Yunnan province, the church has mobilized people to collect waste batteries to protect Erhai Lake. The church in Qinghai province collected more than 1030 tons of rubbish from the Qing Shui river.

IN YUNNAN

When Chairman Xi Jinping visited Yunnan province in January 2015, he instructed the local government to protect the ecological environment and the water quality of Erhai Lake. In response, the Protestant and Catholic Church in Dali mobilized people to collect waste batteries to protect Erhai Lake.

IN HUNAN

After learning about the importance of practising diakonia in accordance with the Bible, church leaders in Hunan province discussed how to best do this together. All of the churches had many people who

It can be very beneficial to keep up to date with government policies. This story is such an example.

After the river cleaning, the water in Qing Shui River ran clear and the surrounding area looked again like it should – clean!



were keen to serve. What could they do? They had volunteers and time. So, more than 100 congregations located near Xiang River decided to clean the river together as there was too much rubbish floating in it. First, the pastors preached about the importance of creation care in their congregations. The following week, volunteers from the congregations went together to the river to collect rubbish. After that, the volunteers distributed free

textile bags in towns and encouraged people to use these instead of plastic bags. Over several months, the congregations collected more than 50 tonnes of rubbish.

IN QINGHAI

Yuanyuan church in Qinghai province decided to clean the Qing Shui River of rubbish as a way to show Christ's love in a very practical way and help to protect God's creation. 20 volunteers in the church



as well as villagers in Huangyuan county collected rubbish over the summer. A local Tibetan Buddhist monastery wanted to help, so two monks joined the cleaning efforts of the church. Over the course of four months, the 16-kilometre-long Qing Shui River was cleared of 1030 tons rubbish. Before they started, the river looked like a landfill. Both banks of the river and the river itself were covered in rubbish and plastic, and sundry products were floating

in the water. After the river cleaning, the water in Qing Shui River ran clear and the surrounding area looked again like it should – clean!

COULD YOUR CHURCH CLEAN A RIVER?

All these churches chose to use their resources, their time and passion, to look after God's creation. Perhaps your church could clean a river near you?

*These churches
chose to use their
resources, their time
and passion, to look
after God's creation.*







CREATION CARE



Transforming our farmland

MAKING GOOD USE OF THE LAND GOD GAVE OUR CHURCH

Churches are rooted in their community and should take care of both the spiritual and physical needs of their neighbourhood. Close to the city of Nan, Thailand, the church is working within the community to make life better for everyone in it. This is the story of how church land has become a blessing for the church and the community.

POOR HARVEST DUE TO ACIDIC SOIL

It has been 10 years since the church acquired the land on which they are farming. Initially, we planted rice there and used water from the mountains to irrigate it, but the harvest was very bad. The following year we tried planting rice again; yields increased slightly, but the soil was found to be barren. Even though the cultivated land was a large area, there was little

produce to harvest, and what was harvested was of poor quality. Because of this we decided to send samples of the soil and the water to a laboratory in Nan city. The lab-results showed that there weren't any problems with the water, but the soil was so sour that the crops could not grow properly.

During this 2-day-training they learned how to work with a soil that is acidic.

LEARNING TO FERTILIZE ... AND TURNING ORGANIC

Therefore, we decided that seven of the evangelists working on the farm would attend trainings in Nan city to improve their knowledge on this subject. During this 2-day-training they learned how to work with a soil that is "sour". They also learned about different types of composting, for example mixing faeces of pigs or

cows with dry rice stubbles. The students applied this new knowledge to the farming and after preparing the land they spread the fertilizer around and planted the vegetables. Within 45 days, the vegetables had grown big and we had a good harvest. The soil rested 15 days after this before new crops were planted again.

To ensure good soil and healthy produce, the team decided to turn this farm into an organic farm. We planted many kinds of vegetables and fruits: green vegetables, strawberries, melons, Japanese cucumbers, carrots and broccolis. The melons were the most profitable. When the people around saw the crop and the quality of the products in the garden, they returned to observe and learn the farming techniques. There were also people from the surrounding villages who came to study and be trained on farming techniques.

Some of the vegetables we planted were not known in the Nan area, like Japanese pumpkins, melon, bok choy and Japanese cucumber. During last year, we grew six varieties of vegetables and three varieties of melons. In addition to growing crops, we raise animals like pigs, oxen and cows and poultry with good results. Every month we hold meetings to evaluate the work that has been done and to plan for the next step. This is to ensure a good strategy and plan for our work.

INTERESTING PRODUCE – PEOPLE COME TO LEARN

There have been times when the local government has invited us to trade-fairs to





More and more people are interested in farming organically, which gives us good hope for the future.

promote and sell our products. Selling the products has not been difficult because there are many restaurants in the area that are interested in our produce, and there is an increased interest in buying organic products.

The existence of this farm is one significant way for the church to support itself financially. The farming brings income and improved finances and knowledge for the people who work there and the people who come to learn from the farming style. The whole community benefits from the existence of the farm where they can study and apply organic farming methods.

TURNING AWAY FROM CHEMICAL FERTILIZERS

In the past, the people in this area used a lot of chemical fertilizers on their farms. This has been a threat to the environment as well as to the health of the population. The area is mountainous, and when it rains, the chemical fertilizers run into the river. This river water is used for many purposes like drinking, washing, planting, etc., but is not good for their health. More and more people are interested in farming organically, which gives us good hope for the future of the environment and quality of people's lives.

ESTABLISHING A RESORT TO INSPIRE

The area where the farm is located is the second most popular tourist destination in Nan province. There is still

unused land available and the church in Nan aims to establish a resort there. The quality of the local environment and the landscape is an asset for this place. Part of the purpose of building this resort is to inspire and motivate customers to use and consume natural and organic products. Many churches in Thailand own or have access to farming land which they can use to benefit their communities. One of our goals is to share our knowledge about how to cultivate organic crops and vegetables by taking advantage of the way nature works – farming God's way!

USE WHAT YOU HAVE – USE YOUR TALENTS!

We want to use our talents not only to benefit the church, but also our community. We are using what we have: the land, our knowledge, our connections to authorities and training institutions, our motivation and passion and our fellowship in Christ.

Thank you, Jesus, for strengthening and advising all the leaders.











CREATION CARE



Home of Grace

HYDROPONICS, SOAP AND SECOND-HAND CLOTHING
– FINDING CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

Home of Grace, Bangkok, is a safe haven for women in difficult situations who need a shelter. Faced with decreasing funding, the staff of Home of Grace found alternative sources for income.

In the suburbs of Bangkok, we find Home of Grace. This is a safe haven for mothers-to-be, those who have given birth, and for women in difficult situations who need a shelter. The home has served women for over 30 years offering counselling, shelter, vocational training, advice on parenting and rest for the tired. Unfortunately, in recent years overseas funding has decreased. Instead of cutting activities, the staff in Home of Grace have used their talents and creativity to find alternative sources for income to be able to continue their work.

LEARNING ORGANIC FARMING

Ms Pisara and Miss Nipaporn have worked at Home of Grace for many years. They are both originally from the countryside. When they were young, they had to help their parents in the farm. Lack of access to artificial fertilizers at that time led their families to organic farming. Pisara and Nipaporn therefore learned how to make plants thrive with natural fertilizer.

Today, the garden surrounding the centre has become a place for growing organic vegetables, herbs and fruit, and both Pisara and Nipaporn have greatly benefitted from the knowledge they learned as children helping out in the family farm. The farming started first in a small corner of the garden, and then the area and range of crops were gradually expanded. Today there are 10 different types of vegetables and herbs in the garden as well as 6 fruit

varieties. Pisara and Nipaporn actively look for new ways to improve the garden. The crops they grow are used for cooking in the centre and sold to others. Neighbours frequently ask if they have vegetables or fruit for sale, because they know that the crops coming from Home of Grace are safe and healthy.

Pisara and Nipapor are always open to new ideas and are constantly looking for ways to improve their skills and talents in order to share their new knowledge with the women living in Home of Grace, and to raise more local income to keep the centre running.

HYDROPONIC SYSTEM

When a hydroponic system in the head office of the local church was no longer in use, the staff in Home of Grace asked to take it over. They sought knowledge online about hydroponic farming and started to grow lettuce. The first crop has already sold out, and they hope this will become a reliable source for income for Home of Grace in the future. There are plans to expand the range of vegetables in the hydroponic system, since organic vegetables are very popular in Bangkok.

SOAP FOR HOPE

Another activity started in Home of Grace recently, is soap making. A hygiene company provided a soap machine, cleaning equipment, and gave the staff training in how to upcycle used soaps into beautiful new soaps. A five-star hotel in Bangkok regularly delivers good quality used soaps to them. This is a win-win situation; Home


of Grace helps the hotel to reduce their waste and, at the same time, raises funds for their work by selling the soaps.

COMMUNITY STORE

Another way the staff has found to increase their income is the Home of Grace Community Store. To successfully run this store, the staff are cooperating with several other groups, including local authorities. Among others, they are cooperating with two international schools and an expat ladies' group.

The staff experienced that it was easy to get access to used clothes and other used items from international schools and expat groups and contacted them to ask for cooperation. The responses were positive, and today Home of Grace has regular access to used clothes and items, and not least, volunteers with different talents. Designers, advertisers, people with experience from sales, photographers are among volunteers who help to improve the store and promote it, as well as arranging monthly flea markets. All this provides valuable income for the centre and useful work training for the women living in Home of Grace. In addition to the Community store, Home of Grace runs a small coffee shop – “Garden Café”.

Pisara and Nipaporn, together with the staff of Home of Grace and many volunteers from different countries, are making a positive change, by using, sharing and developing their God given talents.

A photograph of two women standing in a garden. On the left is a large, dense green plant with heart-shaped leaves, growing on a metal trellis. The woman on the right, wearing a black t-shirt with a pink graphic and black pants, is pointing her right index finger towards the plant. The woman on the left, wearing a pink t-shirt and black pants, is smiling and pointing her right index finger upwards. In the background, there are residential buildings with red-tiled roofs and power lines. A white circular text box is overlaid in the upper right corner.

*Pisara and
Nipaporn are always
open to new ideas.*

*The Parable of
the Talents
— Matthew
25:14-30*

A RETIRED PASTOR'S PERSONAL REFLECTION

LEARNING AND REFLECTION

At one time or another most of us have tried to avoid the consequences of our actions with lame excuses of one type or another. Did you ever try to get out of a speeding fine? “I’m sorry officer, I didn’t see the speed limit sign”.

When we stand before God’s throne on judgement day and give an account of what we have done with our lives and with what God has given to us we won’t be able to avoid the consequences with lame excuses, as God knows exactly what has taken place in our lives.

In order to help us understand the seriousness of that accounting, Jesus told the parable of the talents. There are three threads or themes that run through this story which teach us about God, the master and what He expects from us.

**THE FIRST THEME:
WONDERFUL NEWS! A ONCE IN A
LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY.**

At the time of Jesus, most of the wealth was concentrated in just a few families. And this story is about one of them. The master gathers three of his employees around him and does an extraordinary thing – he entrusts all his wealth to them and then leaves on a journey.

The servants realise that this is a “once in a lifetime opportunity”. This is the opportunity for them to be able to exercise their

initiative and develop their gifts and rise to positions of greater responsibility, if they do well.

So, what do they do with this defining moment? In verse 16 it says, “The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.” Matthew 25:16

He responded at once to this great opportunity. This is a parable about the Kingdom of God where there are boundless opportunities for all of us and so, that same question is valid for us today. What do we do with the opportunities God gives to us?

Let me answer that question in its biblical context. In Psalm 139:13-14 it says, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

It is quite amazing to think that God created us as individuals. Having different abilities and different personalities – in fact, being unique, there is no-one else in existence that is exactly like you. And as we place our trust in Jesus and are born of the Spirit, so the Holy Spirit gives us additional spiritual gifts. The point being that all of these are gifts from God.

The Lord of the gifts has been very generous to you and He wonders: “What are you going to do with what I have given you?” How are you going to use your talents?

In this story, there are people with varying numbers of talents, but there aren’t any “no-talent” people. Likewise, there aren’t any “no-talent” people in our world. However, there is a “one talent” servant who buries his talent. Why? Maybe he was jealous of the other two servants who had so much more.

Unfortunately, there is a universal tendency to compare talents. We compare ourselves and wish we had what others have – their physical attractiveness or their success or their achievements. A part of the lesson of this story is that I must refuse to compare my talents with those of anyone else because it will only make me miserable. What is worse is that if I spend my life wishing I had the talents that others have, I will end up discounting my own and burying the treasures that the Lord has given to me.

You must come to identify, cultivate, invest, prize and celebrate the gifts that have been given to you. God is very wise and knew exactly what He was doing when He made you as you are. He did not make any mistakes, and He is well pleased with your unique combination of gifts. God has entrusted us with everything we need in order to fulfil the purposes for which He

put us on this earth in the first place. God does not ask us to live someone else’s life. He won’t ask us, “what did you do with what you didn’t have?”. But He will ask us, “what did you do with what I gave you?”

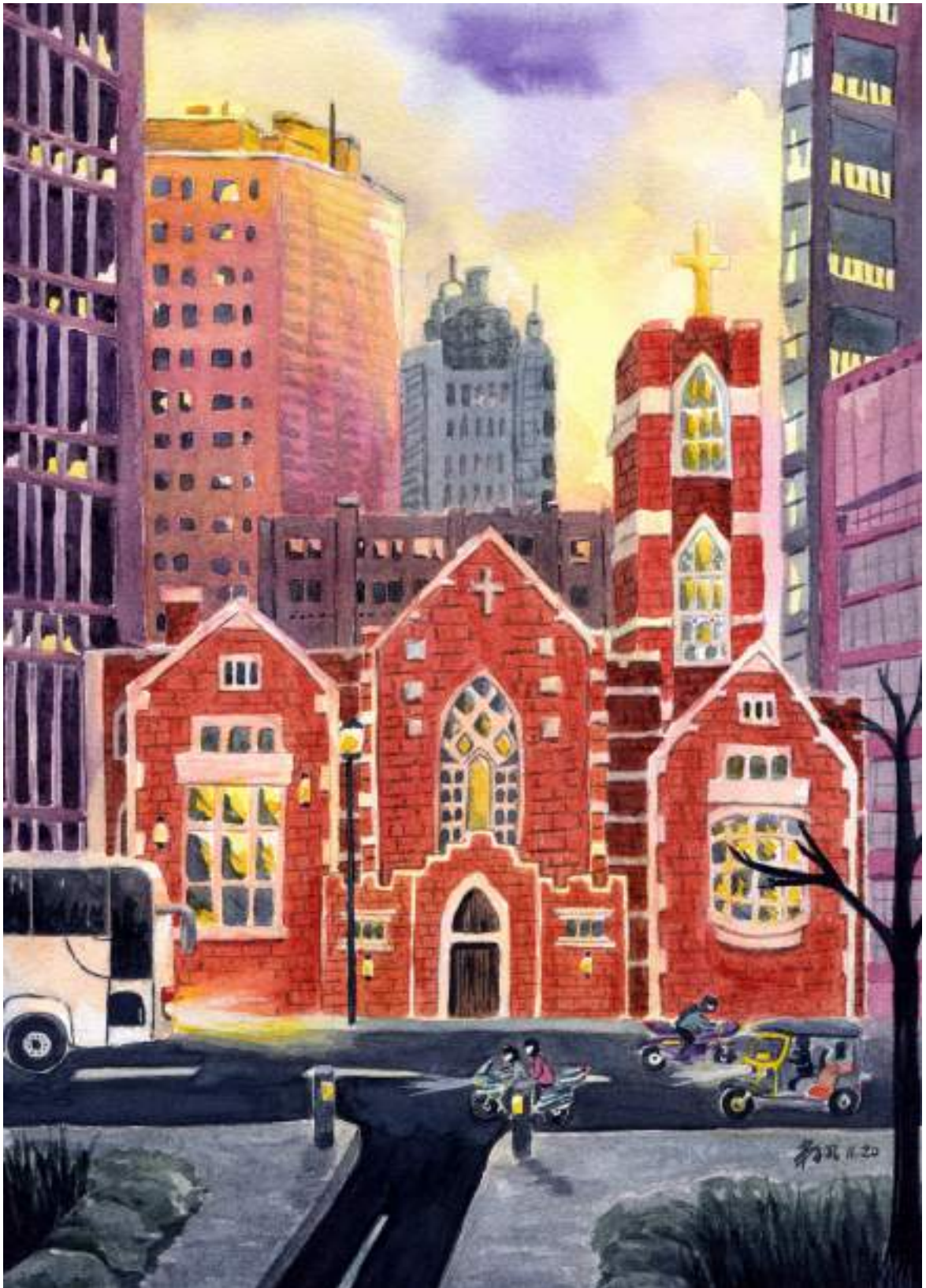
THE SECOND THEME: ACCOUNTABILITY.

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.” Matthew 25:19

The Lord of the gifts is the Lord who will settle accounts justly. When we think of the slave trade, when we think of the millions of innocent people suffering because of other people’s struggle for power or wealth, we long for that time when God will settle accounts.

In this parable, Jesus is saying that He is coming back. He, the Lord, will settle accounts with evil CEO’s of multinational corporations, violent criminals and corrupt leaders, and He will also settle accounts with you and me. In the parable, when the master settles accounts, the first two servants receive the same reward because they gave of their best.

But then he comes to the third servant who had received one talent, he says, “‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went



out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.”

This servant is trying to evade accountability for his actions. He’s saying, “Don’t blame me. It is your fault. The reason for my inactivity is rooted in your character. That’s why I didn’t do anything”.

The master does not remind the servant of just how generous he had been in the first place. Basically, what he is saying is, “You got this much right. It is important to me. Your life and what you do with what I have given you is of utmost importance to me. It matters for you and it matters for this world that desperately needs what I have to offer it through what I have given to you. It matters to me.”

Then he goes on to say, “If that’s really what you thought of me, if you really thought I was just this harshly demanding person, at least you should have done something. At least you could have invested the money”. In this story, the servant does not embezzle or defraud his master, and he is not judged for doing bad things, but he is judged for doing nothing.

**THE FINAL THEME:
THE LORD OF THE SETTLED
ACCOUNT IS ALSO THE LORD OF THE
ABUNDANT REWARD.**

The master comes back and sees what the first servant has done and says, “Well done,

good and faithful servant”. Wouldn’t it be great if, when we stand before the throne of God and give an account of what we have done with what He has given us, He looks at us and says “well done, good and faithful servant”?

However, the story does not end here. The master doesn’t say “Well done. Now as a reward you can live a life of luxury”. And neither will this happen when we stand before God. He won’t say “Well done. Now you can sit on a nice fluffy cloud and spend eternity being waited on hand and foot”.

The first two servants had proven themselves trustworthy with a few things and so they are given many more responsibilities. In Revelation 3:21 God says, “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne”. Likewise, God will be saying to us in eternity, “Now it’s time to get on with the real work. We have a whole new universe to subdue and create wonders in”.

Work will no longer be a curse, something that is a heavy burden – instead, a part of the reward of heaven is that we will see the full potential of humanity realised, including our own.

God never intended that we should compare ourselves with one another thinking “I wish I had all the gifts and abilities that

other person has”. You are unique. There is no-one else in the whole of humanity or history that is exactly like you. God was involved in creating your genetic code, in developing your character and personality. God has given you the opportunity to do things that only you can do.

There is so much that is outside of our control in life. So, let us spend our lives focusing on what we can do and not on what we can’t.

When I was a teenager and even into my early twenties, I really hated who I was and what I thought I could do. I wish somebody had said to me that God had made me to be the person that I was, that He thought my character and personality were brilliant and that He wanted to use me for His service. This is true for you as well. In your uniqueness, you can do unique things for God.

I would love to think that maybe there could be one of two things written on my gravestone: Either “Well done good and faithful servant”, or in Hebrews 11 where it talks about people of faith – “God is not ashamed to be called His God”.



Becoming stronger

DISCOVERING OUR GOD-GIVEN GIFTS





We spoke to Aiza, who has to work abroad to feed her family. She reflects on her life as an expat Filipina and her dreams of returning home soon.

Aiza (35) is a widowed mother of two young boys. She has lived and worked in Hong Kong for the past five years as a domestic helper and is her family's primary breadwinner. She has had to leave her children in the care of her mother and sister. She is not alone. At present, there are around 2.2 million Filipinos working abroad, many of them leave families behind and send money home every month.

After almost five years of working abroad, Aiza is hoping to return to her two sons soon and settle down permanently in the Philippines. We sat down and chatted, and I asked her to reflect on her time abroad.

When you meet Aiza, the first thing you will notice is her cheerful personality and contagious laughter. Her joy in knowing Jesus and thankfulness for life is visible. "I became a Christian in the Philippines. Jesus changed my life and gave me an eternal hope. God has continued to work in me and to bless and develop me," Aiza says with a smile.

A NEW CONFIDENCE

When asking in what way she has changed most since moving abroad, Aiza doesn't miss a beat: "Confidence!" she answers. "When I was younger, my mum would make all the decisions, and after I got married to my late husband, my mother-in-law made all the decisions. I used to

feel that I couldn't make any decisions, nor that I had any kind of voice myself. I also felt so shy and scared of trying new things. However, over the past few years I have become more mature and I can think more about ways I can look after my own family and I can initiate positive change myself."

CHALLENGES AND ENCOURAGEMENT

"So, what has helped you change in this way?" I ask curiously. Aiza looks into the distance and puts up two fingers stating confidently: "New challenges and a very encouraging friend! When I first came to Hong Kong, everything was different from my home village: the weather was cold, people used the underground and even most of the tasks in my job, including cooking and cleaning, were actually new tasks for me because others used to do these tasks at home."

COURAGE

"So, how did you react to this new situation?" Aiza answers: "I was very scared at first, but my friend encouraged me to be courageous and try new things, even though I was uneasy. My friend often said: 'Even if you fail, just try again – it won't be a disaster!'. So, I tried, and I found that God has given me abilities I had no idea that I even had! Sometimes, things would not work out according to the plan, like when I got lost for four hours using the underground or when I tried to make a new recipe and the dish did not turn out so well. However, I soon discovered that very often I was successful, and soon cooking and baking became some of my





*New challenges and
a very encouraging
friend motivated me!*

favourite activities because I found that I could make food that tasted great and that would make other people happy. That really encouraged me!”

DISCOVERING NEW GIFTS

“After gaining confidence cooking and baking, I decided to also try other things that I had never tried before to see how it would go, and I was surprised at how much I enjoyed things I had never tried before. I discovered that I was not only good at making food, but also organizing the household and planning, operating a computer and even telling people about Jesus. Before I came to Hong Kong, I would never have shared my faith in Jesus with strangers, but now that I have tried, I love doing it. I keep discovering new gifts God has given me! Now church is online due to Covid-19, but I cannot wait for when normal church opens, so that I can try helping teaching Sunday school to discover if teaching children is an area God has gifted me in. I really like the idea of teaching young children about Jesus.”

ENCOUNTERING RACISM

Mesmerised by her enthusiasm, I am curious about the new challenges she has met abroad, so I ask: “What has been most challenging and how have you approached these challenges?” She looks pensive and serious, and then she answers: “I think encountering racism here has challenged me the most. The first times I encountered bad treatment and abuse, I just felt stupid as I felt that I was no-one,

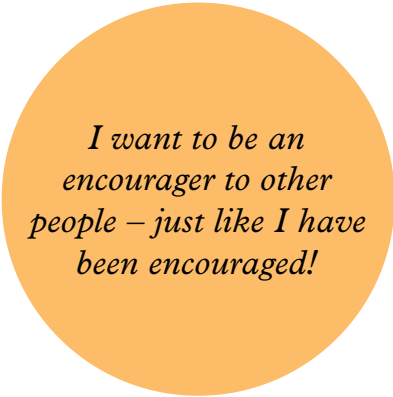
so it did not matter. I just felt bad inside and I ran away. After realizing that I am cherished daughter of God and a human being with feelings, I decided to challenge people who discriminate me. I know that I am created by God and valuable to Him. Mostly, people react well to this. Even if the person gets even more angry, I know that God loves me and that is all that matters at the end of the day. I do not get my value from other people, but from God.”

GOD’S PRICELESS CREATION

“Many Filipinas here believe they are worthless because they have low status in this culture, and that they should not complain or fight. I encourage them to have courage and tell people when their feelings are hurt and stand up for their rights. We are God’s creation, equal in God’s eyes and valuable to Him, no matter what society might try to tell us.”

CLOSER TO GOD

“Many people get scared by rejection and discrimination, yet you seem to be coping well with it. Why?” I ask. She smiles and answers: “As I have gotten to know God better, my faith in Jesus has grown. In this situation, even rejection has made me stronger. When people discriminate or treat me badly, I remember that I am a loved and precious daughter of God. Through God you know that you can do things that are difficult, because He is so strong and powerful. He enables me to do things – even things I didn’t know I could do!”



I want to be an encourager to other people – just like I have been encouraged!

NEW ADVENTURES

“So, when you return to the Philippines, what do you plan to do?” I ask. “I’m not sure yet, but I feel like there are so many possibilities, and that makes life quite exciting to me. Before, I would just do what people told me I should do and not dare to explore other alternatives. Now, I realize that God has given me lots of different gifts and that I can use them to bless others in different ways. Now, I realise that I can cook and bake new foods, organize a household, do gardening and grow plants, sew clothes, repair things, give massages, act, dance, sing and play the guitar. All of these things I can use to honour God and encourage others,” Aiza answers with a calm confidence. “There are even more things that I have not yet done, that I would like to try out, like teaching children. Perhaps I could study to become a teacher? Or perhaps I could start a restaurant or a bakery? I am praying to God for guidance and will see what doors God opens. God is faithful and provides what we need. It’s fun to be part of His adventures!”

ENCOURAGE OTHERS!

“If you were to sum up your experience abroad over the past five years, what are three lessons you have learnt that you would like to share with others?” She stops for a minute to think, but is clear in her answer: “I know three things all people can try, wherever they are and whatever they do:

1. Draw closer to God! Seek God first, and He will heal and give you strength.
2. Use your talents! Try to do things you’ve never tried to do before, even if it is difficult, and discover how God has gifted you. If you fail, you can try something else!
3. Encourage people around you! I could never have changed the way I have changed in the last five years if it was not for my friend who encouraged me when I was down. Encouraging other people and praying for them can have a huge impact! When I go back to the Philippines, I also want to be an encourager to other people – just like I have been encouraged!”

JOSHUA 1:9

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”



BEING A MOTIVATOR



Esther's heart for her people

BEING A FACILITATOR IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

Esther makes a difference in her community. Through education, practical work, motivation and an inclusive way of life, she makes a change for her neighbours through the use of her newfound talents.

My name is Esther, and my family are a part of the Gypsy community in India. My passion for ministry goes back 40 years ago, starting with my father, Pastor D. John Chidambaram. He lost his parents when he was 7 years old and started living on the streets, without anyone to love and care for him. It seemed like no one was looking out for him. But Jesus was. A missionary saw him living by himself and brought him to the city of Chennai. Eventually he became a pastor and decided to return back to his native home where he could live and serve amongst his people – the gypsy tribe. He got married, and together

with his wife they started doing ministry in their community. However, the response from people was hostile. They did not want to hear about Jesus, and they rejected him and his wife.

It seemed like no one was looking out for him. But Jesus was.

WITNESSING GOD'S MIRACLES AT A YOUNG AGE

For as long as I can remember our family has had little to no money. I have wanted to serve God since I was 7 years old. At that time my dad was running a children's home, and there were about 50 children living there, but there was never a lot of money to run this orphanage. I remember one day; we were all hungry and there was no food for the children in the children's home. I asked my dad about what we were going to do, and he said: "Ask Jesus, God



will help you, he listens to the prayers of little children”. Immediately I called all the children from the orphanage and asked them to join in prayer with me. After 20 minutes of prayer, a stranger knocked on the door and asked if any of the people in charge of the orphanage were at home. “I am,” I answered him. He looked around and said that he had brought wedding food because the wedding they were catering was cancelled. I was ecstatic – My God provided us with a delicious meal, abundant, with different types of food! We were used to only eating rice porridge, but that day we witnessed an awesome miracle. Praise be to the Lord.

FINDING YOUR WAY THROUGH TRIBULATIONS

Persecution of Christians has been a constant factor influencing our lives, and it is increasing rapidly throughout the country. Our people’s beliefs are different from

the belief my family and I have in Jesus, and they do not like that we minister to them. The community leaders and priests from the village temples are constantly trying to defame our name and persecute us because we don't follow the traditional gypsy way of worshipping. The worshippers in our churches have been attacked several times, and we have been driven out of our home to seek shelter on the street or in churches, fearing for our lives. We have been broken hearted and beaten, but in the midst of it all, God has provided and fought our battles for us, as per Exodus 14:14: "The Lord shall fight for you; you need only to be still".



With God's guidance we planned to build a new church after the old one was burnt and damaged. We used our savings and collected a small amount to start the project. But some religious leaders came and damaged what we started and threatened us, forcing us from our home next to the church and into the streets. This incident led me to depression and stress in my personal and spiritual life, as my parents were getting older and we were without a place to seek shelter. Our family was devastated, and we felt like we didn't have the strength to live anymore. Our house had been taken from us; we were helpless. We prayed to God for strength to face these challenges and tribulations for Christ. By the grace of God, we got a place to reside after a year on the streets. Our Jesus rescued us from the hands of the devil, and He gave us a big victory. We felt God's guidance to start the project of building a church again, in the same place

where we had not been allowed to worship for more than one year.

CULTURE CLASSES AND EDUCATION

I started a children's ministry, wanting to tell the story of Jesus to the children in our community and teach them about the culture and traditions of our community. Evening classes were offered for free, but nobody showed up. I was disappointed and prayed for God's wisdom – I knew he had called me to work with children. I did not know what to do.

The first year we had 30 children, the next year 70, and now there are around 200.

After some time had passed, 6 children started attending class and I taught them various traditional dances. As I got to know these children, I became more and more aware of the lack of education in our community. It is not common for people in the gypsy tribe to send their children to school. The school is looked at with suspicion, and parents fear that the children will be beaten and bullied if they go there. My people are looked down upon by others because of poor hygiene and lack of education. I was convinced that education would be a key to empower the community and a way to earn their respect from others outside the gypsy tribe, so I wanted to help children get educated. I went to several of the closest schools and asked if they could offer free education to gypsy children. It took many tries, but I finally got a yes from one school. The first challenge was overcome, but I still had one big challenge left; I had to convince the parents that it was safe to send their children to school. This was not easy. Even knowing that they would receive free education, only one couple agreed to send their child to school. Some time passed; the community saw that the child was safe at school. They saw that he did not get hurt, and therefore more and more parents decided to send their children to school as well. The first year we had 30 children, the next year 70, and now there are about 200 gypsy children that are being educated in school with God's help.

BUILDING TOILETS, IMPROVING LIVING CONDITIONS

When I was in my mid-twenties, I had the opportunity to do my Bible-studies in Norway. I was so happy and felt privileged to go abroad and pursue my studies, being the first person from my community having the opportunity to study abroad. I finished my studies and went back to India. In Europe I saw to my surprise that they had toilets inside their houses. In our town in India we don't have toilets, but defecate outside in the nature. This is unhygienic and bad for health, but also dangerous for women because there's a high risk of being assaulted and raped. Therefore, with some financial support from friends, I built my own toilet in our house. Our neighbours and the rest of the community were curious and came to look at what I was doing, asking me questions and looking at the toilet. After seeing that this toilet was safer and more convenient than going outside in nature, they started building toilets for themselves too. This was another step in the right direction for my people, living conditions were improving.

BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT: SEWING MACHINES AND CATTLE-REARING

My family and I wanted to help women to become more independent through education, developing skills that help them to become more financially independent. Therefore, we started a self-help group for the ladies in our community, where they could sew together and get income from selling what they made. By God's grace, we were able to gather 5 sewing machines.



Many are benefitting and blessed by this job opportunity, and we rejoice with them. In addition to the self-help group for women, we are in the planning stages of starting a cattle-rearing project for our people, so they can do animal husbandry and create income and not have to struggle as much for survival.

THE FUTURE: A NEW CHURCH FOR THE COMMUNITY, NEW HOUSES FOR FAMILIES

Despite the persecution we have faced, and at times are still facing from the government and people in our village, our church has grown. And because of that, our building has become way too small. Everything we do, we do by faith. After

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

a long time of planning and facing many difficulties, we have finally, by faith, started our building project for a second new church. We hope that we can build a place to worship and glorify God's name in the midst of our community. God has opened a door to worship him in two different places with loud praise and joy, even if the church building is not yet finished.

In the future, we hope that we will be able to build new houses for poor families.

The people in our community have changed their opinions of us. They initially thought we were their enemy, but now they see that God has provided for us even when we are faced with persecution and opposition. God is moving hearts.





YOU TOO CAN BE A FACILITATOR!

You may have noticed that in many of these stories there are a few key individuals. These people work with their churches and communities to help them discover their talents and make use of them. They help bring about positive change. We could call these people “facilitators”, people in the community who act as informal leaders in initiating projects, motivating and activating others. You might think that a facilitator is someone who has training on the subject of facilitating, and that you don’t have the necessary competence to do this. Being a facilitator is not about being an “expert” or a “professional”! You can start with developing an attitude and enthusiasm for recognizing the talents in your community and encouraging people to use them. Some key characteristics of a facilitator are: a willingness to learn, being compassionate, sociable, respected by the community and church, prayerful, inclusive, valuing others, flexible, confident, patient, affirming, accepting and humble.

We would challenge you to consider: how about you make sure you are one of those people? Everyone can have a positive impact on their lives and the lives of those in their church and their community. Don’t sit back and wait for others to do something, get busy!

Being salt and light in the community

SHARING EXPERIENCES AND IDEAS





'If you want to do something, don't hesitate to do it. Just trust in God and start with the small things. With creative ideas and being open to learn from other people, you will see good results!'

These are the encouraging words of 41-year-old Charya from Cambodia. He's married and has two children – and now, he gets to spend more time with them too.

He and his wife used to spend long hours working for the same company and didn't have much time at home. They worshipped together at church on Sundays but weren't really more involved than that.

Then, one day, staff from a Christian NGO came to their church. They spoke about empowering people to transform their lives by building good relationships and sharing their knowledge, skills and

ideas with each other. The church could see the great value in this kind of thinking, and they chose Charya to be trained to take this work forward in their community.

As Charya describes it, the work gets people to 'think more deeply on how to use resources, to be more creative and to help to gather people [to do] things together...'

SHARING EXPERIENCES AND ENCOURAGING EACH OTHER

Through weekly meetings and Bible studies, the group members build their faith, encourage each other and share their knowledge. Charya himself learned about raising animals from other members in the group. This gave him and his wife the idea to start a small business raising chickens, ducks, geese and pigeons. Now they make an income selling eggs and chicken meat. As a result, they have a better standard of living and it also means they can work for themselves, allowing them more time to look after their children.

Charya says that other church members have also found ways to increase their income through their involvement in the project. This is a great encouragement to him. He says it reminds him of the scripture that calls us to be salt and light – to be willing to share our experiences, ideas and knowledge to help improve the world around us.

How can we make better use of our resources, be more creative and help people collaborate?





*The Home of Angels
has become like a
second home for
many families.*



SERVING THE MARGINALIZED

The Angel Fellowship

LEARNING AND REHABILITATION CENTRE
FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The ‘Angel Fellowship’ started over 10 years ago as a way to provide fellowship and vocational training for people with disabilities and their families. From this, a professional training centre has been established, providing special education and rehabilitation as well as support for parents and caregivers.

The “Angel Fellowship” started in the church where I am a pastor. I am Pastor Wong and our congregation is made up of a variety of people, including many people with different mental and physical disabilities.

SELF-RELIANCE, DIGNITY AND BELONGING

The idea of “Angel Fellowship” can be traced back to 2008. At that time, our team noticed that there were many people

in the community who had to stay at home because of their disability. They had few or no friends, were not attending any social activities, were not employed and were excluded from the community. The loneliness and helplessness of these people and their families deeply grasped our hearts and we wanted to do something to help them. As a result, Angel Fellowship for disabled people was formed to help them get vocational training so that they could live a life of self-reliance and of dignity and to provide a place of belonging for them in the fellowship of the church. In the process of carrying out services for people with disabilities, volunteers of the church become more and more active and have found multiple ways to provide services of support. Many of the people with disabilities have difficulty coming to the church, so volunteers offer transportation.

Children who were once stuck at home with few prospects, are now dreaming about what they want to be when they grow up: English translators, writers, inventors, computer programmers and graphic designers.



A SATURDAY SCHOOL FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

During these fellowships, some parents of children with disabilities shared about their daily struggles. Because the schools could not give the children the help they needed, they had to stay at home even though a lot of the children did not have any mental disabilities. The parents bore the economic pressure of treatment and rehabilitation in addition to caring for a

child with disabilities, which made them physically and emotionally exhausted. To address this situation, we initiated “Home of Angels” (HoA) in 2014, a weekly Saturday school that provided special education and rehabilitation for children with various disabilities and their families. Children attended classes in the morning and rehabilitation training in the afternoon, including physical therapy, art therapy and music therapy. The



teachers, staff, and most of the rehabilitation therapists were volunteers from the church. HoA not only provides education for these children, but also the opportunity for them to make friends and have fellowship. Additionally, this arrangement serves as a support group for the parents. They meet up when accompanying their children and can support and encourage each other as well as sharing resources. The physical and emotional pressure on

the parents has been greatly reduced, and the HoA has become like a second home for many of these families.

FROM MEETING ONCE A WEEK TO MEETING EVERYDAY

Limited by the venue and resources, the church could only arrange these classes once a week, which was far less than what was needed. Therefore, I gathered my team and we started to raise money in

*“Although I can’t
walk, I can do a
lot of the things
you can do”*

2016 for a more professional training centre. Two years of hard work and fundraising resulted in the church being able to finally buy an apartment in 2018 and open a new centre for children and parents. Since then, the children have their own daily learning and rehabilitation centre open from Monday to Friday. The centre can serve 15 children with disabilities. These children who were once locked up at home and thought useless are now dreaming about what they want to be when they grow up: English translators, writers, inventors, computer programmers and graphic designers.

During a special Christmas performance in the church, a little girl with a cerebral palsy proudly said to the congregation: “Although I can’t walk, I can do a lot of the things you can do”. With the support of HoA, children have been integrated into regular schools and are enjoying studying with other children.

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF FELLOWSHIP AND READY FOR MORE

Over the course of 10 years, with the resources mobilized and volunteers being helped to discover their hidden talents and abilities, the church has been able to support more than 200 people with disabilities and their families. The children attending HoA are growing day by day and there are plans to provide vocational training for older children, giving them the chance to work and earn a living.





*Be transformed
and use your
talents cheerfully!*

LEARNING AND REFLECTION

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. ³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. ⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to your faith. ⁷If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Romans 12:1 – 8

An important goal in Christian Community Development work is the transformation of individuals and the community. People are to live abundant lives physically, mentally and spiritually. The community is to attain harmonious and peaceful relationships both with God and other humans. The Bible speaks about this in for example Paul's

letter to the Romans 12:1-8. In chapter 12, Paul explains how followers of Christ must change their thinking and behaviour.

THE CHANGES

The first necessary change is to “be transformed by the renewal of your mind”, instead of conforming to the pattern of this world (12:2). The corrupted world has many ways to influence and control people's minds, through traditions, cultures, principles and values that are against God's good will. Often this influence can lead us to godless and selfish lives. Our thinking must be changed by God's values.

The second necessary change is to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (12:1). Before they became Christians, people were living mostly for their own benefit. They were letting “sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires” (6:12). After believing in Jesus, they must offer their lives to serve and please God. Our lives in this world, and the community we live in, must be motivated not by our own selfish desires, but by committing to fulfil God's purpose.

A major principle of the Use Your Talents approach is that effective Christian community development starts by a “change of the mind”. The poor and under-privileged communities are often locked up in ways of thinking that hinder changes. Many see themselves as powerless and can only wait

for help from others. Worse still, they may think it is normal to be exploited or to exploit others to protect personal interests. In Paul's words, this kind of thinking must be challenged. A renewed way of thinking will enable individuals to reform their lives and also have positive effects on the community. He explains this in Romans chapter 12.

ONE BODY IN CHRIST

Paul describes the Christian community as "many members forming one body in Christ" (12:4-5). Believers are not just taking care of themselves. The new thinking encourages them to see every believer as limbs and parts of one body fully integrated, functioning to contribute to the life of the body of Christ on earth. Moreover, this body exists and lives according to the will of Christ. To have Christ as their head is fundamental to the healthy development of a group of believers, as they come from many different backgrounds. Paul is here writing to Jewish and gentile believers living in Rome, often enemies of each other with different languages, skin colour, levels of economic resources, status, citizenship, and the like. Such differences have caused broken relationships and conflicts in our world. This is why Paul warns against the thinking that we are superior and more important than others (12:3).

The "one body" concept has another important implication for community

development. Paul says, "we have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us" (12:6). All Christians have "gifts" given by God, specific talents, or abilities that should be used for good purposes and to benefit the body of Christ – that is the Church here on earth. This is another major tenet in *Use Your Talents*. Having changed our minds, no longer hanging onto our perceived powerlessness or superiority, we must go one step further, and recognize that all believers indeed possess precious and valuable God-given talents. Everyone is important and has an indispensable role to play in building and developing the community they belong to. According to the rich grace of God and the many gifts He has given to the believers, there are diverse ways in which individuals can contribute to community development. God has blessed us richly with a wide diversity of abilities, talents and resources; examples of these can be found in verses 6 to 8: these are prophecy, service, teaching, encouragement, giving, leading, caring, providing and showing mercy. For simplicity we can sort them into two groups of speaking and serving. However, their functions and effects overlap and are mutually reinforcing. Speaking can convey knowledge of God's will, explain truths, and reprimand and counsel the unfaithful ones. Service can provide the needs of the disadvantaged, encourage the oppressed, and cheer up the downhearted. When all members are conscientiously participating, the commu-

nity can develop in a healthy and sustainable way. The list of gifts given in the Bible is not comprehensive; He has graced us with many more in addition to these!

USE YOUR TALENTS!

In a world of broken relationships, mistrust, exploitation and poverty, the Use Your Talents approach challenges us to change our minds about how the world should be and how we should live. Let us strive to know God personally and God's will for the world and for ourselves, so that people and communities can be renewed, and all may enjoy a good God-centred life. Our challenge is to discover and use the talents that God has graciously given to us to help us obey His will. We should all co-operate to transform the fallen world, making communities more harmonious, and people's lives happier.





SERVING THE MARGINALIZED

Tutoring with love – building hope

AFTER SCHOOL CLASSES FOR DISADVANTAGED KIDS

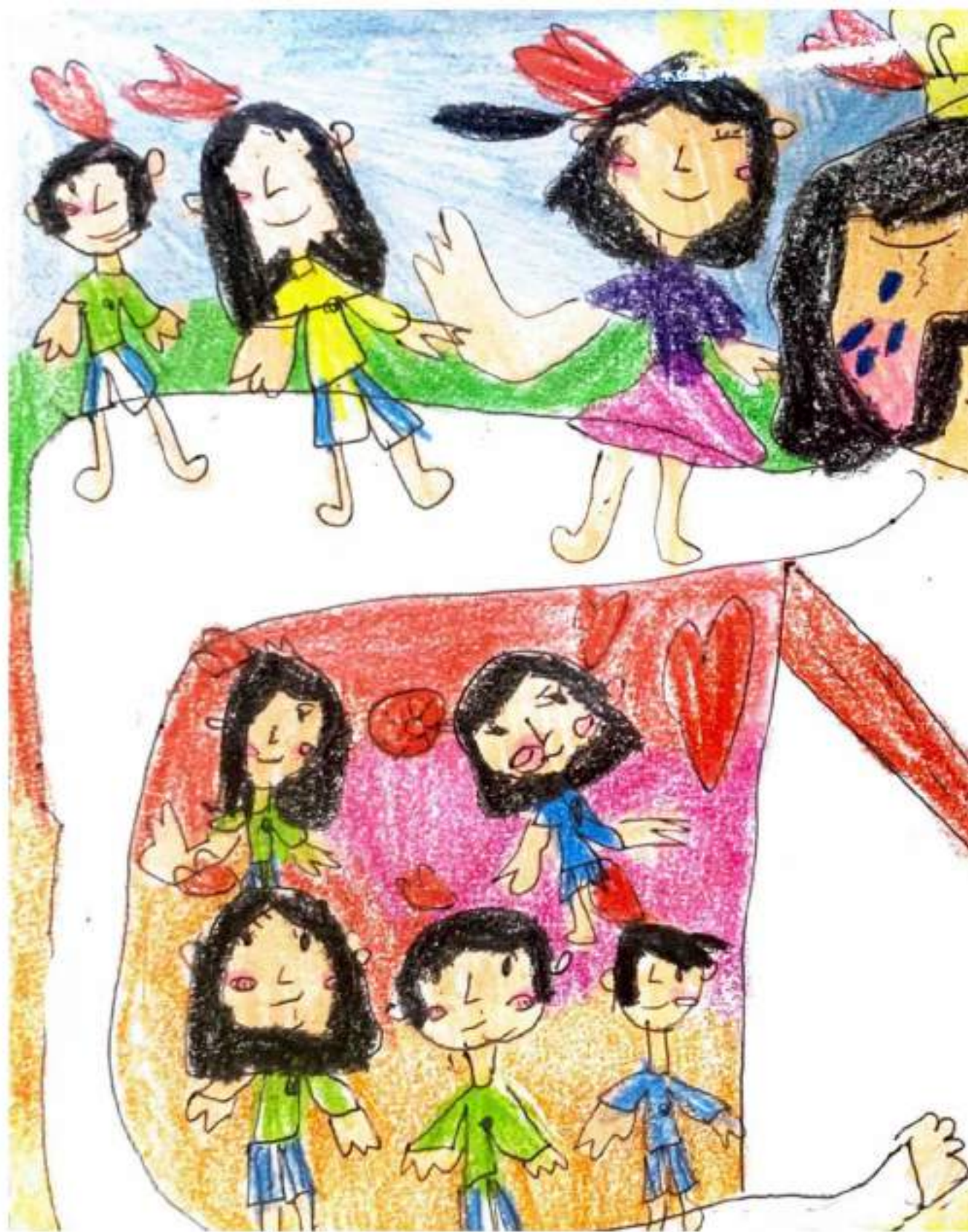
In 2014, Sister Phan resigned her job, wanting to help children in need. Now, 12 primary school and middle school students attend her after-school classes and have dinner together.

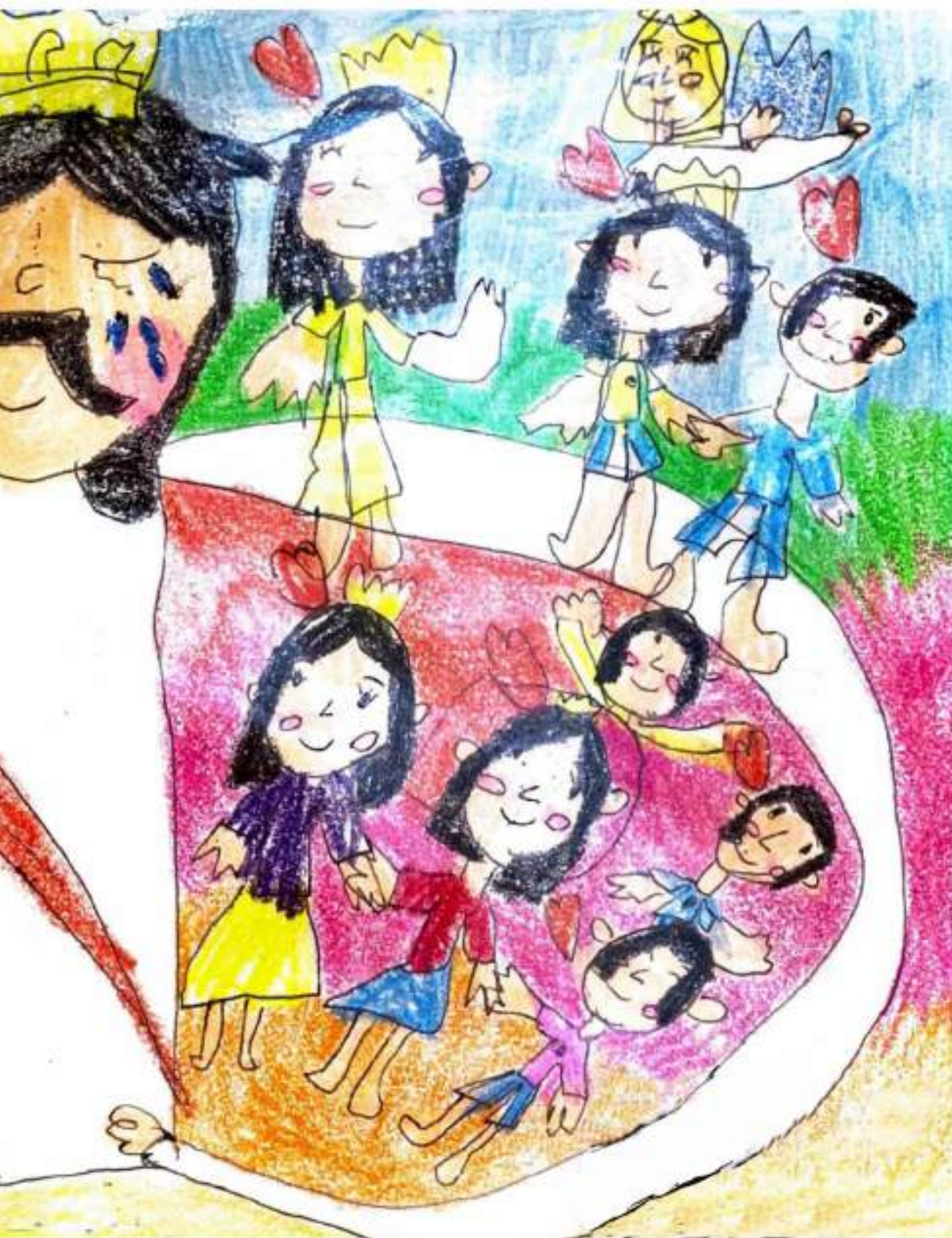
WANTING TO HELP CHILDREN FALLING BEHIND

You can call me sister Phan. In 2014 I resigned from my job in a good company because I wanted to help children in need. I was very excited to begin to work in youth ministry. Three years later, I decided to focus on a poverty-stricken community in a suburban area where I wanted to use my time, passion and abilities to help the poor children and their families. The people of this community were all migrant workers from rural areas close to the city. Most of them were living with little income due to disabilities, diseases or poverty. Others

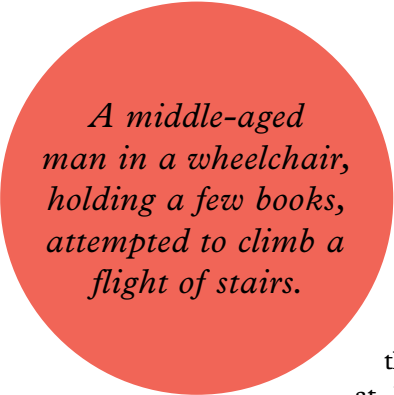
came from broken families or were elderly without children who could not care for them. Anyone who enters the community for the first time cannot help but be moved by the number of people wandering aimlessly around in the streets, including people with disabilities. A lot of children are not at school because they struggle with academics and fall behind. The teachers blame the children for causing them headaches, and most of the parents of these children are too poor to hire tutors,

Anyone who enters the community for the first time cannot help but be moved by the number of people wandering aimlessly around in the streets, including people with disabilities.





Art by Elsa Yuen



A middle-aged man in a wheelchair, holding a few books, attempted to climb a flight of stairs.

are too busy or lack the knowledge themselves to help the kids in their studies. This results in these children either playing games on their phones, watching TV at home or spending time outside in the streets.

PLANNING TO OPEN AFTER-SCHOOL CLASSES

I learned about this situation and went to visit the families living in the community, anxious about how the children were doing. I wanted to approach these families with love, compassion and sincerity, and thankfully they responded by telling me many of their problems. After listening to their stories, I went to the community leaders with the intent to cooperate with them to improve the lives of the people in the community. When they listened to my plan of opening an after-school class for the disadvantaged kids, they were very pleased, and generously allocated two rooms for me to use. The parents were over the moon and volunteered to cook dinner for the children attending class.

TEACHERS FOUND IN UNEXPECTED WAYS

As location and food was arranged, the only resource we lacked was teachers. So, I sat down with my team and we prayed to God, asking him to provide volunteers who could help teach the classes. Two days later whilst visiting the community, I saw a middle-aged man in a wheelchair. He held a few books in his hand and attempted,

with great difficulty, to walk up a flight of stairs. I went forward to help him and talk to him, and I learned that he used to be a university student but became a paraplegic due to a car accident. He was now making a living by providing tutoring. When I asked him whether he would be interested in helping the children, he agreed happily to teach reading and writing for free. A few days later, after hearing about the project, the son of one of my friends offered to be a math teacher.

One year has passed, and there are now 12 primary school and middle school students who attend the after-school class and have dinner together every Friday. Five families take turns in cooking for the kids. Both the kids and their parents are very grateful to our team, because not only do the kids perform much better in school, but their families are also happier and more harmonious than before.

WANTING TO SEE CHANGES IN THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

I am still not satisfied, because I want to see changes in the whole community. Every New Year's Eve I organize volunteers from churches to celebrate with the children in the community, making gifts they can give to the elderly, and helping the elderly clean their rooms. Thanks to the house visits many families have been comforted and given opportunities to develop their vocational skills. Whether it is children, parents or old people – everyone can feel that there's love moving in the community, and that hope is rising.



Walking on water

BIBLE STUDY FOR SMALL GROUPS
WANTING TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE

– From Tearfund’s *“Umoja: Facilitators Guide”*.

LEARNING AND REFLECTION

As members of the Church and our communities, we can work together to bring positive change to the community and transform families and individuals. This can involve taking a risk. It demands courage and faith to perhaps take on something new or meet with people we may not like or have a prejudice against.

This Bible study encourages us to take a risk, in the assurance that God is faithful and will guide and help us through the difficult challenges we might face.

If you want to, you can split this Bible study into three sections: *Seeing the wind*, *Walking on water* and *Focus on Jesus*.

Read Mark 6:45-56

SEEING THE WIND

1. What aspects of this project do you fear most or keep you from trusting God?
2. How can these be addressed practically and spiritually?
3. What is one step you could take today to address these fears?
4. What experiences have you had where God has enabled you to take a risk?

WALKING ON WATER

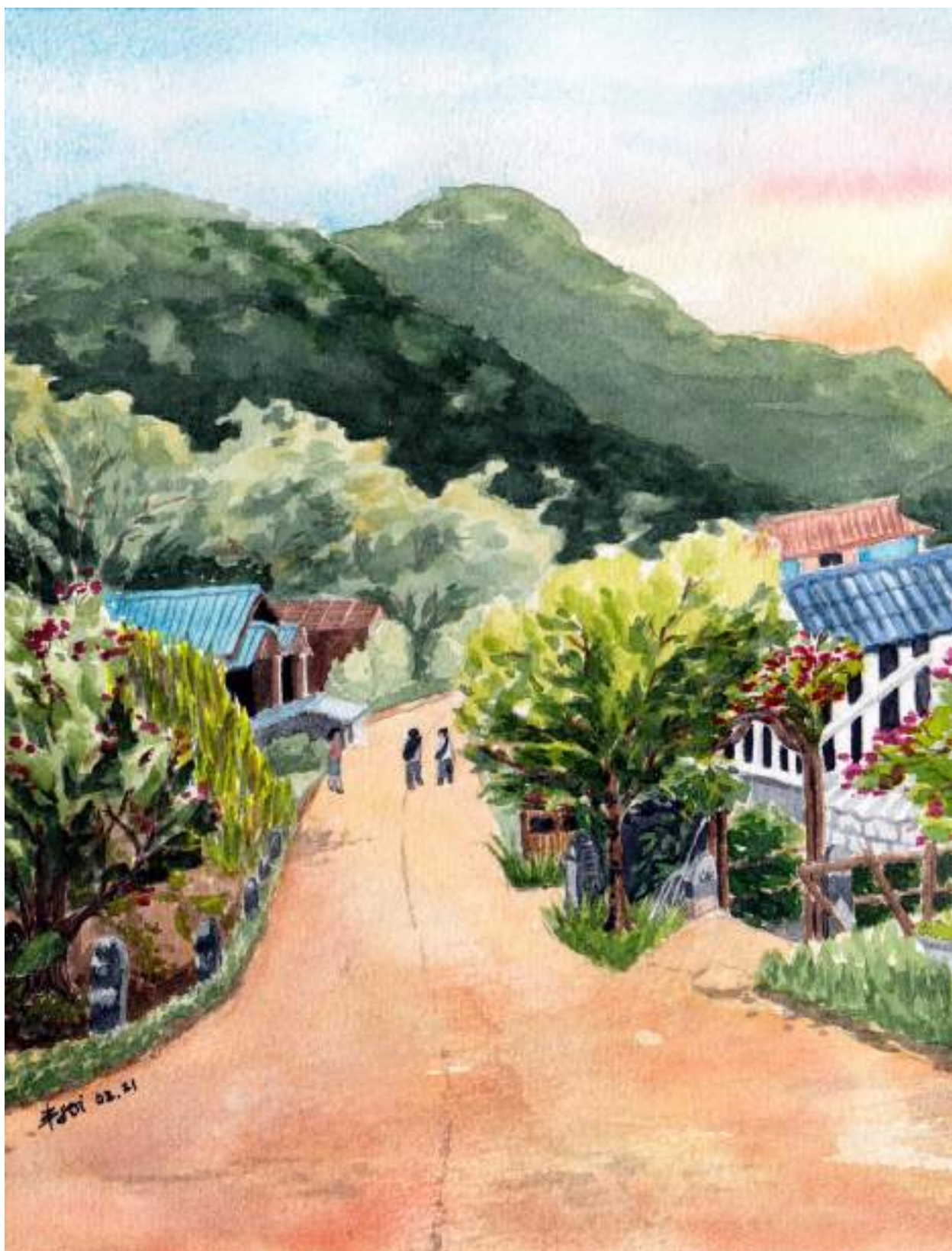
1. How have the challenges and problems you have faced in the past had an effect on your spiritual growth?
2. In what ways do you think the project team can grow through the challenges of this project?
3. How do we create time and space to reflect on the challenges and pray about them?

FOCUS ON JESUS

1. What things help us to step out and take a risk?
2. In what ways can we encourage each other?

PRAYER: We pray that you will have the strength to stick it out over the long haul – not the grim strength of gritting your teeth but the glory-strength God gives. A strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us.

Colossians 1:11 (The Message)





*Working together to
bring positive change
to the community and
transform families and
individuals.*



SERVING THE MARGINALIZED



When the whole church cares

COUNSELLING FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

With the help of her pastor, May set up a counselling office for women with unwanted pregnancies. Now the whole church is involved in providing support and resources for both women and families with troubles.

My name is May. I started serving in the church 10 years ago after accepting Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. After I married, my husband and I became co-workers in the church. However, I felt that my gifts were not fully developed and used.

STUDYING COUNSELLING

While serving in the church, I discovered that I was good at counselling sisters and helping them be set free by applying the word of God. Therefore, I decided to study counselling and obtain a counselling certificate, hoping that day I would

have the opportunity to serve the Lord through counselling.

COUNSELLING FOR SINGLE MOTHERS

Two years ago, my heart was deeply touched when brother Tan preached about the protection of life. My heart went out to the women who were considering abortion, and I longed for an opportunity to care for and serve these women. I approached my pastor and shared my thoughts with him, unexpectedly he agreed that we should do something for those women. With the help of the pastor, who also was the director of a local hospital, I was able to set up a counselling office in autumn of 2017, specifically providing counselling services for single mothers who faced challenges and were considering aborting their babies.

My heart went out to the women who were considering abortion.





CALLED ON THE WHOLE CHURCH TO GET INVOLVED

I was the first person to work in the counselling office, and I am very grateful that I could serve using my gift. Three months later, although I was physically and mentally exhausted, I still firmly believed that the job was assigned by God. But I felt helpless because sometimes the women I met would still choose abortion. I felt strongly that this was not just my own ministry, but also the church's ministry. So, during a Sunday worship service, I stood up and witnessed, calling on the whole church to get involved and pray for this work and for the pregnant women. Since then, the church has regarded this ministry as their own, praying for the work, for the pregnant women and for those of us serving in the ministry. Some sisters in the church volunteered to accompany the women and take care of them, helping me be more effective in my work and empowering me. I organized volunteers to provide support and resources for families who were unable to take care of their new-borns, so that the children could be looked after and raised properly, with the love and attention they need.

Today, I feel supported and encouraged, full of enthusiasm because I can use the gifts God has given me together with my brothers and sisters.

I feel supported and encouraged, full of enthusiasm because I can use the gifts God has given me.


How many assets can we make use of in our community?

BEE KEEPING AND GROWING TEA

Ming has a passion for his community. An interest in honey turns out to be a tool for change for the local community where he lives.

Ming and I met three years ago over our interest in honey. Later I found out that, together with another four brothers, he had been actively engaged in social services for many years: taking care of the elderly living alone, people with disabilities and orphans. On several occasions when I accompanied him on his visits, I found that beneath his strong and big body, there beat a pure and gentle heart! He often visits a man with syphilis and helps wash away faeces from his bed and clothes.

Ming has mobilized local churches to participate in social services, actively responding to the needs of different villages. Two years ago, he even arranged free transportation for pregnant women and patients who were unable to pay for transport to medical facilities. He later rented an apartment close to the county hospital for those who were unable to pay for hospitalization.



Ming has mobilised local churches to participate in social services.



– I was encouraged to see how he is using his talent of seeing opportunities in people and situations and helping them improve their lives.



TURNING DOWN FOREIGN AID?

Running several ministries required a lot of funding, and for several years they cooperated with international foundations. However, Ming suddenly turned down the outside funding, saying that the local churches should not depend on outsiders. Many people did not understand his decision at that time, but it turned out that he wanted to develop local resources, and not rely on foreign aid.



DEVELOPING LOCAL RESOURCES

When he and his team went to visit the elderly poor, he found that some of them kept bees. The honey produced was organic and of high quality. However, the elderly did not know how to sell the honey. Ming started to look for different buyers, and he himself worked as an intermediary. Most of the profit from selling honey goes directly to the elderly, and the rest to him and his team for supporting the ministry. To help the elderly and poor people who did not want to be beekeepers, trainings were organized on organic tea planting

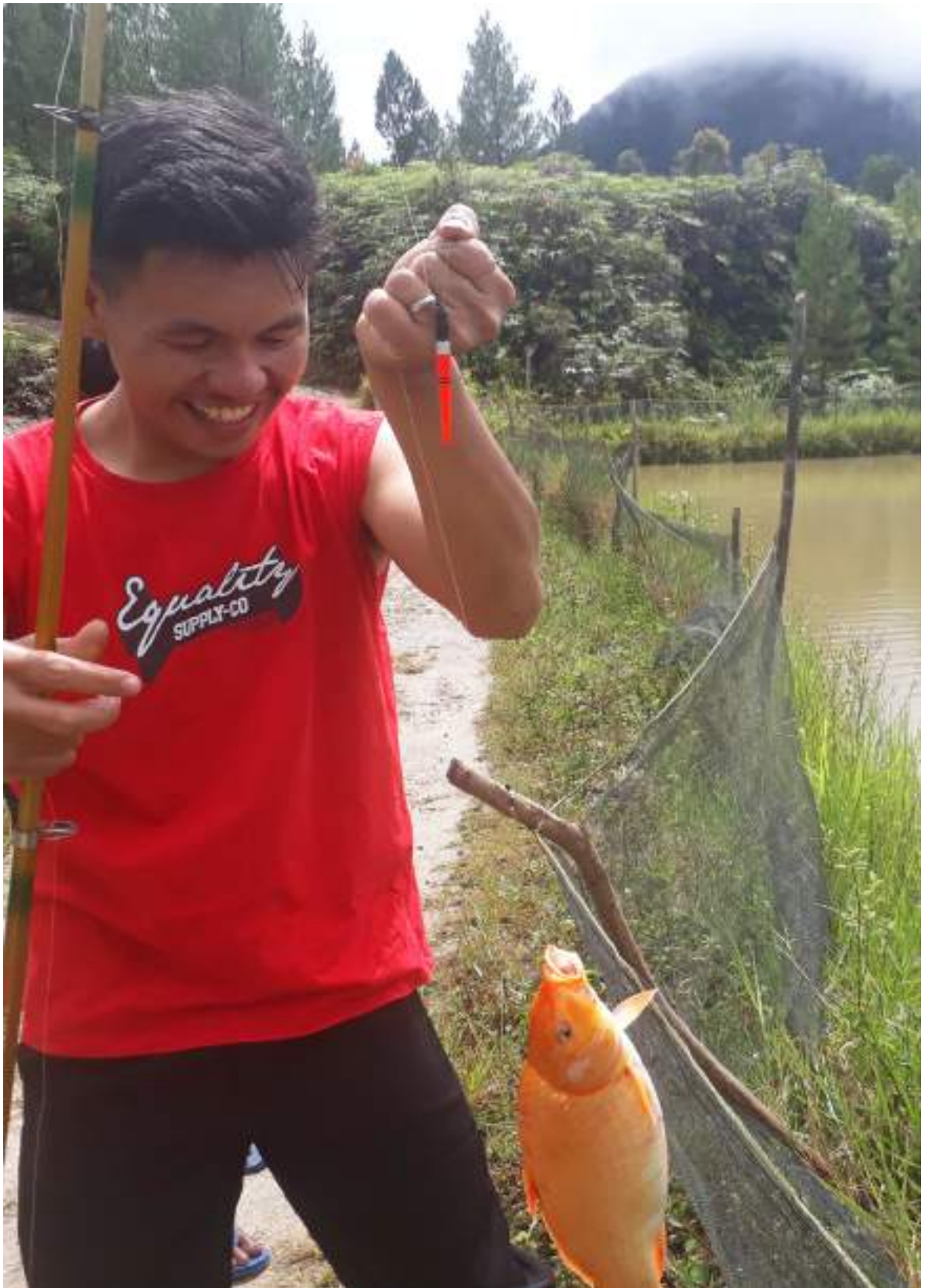


and roasting, so that they could use their skills and abilities to make a profit.

Ming is using his talents and connections to bless others and wants to see others do the same. The elderly are being encouraged to use their skills and abilities in bee keeping and tea harvesting to improve their own lives. In the future, Ming would like to help the youth in the villages, who are unemployed and often have problems with drugs, by helping them discover their gifts and abilities. By organizing a band and a worship team and training

the young people to play different musical instruments, the young people will be able to make use of their gifts and time and promote their minority culture. God is using these people to be a blessing for their neighbours, and they are using their talents for good!

After hearing Ming's story and accompanying him on his visits, I was encouraged to see how he is using his talent of seeing opportunities in people and situations and helping them improve their lives.





Fish farming in the backyard

CATFISH POND IN JAMBI, SOUTH SUMATRA

Building a simple catfish pond becomes a source of good nutrition and steady income.

My name is Ngolu Sinaga and I work with the Suku Anak Dalam Indigenous Group (SAD) in Jambi, one of the regions in South Sumatra, Indonesia. The SAD people group have been living a traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle, never living too long in one place. Therefore, they are not used to growing vegetables, tending to livestock or planting rice for their consumption, rather, they eat whatever the jungle provides.

During my time serving the SAD people group, I wanted to teach these people a skillset that could help them get income when they settled down permanently. Before my placement there, I had lived with a pastor who had asked me to build

a catfish pond next to our residence. Remembering how I had built and maintained the fishpond during that time, I was motivated to build a catfish pond in Jambi.

BUILDING THE CATFISH POND

My hope when building the catfish pond, was to motivate the SAD people group to want to make their own catfish ponds to help reduce the cost of living and also provide an additional source of income, aside from hunting pigs in the forest.

My hope was to motivate people to want to build their own catfish ponds.

THE MOTORBIKE BREAKS DOWN

I built the catfish pond with what I had available of manpower and funds. The work was done manually using tools that I had, and I used my motorbike to transport sand and stone from abandoned broken down buildings in the area. One day my motorbike stopped working. I found out that the oil pump was damaged, and that it would not turn on at all. I was stuck, not able to transport the 30 bricks I had bought from a sister in the local church to use as building material for the first stage of the pond. I had to figure out another way to transport these bricks. At that time, I did not have savings to spend on repairing the motorbike. I had to wait to repair it until a later time when I would have income from selling palm fruit and hunting wild boar. So, I borrowed a rickshaw from some acquaintances to use for transportation. It proved to be a good way of transporting the bricks, and I worked on the fishpond until it was finished.

This is the story of how I built a pond. I hope that in sharing my experience I can be of inspiration to the Suku Anak Dalam people and others so they can build their own ponds and help themselves get good nutrition from eating some of the fish in the pond and income from selling the rest.

YOU TOO CAN BE AN INSPIRATION

Like Ngolu Sinaga here, several of the people in this book try out the activities themselves first. Once they have tried out the activity and find that it works, they then go on to suggest that other people join them. They are risk takers and serve as inspiration for other people in their communities. When others see that Ngolu Sinaga is trying to do new things, they are also inspired to try out the activity or to use their own talents to find other ways to improve the lives of themselves and those around them.



*Ngolu Sinaga and his
friend catch their fish
in the backyard.*







Use Your Talents – Guidelines

 GUIDELINES

Use Your Talents (UYT) is an approach to development we can use to help us identify and make use of available resources at all levels of our society – including family, church, community, county/district, prefectural, provincial and national levels. We start by looking at what resources we already have and then make plans on how to use these to help us in our lives and bless those around us. This helps us to appreciate what we already have and empowers us to take steps to improve our lives. As individuals, families, churches and communities, we are no longer dependent on external help and can

immediately start making a difference to our own development.

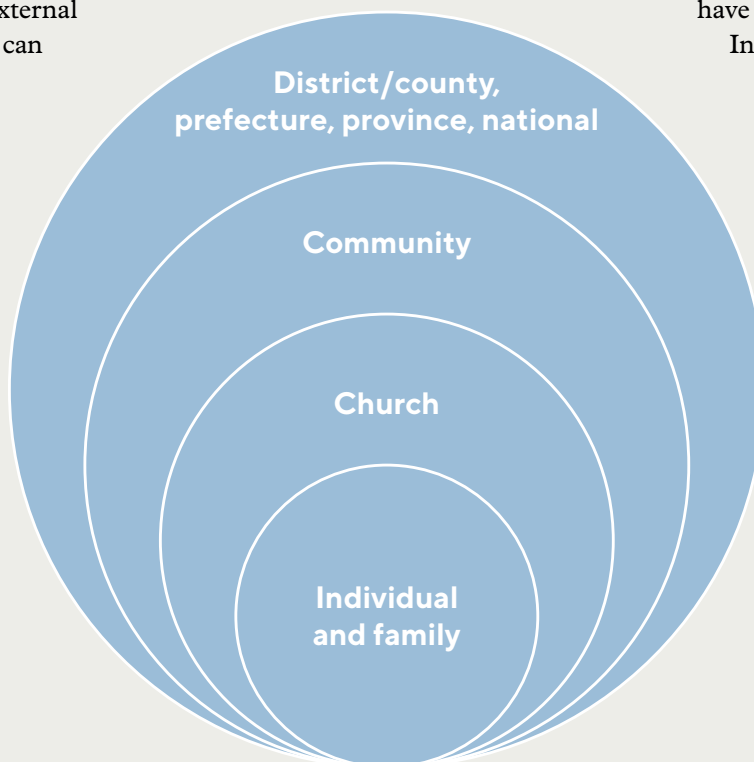
When analysing our situation and thinking about using resources, it is a good idea to first start with those closest to you, and then move further out:

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE FAMILY

One great way of getting started, is to begin with yourself and your family. Asking and answering some simple questions

together with your family/household can help you recognize the talents you have at hand.

In the article



“Guidelines for Asset Mapping” (see page 127) there are some examples of questions you could ask.

Answering these questions will give you a good starting place to look forward and see possibilities. As you spend time together discussing these questions, ideas might start to pop up. For instance: Elisabeth is an artist, Akela plays the violin professionally and Xiao Wei has some real estate, together they talk about opening an after-school tutoring business. Some of the ideas might seem crazy, but it is good to brainstorm and not be afraid of “wild” ideas. Sometimes they lead to important actions.

Once you have spent time brainstorming and come up with a few ideas, it is time to evaluate them and reduce them to a few (2-4). It may help you to consider the following questions:

- Who will benefit from this plan, and how will they benefit?
- What are the risks? Are there any potential problems that might hurt what you hope to do?
- What kind of knowledge or skills do we need?
- Whom do we need to consult?
- Who can give advice?
- Who do we need to cooperate with?
- What will be the concrete steps in our plan?

After that, decide on a plan of action with a simple time schedule where you agree on the steps to follow. Keep written records of this.

IN THE CHURCH

In the congregation, the principles are the same. Whatever position you have in the congregation – whether it is as a pastor, a church worker, youth leader or small group leader – the most important thing is to look out for possibilities and creativity and appreciate and cherish the resources and talents of your church. Often a good starting place will be to engage those who are already “using their talents”, whether it be in their church, community, or family. Those who are creative, active, look for possibilities and new or better ways to do things, big or small. You could start discussions with a few individuals or families about the local situation and what possibilities there are if talents were combined and used.

It is helpful for the congregation to promote UYT in a systematic way. In the services, the pastor and leaders can emphasize that all Christians have talents and that we are called to use them. In addition, practical examples and ideas can be shared in announcements. Sunday school is also a great place to teach children to use their talents, this can be encouraged by, for instance, getting them to use their talents in church, teaching

them hygiene, encouraging them to grow vegetables or using their computer skills.

The church could help by organizing training to help their members recognize their talents and resources, carry out an asset mapping exercise, and facilitate meetings where people can discuss possibilities for united projects. The church may even initiate voluntary community work, for example, tree planting, maintaining roads, building schools, etc. They could facilitate training in new techniques, such as agriculture, entrepreneurship, and Christian business ethics.

Depending on the context, the church can act as an agent for development by facilitating contact between church members and local authorities, and with people or institutions that have specialized knowledge or competence. It might be a good solution for the church to set up a specific development or Use Your Talents committee or group. In some instances, it might be relevant to start your own NGO. The task for this kind of committee/group could be:

- Connect community members who are initiating or developing an idea with other persons or associations who can help or have expertise.
- Involve people to participate in voluntary communal work.
- Initiate cooperation with local authorities on, for example, local infrastructure, like roads and bridges.

A great example of God's people coming together using their talents and resources can be found in Exodus, as the Israelites rallied together to build the Lord's Tabernacle. This short extract below shows how God gifted people with the necessary skills, knowledge and wisdom.

³⁰Then Moses said to the Israelites, "See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³¹and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills— ³²to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, ³³to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic crafts. ³⁴And he has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. ³⁵He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers—all of them skilled workers and designers.

Exodus 35:30-35

- Make an inventory of human resources and talents in the church and surrounding areas.
- Give people tasks according to their talents and skills.
- Establish routines for follow-up, monitoring and evaluation.
- Establish local income systems to fund the work done by this committee (for example: church offerings, selling products, common activities, etc.).
- If appropriate, use church land as a source for income and a place to try out new ideas.

IN THE COMMUNITY

When starting diakonia work (showing Christ's love in action), attention is often given to resources within churches. However, problems and needs addressed are often closely linked with the communities

that the Church is a part of. Projects for a special group, such as people with disabilities, can often bring benefits to the whole community. In fact, to achieve sustainable positive change, it is necessary to have strong participation from the community. Therefore, it is vital to closely work with all participants of the community to improve the awareness of the people so they themselves can mobilize their own resources for development. This is also a process that promotes and encourages the participation of all community members. Working with the community also ensures that initiatives carried out are relevant to the needs and context of each community. Communities have many different assets and needs. When they take time to think about it, people often know about the many resources in their families or communities, but don't usually think about making use

PROVERBS 3:27

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act.

This verse reminds us that we are called, according to our ability and opportunity, to help those around us in need.

of these unless they get together to consider how needs can be met using locally available resources. It is important that people in the community themselves participate and lead the development of their community.

When a family, Church or community is considering how their lives can be improved, it may be helpful for them to consider:

What are the available capacities and resources in the community?

- What are the needs in the community that can be met by these assets? How should these needs be prioritized relative to the available resources?
- What groups and organizations are in the community? What are they doing? How can we cooperate with them?

DISTRICT/COUNTY, PREFECTURAL, PROVINCIAL, AND NATIONAL LEVEL

Finally, we need to consider cooperating with groups in our wider society; whether it be with governmental bodies, institutions, different organizations or NPOs (Non-profit organizations). For instance, within China, there are Christian Councils and the

WE CAN WORK WITH DIFFERENT GROUPS TO:

- Establish development, coordination and management mechanisms for diakonia through these organizations at different levels
- Facilitate cooperation with local government, professional organizations, NGOs, etc.
- Formulate networks for learning, sharing, supporting and cooperation
- Develop the capacity of churches in diakonia through training, workshops and other approaches, so that they can effectively identify and mobilize local resources to solve problems and tackle needs
- Coordinate resources (policies, technique, human resource and materials, etc.)
- Stay up to date with relevant policies, programs and other information

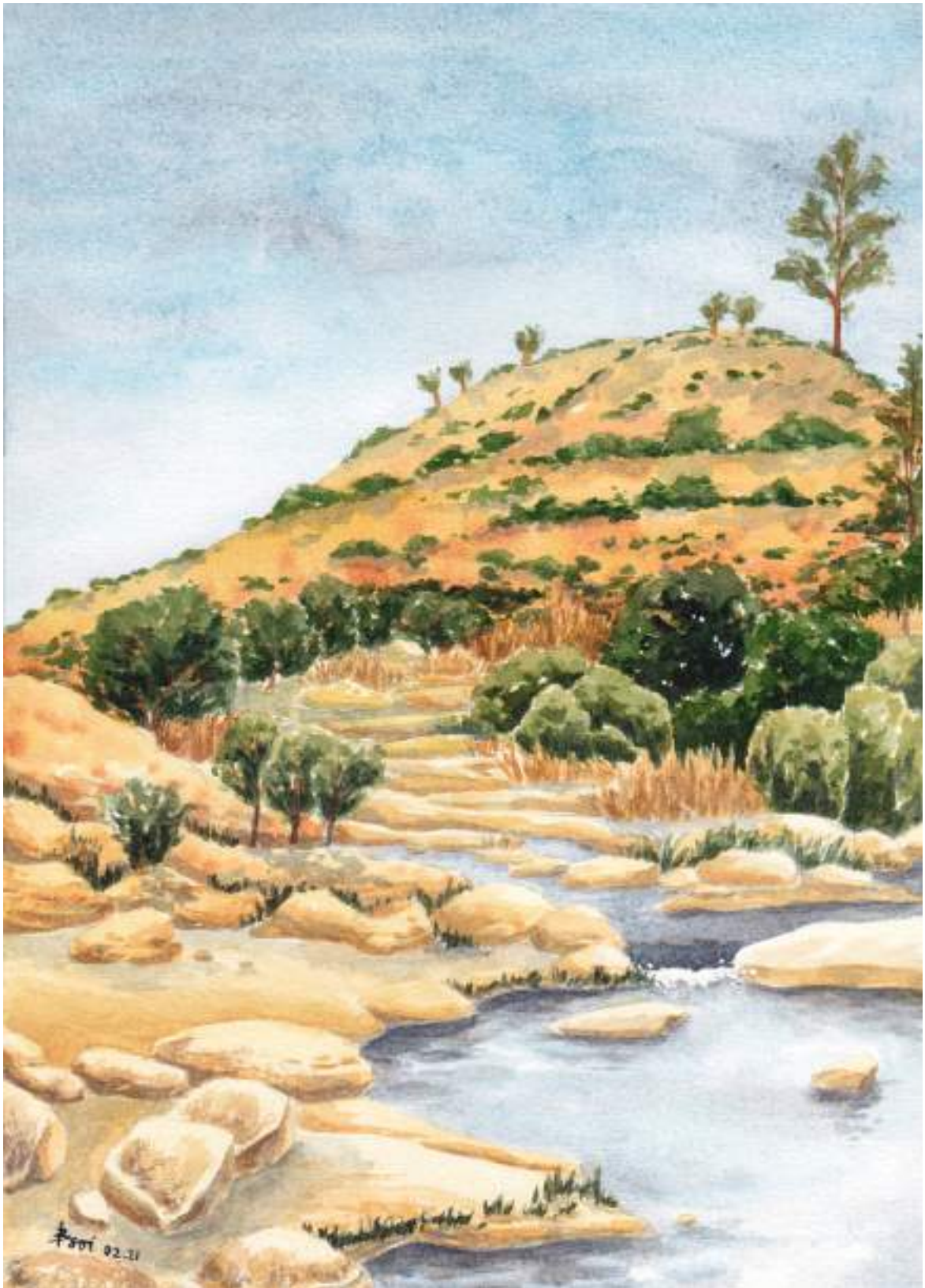
TSPM (Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches) from the province to the district/county level; in Thailand the church has worked a lot in cooperation with the Social Welfare department, and in the Philippines some churches work together with NGOs making good use of their expertise. Use Your Talents helps many people to make use of their own resources to promote development. This does not mean that we should not cooperate with other entities. In most cases, we need to actively seek cooperation with local authorities, enterprises, social organizations, etc.

Cooperating with local authorities is very important because often you need their permission for initiatives, and by cooperating you can achieve greater results. Sometimes they also have programs you can follow, specialists you can invite, or they can provide material or equipment. Cooperation with local authorities can also help remind them of their responsibilities in the community. Local NGOs might also have competence and could be invited to share their experiences. These are just a few ideas to help you get started using your talents in your community.

God wants to use us, and our resources, to bring about transformation in our lives and life of our community.

We hope that this article can serve as a guide for you to recognise your own talents and the talents of your neighbours.









Guidelines for Asset Mapping

FINDING YOUR TALENTS

You can carry out asset mapping in many different settings, with many different groups of people; such as your family, the local choir, your church, a village or even a football team.

Asset mapping is the time you spend together with your chosen group to find out what your group's assets are. We all have gifts in abundance. Let us be positive in our outlook! Our cup is not half empty, it is half full. If we take a good look at our half full cup, we can identify our assets and God's gifts to us. We can then use these to bless our churches, communities and families.

IF YOU CARRY OUT ASSET MAPPING INFORMALLY, SAY IN YOUR FAMILY, YOU CAN ASK QUESTIONS SUCH AS:

- What kind of knowledge and skills do we have within the family?
- Who does what in our family?
- Is there something that our family or one of the members in our family or household cares about in a special way?
- Whom do you relate to outside the family? Individuals, families, congregations, associations, institutions, society.
- What are our physical assets, what kind of land do we have, what could it be used for? Do we have any houses, what could they be used for? What other kinds of property do we have, what could it be used for?
- On what do we spend our money? How much money is it possible to save each week? How could we use this money?

Start here!

ASSET MAPPING IN THREE EASY STEPS

GUIDELINES

If you want to carry out asset mapping more formally, you could follow the suggestions below.

First, split into groups of around 6 to 10 people.

Make sure everybody has multiple pieces of paper (the paper doesn't have to be big, A6 is fine) and something to write with.

1

RECOGNIZING ASSETS AND TALENTS IN YOUR GROUPS

Individually *write down your assets* on the papers. One asset/talent in big, clear words per page, so that it can be seen from far away. You can use as many pieces of paper as you want. But it is very important that there is only one asset per page.

It is a good idea to remind people of what kind of assets/tales there are. Remember, talents are our skills and our knowledge, our relationships to others and our belongings like land, houses and money.

Gather in your small group:

- Read out loud and clear each asset and stick it on the wall, so that everyone in your group can see.
- *DO NOT*: Categorize them, put them in order, put them together with other similar talents or group them.
- Spend some time reading the identified assets and talents.

THESE CAN BE:

- *Physical assets*
- *Individual assets*
- *Associations*
- *Institutions*
- *Economic assets*

2

CONNECT THE DOTS

As a group, brainstorm actions that connect two or more of these assets. How can we connect different assets? It is tempting to put similar assets together, don't, that is not the point of the exercise. Think about how they can build on each other.

Cluster together the assets that could lead to an action. If an asset needs to be used more than once, just re-write it on a new piece of paper.

THINK ABOUT ACTIONS LIKE:

- *Project*
- *Event*
- *Performance*
- *Campaign*
- *Celebration*
- *Making, growing
or fixing things*

Some examples of putting assets together:

> *If we put Maria's broken car together with Padma's mechanical skills and the youth group, we would have a car repair clinic.*

> *If you have an empty church building and retired teachers, you could start a after school homework club.*

> *If you have vacant land, and Sunitra knows how to grow vegetables and Bintang has a surplus of fertilizer from her chicken coop, you could start a small vegetable patch.*

- Tell people why you have clustered assets together, what action could be carried out?
- Look at the other clusters and see if you can add assets. Think about new actions.
- If you think of a new asset not previously shared, add it.
- You can offer suggestions, but do not correct people – it is okay to dream big.
- Talk to each other as you do this.

3

VOTE WITH YOUR FEET

- Finally, give each group of assets a name – an action name. Then, write in on a piece of paper and add it to the cluster.
- Each group briefly introduces to the whole room all their action groups. Everyone listens. People can ask clarifying questions, but no criticism.
- Think about which action you would be most interested in participating in.
- Go stand by that action.

THIS MEANS THAT YOU GET AN INSTANT WORK PLAN:

- The job before you
- The people with you, who have an interest in the same idea
- The assets you can connect to get things done



This article is based on the book by Luther K. Snow: "The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts".

You have finished!

Record the final voting, by taking photos or writing it down.

If you have time and it is appropriate, it is a good idea to finish the session by getting people's impressions of the activity.

Ask them:

- Look around the room, does anything surprise you?
- How did it feel to do this?
- How did it feel to identify your talents?
- How did it feel to connect the dots?
- How did it feel to vote with your feet?
- How do you feel about the future?



Terminology

Asset/talent: A useful or valuable quality, person or thing; an advantage or resource. Examples: Knowledge, skills, relationships, property, money, mindset.

Budget: An estimate of income and expenditure connected to an activity during a specific period of time. Budgets are used to plan and control/manage income and expenditure.

Community: A group of people sharing lives and/or a common interest.

Development: A positive change, growth, improvement, progress in a situation. Bringing about social change that aids humans in reaching their full potential.

Diakonia (similar to “Integral mission”): From the Greek word “diakonos”/“diakonein” (Romans 12:7), which means “to serve”. Diakonia is often referred to as “Christian Service”.

“Diakonia is the caring ministry of the Church. It is the Gospel in action and is expressed through loving your neighbour, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and fighting for justice”. *

Both evangelism (reaching people with

the gospel of God’s grace) and diakonia (reaching people with works of love) are integral parts of God’s great plan.

Facilitator: A person who enables, encourages and promotes other people.

Monitoring and Evaluating: It is a good idea to put into place ways to check that your work is going forward successfully. We can do this through monitoring and evaluation. By thinking through who is going to follow-up the work and how, deciding how to monitor the work and setting a time for evaluation; we are helping ensure that our work stays on track and learn from our mistakes.

It is outside the scope of this book to cover project monitoring and evaluation, but there are a lot of resources available (please take a look at our suggested publications).

Integral mission (similar to “diakonia”): an understanding of Christian mission that includes both evangelism and social responsibility. As Christians and as a Church, we should communicate the gospel in all we say and do.

Project: “A project is a series of activities aimed at bringing about clearly specified

objectives within a defined time period and with a defined budget”. **

Talents/assets: A useful or valuable quality, person or thing; an advantage or resource. Examples: Knowledge, skills, relationships, property, money, mindset.

UYT: Use Your Talents. This is a Bible-based approach to asset-based development.

References and additional resources

PUBLICATIONS

Church of Norway plan for diakonia, 2007
European Commission’s Project Cycle Management Guidelines

Tearfund:

Roots books by Tearfund aim to help Christian development organisations in their work. They provide detailed information on relevant subjects – either on organisational development topics, or on good practice in key development issues:
www.tearfund.org/roots

Footsteps magazine aims to share information, ideas, contacts and experience in a Christian context at grassroots level. It encourages the practical outworking of integral mission in all aspect of local development work:
www.tearfund.org/footsteps

Umoja’s facilitator guide:
www.tearfund.org/umojaguides

RESOURCES ON PROJECT MONITORING AND EVALUATION:

Tearfund:

Simple: https://learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/footsteps/footsteps_11-20/footsteps_11/

Detailed: <https://learn.tearfund.org/~media/files/tilz/publications/roots/english/pcm/2020-tearfund-roots5-project-cycle-management-en.pdf?la=en>

INTRAC:

<https://www.intrac.org/resources/monitoring-and-evaluation-planning-series-5/>
<https://www.intrac.org/resources/me-universe/>

Bond:

<https://www.bond.org.uk/monitoring-and-evaluation>

BOOKS:

Cameron Harder, “Discovering the other: asset-based approaches for building community together”

Sigurd Haus (Ed.), “Use your talents – the Congregation as Primary Development Agent”

Alf B. Oftestad, “How to build a diaconal church”

Luther K. Snow, “The power of asset mapping: How your congregation can act on its gifts”

* Church of Norway plan for diakonia, 2007, p. 5.

** According to the European Commission’s Project Cycle Management Guidelines.

Biblical references

Below we have compiled a list of inspiring and useful Bible texts which relate to using the unique gifts and talents that our God has given us to serve Him and those around us.

EXODUS 35: 30-35

³⁰Then Moses said to the Israelites, “See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³¹and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—³²to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, ³³to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic crafts. ³⁴And he has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. ³⁵He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers—all of them skilled workers and designers.

JOSHUA 1:9

⁹Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

2 KINGS 4: 1-7

Elisha, the widow and the oil

DANIEL 1: 17-19

¹⁷To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

¹⁸At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service.

PROVERBS 3:27

²⁷Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act.

MATTHEW 5: 13-16

¹³“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

MATTHEW 22: 39

³⁷Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

MATTHEW 28: 18-20

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

JOHN 13: 34-35

³⁴“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

ACTS 4: 32-35

³²All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

ROMANS 12: 3-8

³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

EPHESIANS 4:12-13

¹²to equip his people for works of service,
so that the body of Christ may be built up
¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and
in the knowledge of the Son of God and
become mature, attaining to the whole
measure of the fullness of Christ.

GALATIANS 6: 10

¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us
do good to all people, especially to those
who belong to the family of believers.

1. THESSALONIANS 5: 11

¹¹Therefore encourage one another and
build each other up, just as in fact you are
doing.



FURTHER READING

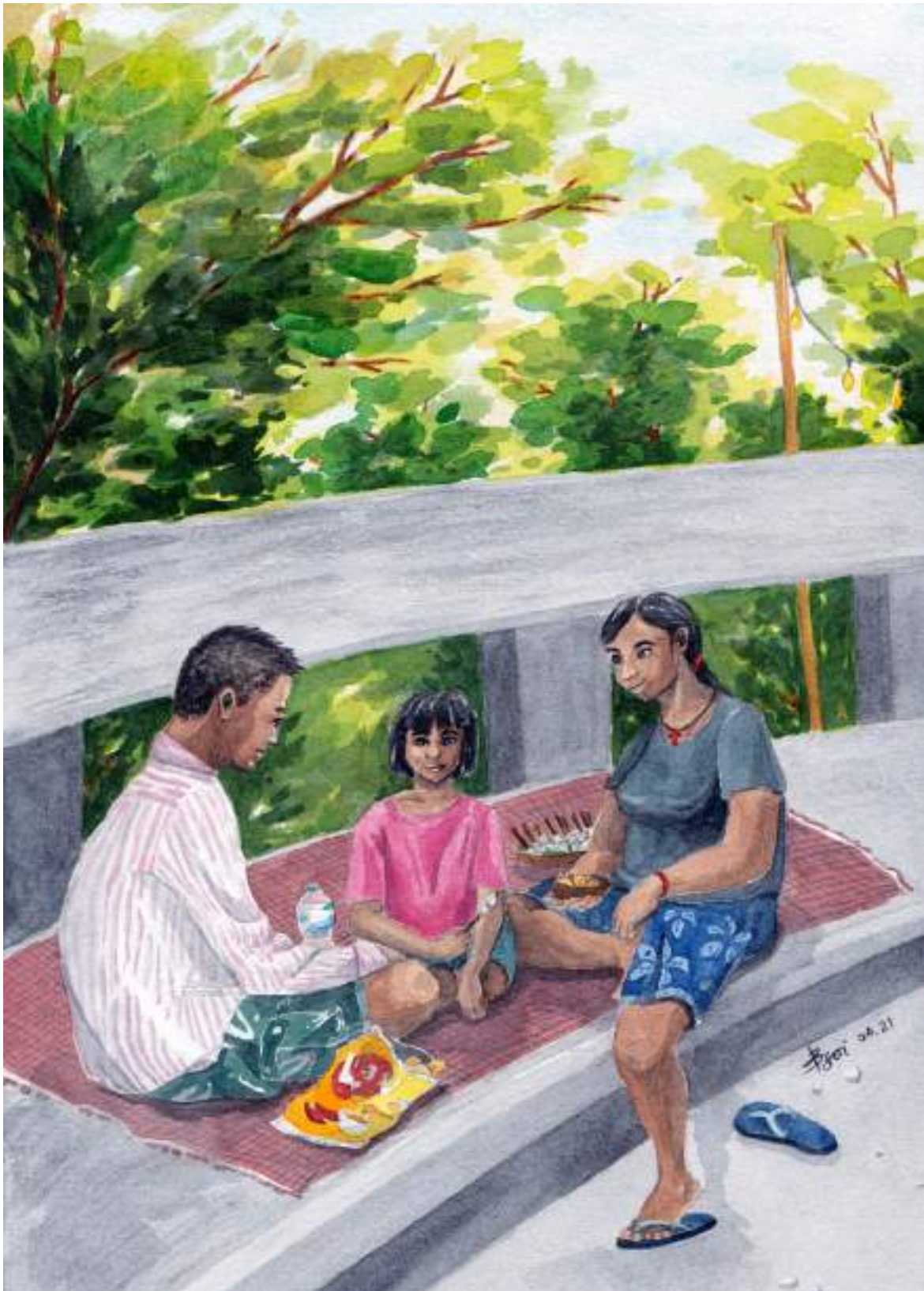
Psalm 132 and 139

Hebrews 11

Matthew 25

Luke 10:25-37 – *The Good Samaritan*

Luke 8:42-48 – *Healing of the bleeding woman*



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Notes

才干 Ta-lâng

تختسارسلقلا

தேதகௌஸலு

재능

Talento தாலந்து Талант

қобилиятига قابليت

才能 ทALENT
ของประธาน

Talenta Bakat

योग्यता

«This opportunity to learn has awakened a dormant talent and given me the chance to use and develop it and pass it on to other people in my community.»

– ‘Saida’ from Central Asia

«Use your talents! Try to do things you’ve never tried to do before, even if it is difficult, and discover how God has gifted you.» – Aiza from the Philippines

«We want to use our talents, not only to benefit the church, but also our community. We are using what we have: the land, our knowledge, our connections to authorities and training institutions, our motivation and passion and our fellowship in Christ.» – Christians in Thailand

«In a world of broken relationships, mistrust, exploitation and poverty, the Use Your Talents approach challenges us to change our minds about how the world should be and how we should live. Let us strive to know God personally and God’s will for the world and for ourselves. Our challenge is to discover and use the talents that God has graciously given to us to help us obey His will.» – Dr. Mok Chiu Yau

DREAM BIG!

Use your God-given talents! For some people this may seem obvious, but for others this statement may be confusing or even intimidating. Our aim with this book is to help you identify your talents and to use them for God’s glory.

USE YOUR TALENTS ASIA!

In «Use Your Talents – Asia!» you will find many examples of people living in different parts of Asia using their talents in various and innovative ways, like sewing, counselling, hydroponics, reaching out to the homeless, river clean-up, helping out with homework and much more. As you read this book, we pray God will guide you and inspire you on your way.