**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

02  **EDITOR’S CORNER**  
by Mr. Bijoy A. Sangma

03  **GREETINGS & MINISTRY REFLECTIONS**  
from the President of APBF  
by Rev. Edwin Lam

04  **LEADING THE CHURCH BEYOND THE PANDEMIC**  
by Jerson B. Narciso

06  **LEADING THE CHURCH IN TIMES OF CRISIS**  
by Rev. Cham Theam Lai

09  **TOGETHER WE ARE STRONG**  
by Rev. Dr. Vesekhoyi ‘Vee’ Tseteo

---

**APBF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**PRESIDENT**  
Rev. Edwin Lam (Singapore)

**VICE PRESIDENTS**  
Mr. Bijoy A. Sangma (India)  
Mr. Ratu Inoke Kubuabola (Fiji)  
Rev. Mark Wilson (Australia)

**GENERAL SECRETARY**  
Rev. Dr. Vesekhoyi ‘Vee’ Tseteo (Okinawa, Japan)

**TREASURER**  
Mr. Peter Leau (Australia)

**COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS**  
Rev. Ronnie Chiu (Malaysia)  
APBAid  
Mr. Bijoy A. Sangma (India)  
Inchargé, Communication  
Rev. Dr. Tim Hyunmo Lee (Korea)  
Mission  
Dr. Miyon Chung (Korea)  
Theological Education  
Rev. Steve Dixon (Australia)  
Asia Pacific Baptist Youth  

**CO-OPTED MEMBERS**  
Rev. Dr. Ross Clifford (Australia)  
Rev. Dr. Bobby Lee (Singapore)  
Assistant Treasurer  

**EX-OFFICIO**  
Dr. Vernette Myint Myint Sann (Myanmar - Singapore)  
President, Asian Baptist  
Women’s Union  
Ms. Elissa Macpherson (Australia)  
President, Baptist Women’s Union of the South West Pacific

**APBF Digest**  
Chief Editor:  
Mr. Bijoy A. Sangma  

Technical Assistant:  
Ms. Ashley Muk

Published by APBF Communications  
Rev. Dr. Vesekhoyi ‘Vee’ Tseteo,  
General Secretary, APBF  
APBF Secretariat, 3-22-5 Goya, Okinawa City, Okinawa, Japan 904-0021
EDITOR’S CORNER

One of the most popular seasons of the world is approaching. It is a season when most people want to be with loved ones. Each individual with reasons best known to them is awaiting to spend their Christmas! For Christians, Celebrating Christmas means the celebration of the birth of Christ. It is telling the world one more time that ‘Immanuel! God With Us’. It is the resounding of the proclamation that the ‘hope of the world is Christ’. It is also the responsibility to bring meaning of ‘tiding of good news’ that Christ is born to save the world.

What would be Christmas like for 2020? This global crisis has left many asking what is perfect safety? Friends with whom you felt most safe has suddenly become indifferent due to the fear of Coronavirus. Anyone, or everyone has become a suspect of being the carrier of Covid-19. The fear of safety has gripped the world as never before. Fear now is the unknown and the truth is, the world will never be near to perfect safe. News of Pfizer or Moderna vaccines proving to be 95% successful has been a welcome to many countries. Vaccinations may come into homes, families, societies; possibly everyone in the world may be required to get vaccinated in order to bring back normalcy; businesses seeking for recovery of economy which includes air travels, will probably require everyone to be vaccinated. But would vaccination bring perfect security into the world? Where can we find true hope of security?

Few months ago this beautiful song ‘Christ Our Hope in Life and Death’ written by Keith Getty, Matt Boswell, Jordan Kaufin, Matt Merker, and Matt Papa anchored a deep sense of hope that only Christ offers. The opening verse goes like this:

What is our hope in life and death?
Christ alone, Christ alone.
What is our only confidence?
That our souls to him belong.
Who holds our days within his hand?
What comes, apart from his command?
And what will keep us to the end?
The love of Christ, in which we stand.

This Christmas season is yet another reminder to believers, to all Christians, that Christ is the ‘only’ hope of the world. And unless we are anchored in the hope that Christ provides, hope and safety will continue to be a wishful thought, a soul search song, a distant wish of the heart.

Biby A. Sengma
Vice President, APBF &
Chief Editor, APBF Digest
At the recent death of my close friend, Prof. Dr. Yvonne Marjorie Salmon, a Messianic Jew, born and bred in Singapore, one who had blessed the nation tremendously as an Obstetrician and Gynecologist and served at the world’s largest maternity hospital for 44 years and brought many lives into this world besides being a professor who had influenced and impacted many lives, I was once again reminded that as Christians, at death we are swallowed by Life Itself. The Perfect Life is the life above, it’s the eternal life, and it’s the life that Christ came to deliver to us! 2 Corinthians 5: 1-5 says:

“For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, 3 if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be uncloth ed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”

This morbid thought about death came to mind largely because of the pandemic when more than a million have perished and millions upon millions have been infected with Covid-19. Death seems to be lurking everywhere and no one knows where or when he or she will be its next victim. It is precisely in times like these that we need to go back to our origin. We were blessed with life when the Spirit of God breathed the breathe of life into the first human being. Since then, every human being has been blessed with life. Death came because of the fall of man and woman into sin. However, 2,000 years ago, the Son of God came to bring life. He came as the perfect physical life–life at its best, lived in the presence of the Almighty, a life of submission to God–loving, giving, serving. He also came to give eternal life. That’s what Christmas is about-God coming in the person of Jesus Christ to deliver life, a life more abundant and free. This is Christmas! This is why we have love, faith and hope!

As long as we live on planet earth, we will be mortals, but in Christ, we have been given the immortal through His death, burial and resurrection and the righteousness He imparts to those who put their trust in Him. Thus between birth and the time the perfect life swallows us, let us live and enjoy this gift of eternal life and be preachers and perpetrators of this life which is truly life indeed. Live it, Love it and Share it! There’s no better time than the birthday of the Prince of Peace, the Giver of Eternal Life!

Blessed Christmas and a wonderful New Year!
My primary purpose in this paper is not to discuss theologically and philosophically what I understand is the nature and mission of the church. I am mainly concerned about how the church could respond and engage meaningfully to the needs of our time especially in the midst of this life threatening pandemic that has swept the whole world. More precisely, my intention is to understand how the church as the body of Christ should respond to crises situations and lead communities to resilience. My response to this question is born out of our actual experience and encounter with the Covid-19 pandemic. In this way, I hope I would rather sound practical and realistic than theoretical.

As you already know, among countries in Southeast Asia, the Philippines is the most badly hit by Corona virus. While other Asian countries are slowly recovering from this global pandemic, the Philippines is still reeling from its devastating effects. The number of people getting infected by Covid-19 is still escalating and the situation seems to get out of control. Budgets are getting depleted and the Philippine government is running out of funds to fight against the spread of the virus. Prolonged lockdowns, community quarantines and travel restrictions have paralyzed the Philippine economy and resulted to closure of businesses, losses of jobs and earnings.

The domino effects of this all-time low economic condition of our country is felt everywhere and our churches are no exceptions. The devastating economic impact of the pandemic has greatly hampered our operations and our varied ministries. Our churches and member institutions are forced to make contingency plans and cost-cutting measures to lessen the impact of these economic woes and in the process many of our plans and commitments are compromised.

The terrible impact of the pandemic is mostly felt because it comes at a time when our country has not yet recovered from a series of earthquakes in Mindanao and then the eruption of Taal volcano in Luzon. Obviously, the frequency of disasters that usually happens in our country has a
significant impact on the recovery of affected communities since by the time they are about to recuperate, another disaster bears us down and so, the resources and coping capability of the people are depleted and compromised.

Indeed, life in this most troubled and trying time is characterized by brokenness. People are feeling the pain of isolation, of losing their jobs and even their loved ones. The massive and terrible impact of the pandemic has led us to a heightened awareness of our human vulnerability and brokenness. It has made us more conscious of the undeniable reality that finitude, dependency and vulnerability are part of our being human and there are situations in life that are way beyond our human control.

Given the precarious state and condition of our country and the world, what must we do as a church called by God to become light and salt of the earth? How can we meaningfully address emerging issues and concerns such as the “new normal” that confront our churches today? Let me venture and suggest a few things that we as a church can do in this time of pandemic and beyond:

**First and foremost**, as a church, we must accept and embrace the reality of our own brokenness and vulnerability. I understand that in a culture that is characterized by the dream of control and predictability, vulnerability is less desired or at most, must be avoided. The bearing values of modernity tell us that the ideal human being is independent, self-sufficient and invulnerable. Security in that sense is defined in opposition to vulnerability. To be secure is to be invulnerable.

This dream of invulnerability seems to find its way in the way we Christians think and do things in the church. We tend to avoid negative thoughts and emotions attached to our being vulnerable because they are a threat to our security and human existence. We even use religious language to suppress or deny them. As much as possible we want to paint a church that is perfect and invulnerable. This ethic of invulnerability however runs the risk of detaching itself from human reality. It runs counter to our faith conviction that is grounded in both our biblical heritage and in our daily experiences of the phenomenon of vulnerability. In fact, “we understand spirituality in the context of our humanity” [Herman A. Moldez, Senior Pastor, Faith Baptist Church, Quezon City and General Secretary of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. Reflection on Psalm 34:17-20, “Close to the Brokenhearted” during the CPBC Hour Online Worship, October 3, 2020] and unless we are able to connect to our humanness, we cannot sympathize and identify ourselves with the vulnerable other-those who are weak, poor and suffering.

The Gospels depict the vulnerability of Jesus as pivotal to the fulfillment of his redemptive mission in the world. From his birth to his crucifixion, Jesus is portrayed as vulnerable and this vulnerability is understood not as a weakness, but as strength, not as defeat but as victory. Jesus’ victory was won not by virtue of using his heavenly power to dominate and control but by virtue of his humble act of allowing himself to be human and to identify himself with the sufferings of those he came to save.

Looking at Jesus as our model, we are reminded that we are called to share in the sufferings of people around us, opening ourselves in this encounter to our own vulnerability and mortality. This is what it means to walk with Christ and to live up to our faith in God. An ethics of shared vulnerability enhances our sense of responsibility and accountability at all levels: in our personal dealings, in the family, in congregations, organizations, the local community and the larger society as a whole. Vulnerability in that sense is not a lamentable fact, but the basic precondition of a responsible, meaningful and productive life. It paves the way for the church to stand on street corners in solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, the weak and the suffering.

My hope is that, this shared sense of vulnerability can lead our ethical thinking and missionary activities towards strengthening the spirit of interdependence, mutual accountability and redeeming love for all humankind. Keeping close to the central message of the Gospel and
not yielding to the pressures and temptations of the powers of this world, the churches should be one of the principal actors contributing towards reaching this goal.

Second, this Covid-19 pandemic presents new opportunities for us to rethink and reconsider our usual way of doing things as a church. This pandemic phenomenon is creating new realities, new relationships, new concepts, new ways of thinking and doing things. It is drastically changing our missional context and we are challenged to think “outside of the box.” Whether we like it or not, “this world-wide phenomenon becomes a new condition or reality that exposes both the inadequacies and strengths of many of our churches, leadership and ministries.” [Notes from Joshua Zonta, Professor, Systematic Theology at Central Philippine University, Jaro, Iloilo City, Philippines.] “The global church therefore is obliged to reorient her ways of life and reframe her ministerial leadership style.” [Ibid.] Changes, innovations, readjustments and restructuring of our methods and approaches to doing missions are inevitable.

The critical challenge for the church in this time of pandemic is how to deal with the emerging internet culture and the formation of the so-called virtual Christianity (new normal) where presence which is essential to its life and ministry is lacking and where communications are being made not face-to-face but through non-physical media platforms. We can be sure that the 21st century church will find a hard time trying to make sense out of these difficult and constantly changing situation.

Taking into account the gravity of the impact of the pandemic, one of the things that our churches should seriously consider is to come up with a clear and relevant vision and mission statement which incorporate disaster preparedness programs. In this way, our churches will be more proactive in responding to calamities that may come at any given time. This is vital for human existence and survival and therefore the church should give substantial attention to it.

Third, this global pandemic accentuates the call for unity and collaboration among and between different churches and other organizations. To survive and go beyond this pandemic, we must affirm and acknowledge our interdependence and our need to unite and cooperate to achieve a common goal. As members of one body-the body of Christ, we are endowed with different gifts and yet we are guided and inspired by the same spirit to do God’s work. In that sense, building up the body of Christ requires cooperation rather than competition. Paul admonished, “I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3).

This time of crisis should make us aware of the importance of living together in unity because our chances of survival as human beings and as a church will depend so much on our ability to unite and work together towards a common cause. There may be times when misunderstandings and disagreements occur among us. Like branches on a tree, our lives may grow in different directions, yet our roots remain as one. We are a people belonging to God and in Him, we are one.

Fourth and last, as we journey together and as we do God’s mission in the world, remember, God is with us. God is active in our lives and is responsive to our needs and to our prayers. And so, we should not despair in the face of adversities but look to God to work for good even in the worst of circumstances. The Bible presents a loving and caring God who dwells with and makes his home among his people. In the Old Testament, the tabernacle is an especially powerful symbol of God’s presence among his pilgrim people on earth. God’s people are sojourners in the land, thus they are uniquely placed to understand and identify themselves with the poor, the weak and the oppressed displaced, the refugees and the downtrodden.

The church for that matter is among mankind as God’s tent of meeting, sharing in mankind’s joys and hopes, anxieties and sufferings. It stands with every man and woman of every place and time, to bring them the good news of the kingdom of God. Yes, in spite of our brokenness we can be a blessing to the world. As a community and as members of God’s household, we live with confidence in the promise that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus! We believe that no pandemic, no illness or disease, nothing done by us and nothing done to us, not even death itself, can break God’s solidarity with us and with all creation (Rom. 8:38-39).

“As a community and as members of God’s household, we live with confidence in the promise that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus! We believe that no pandemic, no illness or disease, nothing done by us and nothing done to us, not even death itself, can break God’s solidarity with us and with all creation.”
he church plunged into a time of crisis in the year 2020 when we faced the COVID-19 pandemic nationwide. We were instructed to stop all church activities as the Malaysian government imposed MCO (Movement Control Order) as a measure to control the spread of the virus. This was unprecedented and we felt helpless in the face of uncertainty as to how to lead the church and minister to the needs of the congregation.

The Challenge...
In respond to the crisis, we took charge of the situation by first surveying the on-going developments in the community, members health, how other churches were doing and the latest government policies with regard to COVID-19. It was important to understand and grasp the overall picture as we took courage to plan our next step of action. Joshua 1:9 remind us that God is with us and we are to take courage in facing challenges and crisis. With this assurance, we recognize the need to stay focus and set priorities in our next course of action.

With all activities being stopped, we need to provide basic ministries to the members. On our priority list is the weekly Sunday Service, pastoral care for those with needs, prayer coverings for members and leaders, and fellowships among members. Alternative methods and approach like using digital or online platforms and social media were considered. Advises and helps were sought from those more savvy with the new developments.

As the church explore and plan solutions to the challenges experienced during the crisis, it was important that the leadership team understand and work closely together. Clear communication and instruction were given to team leaders to prevent misunderstanding. Everyone in the team must know the priorities, the new approach and be on the same page to lead members in the church developments. Since social media was chosen as an alternative platform to run the weekly Sunday Service, members were taught on the usage of YouTube and Facebook to view live and delayed telecast of the worship and messages. Cell meetings were organized through Zoom and Google Meet platforms to ensure continued care and fellowship among members. Even children and youth meetings were held through social media channels to facilitate continued equipping of the people during the crisis.

Provide Leadership...
It is important that leadership be provided to the church during time of crisis to help members walk through the times of uncertainty and struggles. However, leaders are not to lord over members as stated in 1 Peter 5:3. We need to explain properly to members the priorities and focus of the church during the times of crisis and to seek their understanding and support. Positive respond from members are important to preserve the unity and
team spirit of God’s family. Staying united with consultation and support are instrumental to keep the church going through difficult time. The leadership team must stay united so as to convey positive attitude to the church at large. The members must be confident that their leaders can lead them through and out of the crisis. Regular updates were provided to ensure the leaders know the latest developments and be able to provide leadership as the crisis worsens and the ‘fear’ impact was overwhelming. Leading the team to look to God was critical and Philippians 4:5-7 was assuring as members were comforted in the midst of the struggles.

Throughout the crisis, leaders must be sensitive to the needs of members and be responsive to their complaints. Though visitation to members’ home were not allowed under the government regulation, the team modified the approach. As entry to house was not permitted, the visitation team (not more than 3) stood outside the gate, spend a few minutes to listen to members and finally prayed for them. The approach provides the personal touch during visitation but abide by the SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) set by the government. The church has to adopt a new ‘normal’ by innovating and fine tuning our ways. We may need to change the way we do things, but we keep the personal touch and stay sensible in our approach, being practical and effective. Suggestions from members and leaders were taken into account and we kept a listening ear to ensure that we do not miss out God’s prompting in our hearts.

During a crisis, we can often be overwhelmed by issues and problems. John 3:16 reminds us that Jesus came to give his life for the people (world). People must always be our priority in the church, even during the crisis. For the church, activities and programs are important but people are the prime reason why we exist. To ensure that we don’t lose members who are not able to attend Sunday Services because of the COVID pandemic, leaders are mobilized to connect and contact them and to visit when possible. Members need to know that the church care and are in constant prayer for them. This must be made known to members that they recognize their significance to the church and that they are our priority. Whenever we plan any programs, the needs of members are prioritized and taken into account. This is to prevent members from feeling being left out and unimportant to the church. We put in every effort to keep every member in our prayer just as in Luke 15:1-7, we watch over our sheep so as not to lose anyone.

Rejoice in the midst of crisis because God is our strength. Receive His love and rest in His comfort as we await the victory that Jesus has won.
If you are familiar with the song "We Shall Overcome", you might have grown up at a time hearing of Martin Luther King Jr and the civil rights movement in America. For some of us, we grew up singing the song in our Sunday School classes. The song is simple, singable, memorizable and sends a sweet message of hope, togetherness and unity. "We shall overcome, we shall overcome, We shall overcome someday. Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe. We shall overcome someday." Noah Adams who explored the history and legacy of the song "We Shall Overcome" for the NPR 100 in 1999 explains "We Shall Overcome" began as a folk song, a work song. Slaves in the fields would sing, "I'll be all right someday." It became known in the churches. A Methodist minister, Charles Albert Tindley, published a version in 1901: "I'll Overcome Someday." (https://www.npr.org/2013/08/28/216482943/the-inspiring-force-of-we-shall-overcome)

While the song has become known as a Civil Rights Protest song, what is evident in the song is the power of music that unites people to a cause. The song is a testimony to a cause that has led to bring change by offering hope to a generation that faced oppression and injustice. While the song is sung by many for different reasons, the song is not necessarily a defiant song, but a song that promises hope, that no matter what the struggle, we shall overcome. How do we embrace the song?
Together We Are Stronger

Over this period of 2020 the body of Baptists has stood together to overcome this Pandemic. With the global call coming out from Baptist World Alliance, the BWA led the call of ‘Standing Together’; by way of providing grants to many of the 241 conventions in 126 countries. What a work of unity! BWA has led well. We thank God for our leaders. Alongside, the APBF as a regional body ran more than a dozen regional calls, calling up prayers with leaders in conventions severely affected by Covid-19. The Zoom calls with Presidents/General Secretaries of regional conventions was instrumental in order to hear from leaders across the region, share solidarity that they are not alone and together as APBF we shall overcome the Pandemic together. The regional call helped to learn how each region or conventions responded to Covid-19 situation. It was a meaningful time both spent in listening to each other and to pray for one another.

To facilitate more effectively, APBF region was divided as follows:

1. **The Curry Nations**: India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka
2. **The Exotic Nations**: Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam
5. **The Noodle Chopstick Nations**: Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau

As BWA gave a ‘Standing Together’ call across the Baptists around the globe, and APBF sent out its appeal, several Conventions and Churches made contributions to the APBAid Appeal. The APBF is indeed thankful to everyone who has responded to the call. These aids are still on-going as need continues to arise (Covid-19 and Typhoons). Nevertheless, Baptist believers/churches/conventions have stood through the crisis, resilient to stand together during this time of Pandemic and in unity, tuned our hearts to “We Shall Overcome”.

**Strategic Partnership**

Another strategic responsibility for APBF is the raising of the next generation leaders in our region. A program called the ‘Catalyst’ which is an Emerging Leader’s Training program was launched to facilitate an on-going training that will run until 2022. The Catalyst has recorded 46 participants from several conventions who have recently finished the first phase of 7 Modules ELT led by APBF Leaders. The second and third phase will commence in April and November of 2021, running until 2022. Pray for the team as they are mentored by the leaders of APBF.

Come 2021, whatever lies ahead, we shall overcome together as one body in Christ called together to bring impact into the world. We shall be “Baptists Together Transforming Lives in Christ Across the Asia Pacific”. Our mission to Inspire and Equip Baptists by Collaborating, Networking, Training and Serving to fulfil the Great Commission will continue to drive the work of APBF. With Christ it is possible.

May God Bless the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation!
MERRY CHRISTMAS
& Happy New Year

APBF is a regional organization of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). We represent over 33,000 local churches and 60 conventions in 22 countries across Asia Pacific.

APBF...
...promotes fellowship, cooperation and service amongst Baptists.
...stimulate and coordinate evangelism.
...assist in consultation and planning for various ministry programs.
...to function as a regional organisation of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA).

HOW TO REACH US

www.apbf.org info@apbf.org
seapacificbaptist@gmail.com APBFbaptist