

# In-Deep Conference 2019 –



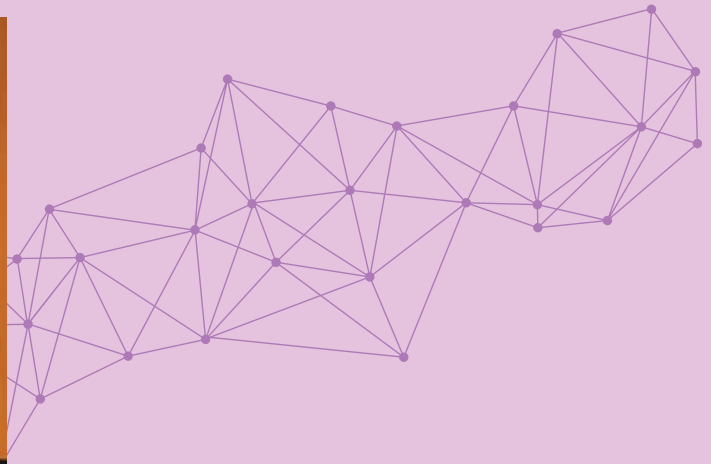
Connectionalism is said to be one of the great Methodist distinctions and is noted to be “rooted in the biblical image of the church as the body of Christ, inspired and gifted by the Holy Spirit”.<sup>1</sup> Beyond being a distinction, it is also one of the greatest strength of the Methodist Church in Singapore. This is because, each congregation is not restricted to the resources available within itself, but is able to reach across the entire Methodist connection, to have access to a wide variety of resources, drawing from each other’s strengths and giftings.

It is with this in mind that the TRAC Board of Worship and Music (BOWM) continues to organize the In-Deep Worship Conference on a yearly basis. This annual conference serves as a platform to gather members across our 21 TRAC churches who are involved in the music and worship ministries, to equip and educate, allowing us to enhance our skills and knowledge to serve God better.

This year, the theme of the conference is “the changing landscape of worship”, with Pastor Benny Ho as the keynote speaker, and augmented by five specialised workshops, to meet the varied needs and interests of the participants.

During the plenary sessions, Pastor Benny referred to John 4:1-34 as he investigated the meaning of true worship as sought by God the Father, which was to worship in spirit and in truth. By expounding on biblical insights, he suggested that true worship is the right, natural and spirit-inspired human response to the touch of a holy God. This touch is the initiative of God as demonstrated by Jesus who took the initiative to start the conversation with the Samaritan woman. He pointed out that this touch of God transcends gender, cultural, moral and religious barriers, awakening all of humanity to the reality of His genuine interest and care for us, enabling all to worship God who meets us where we are. He went on to draw lessons from Exodus 30:34-38, to give us insights into what makes our worship “acceptable and a sweet fragrance to our King,” stating that just like the ingredients of incense (stacte, galbanum, onycha, frankincense and salt), worship needs to be one that is focused wholly on God (free from the influences of the flesh), is an act of sacrifice (and sometimes as a response to difficult times), one that arise from our deepest depths, one that is pure and one that happens “when there is agreement between spirit and body, heaven and earth.”

<sup>1</sup> Peter Teo et al., *The People Called Methodists: The Heritage, Life, and Mission of the Methodist Church in Singapore* (Singapore: Church and Community Relations Department, Bishop’s Office, Methodist Church in Singapore, 2003), 35.



Finally, Pastor Benny turned to Psalm 134, the last song of ascent (the Psalms the Israelites would sing as they ascended Mount Zion). He explained that it is the last of 15 Psalms, and is akin to 15 steps of ascension of growing intimacy with the Lord, starting from a place of gloom and repentance, to a place of spiritual climax of worship of the Lord. Hence, the ultimate purpose of ascending the hill is to draw closer to God and to worship Him, and explained that the songs of ascent typifies our discipleship journey which has four dimensions, namely, our sacrifice of praise through our lips, acts of giving, acts of service, and finally “the sacrifice of the nations” which links worship to evangelism and cross-cultural missions. More specially on “the sacrifice of the nations”, he argues that missions exist as a temporary necessity to bring all into the ultimate aim of man, which is to worship God, but the church ultimately exists to glorify and worship God.

On the plenary sessions, Stacey Ng from Barker Road Methodist Church shared that “I felt pastor Benny’s session helped to change some of my perspectives towards worship - such as the fact that the audience to our worship is God and not the congregation, and that we are commanded to worship not just when we feel like it, but even more so when we don’t feel like it, and we will feel worshipful as we praise God. And this influences how I will model and teach about worshipping God and carrying a desire to praise God to the youths in my ministry.”

The workshops were varied, such as *Excellence in Choral Ministry*, targeted towards choir singers, musicians and choir conductors. This was facilitated by Dr Joel Navarro, who, by means of group discussions

and mutual learning, spurred the participants to achieve greater excellence in their ministry.

Ps Andrew Yeo, in *Leading a Worship Ministry*, provided valuable insights on how to empower, lead, mentor, and develop worship teams and leaders in a worship ministry setting.

Mervyn John provided an overview of developing worship bands against the backdrop of an evolving worship landscape in *Band Dynamics*.

Alarice Thio conducted a song-writing workshop during which song-writers were given the opportunity to present, receive feedback, and refine their existing songs or song sections, while Alarice shared some helpful tools and tips to write effective worship songs.

*Dangerous Decibels*, led by graduates from the Audiology Program at the National University of Singapore - Melissa, Penuel and Yuhan, discussed noise-induced hearing loss, tinnitus and ways to prevent them through inquiry-based learning with lots of hands-on activities.

Beyond the plenary sessions and workshops, another significant aspect of the conference, and possibly the more significant, is that through this conference we were able to draw many people across the different churches who are united in their service in the worship ministry. This gave them opportunities to network and learn from one another, sharing lessons learned and the latest equipment and skills, encouraging one another, building one another up, and shaping the future of our worship landscape in our church.

To that end a select group of participants, primarily the worship chairpersons of the various TRAC churches, were hosted to lunch by the members of the BOWM. This was part of the initiative of the board to enhance connectivity across the different churches, by facilitating networking meetings both on the district level as well as the conference level, to provide the chance for the worship chairs to meet each other and exchange notes, as well as interact with the BOWM Board members. During the lunch, the participants shared the challenges they faced – such as recruiting for their ministries or raising competencies in their members - and some initiatives to overcome these challenges while to discipling their members. During the lunch, the participants reaffirmed their commitment to continue to network and collaborate to bring our ministries to a higher level.



Agreeing on the value of networking through the networking lunch was Dawn Koh from Ang Mo Kio Methodist Church, who said that “the networking lunch was a great time for us to gather with other TRAC churches. Through the lunch, we shared common challenges such as recruitment for our ministry and solutions that worked for some churches. Additionally, the lunch served as a platform for us to identify possible ways resources can be shared across churches.”

Being a worship conference, the In-Deep Conference 2019 aptly ended in the same way it started, with worship, which was a precious and beautiful time, seeing representatives of the many TRAC churches coming together, responding to our great and magnificent God in the only appropriate manner – singing praises and glorifying Him.

