

YIO CHU KANG CHAPEL

Pioneering work

Yio Chu Kang Chapel is one of the early post-World War II Brethren assemblies to be formed. It traces its beginning to a small Sunday School work commenced in 1953 by Mr and Mrs Cook from Candida, Mrs Cook was an assembly missionary while Mr Cook was working as a pilot.

Among the pioneers of this ministry working hand in hand with the Cooks were Mr and Mrs P.J. John. Soon this ministry grew and was to become a vital arm of the assembly work to be established at Yio Chu Kang. In August 1953, the elders of Bethesda Hall (Bras Basah) felt it was time believers living in the vicinity of Upper Serangoon, Serangoon Gardens and Yio Chu Kang meet together for Sunday worship.

Hence, the assembly at Yio Chu Kang began on 3 January 1954, when a number of Christians living in the surrounding district came together to break bread for the first time. The Sunday School was held in the afternoon and grew to over 100. There were some 20 Malayalee families (from Kerala in India), about 15 British serviceman and their families, who were residing in Singapore, and a number of Chinese families, who met for worship and to encourage one another from the Scriptures. The small congregation used the church premises at 140 Yio Chu Kang Road, which belonged to Yio Chu Kang Gospel Hall, a Hokkien-speaking Brethren assembly, which had been established since 1930. The land for this building was donated by a merchant, Mr Chew Hu Kwee, an elder of Yio Chu Kang Gospel Hall.

In 1957, the following were appointed as elders – Messrs P.J. John and C.R. Hale. In the early 1960s, preachers such as Messrs W.G. Stott, Dr G.D. James and other full-time workers were invited to minister the Word. Gospel services were conducted though the response was small.

Through difficult times

In the period 1964-65, the church went through difficult times. The announcement of the British Forces' withdrawal came as a shock to Singapore. The assembly at Yio Chu Kang faced a severe crisis following the repatriation of many of its members back to their homelands. There was a dearth in the leadership and membership fell drastically.

Thus, owing to dwindling attendances and inadequate numbers of brethren to help in the work, the Yio Chu Kan assembly formally asked the leaders of Bethesda Hall (Bras Basah) to look after the work there with effect from January 1966. So, in that year Mr Lauw Kim Guan was sent from the Bras Basah assembly to help strengthen the leadership and develop the work. He challenged several members from Bethesda Hall (Bras Basah) to join the work at Yio Chu Kang, among whom were Mr and Mrs Tan Leng Ghee and Mr and Mrs Yeo Oon Boo. Mr Yeo took on the responsibility to rebuild the Sunday School. Later, Messrs Freddie Hoe and Ronnie Lim came over to share in the leadership. Subsequently, the assembly was revived and in mid-1969, it regained its autonomy.

The church moved a few times. With the widening of Yio Chu Kang Road and increased traffic volume, which contributed to higher noise levels, the church relocated in 1963. It moved to

the premises of a private kindergarten at 2 St. Heliers' Avenue, a short distance from the Yio Chu Kang Gospel Hall. This was kindly made available by a Christian sister, Mrs T.K. Ng.

As the church grew, the leadership felt the need to look for a more permanent place to develop its ministries. In 1975, the congregation of about 60 members took a giant step of faith to purchase a private bungalow at 40 Jansen Road. Members gave generously and used their talents in many creative ways to raise funds. One such means was the production of a musical "The Living Song" in 1974, which was staged at the Victoria Theatre.

Moving to a permanent location

Two years later, a larger piece of property along Yio Chu Kang Road was offered for sale. Due to its strategic location and its potential for future development, the property at Jansen Road was sold to purchase 242 Yio Chu Kang Road in 1978. The wooden bungalow, with durian and rambutan trees in the garden, became the church's new home. Sunday School classes were held in the building and also under the trees, while baptisms were conducted in a small pool in the garden. Mr Freddie Ho was appointed the first full-time worker of the church in 1980 and served till 1995.

In the 1980's, the leaders of Yio chu Kang Chapel (English-speaking congregation) and Yio Chu Kang Gospel Hall (Hokkien-speaking congregation) combined their resources and embarked on a three-storey building project. This building was dedicated to the Lord in October 1988 by elder Mr Peter Loh, who was instrumental in designing the building and also coordinated the entire project.

Meanwhile, the neighbourhood in the church's vicinity was undergoing notable changes. From a sparsely populated area, Housing and Development board housing estates spouted in Serangoon North and Hougang, and many new private residential houses were added in the Poh Huat Road and Parry Avenue vicinities.

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