

Trusting God: *Rev Dr Philip Siew's Journey with Seminari Theoloji Malaysia*

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Life has been full of unexpected surprises for Rev Dr Philip Siew. He probably never would have imagined himself becoming a pastor, much less a theological educator, or even the Principal of Seminari Theoloji Malaysia (STM). He was born in Georgetown, Penang, on 22nd February, 1955. By the age of 13, he was already a member of a juvenile gang in his residential area in Penang. Gang fights were a normal activity during his teenage years.

God, however, eventually turned his life around. While attending a Christian camp at the Christian Convention Centre at Batu Ferringhi in December 1970, he heard the sharing of Mr Hsueh Yu Kwong (薛玉光), the camp speaker. Mr Hsueh's messages had an impact on him; they changed his life because he experienced God's saving grace there. With this newfound life in Christ that he now experienced, Philip reached out to his gang members, sharing the Good News with them, but they made fun of him, calling him "a good son". Eventually, he would leave the gang and their bad habits, and follow a higher calling.

The desire to serve God in the ministry saw Philip enrolling at Trinity Theological College (TTC), Singapore, in 1978. He spent the next four years at TTC, during which time he was elected President of the Student Council in 1980. From September 1981 to July 1982, he took a break from his theological studies and went back to pastor Penang Cantonese Methodist Church as their pastor Rev David Foo was away for a year for further studies in England. He eventually returned to TTC in August 1982 and graduated with a Bachelor of Theology (BTh) in 1983.



After graduating, Rev Philip Siew was posted to Penang Cantonese Methodist Church and Butterworth Chinese Methodist Church as the assistant pastor. He was appointed as pastor of Ampang Chinese Methodist Church Kuala Lumpur in 1988 (January-July) before he went off to TTC again to do his MTheol under ATESEA in 1988 to 1990. While pastoring at Ampang Chinese Methodist Church, he taught a course at STM when it was located at the Methodist High School in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur; he even supervised a student's thesis.

Marriage was not far off and on 14th April 1984, he married his long-time sweetheart, Magdalene Laeu Siew Hwa. About three years later they were blessed by the arrival of their daughter, Debbie Siew, on 21st August 1987.

Teaching would ultimately become his lifelong passion and conviction. He pursued further studies at TTC in 1989 and graduated with an MTheol from SEAGST in 1991. Upon his return, he was appointed as full-time pastor to Pandamaran Chinese Methodist Church in Klang, and taught part-time at STM from 1991 to August 1992. When STM was in Xavier Hall at Jalan Gasing, Petaling Jaya, he continued faithfully to render his service. Rev Philip Siew proved to be a passionate pastor at heart, and also full of zeal to equip God's people. As a part-time lecturer, he taught several Old Testament courses in Chinese, and Hebrew for both the English and Chinese department students. Many students will remember him as being small in stature, but possessing a booming voice, and who taught with passion and conviction.



Rev Dr Philip Siew being the president of student council of TTC in 1980-1981.



Rev Dr Philip Siew and family.

On 31st August 1992 he departed for studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, where he obtained his MTh (Missiology) in 1993 and then embarked on his PhD (Inter-cultural Studies) programme. While studying there he also pastored a church from 1994 till he graduated. This period was both challenging and demanding as managing studies, pastoral tasks and family responsibilities at the same time required huge commitment and effort. He finally graduated with a PhD in Inter-cultural Studies in 1999 and returned to Malaysia in June that same year. He joined STM as a faculty member on 1st July 1999. This marked a new chapter in Rev Dr Philip Siew's path of service to God and God's people. However, his heart for pastoral ministry remained, and thus he took up pastoral duties at newly founded Nilai Chinese Methodist Church in September 1999.

As STM grew and expanded its theological programmes, Rev Dr Philip Siew was entrusted with more tasks and duties. He was appointed to be the Director of Postgraduate Studies from 2001 to 2010, and subsequently the Director of Advanced Ministerial Studies from 2011 to 2015. Under him, the number of students who enrolled for these studies grew steadily.

1st April 2015 was a historic day for Rev Dr Philip Siew as he was appointed the fourth Principal of STM. Shortly after he was officially installed at a special service on 6th May 2015. Since this position involved venturing into new areas of responsibility, he made the difficult decision to withdraw from being pastor-in-charge at the church in Nilai in December 2015. During his tenure as Principal, Dr Siew initiated the Christian Worship Programme in 2017 to provide an avenue for those who wish to specialize in this area. The new extension block that is going to be completed will have facilities to further advance this programme. He is also actively involved in building ties among the pastors in Seremban.

Although teaching and other responsibilities take up much of his time and energy, Rev Dr Philip Siew makes sure he carves out time for exercise and sports. He is a familiar sight on the basketball court at STM. While he may not have the height of the other students, this in no way hinders him from making them work hard to counter his swift moves on the court. Such times of interaction give the students the opportunity to relax with him and chat informally.

Rev Dr Philip Siew's long and fruitful journey with STM will officially come to a close at the end of 2020 when he retires as Principal and also as a full-time faculty member. By then, he would have rendered twenty one and a half years of full-time service. Nevertheless, he will surely continue being involved in God's ministry. While this ministry may take different forms, what is certain is that it will still be accompanied with the same passion and commitment.



At STM 40th Anniversary Dinner.



Rev Dr Philip Siew is an active game player.



With Students at STM chapel.