

**Spring 2008**

**THEME ARTICLE**

- P. 1     Envy, Loneliness and  
          Collegiality Among  
          English-Speaking Asian  
          Pastors  
          — John Ng

**STUDENT COLUMN**

- P. 5     An Eighteen-Year  
          Promise  
          — Shanon Lee
- P. 7     Some Reflections on...  
          — Xian Tien Zhong

**ALUMNI COLUMN**

- P. 9     Theological Training and  
          Full-time Ministry  
          — Yu Lin Liu

**NEWS**

- P. 11

## Envy, Loneliness and Collegiality Among English-Speaking Asian Pastors

**John L. Ng**

Some time ago, within a span of a few months, several English speaking Asian pastors resigned from their pastorates. No doubt each had personal reasons for leaving. But as I explored the decision-making process with some of them, I realized that what they commonly went through was both harmful and hurtful. Most of them made that life changing decision alone. They hardly spoke with anyone about their struggles. At the monthly pastors' fellowship we received the news with shock and incredulity. It reminded me of a guest lecturer who told my class what he had discovered in pastoral work that he had not know in earlier years. He said "I didn't realize how lonely being a pastor can be. I have many pastor-friends, but we are not close. We are too competitive to be close friends."

My colleagues apparently made their decision in isolation because we are competing with one another in ministry. As ludicrous as it sounds, many of us suffer loneliness because we feel like competitors in the ministry of the gospel. Some competition is in the guise of jealousy. Jealousy is that unspoken fear of losing what we think we have to others. A pastor I know would not allow his predecessor to preach in his church. Apparently his predecessor has nurtured some wonderful relationships in that church and is still well loved and respected. This pastor's jealousy for his congregants' admiration will not permit him to share his pulpit with someone who is more admired than he. When

asked why their former pastor has not been invited to preach, my colleague manages a halting excuse. But most people know the true reason is jealousy.

Jealousy erects walls around our ministry to preserve what we have worked for. These walls may keep what we want to protect inside, but they also keep those we are jealous of outside. In public, we exchange pleasantries cordially, but we secretly want nothing to do with one other. Jealousy insulates fellow ministers from one other.

Then there is envy. We pastors feel lonely and are isolated because we are envious of one other. When we are envious, we desire to have what others have. A prominent non-Asian pastor in New York has attracted many Asians to his church. His postmodern-sensitive preaching has resulted in many Asian pastors losing their members, some key leaders, to him. Many of us talk unashamedly about how envious we are of him.

One form of envy is admiration. We genuinely admire this pastor's success among Asians. If they do not attend his church, they may not go to church at all. It is obvious that God has touched his ministry marvelously. When he is speaking somewhere on church issues, if it is convenient, we want to go and listen to what he has to say. A colleague of mine frankly admits that this pastor is his "hero" and wants to emulate him.

Then again, our other form of envy is not so healthful. When his name comes up in our conversations, some of us swell up in anguish and turn resentful. We wonder quietly why God seemingly is unfair. Why should he be so successful when we think we are just as good or better than he. Some of us like to make fun of how nerdy he dresses or how out of shape he is. A few blame him for their low church attendance. One angrily concludes that what this pastor has done to the Asian churches is "reprehensible."

Our envy is not only reserved for clerics of notoriety. Many are envious of one another. When I came back to New York City in the early 1990's, I joined a monthly pastors' fellowship. On a typical weeknight meeting, we gather in some church basement. Over dinner we shop chitchat. Every once in a while, someone may dish out a discussion on a ministry related topic. Whatever we are doing, our intention is to create an inviting environment for full-time ministry workers to find encouragement in collegiality.

Our monthly pastors' fellowship has stayed relatively small as a pattern emerges. There are three types of participants. There are a handful of pastors who come consistently. They see that our fellowship scratches a certain itch among pastors. As colleagues, we gather to encourage one another, compare notes with one another, pick one another's brain, share a

joke or two with one another, and be with one another. These conscientious pastors make it a priority in their schedule to show up.

There is a second group of pastors who come irregularly. At times they promise to attend but never show; other times they show up when they say they are not coming. Some come late and leave early; some come early and leave before the meeting begins. Some come just to grab a plate of food then leave; some come but keep to themselves. Although many in this group agree that the fellowship has been personally helpful, they show no strain to support it.

The majority of Asian pastors in New York do not attend any pastors' fellowship. Most are from smaller churches; a few are from established churches. All are on our announcement e-mail list. Yet they have no real urge to attend. Reasons are many and vary. Not all is prompted by envy. Some pastors do not come because they have young families. They want to keep their free evenings from church free for their family. Some pastors cannot come because there is too much to do and not enough day hours to do it so they steal from their evenings. They would rather do work in their study than attend fellowship with other pastors. Some pastors do not come because they are loners and keep to themselves. Their parish is their whole world, and they seldom want to leave it.

Of all the reasons why most Asian pastors do not attend our fellowship, the most pervasive is probably professional envy. I think most pastors do not mingle with one another because they envy others. They sincerely believe that other ministers are rivals. If their rivals have better preaching ministry, they feel dumb. If their rivals have larger churches, they feel small. If their rivals have more spectacular ministries, they feel inept. If their rivals have a greater reputation, they feel ordinary. Few prominent pastors, in a strange reversal of envy, do not come because they feel that they are above the fray. In their busyness, they have no time for us. We are not mean spirited; most of us are well meaning. We do want to work in a concerted effort for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But our unguarded envy gets in the way.

Of all the professions, I would have never suspected this deadly sin of envy among professional pastors. I mean, if you crave power, fame and wealth, the pastorate is not the vocation to get into. The April 26, 2004 issue of Time magazine lists the 100 most powerful and influential people in the world. With the exception of the Catholic Pope, no other professional cleric is mentioned. Awhile back, a pastor friend griped about his meager paycheck that had stayed with the same amount for four years. Without his wife's supplement salary, he would not be able to afford professional minis-

try.

Yet this envious malaise is real among pastors. It has made us more insulated in who we are and what we have been called by God to do. Why are pastors so competitive with one another? After much struggle with this question, I have some tentative observations:

*One, there is a link between emotional health and true spirituality. Enough of us are educated beyond our spirituality. Who we are and what we do, feel and believe do not match our theological knowledge. Pastors maybe hold positions of church leadership but may not be emotionally mature enough to handle its demands. In some sense pastoral work is a lose/lose proposition. If we do well, congregants give God the glory; if we do badly, they blame us. Whether we do well or badly in pastoral work, we do not get any credit. No wonder pastors are less than healthy emotionally in ministry (read *The Emotionally Healthy Church* by Peter Scazzero). Suffering this emotional malady, we touch no one and allow no*

*To seek meaningful fellowship with other pastors, we have to make peace with envy and competitiveness.*

*one to touch us.*

*Two, there is imbalance in our social life. Enough of us do not have a life apart from church life. We seldom see fellow pastors and their spouses socially. A friend complains that he has tried every way to reach out to his colleagues in ministry. When they come to his home for dinner, they often arrive and leave promptly. The worst part is that his dinner invitations are never reciprocated. After awhile, he stops trying. Social isolation feeds envy, and envy feeds social isolation. I do not know which comes first. But I do know that both are harmful. The more we do not know one another socially, the more we struggle with envy; the more we struggle with envy, the less we want to be with one another socially.*

*Three, few pastors have few meaningful friendships. Most pastors I know are Asian men. They are notorious for being mono-relational. It seems we do not know how to nurture intimate relationships with other men. A colleague has worked with his senior pastor for more than five years. They meet weekly at the church office. Apart from that, they have never seen each other outside the church. At their office meeting, neither shares any thing personal. My friend groans, "I don't know this guy, how do you expect me to trust him." Lack of meaningful*

*friendships makes us distrustful of one another. Without real friendships, we see others as a threat to our true self.*

*Four, enough of us also scuffle with this overwhelming sense of ineptitude in pastoral work. Its demands are always more than the tools we possess. Not wanting others to see our inadequacy, we would rather not see them at all. Some time ago, I spoke at a men's conference on the subject of failure. In the talk, I recalled samples of failure in my ministry. Afterwards, a long time acquaintance stopped me and said, "I can't believe you. You always looked so competent." From a distance, we all look better than we really are. But the closer we get, the more glaring our true deficient self becomes. So we do not allow proximity with those who do what we do. We really do not want people to see how inept we really are.*

These reasons for envy contrive a vicious cycle. We are forever socially isolated and feeling professionally inept without the fellowship of other ministers. We will always feel lonely and inept when we touch no one and allow no one to touch us. Here are a few simple solutions that are obvious to many of us:

*One, we all need to cultivate mentoring relationships with more mature pastors who can touch us with their experi-*

*We will always feel lonely and inept when we touch no one and allow no one to touch us.*

*ence. Life is tough and ministry is tougher. This sensation of ineptitude is real. Without the wise guidance of a finger-pointing mentor, it would be nearly impossible to find our way home in ministry. At the moment, I am grateful that I enjoy several mentoring relationships with pastors. Two are mentoring me, and I am mentoring others. All these fellow ministers help me learn, grow and gain wholeness in pastoral work. Some meet with me once a month; others more often. I always walk away from our encounters feeling good being in my own skin and better in my pastoral task.*

*Two, New York City is probably the best place to live and do pastoral work. The Big Apple is a world-class city. It has more than 400 neighborhoods, 150 museums, 400 art galleries, and scores of concert halls and theaters. It is the home of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Botanical Garden, the Bronx Zoo, Lincoln Center and more than 500 parks, including Central Park. The New York winter is not fun. But the rest of the year is almost heaven. What the*

*city has to offer can enrich our lives and our relationships with one another. The God who has called us to church work is also inviting us to enjoy the place in which we do church work.*

*Three, we should make it a priority to cultivate meaningful friendships with one or two pastors. Only another pastor can understand what a pastor stumbles through in church. When I was twenty-something, in the morning light of ministry, nothing looked too difficult. In the bright light of morning, I felt invincible and needed no one. Now that I am pushing sixty, in the twilight of ministry, I see a very vulnerable reality. As that Beatles song goes, I get by with a little help from my friends. What few pastor-friends I have are invaluable. I crawl to them every chance I get – when I am upset or confused, defeated or lost, when I read a good book or get a good student evaluation. Without these few good friends, I probably would have left the pastorate long ago.*

*Four, there is something to be said about being with other pastors. Since we are in the same boat, there is safety in numbers. Our circumstances may stay the same, but I always go home from fellowship feeling better about myself and others. To seek meaningful fellowship with other pastors, we have to make peace with envy and com-*

*petitiveness. Go get some counseling if we must. Do what we need to do to get over this rivalry. Be sensible enough to admit that there will always be others who are better or worse than we are in ministry. Once we get past that pathology, I think we will see others not as competitors but as companions in a long journey of the same direction.*



*Dr. John Ng is Associate Professor of Pastoral Studies at Alliance Theological Seminary. Besides teaching, he also serves as the English pastor at New York Chinese Baptist Church. Dr. Ng has been actively involved in mentoring and nurturing future Asian leaders for God's service.*

## STUDENT COLUMN

# An Eighteen-Year Promise

**Shanon Lee**  
**Third Year Student**

It was May 1985 when I graduated from college. I was about to land a position with an international accounting firm when the job market took a sudden downturn. Accordingly, the firm decided to defer my job offer for one year, and I was left without a job. As a foreign student who wanted to stay in U.S., my other option was to attend graduate school.

I hated the idea of staying in the same college for another two years for the masters program because most of the brothers and sisters in the church knew that I would be leaving the city and moving on with a job. Staying on reflected my failure in the job search, and I could not stand that feeling. Even if I could not find a job, I wanted to go to somewhere else so that I did not have to face all these people in church. However, my best option turned out to be staying at the same college and I, reluctantly, met my destiny there.

At that time, I strongly believed that God intentionally put a road block in my job search as He wanted me to continue serv-

ing in the student fellowship and the church. As a result, I decided to do something to tell God that it was a BIG mistake to keep me in the church. I wanted Him to know that if He did not provide me a job, I would not serve Him anymore in any way. With my mind made up, I began to take a very uncooperative attitude in church. Against my usual practices, I did not reach out to new students, I did not take part in church activities, and I even did not spend time with God. I thought, by doing all these things, I could force God to do things my way.

Interestingly, when I kept myself away from God, I found God being very distant from me. I thought that God would care how I acted and would do something to make me feel better. At least, He should give me a reason why He did not provide me a job and comfort me. But, He did not do anything. He just let me lay low and run my course of spiritual downtime. At that time, I felt that I could understand Elijah's feeling in 1 Kings chapter 19 when God seemed nowhere to be found in his life.

A semester passed without leaving any traces in my life. As usual, the student fellowships of the universities in the southwestern states organized a winter evangelical camp. I was not excited in joining this camp because I was still upset with God, and the two main speakers of the camp were not my favorite preachers. However, our God is a humorous God. While I did not expect anything from this camp, God used this camp to revive my spiritual life. Through the various messages and personal interactions with one of the preachers, God showed me how self-centered and foolish I was, and I had no choice but to kneel down and pray for His forgiveness. Until then, I was once again reconciled with God. God continued to work in my heart and even called me to full time ministry on the last day of the camp.

To me, serving God on a full-time basis is not an easy road. There are many temptations along the way. In the following year, I passed the certified public accountant examination and landed a job with another international accounting firm in San Francisco. Not willing to let go of the earthly achievements, I asked God to give me 18 years to pursue my own goals and career before I gave my life to full time ministry.

During this period, God gave me a lot of blessings in my work. In 1998, God gave me a job opportunity in Hong Kong. Both my wife and I believed that

we would not stay in Hong Kong forever; even though, we did not know how, when, and where we would come back to the States. The work in Hong Kong was both challenging and rewarding. However, such opportunities drove me farther away from my commitment to God. During those years, even though God had spoken to me several times through His words, I was not ready to leave my comfort zone and cruise into an uncharted course in God's deep sea of faith and mercy.

In early 2003, our family started praying about moving back to the States because my wife and I wanted our children to be educated here. I also started praying for God's will on my life, as I remembered my "Eighteen-Year Promise" was coming up. After praying for a year and nine months, God prepared a job for me in New York. Moving away from Hong Kong was a significant step for me because it basically represented the end of my career. However, it did not bother me much at that time as our desire to move back to the States was stronger. As a result, my family moved to New York in early 2005.

We led a simple life in New York until late October of 2005 when God once again called me to full time ministry. Through Matthew 14:28 – 29, God challenged me to follow Peter's example in experiencing His truth and power. If Peter had never stepped out of the

boat, he would have never walked on the water. Similarly, if I would not leave my safety zone, I would never know God's plan in my life. By then, the decision was an easy one, as I knew my promise to God was overdue by almost two years and I had no affection for the job in New York. In addition, my wife was very supportive toward my decision to quit my work and attend seminary on a full time basis. She had only one condition, i.e. to obtain medical insurance for the family, and God had provided us with affordable insurance through a state program. I thank God for giving me this second chance to serve Him and experience Him.

Time really flies as I have already attended ATS for almost one year. It is quite difficult for me, as a middle age man, to pick up studying again. If I had known that it would be so hard, I probably would have started seminary earlier. But in any event, God's grace is sufficient, and I thank Him for preparing a suitable seminary for me. I have two more years to go in my seminary training, but I enjoy this time, as I can see God is preparing me for my future service.



*The happy family of Shanon Lee: his wife, Jade, along with their son, Jonathan and their daughter, Jessica.*

## Some Reflections on...

**Xian Tien Zhong**  
Second Year Student

### ***"One must study for serving"***

I'm grateful to God for giving me the privilege to serve him for a few years at the pastorate and later on leading me to study at the seminary to prepare me for the Kingdom's work in the future.

### **Childhood Dream Came True**

My parents were Christian, so I knew Jesus' name since childhood. I could sing many hymns and recite the Lord's Prayer. From my parents' examples, I became a Christian. It was like the lyric of a hymn that says: "I don't know why God's wondrous grace and His salvation made known to me, but I know whom I have believed, and I believe that he is able to keep me until that day!" During the rough years of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, there were no churches open for worship. Only a few brothers and sisters, ten at the most, worshipped secretly at someone's home. One volunteer preacher greatly influenced me. Every time he visited us, we would sing and pray from morning till evening

and listen to his messages for hours. I can still remember many of his messages and testimonies. I was so touched by his sermons that I made a secret wish that I want to emulate him, to become a preacher like him.

That dream from childhood had long been forgotten, but God doesn't forget. He led me to realize my dream! I have been in full-time ministry for six years. As I reflect on what has happened in the past and examine God's hand on me presently, countless thoughts of gratefulness come flushing into my mind. Praise God for his wondrous grace. I have nothing to boast of.

### **Lesson From Ministry**

In the past six years of pastoring, God has transformed me from a servant without theological training into a senior pastor in a small church. I compare myself to a bare-footed doctor during the Chinese Cultural Revolution who did everything from scratch. However, I learned and benefited a lot from these numerous roles I played. To sum up, it was a bitter-sweet experience.

rience.

### **Faithful in Small Things**

In a small church where our brothers and sisters are busy with their jobs and family life, I am usually the one that opens and closes the door at the church. I also clean up after service. Most of the time, I am the first one to arrive and the last one to leave.

The congregants move in and out of the neighborhood often, so saying hello and bidding goodbye is my common practice. I am often called to offer carpools or help people relocate. I joke to myself that I am the worker and driver of a "moving company"; however, I look at them as opportunities to build muscles. In serving the senior members, I am also their driver and tour guide. Every Friday during the fellowship time, I play the role of chef for the love feast. Each time when we sit down to enjoy the food and I hear people commenting "Our pastor's cooking skill has improved," my heart brims with joy!

So the church ministry nur-

tures my physical health and enhances my ministerial skills. After a while, the brothers and sisters volunteered to cook, because they said among themselves that they shouldn't have let their pastor become a cook. They initiated to share my loads. This kind of true love can only be found in the body of Christ.

### **Devotion and Servitude of Love**

In serving the Lord, we should devote all our heart, mind and strength. In serving men, we should share one another's burden and take actions. I apply these two principles in my daily encounter with the parish. As our church is composed of many young couples, almost every year there will be newborn members added to the church family. I work alongside my co-workers to pray and care for the pregnant sisters or those that just gave birth. I really enjoy the privilege of delivering nutritious soups to them in the hospital. I do hospital visitation on occasions like this. Sometimes after evening fellowship or prayer meeting, when the need arises, I stay to counsel couples who suffer in their relationship or encounter job-related issues. I then play the role of an encourager and counselor. At times, the counsel prolongs till midnight. I hold on to the Lord's given strength to pray with them, even cry with them. The Lord never fails in comforting each one of us.

It dawned on me after many

years of ministry that I needed professional training to serve the Lord more effectively. I'm grateful to God for the experiences in the ministry that had filled me with surprises, hardship, tears, and yet these are all tremendous blessings. Whenever I feel low and hit by frustrated feelings, God always encourages me with Psalm 126 verse 5: "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy." Praise the Lord for his goodness and faithfulness. He never forsakes me even when I disobey his will, or am indifferent to his warning. He preserves my soul and "He crowns the years with bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance...they shout for joy and sing." (Ps. 65:11, 13).

### **Seminary Training**

In God's time, he brought me to study at ATS. Studying and serving at the same time has broadened my view on ministry because I can practice what I learn at the seminary. To do theology is to study God, so studying in the seminary helps me to grow professional and spiritually. By entering seminary, I've become more aware of my future direction, and my desire to serve the Lord has grown stronger. I believe that the purpose of studying theology is not just to increase my knowledge about God, but to be near God.

At ATS I learn inside and outside the classroom. My walk with the Lord becomes closer by attending the prayer meeting and

joining the gospel team. During the prayer meeting I learn to pray, share, encourage and share each other's burden. The prayer meeting also widens the horizon of my prayer. We pray for the churches we serve and for the Kingdom's ministries. In the past few years, the gospel team has helped the Chinese Christians in Norwich, Connecticut, first to form a fellowship, then to establish a church. I have also taught and preached in the fledgling church. The young church has not only helped the local members, I personally have accumulated experiences in being involved in their ministry. I'm glad that my own church is willing to support me to teach and preach in the Norwich church. As Jesus has said, it is more blessed to give than be given.

In the past few years, I see God's grace and abundant blessing to the church I've been serving, and so far there have been more than 100 people that have accepted Christ. Some of them, after leadership training, have played key roles in the church ministry. Some have moved away to pursue their study or to live closer to their new-found job, but they eventually all become blessings to other churches.

I still have a long way to go as far as the pilgrimage is concerned. But I will continually rely on God's grace. My desire is that one day when I'm face to face with the Lord, he will compliment me, saying "my good and faithful serv-

ant, come enjoy the feast with me.”  
I anticipate that indescribable joy!



*Xian Tien Zhong is already pastoring full-time at New Haven Chinese Alliance Church while he is receiving his theological education at ATS.*

## ALUMNI COLUMN

# Theological Training and Full-Time Ministry

YuLin Liu  
Class 2005

The Church in our age generally agrees that pastors need to have theological training to meet pastorate demands and that the Master of Divinity degree is good enough for them. In the past, some churches would oppose their pastors having formal theological training, assuming that the training provides them with mental knowledge, but that in shaping the spiritual maturity, it is not profitable. They said that the theological training and spiritual growth run on two different tracks. But from what I observe, the ones that oppose the theological education normally have not had seminary training themselves. They still carry the baggage from the lay leaders in their church who taught them on the outset of their faith that the theological training is useless.

In 2001 when I was working for IT Corporation in Singapore, their financial forecast was gloomy. It was estimated that a big portion of the employees at IT would be laid off, so everyone was fidgety. At that time I had been a Christian for four years. Facing the

uncertain future, I went to church frequently to pray and seek the Lord's comfort. As I prayed persistently for four months, I became more and more clear that God wanted me to serve Him in the church, and in the long run, He would lead me into full-time ministry. Since then I began to ponder the necessity of theological training. In the following two years, I had read many Christian books in preparing sermons for a mainland Chinese church. In my busy professional life, I managed to find time to read a book about church history and I had also familiarized myself with a couple of books written by Watchman Nee. I thought by accumulating the experiences in preaching and teaching, I could further evaluate the possibility of serving God full-time. In Singapore there are several seminaries and I met a friend who was studying in one of them. She explained to me the good things about studying theology. The conversation with her had paved the way for me in making the decision to enter a seminary. However, many congregants in our church voiced their opposition

forward my getting the theological education. They feared that I might compromise my faith if I did enter a seminary. I encountered one trial after another while waiting for the enrollment paperwork. In the end, all trials were used by God to test my determination in serving Him. These trials were tools to help me make certain God had indeed called me. Praise the Lord for His sustaining. After the test I was reassured of God's call and His faithfulness to lead me through.

I have been studying theology for nearly six years. From my personal experience, I notice we seminarians are trained to think logically in doing hermeneutics and are under pressure to meet the deadline. Very often we read the Bible for the sake of writing a paper instead of meeting and knowing God. We miss the given privilege of allowing God's Word to cleanse the darkness in our heart. We sidetrack God's Word to do academic research and hinder its renewing our spiritual life.

On the other hand, theological training does provide students a platform to learn how the power of God's Word and His Spirit established the Church in history; how the heretics came about and the Church defended the truth; how Christian doctrines were formed; and how believers in our present time can learn from mistakes of the past.

Prior to my seminary train-

ing, I emphatically pursued the transformation of my inner spiritual life, but I didn't make much progress. It was like I was crossing the river by grabbing the stones on the riverbed. I was not able to discern spiritually what kind of Christian books could help me grow. I envied the spiritual insights the authors described in their books, and I strived to obtain similar miraculous spiritual experiences they had. My desire at that stage was to search for a way to transform my spiritual life. I even faithfully followed the spiritual disciplines the book writers described in their books to "find God." I did get some insight from each book; yet my heart was still heavily burdened by the frustrated feeling in my heart that I couldn't reach a new spiritual horizon I envied. Later on, I realized the cause of my devastation was my partial understanding of God's Word, and without recognizing it, I was actually interpreting the Bible with my own cultural upbringing. I fell into prey of fighting with the flesh with my own might, not leaning on God's mercy and grace. I had become a legalist without knowing it. I did not know that God had given me within my heart a new spirit and a new life in Christ.

It dawned on me one day, when I was sharing my frustration with some pastors in China who told me their similar frustration, that I had emphasized so much how to conquer the flesh that I had actually isolated myself from others. I and my peer pastors feared that by

relating to others, we would expose our struggle, and this state of mind has a link to our cultural heritage. We practice conquering the flesh, and by doing so we are like ancient Buddhist monks that think they're superior to others because they're at the top of the ladder versus others at the bottom of the ladder. We hide the pride deep in our heart and entertain ourselves with it. I notice many other Christian workers have the same spiritual defect without being aware. Some may realize the defect, yet they have no power within themselves to change. They work hard for the break-through. I believe this cause has made some churches to choose the "patriarchal" leadership, which is unfortunately dictatorial in disguise.

I believe that not every lay believer needs formal theological training, but pastors and ministers do need seminary training. We are so blessed with many options of seminaries from which to choose. Some seminaries emphasize the academic and professional skills, some spiritual formation, and still others pastoral care and discipleship. However, if a seminarian wants to study theology for pastoring, he should look for a seminary that focuses on evangelism, counseling and pastoral care. To obtain a Master of Divinity degree, it normally would take three years to acquire the credits required. But some seminaries have condensed their courses so intensely that their students might not be able to digest what they learn in three years. Take

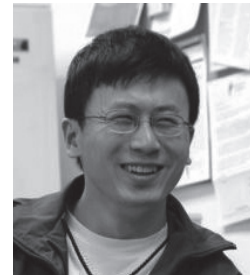
Greek and Hebrew courses as examples. It takes the students one and a half years to complete each course. I often hear seminarians mention that in order to graduate in three years, they need to take as many credits as they can afford, but the heavy work load hinders them from absorbing and practicing what they learn. Some even admit that they lack time to pray and spend time with the Lord. On their commencement, they have a “hat” to crown their head, but their foundation of faith still remains shallow. So I would advise the Christians that are thinking of studying in a seminary to watch out for the slip that in meeting the academic demands, they might sacrifice their relationship with the Lord. Our source of strength comes from spending time with the Lord. It’s better to take Greek and Hebrew courses slowly and soundly even if it takes longer than three years. The most important part of theological training is spiritual growth, healing from the Lord, and being set free from the inner bondage. The reward of studying theology is to know oneself, know others and know God. Besides using the theological study to renew faith in the Lord, seminarians should also intern in different churches to practice what they learn from the classroom. I thank God for giving me the privilege of finish my last year of M.Div. degree at the Alliance Theological Seminary in Nyack, New York, where I learned how to nurture a mission mind and spiritual growth. What I learned in

this year has equipped me to face challenges in my future ministry.

It is crucial for seminarians to serve in their churches. Before I started to study in the seminary, I had already served in the church full-time for two years. I continued my involvement at the church even after I entered the seminary. I went to various churches to intern and to learn from others. I was given the opportunity to practice what I learned. If the elders and pastors of the church are willing to take seminarians as Joshua and Timothy were to Moses and Paul, and demonstrate their pastoral skills, the students will learn tremendously. The best benefit is that they could avoid the mistakes a novice normally makes, shortening their transition from graduation to becoming an experienced minister. In this manner they are better prepared to face challenges in the pastorate. To have a mentor to guide them through the struggles of pastoring is indeed a blessing.

Last but not least, it is better for prospective seminarians to research the seminaries available to them and evaluate one by one to decide which one can equip them better to fulfill God’s call on their life. A famous seminary is not always the best choice if it cannot offer the training needed to serve God effectively in the particular call received from God. The seminary study itself is already a process of self-growth, but it sometimes could be a wilderness experience.

A seminarian should hold on to his calling and allow God to break him and mold him toward becoming spiritually mature. May each one of the seminarians receive God’s blessings abundantly, mature in the walk, and receive spiritual insights from the years of training. May the glory of God dwell in each one of you. Amen!



*Yu Lin Liu came from Mainland China. He graduated from Alliance Theological Seminary in 2005. He is now pursuing his Ph.D. degree at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.*

# NEWS

## Alumni Update

Sam Lau (May 2003)'s ordination was held on September 31 of 2007 at Greater Boston Chinese Alliance Church. He has been serving at this church for two years.

Tak Tong Lee (Dec 2002)'s inauguration was held on September of 2007 at Oversea Chinese Mission Canaan Church of Princeton. Tak has served in Paris, France for several years after graduating from seminary.

Jun Ren (May 2007) and his wife Jane Yu Chen Cheng joined the staff of Living Stone Christian Church at the end of last year.

Adam Chu (May 2007) and his wife moved to the west coast at the beginning of the year. Adam is now serving at Tri-Valley Chinese Bible Church in Pleasanton, CA.

David Lo (May 2006), after completing his externship at Rutgers Community Christian Church is now serving full-time at Chinese Evangel Mission in New Jersey.

## Courses Offered in Summer 2008

### Rockland Campus

#### **Development of the Chinese Church in 20th Century**

Instructor: Dr. Peter Au

Date and Time: May 27 - 31, Tuesday to Saturday, 8:30am - 4:30pm

## Courses Offered in Fall 2008

### Rockland Campus

#### **Leadership and Pastoral Ministry for the Chinese Church**

Instructor: Dr. John Ng

Date and Time: September to December 2008

#### **For information, please contact:**

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