

WORLD EVANGELISM FUND

Easter

OFFERING

NAZARENE PRESENCE OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED IN SINGAPORE

<http://engagemagazine.com/content/nazarene-presence-officially-recognized-singapore>

In late 2005, then Regional Director Rev. Verne Ward began to explore the possibility of moving the Asia-Pacific Regional Office from Manila, Philippines, to Singapore. Located just off the southern tip of Malaysia, this city nation is a travel hub for Asia, a gateway to areas where the Church of the Nazarene is not yet established.

Some call Singapore a “Vertical Village” since its 5.8 million people live on an island approximately 26 miles long and 14 miles wide. It has the second highest population density of any nation in the world.



Others see it as the “Antioch of Asia.” Like its first century counterpart, Singapore is a place of wealth and refinement, a leading world-class city, a place of great beauty and commercial importance, a city abounding in leading education centers. And like Antioch, Singapore is a strategic city for the expansion of the Kingdom of God. Within a radius of seven hours flight time from Singapore lie 30 countries, 3 billion people, and 900 people groups unreached by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ward, along with other regional office personnel, made several exploratory trips to Singapore to evaluate opportunities and meet with other churches and mission organizations. The plan was to have a minimal infrastructure in the regional office that included the functions of regional communications, finance, and personnel. All other ministry coordinators would be located across the region in highly functional teams connected together in a virtual office setting.

In one of those early exploratory trips, Dr. Robert Solomon, the Methodist Bishop of Singapore, warmly welcomed the Church of the Nazarene to join in the task of making disciples and forming communities of faith in this strategic city.

Although its Christian population is significant (11 percent), there are also great numbers of workers from some of the unreached and under-reached countries of Asia living and working there.

The regional office team was excited at the chance to be involved in hands-on church planting along with their administrative responsibilities. A major factor standing in the way of such a move was the cost of office space and housing for four families. But Dr. Hudson Taylor’s quote, “God’s work done in God’s ways will never lack God’s resources,” was to be proven true once again. In an amazing sequence of events, God laid it on the hearts of some dedicated Nazarene investors to help provide four apartment units and a regional office facility.

The great adventure

In the summer of 2006, four missionary families moved to Singapore to embark on a great adventure for God. It was an exciting and painless move for the nine MKs (missionary kids) since they moved en masse and all enrolled together in an excellent Christian international school. God had already prepared the way by sending a Nazarene couple to teach at the school the year before. They were a great help to our families during that initial year.

The registration of the regional office as an official Singapore company was relatively easy. Government processes and procedures are clearly spelled out and strictly followed so there were few surprises. However it would be over 10 years before the Church of the Nazarene could be officially registered in the city-state. Those years were filled with many challenges, victories, disappointments, and learning opportunities.



Seeing the person in front of you

The 5.8 million people in the city nation of Singapore represent an intriguing religious composition. A recent survey lists the population as 33.9 percent Buddhist, 14.3 percent Muslim, 11.3 percent Taoist, 11 percent Christian, 7.1 percent Catholic, and 5.2 percent Hindu.

Over 16.4 percent list their religion as “none,” a group who think of themselves as “free thinkers.”

Given this mix of diverse religions and the high population density, one would expect to encounter much ethnic and religious tension. In fact, there is little such tension. Religious harmony is highly valued and guidelines are strictly enforced. But the laws designed to maintain religious harmony mean some conventional evangelism and church planting strategies are not allowed.

The regional office team in Singapore was greatly influenced by Neil Coles’ book *Organic Church*. Since each team member had full-time administrative assignments in the regional office, it was clear that ministry would have to happen “organically,” in the course of their daily lives as followers of Jesus. No one was a full-time church planter. They were simply full-time followers of Jesus called to make disciples.

In addition to the missionary team, God brought to Singapore a number of Nazarenes who were teaching or studying and who shared the vision of making disciples. Together, they began focusing on the people God was bringing in front of them each day, looking for the “man of peace” to whom God might be speaking: the taxi driver; the guard at the condominium; the international student; the teenagers on the community basketball court; the cashier at the local grocery store.

On one occasion, a regional office family learned about some individuals from Myanmar wanting to improve their English skills. The family opened their home to offer English classes on Sunday evenings. The stories they studied were either from the Bible, or had a Christian theme. As relationships deepened, a ministry to people from this nation began that continues today.

On one Sunday morning, another family was late for the local church they were attending. As they boarded the public bus, they met a graduate student from China who was visiting the same church by herself for the first time. She had just prayed, “God, if you are there, send someone to sit with me in church today!” She was amazed that her prayer was answered so quickly by a God she was not sure even existed. The family invited her to sit with them during the service and afterwards she accepted an invitation to lunch at their home. The conversation led to them watching the JESUS film together, after which she accepted Christ as her savior. With the help of a Nazarene school teacher, they started a ladies’ Bible study.

Another team member and a Christian graduate student started a philosophy discussion group and invited secular graduate students to discuss topics such as euthanasia, free will, ethics and metaphysics. The discussion leaders watched for indications that God was at work in the hearts of participants and prayed for opportunities for deeper conversations.

One family opened their home to international students who were studying in Singapore to help them improve their English and give them a loving family environment. Christmas and Easter seasons became great times of outreach with some students hearing the stories of Jesus’ birth, life and resurrection for the first time. They began to meet every Sunday afternoon for lunch, fellowship, worship and Bible study. One Christmas, the group learned that “Bethlehem” meant “house of bread.” Since there was always fresh, warm homemade bread for lunch, the group began to call themselves “The House of Bread,” or HOB for short.

And slowly, the community of believers began to grow. Jesus was building His Church! Some years, there were eight or 10 baptisms in swimming pools or on the beach. Some years, there was only one. Many who were touched by the

ministry were students who moved on to graduate school or to work in other countries. But the core group continued to grow.

Registration of the church

In late 2012, Rev. Mark Louw became Asia-Pacific Regional Director, and continued to encourage the development of the local church. Finally, in February 2016, the legal process was completed, and the Church of the Nazarene Singapore was officially registered.

Today, the House of Bread is a vibrant organic church composed mainly of young professionals. What started out as an outreach to international students 10 years ago now has several married couples. Toddlers and newborn babies add new, exciting challenges and opportunities. Another worship group composed of workers from Myanmar meets several times month for worship and fellowship. An English class meets every Sunday evening. During the week, smaller groups meet, including a men's group, a ladies' group, a discipleship group, and a philosophy group.

Many of the new believers are interested in ministerial training, and plans are underway to offer the Nazarene Course of Study modules, which are preparation for ordination, as night and weekend classes. One young lady responded to God's call to further training and is studying full time at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary in Manila, Philippines.

The church is involved in the sponsorship of refugee children, as well as in local ministry to the elderly. Local outreach activities include game and movie nights, weekend retreats, and an annual 5 K run. Short-term mission trips beyond Singapore have helped to increase members' compassion for those in need in other Asian nations.

If you were to visit the Church of the Nazarene in Singapore, you would not see an impressive building. However, you would meet people whose lives have been radically changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and who are passionate about making Christ-like disciples, in Singapore and beyond.



nazarene.org/generosity