SERVING IN A PANDEMIC

— By H, a missionary serving in East Asia

When COVID-19 struck in January last year, I was home for Chinese New Year and my mum's 103rd birthday celebration.



COVID in Singapore (Source: Reuters)

Initially, I was not too concerned as the numbers of infection were few. Besides, I had successfully applied for a visa to return to the field. We had a community health project with a Township Hospital since 2019 to screen villagers for hypertension and diabetes, and to train the local township and village doctors to diagnose and manage these chronic medical conditions. I was looking forward to work with the hospital to complete the screening for the remaining two villages, after which we would help them to set up a Clinical Centre for the management of chronic diseases. Besides the medical project, we were going to start a new project to sponsor poor rural students for university studies. Ten applicants were to be confirmed following home visitation and interview. Other ongoing projects included training therapists in the rehabilitation of children with autism and other special needs children.

Unfortunately, COVID cases increased rapidly around the world, leading to border closures. My visa then expired and applications for a new one became very difficult, if not impossible. However, colleagues from Taiwan and Hong Kong were able to return to the field from May 2020. At this point, I became envious and fretful. What was thought to be a temporary pause had become an interruption of uncertain duration. I did not know how or what to plan for.

Thankfully, at this time, my counselling training and skills could be put to use. I was introduced to a local faith-based NGO to do virtual counselling for Chinese-speaking migrant workers. These migrant workers had either contracted COVID or were in quarantine. Hearing their stories made me grateful that I was home, on familiar ground and with loved ones. They were sick and scared in a foreign land, and many had no one to turn to. They did not want to burden their loved ones back home with their anxieties or fears over their sickness or their employment situation in Singapore. The pandemic had heightened anxieties and revealed hidden fears in people. As mental health issues were discussed more openly, more friends and colleagues were approaching me for counselling help. I was also able to journey with some missionaries caring for their aged parents and with post-traumatic debriefing, which were totally unrelated to the pandemic.

As for field ministry, we had to adapt to new ways of working, especially in utilising technology. So medical training and work meetings went online via video conferencing platforms. We even managed to interview our student grant applicants through video calls.

When the foreign workers were off-site, our local colleagues handled what we were unable to do remotely. This led to their growing confidence and increasing competence in the work. With restrictions in travel and quarantine requirements, short-term teams were unable to help us in person. This would have significant implications on the effectiveness of skills training. But by having hybrid meetings with remote and in-person training, we partnered with other like-minded people and groups already on-site with the resources we need.

Being at home also meant I could assist with leading Bible Studies for my church cell group and facilitate a Bible Study on tentmaking for a group of young people from different churches. I was available to friends and colleagues needing prayers and visitation and also to my family, including caregiving for my aged mum. When one of our domestic helpers had to leave suddenly, I was able to step in quickly to help.

Honestly, there were days when I felt I had the best of both worlds; I could serve both the field and home. As 'necessity is the mother of invention', our team had grown in creativity and innovation. There was more collaboration with other like-minded people and more importantly, our local colleagues had been empowered as they took on more responsibilities in our absence.

There is after all, a silver lining to the pandemic!

Come, see the glorious works of the LORD:

See how he brings destruction upon the world.
He causes wars to end throughout the earth.
He breaks the bow and snaps the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
- Psalm 46:8-9

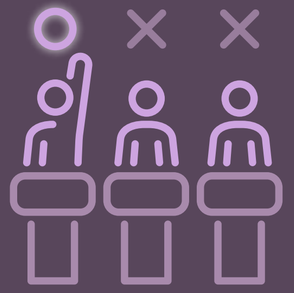
QUIZ TIME!

1. **What are the six ways OMF does missions?**
   A. Learn, Pray, Go, Send, Welcome, Mobilise
   B. Welcome, Invite, Open, Collect, Provide, Volunteer
   C. Begin, Listen, Eat, Serve, Share, Save

2. **What is the name of the ship that's printed on our mask?**
   A. Greyhound
   B. Vigilant
   C. The Lammermuir

3. **Which Psalm did H quote in her article?**
   A. Psalm 46:8-9
   B. Psalm 91:11-12
   C. Psalm 141:8

4. **What is the name of the organisation in Samuel's article?**
   A. Sonoko
   B. TonCedar
   C. fmZero

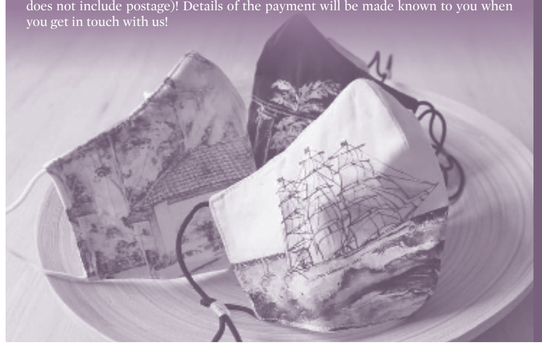


Be the first to reply to our quiz with all the correct answers! The top 3 will win a gift pack including masks from us! Just email your answers to sg.comm@omfmail.com. The closing date for submission answers is 31 July 2021, so don't wait!

MASKS FOR SALE $12 ONLY!

These reusable antibacterial face masks, beautifully designed and crafted by our OMF Singapore staff, comes with a colourful artwork of The Lammermuir, the ship Hudson Taylor and the first CIM missionaries sailed on to China, pre-packed and paired with either a white or black design of the OMF Pavilion. See our designs in full colour at our IG @omf_singapore.

Email us at sno@omfmail.com or call us at 6510 3130 to order your masks now (cost does not include postage)! Details of the payment will be made known to you when you get in touch with us!



ENGAGE WITH US!

Please take a look at available opportunities at opportunities.omf.org and let us know if any of them fits where the Lord might be calling you! If you have any inquiries or would like more information, do get in touch with us and we will contact you shortly! One way for you to be engaged with us is through social media! Use it to connect with us and God's heart for the world. Invite friends to follow us for encouraging stories, prayer and call to action!

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Mobilising Singapore for the Urgent Evangelisation of East Asia's Millions

— A missions newsletter by OMF Singapore —

UNWAVERING MISSIONS ADVANCING FORWARD

— Samuel Lim

In an age of disruption where livelihoods are put into disarray, masses are still adapting to a new way forward. This unprecedented reality has seeped into all spheres of society, not least shaped the life of the Church and global missions.

One of the biggest questions in considering the future of missions involvement as we are so used to is, "How can I be involved in missions when it is getting harder to travel?" A perfectly valid question which we will explore together.

Travelling into another country to learn and serve among different people groups and cultures has been one of the key ways in which many engage with missions. Through the years, the sending of missionaries and short-term teams overseas highlight the incarnational pulse of missions. While travelling overseas for missions has largely defined our missions involvement, I would like us to think of missions as a beautiful tapestry woven by many different colored threads. As such, there are a variety of creative and equally significant threads to missions engagement that we should also consider, especially with our rapidly changing world.

TAKE INITIATIVE

Concern for the local pandemic along with travel restrictions and national measures have contained us geographically. These have somewhat truncated our perspective of missions to be rather inward-looking and less attuned to the news outside. There is a risk that many unreached people groups and countries are fast becoming forgotten. The phrases 'long absent, soon forgotten', 'out of sight, out of mind', can soon become a reality for these unreached people groups and countries if we don't take the initiative to intentionally remember them.

When Apostle Paul was not able to travel to visit the different churches in Asia Minor, he did not forget about them. He took the initiative to learn how they were doing (1 Thess 3:5-6), he actively remembered and prayed for them (Phil 1:3-5) and always encouraged them of his love for them (2 Cor 2:4).

We too need to take a greater initiative to pursue missions engagement.

- Will we avail our time to ***explore*** **and** ***learn*** more about missions through the various workshops, events or meetings available?
- Can we be ***intentional in praying*** for unreached people and countries in East Asia and perhaps commit to be part of a regular prayer group for them?
- Have we considered ***involving ourselves*** with ministries reaching out to the migrant or diaspora communities here at our doorstep?
- How about **being** ***advocates*** for different ministries and missionaries by writing to encourage them or sharing about missional needs and opportunities within our own social media sphere?

Let's take the initiative to keep up to date with missions.

BE INNOVATIVE

With the world rapidly changing, many are starting to realise that maintaining the status quo is no longer sufficient. There is a growing need to be agile in this age of disruption so that the Church and global missions will not be chronically surprised by changes.

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Being innovative is no longer a language only for startups and entrepreneurs. To nurture a culture of innovation in missions engagement is crucial in making the truth of the Gospel meaningful to the current realities, now more than ever.

A culture of innovation in missions engagement is the creative discipline to understand the times and provide a fresh perspective, not necessarily new, to doing what is needed. Just like the men of Issachar who understood the times and knew what Israel ought to do (1 Chron 12:32).

Allow me to briefly put forward a few innovative perspectives on how we can engage with missions:



TonCedar is a Thai missional startup that unites influential impact makers to create sustainable businesses. Check out their programs and project at toncedar.org

Long-term placement in addition to just short-term trips. As it gets harder to travel overseas with the additional measures and processes, going on short trips may not seem worth it. Maybe this is the time for us to stretch ourselves and take a bold step to commit to a longer term missions placement and make the challenge of travelling overseas count.

Issue-based focus in addition to just country focus. When we think about missions engagement, we usually think in terms of country or people group. But there is a growing need for missions to engage with key issues like poverty, migration, justice, technology, ageing population, creation care and much more. We need people in missions who are as passionate for these issues as those who are for specific countries. You can find out more about these missions opportunities from *opportunities.omf.org*

Planting leaders in marketplace in addition to just planting churches in villages. With the increasing rate of urbanisation in East Asia, we need to reinvigorate urban missions engagement. The arena for church and discipleship will have to take place at the heart of urban society, the workplace. Do not underestimate your experience and skills in a vocational setting. Allow what you do well to have a redemptive purpose. There are exciting ministry opportunities to use your vocation to shape the culture of work for the Gospel and catalyse indigenous leaders in the marketplace.

Every disruption reveals not just vulnerabilities but also opportunities. While it is a good time to reflect on how we have been involved in missions so far, we also need a renewed vigor and courage to partner with what God is doing. The missional heartbeat of followers of Christ is to keep asking ourselves, "What has God called us to be and do in our current context?" Are we ready to rise to our new context?



BUBBLES OF FAITH AT WORK

COVID has most certainly changed many aspects of our lives, how we work and rest, transforming our spaces at home and even send us very much into the digital world. But missions will still go on, with or without a pandemic; God's Work cannot be deterred, and there will never be a lockdown in His Plan. Our missionaries, wherever they are whether on field or locally, they carry on with His guidance. In these little bubbles of faith, read of the joys and challenges they've had in the past year at the peak of the global pandemic and let it encourage you!



Shao & Levene (Japan)

Spiritual Hunger

"There are increasingly many people who sign up to our online conversation cafe event every week and to do Bible Study. Through these, we are getting to know more new people, whether people who work late, or mums who have kids at home. We praise God that people's hunger for Him is growing!"



Lim Family (Mekong)

Joyous Relief

"The water we have at home comes from a nearby waterfall had run dry, such that we had to ration what water we had at home. But a week after we sent out our prayer letter, we had short spurts of heavy rain each time, Then a week later, heavy rain overnights for a few days consecutive. The water started flowing into our house and we were eventually able to fill our water tanks again."



Florence (Mekong)

Salvations

"Across several months, God has answered prayers that more Shan found salvation through faith in Christ and were baptised. Through 2020, God has softened and opened the hearts of the Shan, 15 people came to Christ: 1 Karen, 1 Lisu and 13 Shan. All glory to God!"



Cherlyn (Thailand)

Golden Silence

"Tasked with preparing a teaching session on Listening to God's Voice at the end of the month, I am grateful for this period to be able to ponder more about what it means to be in silence and listening for God's voice in our daily lives."

Michelle (Thailand)

Continuous Faith

"I felt God's prompting to bring Jiap, Prae, Panpan and Phat together to draw them back to Him and fellowship with them. Meeting them weekly to study the Bible and pray for one another has been a precious time to see these ones hungry for God."





Rebecca (Cambodia)

Finding Rest in God's Sovereignty

"A few wise ones challenged me to take a hard look at how I organised my rhythms of rest and work; co-workers looked out for me; once again I came to realise that prayer really works. Nothing guarantees my well-being; only the Lord God in all His wisdom, power and presence knows just exactly what I need, even if I may want something totally different."



Paul (OMF Singapore)

New Missional Mindset

"With unexpected circumstances, we can not simply stop what we do. Our mission in mobilising Christians for East Asia must adapt with the constant change. While going digital or hybrid seem a great challenge, I'm comforted and confident by God's reassuring guidance and presence with us every step of the way."



A&H (Philippines)

Meaningful Learning

"Though we were under lockdown for many weeks, we were blessed with the opportunity to be meaningfully occupied online - our children attended their classes and we took our language lessons, having more lessons each week than before the lockdown. Life at home is not without its boredom, though. But we're contented for the time and things we have, having all we need in Christ."



Louis & Chris (Japan)

Masked

"In this crisis, we saw the numbers of homeless friends joining the queue for our food distribution increase from 45 to 55 people. The immediate task was to get washable masks for them to protect their health. We got in touch with a lady and her team to make sets of masks for the Homeless and another batch for the poor at an affordable price."

Rixin (Taiwan)

Christ On!

"We had a wonderful summer camp in July (2020) with 25 kids, most of whom are non-believers, talking about God's care and control over our lives, and that life is full of hope and excitement when we trust in Him. On the last day, parents were invited where they could see what their kids had been doing and also got to hear the message of the camp. It was tiring, but my heart is full of praise and thanksgiving."



Chelsia (Japan)

Rich Truths

"Bible studies are not common in Japanese churches, so it has been a joy to see the ladies I do one-to-one with wrestle with Scripture, discover the rich truths for themselves and respond with reflections."



JS (East Asia)

Building Trust

"Though classes have resumed and exams are looming around the corner for some, not all are fully immersed into their studies yet; there are other students too who are waiting for placement results which were delayed. In other ministries, we thank God that two brothers prayed to receive Christ! Still, other students come to talk to us with issues that they have. Keep us in prayer as we minister to their needs."



Daniel & Joylyn (Japan)

Here I am, Send(ai) me

"While COVID did not allow us to invite many people to our farewell, we were able to invite two good friends to come- Eriko-san, our first friend in Hanamaki through a community cooking event and a tremendous help in settle into life in Hanamaki; and Shino-san whom Joy did Bible Study with for six months. That Sunday, she came together with her mother who told us she has observed a positive change in Shino's life."