

TO BUY OR NOT TO BUY?

That was the question!!

A whirlwind of events spun us into an orbit so unlike our usual ministry in CBC. This Circuit Breaker opened our eyes to the needs of the community...while we're all spaced out in each of our homes, there are Singaporeans out there without a place to call home. It was a very real need given that spacing out was highly critical to prevent possible infections. Thus, the question came, "Would Mt. Carmel BP Church form a joint task force with The Bible Church to house the homeless in Singapore?" I responded as many of us would: "Huh? What? There are homeless in Singapore?" Little did we know. And...they are fellow Singaporeans.

On 10 April, Ps Boon Leong raised this opportunity to house the homeless on the Pastoral Team's WhatsApp group. Our newly-appointed Young Adults Pastor, Ps Liang Wei, sprang into action to form a team with some young adults. A siren call was sent out to anyone interested to be part of this team. I WhatsApp-ed Cindy Tan and Lim Mui Hong as well as Stanley Kiew, who willingly pulled up their sleeves, let down their hair and got cracking to source out the supplies.

That very afternoon, we had our first Zoom meeting as God led Ps Liang Wei to guide us in setting up this Shelter. If we didn't know him before, we certainly got to watch him in action with the cool, calm and gentle touch of a skilled surgeon...err I mean shepherd...to take us through what was involved. Can you believe it? He had only really been on the ground less than 2 months and he was already able to round up a team of bright, skilled and compassionate young adults plus a few of us older ones to get the ball rolling. Praise God!

From the get go, different ones stepped up to the tasks. Like the whizzing of fireworks in the night, the ping of WhatsApp messages, video chats, Zoom meetings were just shooting everywhere. You might think that the procurement of household supplies would be a piece of cake ya? Yes and no. Not if you wanted something affordable, standardized and in stock. Talk about window shopping. Cindy went to Sheng Shiong just across our church while I was window shopping online. The excitement was climbing as the energy was high. The Procurement Team was made up of Koh Hock Tee, who is a member of The Bible Church (TBC), and the 3 of us sourceketeers! 1 guy and 3 gals! We were going so fast that we must have seemed to him like a comedy routine of spinning the plates to keep from falling. I was checking online for the best deals and Cindy was comparing notes with me in going to Sheng Shiong. Mui Hong was giving good alternatives as we bounced ideas! What about this? What about that? It was hilarious – as though we were literally doing a makeover of our classrooms into a home.

You might think, "it is only shopping. How difficult can that be?" Wait till you hear the considerations! The four of us zoomed to discuss: what items can easily be donated like fans and sleeping bags and what items do we need to buy? We had to factor in cost, stock supplies, and speed of delivery. We found some great deals, but they would take over a month to arrive from China! So we had to look for domestic suppliers. But why not? Let's support our economy. We also had to think of security, safety, hygiene, housekeeping, labelling, possible mingling and interactions between stayers and how to encourage social distancing plus responsibility, cleaner's well-being plus maintenance by cleaner and the stayers.

Hang on. We literally had to think of cost effectiveness with the possibility that the stayers may only choose to stay a night or two. In our minds, we thought that the stayers would stay until the end of the CB, but that might not be the case, we were told. Our shopping list then had to change, because the initial plan to house women was changing as we were informed that there was a greater need for housing for men.

The word went out about this initiative and folks were offering to give towards this cause. Hallelujah! We had to ensure financial prudence and accountability. The paperwork and the counting of expenditures was enough to drive me crazy as I am not a “numbers person”, but the team made the difference! What do you know? We found a way to work online together using Google sheets and slides – a new platform for sharing. Working hard with much laughter and encouragement was how we cheered each other to the finishing line. We uploaded photos, receipts, purchaser’s name, vendor info and any pertinent info, not only for now, but Lord knows if He should call on us again, we have it on record somewhere for reference.

Christ followers were sharing the resources as anyone had need. By God’s grace, Ps Liang Wei was able to learn from veteran Safe Sound Sleeping Place Yio Chu Kang Chapel’s Ps. Rick Toh what we needed to know. Mui Hong attended a Zoom training session and shared with us photos of how it was all set up. Thank God for open doors, warm hearts and helping hands. The Catholic Welfare Services had safari beds available. We managed to get 10, and more came to us later. TBC and Carmel were ding donging back and forth to figure out who, what, where, when and how? We got to know one another as we met over Zoom. Some of us had never seen each other in person, but this common cause, a burden shared by the teams on each side, tore down the invisible wall and bonded us in Christ’s love for the poor and marginalized! God is good! We were envisioning a ministry of servanthood, dreaming up the configuration of the Shelter, laughing over the resources we needed, brainstorming names to call the Shelter, and praying together for God’s leading and wisdom each step of the way, through the hiccups.

The uncertainty of the official start date was nerve-wrecking. We had no idea whether we would get the government permit. How do we proceed? To buy or not to buy? Could we afford the time to wait? No. Should we act in faith. Yes! The need was high, we heard. What reason could there be for not setting up CBC Shelter? Miscommunication between agencies? By faith, the team decided that we have to act. So as the joint task force was sitting on the edge of their seat raring to go for 20 April, Monday, we went into hyper mode and began shopping on 16 April. 4 days! Four very intense non-stop day-and-night shopping to get as much as we could for Monday.

And then pop! The bubble burst! The application for the permit was rejected. What?? One agency gave us the “go ahead” but the other said “no”. It was our circuit breaker!! I, for one, was glad as I needed time to get some of the safety supplies of taping, netted fencing, safety goggles and suits delivered as soon as possible. I was stuck without suppliers that had stock and could deliver, until I stumbled on an industrial supplies site that could do exactly just that. Yes! Thank You Lord! So thankful was I for our own mini Circuit Breaker and while there were thoughts for appealing to powerful connections, we went to the Highest and bowed down in prayer as a team.

Ps Liang Wei gently reminded us that this was yet another time for the team to come before the throne of God! We did, and soon after, we were jumping up and down that all was not in vain. God answered our prayers. The stayers had a place to call home during the CB. We could move into set up mode, and the next team of hosts, food supplies team

(of which Mui Hong is actively coordinating for our side), and onsite operations team could be the face of the church to the people. We worked together inside out to bless those in their time of need and in turn were deeply blessed by the fellowship and friendships forged in giving of ourselves away. God is good! It was intense but a fond affection stirs in our hearts for the blessing of serving together for the good of others. Praise God from Whom all blessings flow! Nothing but praise and some steam was let out as I deflated with thanksgiving on my floor to see how God has worked all things through everyone together for His glory!!

Cynthia Wee