

# CORONA PANDEMIC AND MIGRANT MISSIONS

## - A Study of Migrant Missions among the Thais in Singapore

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The coronavirus pandemic has brought changes to Singapore's churches and migrant missions. We would like to examine the change in the mission environment in the context of the coronavirus pandemic by studying the case of migrant missions among the Thais in Singapore. Singapore is a multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural country that gained independence from Malaysia in 1965. As a city-state, it achieved social stability and economic development through many factors, one of which is racial harmony. The reason that Singapore played a decisive role in achieving economic development is because of the availability of cheap labor from neighboring countries including Thailand. The early migrants from Thailand arrived in Singapore since the 1970s. The first Thai church was opened in Singapore in 1978 (Kim 2019: 2). Since then, the number of Thai migrants has steadily increased and this number is now estimated to be around 20,000. Most of them are skilled laborers who have obtained two or more work skill qualifications. Another group of Thai migrants to Singapore are the Thai migrant women. This group is estimated to be around 20,000. They settled in Singapore after international marriages with Singaporean men. They are one of the groups of people that we focused for evangelism and outreach with the love of God and the gospel of Christ among Thai migrants. Singaporean husbands and children are included in the Thai migrant missions.

The coronavirus pandemic has shaken the whole world. The globalization of the world has played a direct role in the spread of the COVID-19 virus. On December 31, 2019, cases of COVID-19 were announced in Wuhan, China. About 70 days later, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic. At that time, there were 120,000 people infected in 114 countries. In less than two years, the pandemic had caused enormous damage to the international community. Normal daily life with activities outside homes did not exist any longer. As of November 2021, the coronavirus had spread to countries around the world, with 254 million confirmed cases and 5.11 million deaths.

When the pandemic spread in Singapore, infected foreign workers were locked down in their dormitories and they were restricted from leaving their dormitories. Missionaries and volunteers from churches partnered together in visiting the dormitories, and met with some of the quarantined migrant workers. They provided them with some basic items to meet their needs like dry foods and hygiene products. This was either done directly by mission organizations or through the assistance of the

Thai Embassy. Concurrently, they prayed for those migrant workers, giving them faith and hope through the Word of God. Consequently, several Thai workers returned to Thailand during the pandemic when their health deteriorated and when their contracts expired.

### PANDEMIC AND ONLINE WORSHIP SERVICE

The coronavirus pandemic brought about many changes to Singapore's churches and migrant missions. Online Worship Service was the greatest change of all. The Singaporean government vigilantly made decisions on measures to deal with controlling the spread of the virus. The decisions were delivered to each local church in Singapore through the National Council of Churches of Singapore (NCCS) by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY). Pastors and persons-in-charge from every local church gathered online to receive the information, to ask and clarify rules implemented. All churches acted upon the safety management measures for social distancing and Santiphap Church in Singapore was one among all which complied with the new safety regulations.

#### Stage 1

*Duration: January - March 2020, 3 months*

*Worship Arrangement: YouTube Online Streaming*

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, churches in Singapore have now limited the capacity for gathering for worship. Many churches were initially 'lost' in terms of how to manage onsite services within the constraints of the safety management measures. Churches decreased the number of onsite worshippers with the remaining worshippers joining the services which were streamed online. Some churches had already been operating online worship services prior to the pandemic. However, for most churches, setting up online streaming services was something new. In addition, all this happened suddenly, within a short time. Without much technical knowledge on how to set up live streaming, most churches used YouTube for online streaming of their worship services using a computer laptop. During the initial three months, a Singaporean volunteer played the primary role in implementing online streaming worship services with live congregation for Santiphap Church, Singapore.

#### Stage 2

*Duration: April - August 2020, 5 months*

*Worship Arrangement: YouTube Online Worship*

The circuit breaker was enforced on 7 April 2020

in Singapore. All churches in Singapore ceased gatherings; onsite worship services were prohibited. From then on, Sunday worship services were only conducted online. Worship services were pre-recorded and transmitted during Sunday worship time. This process took twice as much time and effort to implement than 'live' worship services. Besides preparing and preaching sermons, recording and editing videos posed a great challenge to those without professional technical assistance to produce them. Furthermore, although the number of attendees at the worship service was shown on YouTube, the identity of the viewers was not known. Hence the church was unable to know which member actually attended the service.

### **3rd Stage**

*Duration: September - December 2020, 4 months*  
*Worship Arrangement: Zoom Online Worship*

As mentioned above, it was difficult to check if members attended the online worship service on YouTube. In fact, it had reached the point where there was no communication with members for long periods of time. Hence, the church began to consider to use the Zoom platform for conducting worship services. Those who had never used Zoom did not understand the platform and experienced difficulties in logging onto Zoom, and they could not understand the different Zoom functions. But through trial and error, the worship services over Zoom were eventually implemented and ran smoothly. Using Zoom, worshippers were able to see each other virtually on screen, and online participation started to increase. Of course there are cases where some of the members could not log onto Zoom because of unstable or no access to Wi-Fi. Others also needed individual help to install the Zoom app on their handphones and be taught how to use it.

### **Stage 4**

*Duration: January - April 2021, 4 months*  
*Worship Arrangement: Onsite worship and Zoom Online worship*

A year after the pandemic was declared, Singapore began to cope with better safety rules. Churches slightly relaxed. Singapore churches resumed physical worship services with limit to 50 people at one service. Churches started onsite worship services with much anticipation and joy. Concurrently, because of the capacity restrictions, online worship services continued to be held for members who were unable to attend the onsite services. However, when the virus infection cases increased again, onsite services were once again suspended. Much to the disappointment of the church leaders, online services were once again the only way of worshipping God.

### **Stage 5**

*Duration: May - November 2021, 6 months*  
*Worship Arrangement: Zoom online worship and small group sharing*

The Zoom online worship service was a platform for participants to meet each other virtually, see each other 'face-to-face', fellowship and socialize. When everyone became accustomed to turning their videos and microphones on & off, the services proceeded smoothly. Pre-recorded worship songs were played weekly. In a way, worshipping over Zoom allowed one to be more focused than the physical worship service. There were no distractions over Zoom. Immediately after the worship service, the worshippers were assigned into breakout rooms where in the smaller groups, they were able to share their thoughts on the sermon of the day. Each group would then return to the general room and present their summary of their thoughts. Through the process of worship and sharing, everyone was able to participate, gain knowledge, and share their life-changing experiences.

After almost two years since the outbreak of the coronavirus, the Santiphap Church in Singapore, along with other Singapore churches, had gone through multiple forms of conducting worship services - from physical worship services to online worship services. Some churches hold a hybrid of the two. Initially, there was great concern as to whether worship services would be able to continue. But as time passed, online worship service was gradually established, carried out efficiently and accepted by most people. Currently, all worship services and ministries are carried out online. As a result, the faith of believers continues to grow and new believers are being added in number to God's kingdom. It will be necessary to examine the areas of ministry that are conducted online.

## **MINISTRIES THROUGH ONLINE**

God gives His people wisdom and opportunity even in challenging and difficult times. During the pandemic, the online ministry opened an alternative way in which people can gather besides in-person gathering. Through difficulties come opportunities! The amazing work of God has now united a group of Thai believers who had been scattered due to the pandemic. They are now gathering in the online service. At the same time, the Singaporean husbands and children of Thai migrant women have also started to attend worship services together.

### **Online Training and Discipling Ministry**

As the Zoom online worship services progressed, Thai members continued to increase in number at the worship service. The discipleship program is conducted for lay leaders online. The small group of

Thai ladies are trained in leadership, evangelism and nurturing. In addition, the Singaporean husbands, as heads of households, are trained to grow as spiritual leaders in their family. Their children had attended church services with their parents for many years. But because of the language differences and cultural barriers, they have little understanding of the Bible and have little faith. During the pandemic, these children made a decision by faith to be baptized. One day, these children will become the ones who will bring the gospel to their families in Singapore and Thailand.

The advantage of online training is that it is possible to see everyone on the monitor screen. Some may turn off their videos and participate, but this is also one way to check the status of the individual. Online training sessions provide a forum for more sincere conversations and sharing which may be somewhat difficult when one is face-to-face with the others.

When conducting online training sessions, proper instructions on etiquette and manners need to be given upfront. Some may smoke, lie down, wear inappropriate attire and so on. Hence, guidelines are needed to be communicated to all attending the training sessions to prevent distractions to the more serious participants.

### **Online Healing Ministry**

Believers may have problems with their marriage, children and employment situation. Some are plagued with thoughts of divorce, suicide and so on. Inner healing ministry was conducted online by the healing ministry team. There were some children who were suffering from depression due to family problems, school life, and the pandemic. They were ministered to and recovered by teaching them music and getting them involved in other activities. Through the healing ministry, the relationships between couples were restored and the children also came out of depression as they were able to focus on other activities. The children began to have a more positive image of themselves and regained their self-worth.

### **Online Prayer Ministry**

A new vision was given for the Santiphap Church in Singapore during the pandemic, which is the prayer ministry. For the past 25 years, the Santiphap Church in Singapore had been ministering to the male Thai migrant workers. During the pandemic, these workers were not able to move around because their dormitories were under tight control. Some of them return to Thailand after they completed their contracts.

A new door has opened among the Thai migrants. They are Thai ladies who married to Singaporean husbands. After marriage, they settled down in Singapore. With these ladies, the Santiphap Church in Singapore caught a vision to reach out among Thai

migrant inter-marriage families in Singapore. On a weekly basis, the prayer team meet online to pray for existing cell groups for the multiplication of cell groups in 28 districts in Singapore.

Another powerful prayer ministry is the Thai Overseas Prayers Network (TOPNET). This prayer movement began with the Santiphap Church in Singapore during the days of the pandemic too. God is the Healer and Savior of all. Those who received the vision of sharing the gospel and planting churches in Thailand gathered as the prayer team. The prayer team gathers in online prayer sessions weekly with the hope of God's healing and salvation among the Thais. The TOPNET prayer team devote their prayers which are aligned with the Santiphap vision of evangelism and church planting in the 77 provinces of Thailand. Through this prayer network, Thai migrant Christians from many different countries joined and devoted themselves as peacemakers and channels of blessings from God.

### **Online Cross-Border Worship Ministry**

As the online worship service continues, Thai people who are living in countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Germany, England, Sweden, etc. gathered for worship of God. Thais are scattered among many countries around the world. However, most of these countries do not have any Thai Christian communities. The Santiphap Church in Singapore prayed for them for a period of time and opened a Thai online worship service with English translation. Among the worshippers, there are seekers, believers, as well as those who are called to serve as missionaries. The pandemic has played a role in creating an opportunity to open the door to online worship and mission commitment through the cross-border worship ministry.

Online worship has opened the door for various ministry opportunities both within a country and across all nations. Even though only the online ministry is open instead of the usual physical ministry, the foundation of the ministry is based on the Word of God and the fellowship among the believers continues. It emphasizes that all believers are to attend the online worship service every Sunday. At the same time all believers are trained to do daily devotion by reading the Bible, journaling God's lessons and messages and obey God. Through weekly online prayer meetings, believers experience God's love and power with answered prayers. Evangelism and discipleship as well as baptismal classes and discipleship training are conducted online. Now, churches are ready to worship God and love their neighbors both online and face-to face.

### **SURVEY REGARDING ONLINE WORSHIP AMONG THE KOREAN CHURCH**

Due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, each country has restricted gatherings. In response to the

pandemic, the Korean government has applied social distancing and taken measures to protect the lives of the people. As a result, churches were unable to gather as they previously did for worship services. Korean churches have responded in different ways. Some churches respected the government's decision, maintained social distancing, and conducted worship services with reduced congregation size. Some other churches, however, saw the government's decision as limiting the freedom of religious assembly.

Religious gatherings were banned, and small group gatherings as well as large group worship were prohibited. As on-site worship services at churches were greatly reduced, the number of church attendees dropped significantly, and the evangelistic activity of local churches was greatly reduced due to the more isolated life style for most people. Many small churches have reached the point of closing their doors, and the polarization between growing churches and dying churches has worsened. (Hwang 2021)

Pastors of Korean churches consider having face-to-face worship services at the churches on each Sunday be the proper worship service. Table 1 shows the results of a survey on accepting vs. opposing to online worship service among the Korean church pastors.

Table 1. Accept/ Oppose regarding online worship

Date of Survey	May 2020	June 2021
Accept online worship service	22.2%	28.6%
Oppose online worship service	65.3%	60.1%
No opinion	12.5%	11.3%

Korean church pastors, in general, do not recognize online worship service as an alternative and they uphold the position of maintaining physical face-to-face worship. They regard social distancing measures as a way by which the authorities are using to oppress religious activities and the pastors strongly protested against this. Some churches pushed ahead with the physical worship service, regardless the government's regulations. As a result, there have been cases of further spread of the coronavirus within a few churches and mission agencies.

Table 2. Positions between pastors and members regarding physical worship/online worship

Response	Physical worship service only	Open to online worship service	No opinion
Pastors	73.0%	26.2%	0.8%
Members	27.8%	66.3%	5.8%

Table 2 shows the different positions held by pastors and church members regarding physical worship and online worship services. The coronavirus pandemic has caused the Korean church to face a series of crises. Churches are restricted from onsite gathering. Some

members have stopped attending worship service. As the number of worshipers decreased, so did their offerings.

Pastors of Korean churches predicted that the church membership would decrease due to the impact of the CoVid 19 pandemic by 26.5% of the total church membership. In general, the rate of decrease in membership of megachurches will be greater than the membership of small churches. Among small churches, some will maintain the current membership, while others will close resulting in a huge decrease in overall membership (Choi 2021).

Table 3. Survey on the type of Sunday worship service

Date of survey	Physical worship	Online worship	May 2020	May 2021
Group 1	Yes	Online streaming	24.5%	52.0%
Group 2	Yes	NA	60.4%	36.2%
Group 3	Yes	Recorded sermon	13.9%	10.7%
Group 4	NA	NA	0.0%	1.1%

According to Table 3, the physical worship in Group 3 has decreased from 60.4% (2020) to 36.2% (2021) within a year. On the other hand, the online worship services gradually increased from 39.4% (24.5% + 13.9%, 2020) to 62.7% (52.0% + 10.7%, 2021). A notable change is that churches in Group 4 began online worship service only by 1.1%. As we have seen above, Korean churches have focused on physical worship services even when under the pandemic conditions. Nevertheless, more churches have also started online worship services.

### CONSIDERATION ON WORSHIP SERVICE IN POST-PANDEMIC ERA

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another" (John 13:34).

Under the pandemic environment, countries made social distancing as their norm and this is contrary to Jesus' commandment, "Love one another". How will Christians worship God in the Post-Pandemic Era?

#### Onsite Worship? or Online Worship?

Do not neglect to meet together, as in the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day draw near." (Hebrews 10:25).

From the church in the 1st century, the believers gathered at the temple (Acts 2:46). The position of Korean pastors who uphold onsite worship service is in fact consistent with the teachings of the Bible. However, the temporary suspension of the assembly to ensure social distancing is to control the spread of the virus under the pandemic situation. It is too hasty

to conclude that such suspension is an oppression of religion. All the churches around the world are longing for the day when the believers can worship God together onsite. Therefore, it is incumbent upon everyone to ‘fight’ against the virus and wait for the time when all can gather for onsite worship again. Everyone prays that this will happen as soon as possible.

### Worship in Post-Pandemic Era

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:21,24).

Jesus taught the Samaritan woman about true worship, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Why did Jesus not teach her to worship the omnipresent God, “worship on this mountain and worship in Jerusalem”? True worshippers worship God in spirit and in truth, no matter what happens in worship locations or worship conditions. Institutional churches often believe that there is only a certain way to worship God at their church building. The Samaritans worshipped God on the mountain, whereas the Jews worshipped God in Jerusalem. We all know that God is with His people when they worship Him. During the CoVid 19 pandemic, worshippers were not allowed to gather at the church building. So, they should find an alternative way of worshipping God without being exposed to the virus. We can certainly worship God both onsite and online. Worshiping God online temporarily during the pandemic cannot be viewed as deviating from the essence of worship.

### Praise in a Post-Pandemic Era

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord, Hallelujah” (Psalm 150:6).

The survey conducted among the Korean churches shows they participate in praise and prayer during online worship. (iGood News).

Table 4. Participation during online worship services

Response	Watch the entire worship service	Participate in praise and prayer	Watch worship service quietly	Satisfied with online worship
Online worship	77.3%	57.9%	42.1%	83.0%

According to the results of the survey, 77.3% watched the online worship service from the beginning to the end. It may mean that 22.7% of worshippers did not remain for the whole online worship service but left in the middle of the service or switched to another channel. Among the online worshippers, 57.9% participated in prayer and praise throughout

the worship service. The other 42.1% attended the online worship as a spectator rather than a worshiper. However, the response of satisfaction with the worship service was 83.0%, indicating a very high level of satisfaction. Worship is all about our offering to God including mind and body, time and gifts, money and everything.

So, it is necessary to think about how God, who is in Heaven, receives our worship. Whether physical worship or online worship, worshippers are called to worship the Lord by praising the Lord with their voices. God created men and women to enjoy the fellowship with God and praise His name for eternity. It is right for worshippers to raise their voices and praise God who is the center of worship. As the pandemic situation improves, the government's quarantine guidelines are also being relaxed. The people who are fully vaccinated are allowed to attend the physical worship service. Nevertheless, the congregation attending the physical worship service are required to wear facial masks and are not allowed to sing, but join the worship by watching the recorded praise items. Worshippers need to find ways to praise the name of the Lord both onsite and online.

### Holy Communion in Post-Pandemic Era

Take, eat; this is my body.” (Matt 26:26)

Jesus had meal fellowships with his disciples and many others. The meal fellowship is an important part of a Christian life where Christians share love among each other. Such fellowships are also common in Asian societies. The highest form of the meal fellowship is the Holy Communion in the spiritual realm. But during the coronavirus pandemic, meal fellowship is not allowed even among family members when there is a limit in the social distancing guideline of gathering in two in public. So how can Christians continue to have Holy Communion when the pandemic is a major issue. During the physical worship service, Holy Communion is conducted with bread and wine or grape juice packed in disposable plastic packaging. This ensures that servers neither touch the elements which are served to the congregation, nor have physical contact with church members when distributing the elements. During the online worship service, each person prepares his/her own elements - bread and cup - at home as instructed prior to the service. Then, following the direction of the presider, all received the bread and cup in remembrance of the meaning of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Communion, the church witnesses the death of Christ and spreads the great love of God, and the faith and love of the church community to the world. No matter what the form and circumstances, God’s grace and love may be given to those who partake it through the Lord's Supper.

## Offering in Post-Pandemic Era

“You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God” (2 Corinthians 9:11).

An important part of worship service is giving offering to God. There are concerns about the offering during the pandemic. Since the attendance number at the worship service has fallen, so the offering amount would be decreased in many churches. On the other hand, there are churches which were able to balance the budget as fiscal spending had decreased. Each church works according to its own circumstances. Nevertheless, each worshiper continues to offer tithes and thanksgiving gifts to God. For those worshipping online, offerings are made via different methods of payment. During worship service, when the QR code is displayed on the screen during the offering time, the members make an offering by scanning the QR code with their mobile phone and send offerings online immediately. Some members of the older generation don't know how to make online money transfer. They keep their weekly offerings in cash and wait till they are able to attend the onsite services to make their offerings in church. Believers' offerings are acceptable to God in whichever way they are made.

In conclusion, the coronavirus pandemic had become an obstacle in many aspects. It is not possible for believers to stop worshipping God and love each other in Post-Pandemic Era. The church remains the same as usual as it is the salt and light of the world. Churches worship God and exalt His name whether by physical or online worship service. God's eyes are upon those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. True worshipers call upon the name of the Lord and praise Him forever. Offerings are given to the Lord in faith. Worshipers partake the Lord's Supper by faith and proclaim on the death of Jesus Christ. God's people live in faith and obey His Word. Pastors, remembering the lesson of Jesus saying that “the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11), dedicate their lives to meet the needs of the sheep. Christians are to love God and love their neighbors in normal era as well as in new normal era, both by personal touch and online.

## CHANGING MISSION ENVIRONMENT UNDER THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

How is the mission environment changing in the pandemic and the post-pandemic eras? How can the migrant mission continue God's Mission in light of the changing mission environment?

### Online Worship and Online Ministry

The online worship service that started during the coronavirus pandemic opened up the possibility of online churches. With the opening of the online era,

worship services as well as evangelism, nurturing and disciple training have become possible for both domestic and overseas residents with provided time schedule. The online sessions are available without much cost. It is also easy to log into the session online and be connected immediately. Therefore, there are many advantages when using the online platform. For example, one does not have to travel overseas, pack luggage, purchase air tickets, catch flights, and adapt to local time differences and environment. Based on the experience of the past two years, I would like to give a summary of online worship and ministry and suggest the future direction of online ministry.

Firstly, online worship and ministry have been developed and fine-tuned through a process of gradual improvement. Santiphap Church in Singapore, an example among other churches in Singapore, opened online worship service as a result of the coronavirus pandemic situation. It began with onsite worship service with online streaming, a hybrid form of conducting service. When gathering was no longer possible because of social distancing restrictions, Santiphap Church in Singapore started YouTube online worship service. Then Santiphap Church in Singapore changed the service platform to Zoom online worship service because it was not possible to determine who actually attended the worship service. Since then, all worshipers and pastors have become accustomed to Zoom online worship and everyone has expressed great satisfaction with this form of worship. Santiphap Church in Singapore is currently preparing to resume onsite gathering at the church for worship. Nevertheless, the online worship service will continue without stopping. Online worship service will continue for those who are unable to attend the onsite worship service, including those who live abroad. They gather together to worship online and prepare for devotion to God's mission to Thailand.

Secondly, online worship and ministries should be utilized to meet the needs of the target audience. Santiphap Church online worship is primarily focused on the Thai migrant laborers in Singapore who are not able to attend the worship services. Because it is online, the believers are able to be connected online worship service even after they return to Thailand. Church members can share the gospel with their family and friends in overseas. They can invite them to join the online worship services. In addition, we are able to invite those who have been called for missionary work in Thailand to worship online together. As a result, the online worship service as Cross-Border Worship has already started.

Thirdly, online worship and ministries require continuous efforts to improve its technical efficiency. Thai migrant workers in Singapore, who cannot move around freely, but can attend online worship services. Those who are under quarantine can also join the online worship service. Online worship and ministry are also available to participants who are residents in other countries.

With the advent of the online era, churches need to pay greater attention to dealing with heresy. Most of these cults make very high-quality videos for propaganda and try to provide easy online access to them. As the world goes virtual online, a new, lesser-known cult is spreading rapidly. The church must wake up and keep the truth of the gospel in this online age.

### **Restoration of the Family**

Economic development and the influence from the West changed the family structure from extended families to nuclear families. Many families seek economic stability and ignore the importance of the family. As a result, society is dominated by individualism and selfishness. However, there is nothing more important than a family staying together and sharing happiness.

The coronavirus pandemic is threatening society and the world. However, positive changes are taking place in the households. As more office workers are working from home, the amount of time spent with their family members has increased. An opportunity has been created for the family to eat together, communicate, and grow family love. Even families from far away are able to meet each other online; family bonds are being strengthened. In particular, this happens when the Christian family prepares opportunities to gather and unite in faith through online meetings.

God's salvation begins with one person in each family. And God's salvation is complete when all the households are saved. Families gather at home to call the name of the Lord and worship and praise God. When a family is transformed by the gospel, they open their house and invite neighbors. Families can grow as a small group community.

### **Church with Small Groups**

Under the pandemic environment, the government of each country is restricting the people from holding large gatherings, that includes gathering for local church worship services. It is possible for small groups to gather even under certain restrictions. We must continue to live a fruitful life of faith through small groups. Usually, a local church is considered as a group of gathering on Sundays for worship services. But faith community can exist as small groups rather than large gatherings. Through small groups, people can connect with each other and be accountable by faith. In a small group as a faith community, people encourage and care for each other. Therefore, the importance of small groups must be rediscovered.

Small groups of faith communities will become members of a healthy local church. In order for the small group community movement to continue, it is important to develop leaders who can and will lead the small groups. Small group leaders must be committed to Christ and the local church community.

It is necessary to build a group of leaders based in the local church by cultivating lay leaders who can care and protect their families, hold the truth, and devote themselves as a team member. If online ministries are further developed, online churches might be an option as a local church without a building. Online churches can be established with several small groups (cells). Without small groups (cells), it may not be possible to maintain an orderly local church.

### **Discipleship and Missions**

Online ministry is effective in disseminating information. However, there are great limitations in expressing interest, care and love among the community. Even though the ministry may proceed smoothly online, doing ministry work in person should not be overlooked. In particular, disciple making requires all to stay close to one another. Jesus is our model to follow in disciple making and world evangelization. To carry out His plan of world mission, Jesus called a few, made them disciples, and sent them out to the world as apostles. Following the model of Jesus, the importance of discipleship and world mission should be emphasized.

Today pastors are trained through seminary education. As a result, good pastors and evangelists are in the ministry, preaching and teaching God's Word. However, in the process of cultivating leaders, the church should not overlook disciple making. Local church pastors need to baptize new believers first. Then pastors will nurture them as small group leaders. Small group leaders must be committed to producing 'fruits'. Pastors will disciple those who bear spiritual fruits among the small group leaders. Eventually pastors will recommend them to be next-generation leaders and pastors.

Jesus sent his disciples out into the world with His authority. The Lord has assigned all His disciples to the world mission. A lay leader who can lead a small group and bear good fruits today will become a good fruit bearing pastor in future.

### **Local Church and Church Planting**

Local churches have had the opportunity to rethink their thoughts about churches and missions in various ways during the coronavirus pandemic. During this period, the mega churches stopped meetings and paid only the maintenance fee for the facilities without using them. Certain churches that constructed their own church buildings by taking bank loans closed their doors because they were unable to repay the loan interest. The situation is no different for churches that rent buildings.

Church planting is one of the most powerful ministries of evangelizing the world in obedience to the Lord's Great Commission. However, it is necessary to study how church planting can be done as a self-supporting, self-governing and self-evangelizing church. How can

a church withstand the challenges, such as pandemic, and continue to bear fruit and grow?

There are important steps to take in church planting. Church planting begins with a church planter who goes through the stages of research and evangelism. When there is a believer, the first believer, he can worship God at his home. When his/her family receives Jesus as their Lord and Savior, his/her house will be developed as a house of worship. The house of worship can grow as a cell. At this stage, no church building is required. Even under the restriction of social distancing measure, the cell multiplication can move on.

When three or more cells are established in a community, then the area is designated as the target for opening a preaching station. The preaching station eventually grows into a local church.

In conclusion, the mission environment is changing during the coronavirus pandemic. Accordingly, it is necessary to reexamine the understanding and devotion to the existing church and mission, and to try to make changes according to the changing mission environment. The coronavirus pandemic has opened the door to online worship and ministry. In the post-coronavirus era, online churches and ministries will continue in tandem with physical worship and ministries. Through the pandemic, churches and missions will make a commitment of faith and look forward to the day of the Lord's coming. To fulfill the Great Commission, churches need to be ready for family restoration, small group communities, reproductive discipleship, and church planting.

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