

## Parish of Christ Church – History in Brief

“I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands. I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.” (Psalm 143:5-6)

“பூர்வநாட்களை நினைக்கிறேன், உமது செய்கைகளையெல்லாம் தியானிக்கிறேன்; உமது கரத்தின் கிரியைகளை யோசிக்கிறேன். என் கைகளை உமக்கு நேராக விரிக்கிறேன்; வறண்ட நிலத்தைப்போல் என் ஆத்துமா உம்மேல் தாகமாயிருக்கிறது”. (சங்கீதம்143:5-6)

The Parish of Christ Church celebrates her 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2015. It is a historical event as we remember and give thanks to God for His faithfulness, His goodness and His countless blessings upon the Church.

### Remembering the Days of Old! “பூர்வநாட்களை நினைக்கிறேன்”

The Parish of Christ Church had been founded in 1940, but the roots of the parish go deep into the history, all the way to 1856. A summary of this pre-foundational history of the church is given below based on the late Canon P.I. Samuel Baboo’s report in the 1970 AGM, “100 YEARS OF ANGLICAN TAMIL WORK IN SINGAPORE”.

1856: On Whit-Sunday in 1856, William Humphrey, the Residency Chaplain of the East India Company, in a sermon in St. Andrew’s Church, Singapore, challenged the congregation to support a mission to the Tamil and Chinese communities and the general local population. His appeal was responded to and shortly afterwards on the 25th June of the same year, St. Andrew’s Church Mission was established to administer to the needs of the Tamils and the Chinese in Singapore. At the end of October, Peter Tychicus, a Tamil Catechist arrived from Madras (Chennai). He was the pioneer of the ministry to the Tamils of Singapore undertaken by the St. Andrew’s Mission.

1872: The Rev. W. Henry Gomez from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) took charge of St. Andrews Mission. He was a graduate of Bishop’s College, Calcutta. Under his leadership all the missions began to flourish. He was also the supervisor of St. Andrew’s School and he took the initiative to build a chapel in the school in 1875.

1905: The Mission Chapel was consecrated as St. Peter’s Church. It proved to be of great importance to a number of congregations worshipping in different languages – Bahasa, Hokkien and Tamil. Three congregations, the Eurasian, Chinese and Tamil congregations shared the sanctuary for their worship services on Sunday. This was the “Home” of the Tamil worshippers and in many ways something of a “Mother Church” for the Tamil and Chinese churches of the Anglican fold.



1905-1909: The Tamil congregation was led by lay people, Messers Gnanapragasam, R. Balavendran and D.S. Ponniah, who was also the Principal of St. Andrew's school from 1890 to 1912.

1910 - 1932: 1910 was an important year for the Tamil Church. The first Tamil priest Rev. A.R. Thavasiappan took office as the Priest-in-Charge of the Tamil congregation. He ministered until 1914. After a lapse of two years, there came Rev. R.K. Abraham followed by Rev. D.J. Devapriam and Rev. S. Charles. God blessed the Tamil congregation granting steady growth and progress of the ministry among the Tamils. During the time of Rev. S. Charles, the Parsonage at 118 Keng Lee Road was built and on October 8th 1932, the parsonage was dedicated by the Rt. Rev. Basil, the Lord Bishop of Singapore for the use by Tamil Priests.

1932: Rev. C.D. Gnanamani took over as the next Priest-in-charge of the Tamil Congregation at St. Peter's Church located at Stamford Road in 1932. He was the first occupant of the parsonage which was also used to hold choir practices, Christmas carol practices and Christmas plays. The Tamil Congregation Council also met in the parsonage for its meetings.

1938: The Government requisitioned the Church and School compound. The four worshipping congregations had to leave the compound. They decided to build two separate churches - one for the Tamils and the other for the Chinese. This decision was approved by the Diocese with the intention of developing the ministries linguistically. The present 58,000 sq. feet site at Dorset Road was bought for building a Church for the Tamils. Rev. C.D. Gnanamani and the Council leaders prayerfully worked on a plan to make the design of the Church a unique one wanting it to represent typical Asian concepts with a dome over the altar. But to reduce construction cost, this plan was modified. Rev. C. D. Gnanamani left in February 1939 on a transfer before the Foundation Stone was laid. Rev P.I. Samuel Baboo then took over as the Priest-in-Charge of the Tamil Congregation.



**1940: FOUNDATION**

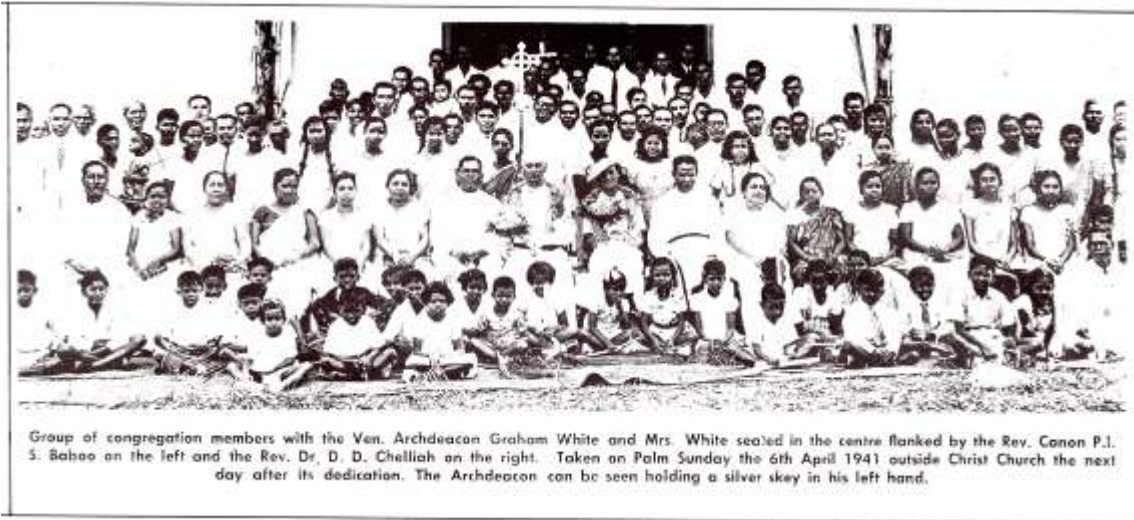
On St. Luke's Day, 18<sup>th</sup> of October 1940, Rt. Rev. B.C. Roberts, Bishop of Singapore, conducted the foundation laying service and laid the foundation stone. **This day has always been regarded as the Foundation Day of Christ Church.**





### **1941: THE DEDICATION**

Laying the Foundation Stone in 1940 was an act of faith. Second World War has already broken out in Europe. War clouds were threatening Asia. Building materials had become scarce and expensive. Money was scarce too. But the work on the new Church continued. He is Jehovah Jireh. He made all things possible. Christ Church sanctuary was completed in April 1941. The Church was dedicated on the Eve of Palm Sunday, 5th April 1941 by the Bishop's Special Commissary Archdeacon Ven. Graham White. On Palm Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1941 the first Holy Eucharist was celebrated in the newly dedicated Church.



### **Meditating on all that You have done!**

“ உமது செய்கைகளையெல்லாம் தியானிக்கிறேன் ”

How our gracious Lord protected and provided for His Church during the five years after the foundation day is awesome. The Church was saved only by His mighty hands. It is a great testimony for us to meditate on and draw strength from.

In the early hours of Monday 8<sup>th</sup> December 1941, Singapore awoke to the noise of a bombing raid carried out by the Japanese Air Force. The War had come to Singapore. By February 1942, the frontline had moved very close to the city. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 1942, both the parsonage and the Church received their first shelling. Over the next three days, the Church and the surroundings were heavily shelled, and the roof came down.



The following morning Rev Samuel Baboo and some of the lay leaders went to church and they sat down and wept. They then cleared the debris and they held a service. The main body of the church was unusable and services were conducted around the baptism font area. The attendance to the services was poor immediately after the surrender as people were afraid of leaving their homes. Canon Baboo wrote, "The building stood while all other buildings around the Church were razed to the ground." The damage was considerable and yet, God had protected the new Church.

With much of the Church articles having been looted, the Parish faced much difficulties. The members learnt to face them trusting more of God's guidance. A good number of men from the Punjabi Congregation of this Parish stayed in the Church compound and watched over the place. They also planted banana trees around the church as food was scarce in those days.

The repair of the building was also somewhat miraculous. One afternoon a few days after the surrender, while Canon Baboo was visiting to the late Mr. P.V. Samuel, the then Hon. Treasurer of the Church at 37 Hooper Road, he met two fiends of Mr. Samuel but strangers to him. One of them asked the Priest, "Father, why do you look so sad?" Canon Baboo's reply was that he was worried as he could not get the necessary materials to repair the Church. The stranger replied, "Don't worry. How many tiles do you need? I will supply them in two days." Within three months the roof was repaired and the services were held regularly in the Church.

Our Choir Director Mr. David Samuel recalls the miraculous escape of his family members in 1941 and how it connected his family and the parsonage in Keng Lee Road as follows: "My father was at work and my mother was washing clothes at that time. I believe, God must have told her to stop and quickly take her children - my elder sister and brother (I wasn't born yet) and go into the air raid shelter which in fact was, just a large and sturdy wooden dining table covered and piled with sandbags. The Japanese from Johor were taking pot-shots and one particular shell hit the coconut tree behind our house and swung into our home. The whole house was destroyed but the shelter protected my Mom and her two children. My family was homeless but Canon Baboo kindly let them stay in the parsonage." Mrs. Pearl Kiramathypathy also thankfully recollects that when the windows of her house in the Serangoon area were

shattered due to shelling and the family felt insecure, Canon Baboo asked them to move over to the parsonage.

During the occupation period from 1942-1945, Singapore was renamed Syonan-to (昭南島 Shōnan-tō, "Light of the South Island" in Japanese) by the Japanese (Wikipedia). During this period, most of the churches in Singapore and Malaya were seized and used by the Japanese as military stores for some time, but later returned for worship. However no preaching was allowed. The scarcity of materials and food extended to even sacramental wafers and wine. The Bishop of Singapore and Malaya Rt. Rev. Leonard directed the churches with an authorization to use water in place of wine, with bread or wafers.

Archdeacon Ven. Graham White consecrated the Christ Church sanctuary and conducted the dedication service on 5th April 1941. During the Japanese occupation of Singapore he and his wife were detained in Changi prison in 1942. He was the senior priest in internment. The work he did in keeping people's spirits up and in strengthening their faith, was of the very highest importance and laid the foundations of the camp's religious life. Mrs. Graham White died in prison in January 1945. Archdeacon Graham White also died in prison in May 1945. He was loved by all races for his dedicated pastoral work.



The Ven. Graham White, M.A.

When the then Bishop of Singapore Rt. Rev. J.L. Wilson was interned in Changi prison by the Japanese, he made Canon Baboo his Commissary for Tamil work in the Diocese (Singapore & Malaya). Canon Baboo visited Parishes in Malaya right up to Penang even as late as in July 1945. He conducted the Tamil services in St Christopher's church, in Johor from 1946-1950 with regular priestly visits.





The Rev. Canon Baboo recalls with deep emotion:

## **Pondering the work of your hands!**

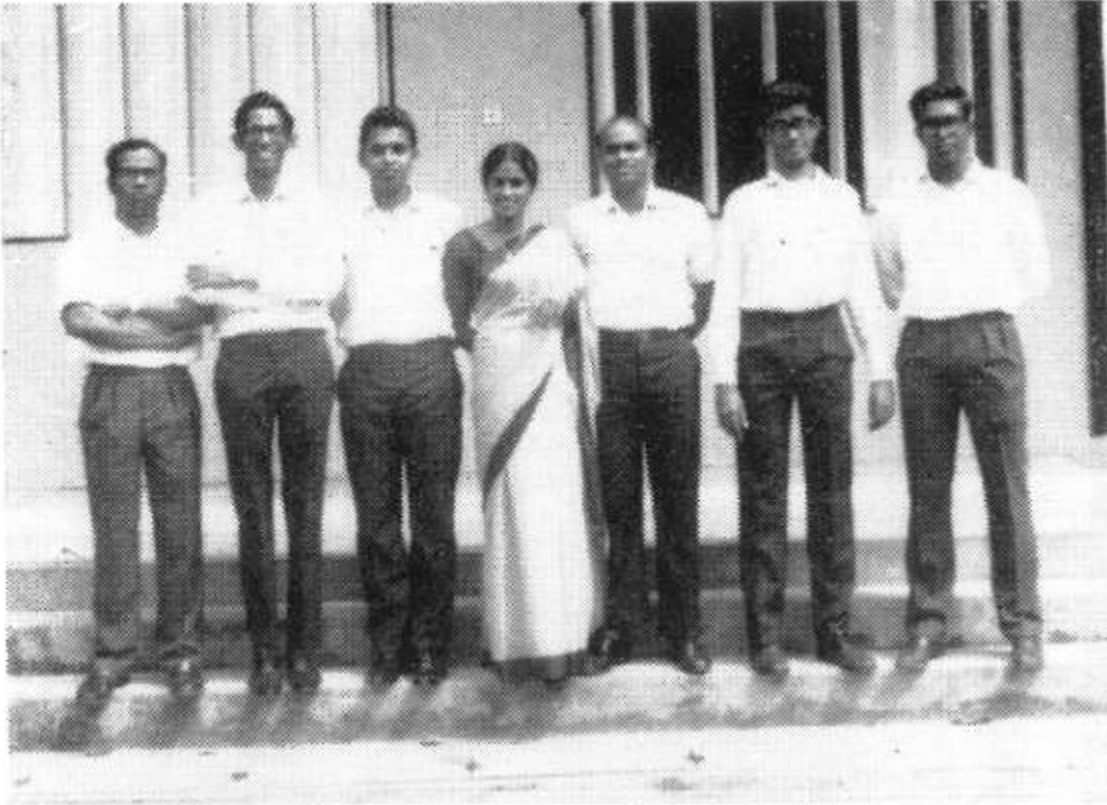
“உமது கரத்தின் கிரியைகளை யோசிக்கிறேன்”.

After the Second World War ended, regular services and ministries resumed with vigour. God's favour was upon the Church. Apart from worship service in Tamil, English, Punjabi / Hindustani and Malayalam services were held every Sunday.



Canon Baboo and the leaders worked with great commitment and vision. The need to provide education especially to the overaged youth who missed four years of education during the war years was a major mission priority for the Church. A high school with 6 class rooms was built and it started functioning in 1953. By 1956, there were 1,200 students. Christ Church attained the Parish status in 1958. The Assembly Hall (Parish Hall) was built and dedicated on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1959 by Bishop Baines.

In 1964, one of the youth league members and a lay helper Mr. Villie Devapiragasam responded to God's calling for full time ministry and joined the Trinity Theological College. He came back to serve in our Parish as vicar from 1979 to 1988.



With great vision and commitment to the great commission, Christ Church planted her daughter church in Jalan Kayu. The foundation stone of Epiphany Church was laid on 1 January 1966 by



Group Captain R.W.G. Freer, Officer Commanding for the RAF OBE and Royal Air Force in Seletar. The Lord Bishop Rt. Rev. C.K. Sansbury blessed the stone and conducted the service. The sanctuary was completed and dedicated on St Philip & St James Day on 1st May, 1967.

<b>Vicar's Name</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Assisted by</b>
<b>Rev. Canon C.A.Caldwell</b>	<b>1972-1979</b>	
<b>Rev. Villie Devapiragasam</b>	<b>1979-1988</b>	<b>Rev. J.T. Bee Bee</b>
<b>Rev. Kingsley Ponniah</b>	<b>1988-1992</b>	<b>Rev. J.T. Bee Bee Pastor Nesamani Daniel</b>
<b>Rev. Canon. Dr.George Karunakaran</b>	<b>1992-2004</b>	<b>Pastor P. Salmon Periyamayagam Rev. Peter Manimuthu Pastor Charles Gnanasekaran</b>
<b>Rev. Dr. J. Albert D. Selwyn</b>	<b>2004-2008</b>	<b>Rev. Peter Manimuthu Pastor Charles Gnanasekaran</b>
<b>Rt. Rev. Raphael Samuel</b>	<b>2008-2010</b>	<b>Rev. Israel Selvam, Pastor Sooriyakumar, Pastor Wilfred Joseph Pastor Edison Nesakumar</b>
<b>Rt. Rev. Bishop Moses Ponniah</b>	<b>2010-2012</b>	<b>Rev. Israel Selvam, Pastor Sooriyakumar, Pastor Edison Nesakumar</b>
<b>Rev. Steven Asirvatham</b>	<b>2012- cont'd</b>	<b>Pastor Sooriyakumar, Pastor Edison Nesakumar, Pastor Byju Samuel, Pastor Paul Xavier (Intern)</b>

The Church continued to experience God's abundant provision, protection and blessings during the years that followed. God chose, called and placed faithful and committed Vicars, Priests, and Pastoral Workers to pastor the parish as can be seen here. His grace and goodness upon the Church are continuing.





The life of the Parish of Christ Church during the past 75 years is the proof that God has been with the Church in all the days. His promise is that His presence shall be always with the Church as she goes forward in faith fulfilling God's great commission.





The late, Mr. Daniel Kovilpillai while narrating the main events that impacted the church in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary magazine wrote, "The purpose of this history, is to elucidate the present, and to illuminate the future. As this brief account shows, the existence of Christ Church today is the Lord's doing. As we move towards the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the future, we do so in the confidence that the Lord has been with us in the past; and He will forever be with us in the future".

"I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land." "என் கைகளை உமக்கு நேராக விரிக்கிறேன்; வறண்ட நிலத்தைப்போல் என் ஆத்துமா உம்மேல் தாகமாயிருக்கிறது".

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சங்கீதம்