

# Our Heritage



Telok Ayer Church ranks as the oldest among Methodist Chinese speaking churches. Deep in the heart of the old Chinese settlement, the church was the base from which the Methodist pioneer missionary, Dr. Benjamin West, reached out to the migrated Chinese. It was in 1889 when Dr. West rented a shophouse in Upper Nanking Street (now no more in existence) to practise medicine and to work as a missionary. He started 2 services on Sunday in August that year at the shophouse, preaching to a congregation of 30 people, speaking in Malay which was translated into Hokkien.

In 1905, the shophouse structure was falling apart, but the Church found a new worship place at No. 12 Japan Street (now Boon Tat Street). In 1913, the Church bought a piece of land at the junction of Telok Ayer Street and Cecil Street. A tent was erected on the site. The Church continued to grow but the tent was soon in a dilapidated state. The Church had to move temporarily to Fairfield Methodist Girls' School at Neil Road. Meanwhile, a zinc hut measuring 6m by 10 m in floor area was constructed on the



same site and in September that year, the Church resumed its worship at Telok Ayer. In 1921, more land was acquired at an adjoining site. The zinc hut was demolished and a three-storey building was built on the larger land by a French firm, Bross and Mogin. The architect was Swan & Maclaren. The building was completed and the sanctuary was dedicated on 11 January 1925. In 1935, Dr. John Sung, a well-known Chinese evangelist from China, conducted revival meetings in the Church. World War II broke out in 1941 and Singapore fell into Japanese hands on 15 February 1941. The Church was used as a refuge for about 300 people. Countless members continued to be encouraged at the weekly Sunday services which did not stop throughout those difficult and trying years.



Amazingly, after so many years, the church building has kept to the original design with little alteration to the exterior look. The basic design is western: a rectangular main body sitting on arch colonnades. But the architecture added an open pavilion on the roof at the front of the building. The roof of the pavilion is carved in the traditional Chinese manner. By this addition, the basically Roman styled building is given a Chineseness that will speak to the migrant Chinese and be identified with them. The Church sanctuary is located at the second storey level. For country churches, it is natural to have the sanctuary on the first storey, but for city churches, it is more practical to have a second storey sanctuary. At the time of building, it was common for European city churches to locate the sanctuary on the second storey. In Singapore, Telok Ayer Church could be the first church building to adopt this design.



Because of our history and the uniqueness of our Church building, on 23 March 1989, the government announced that Telok Ayer Church would be preserved as a National Monument. That year also marked our Church's 100th Anniversary. A series of programmes were drawn up throughout that year for the centennial celebrations. In the following year, in response to the Government's preservation as National Monument, the Church embarked on a major extension and renovation work to restore the Church building to its original grandeur. Started in October 1993, the preservation and conservation project ended in August 1995 with a total cost of 3 million dollars. As we entered into the new Millennium, we launched a new church building project at the site of our former branch church at 61 Wishart Road, off Telok Blangah Road. The new church building known as TA2 houses an 800-seat sanctuary with modern audio-visual facilities and an education centre. The

groundbreaking was held on 16 Feb 2003. TA2 was completed in November 2004 and a combined Christmas thanksgiving service was held there on 19 Dec 2004. Regular Hokkien and Mandarin sunday worships at TA2 commenced on 2 Jan 2005. Two English sunday services and an afternoon Hokkien sunday service are held at TA.



For more than a hundred years, many believers worshipped in this Church. Many of our forefathers from China came here to receive the baton of gospel, evangelizing to their own friends and relatives. Many migrant Chinese received Christ as their personal savior and were baptized here right in this Church. From the days of the rented shophouse, meeting tent, zinc hut to the present solid brick building and then the new TA2 building, Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church will continue to be a beacon, shining for the Lord in the commercial and entrepot heartland of Singapore