

This is the last instalment of our AG History series.

# Early History of the Assemblies of God of Singapore

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Getting to know our beginnings.

## The Formation of the Assemblies of God of Singapore

The history of the Assemblies of God (AG) of Singapore as a separate entity from the AG of Malaysia began in 1966. After the separation of Malaysia and Singapore on August 9, 1965, legal problems arose that caused the formation of the AG of Singapore.

On May 2, 1966, a meeting was held at Faith AG to form the AG of Singapore. 24 delegates, including ordained and licensed ministers of eight churches, namely Bethel AG, Faith AG, Grace AG, English Calvary AG, Chinese Calvary AG (New Life Church), Elim Church, Elim Chapel (Emmanuel AG) and Evangel AG attended this meeting.

During the meeting, the constitution of the AG of Malaysia was adapted for the newly formed AG of Singapore. A committee was proposed and appointed to study and present further constitutional amendments for adoption in another meeting on May 9, 1966 and the following were elected to form the first Executive Committee of AG Singapore:

- General Superintendent – Rev Stevens L Nolin
- Assistant Superintendent – Rev Oh Beng Khee
- Secretary/Treasurer – Rev Andrew Yeo
- Committee members – Vincent Cheo and Lee Seang Lip

## Key Milestones Along the Way

Through the years, we thank God for key events that have forged our foundations.

In March 21, 1977, the Bible Institute of Singapore was founded. Prior to this, students who could not obtain a student visa to go to the Bible Institute of Malaysia went to the Laymen Bible Institute with Rev Oh Beng Khee as the principal. For three years, this arrangement helped many students until the Bible Institute of Singapore began.

Along the way, there were also many notable organisations set up that led the AG of Singapore to where it is today. The General Council office, Teen Challenge, as well as national departments like the Printing & Literature Department, Missions Department, Youth Department and Christian Education Department.

## Immense Church Growth

The number of churches grew from eight in 1966 to 44 in 2015. In the early days, most AG churches did not have their own properties and rented shops or houses instead. As of the Statistical Report released in 2016, over 22,701 people attend AG worship services and 558 workers in foreign missionary work.

It was the faith of our pioneers that led to the planting of churches here. It was also the faith of this previous generation that forged the way for breakthrough in AG church growth. Who were these faith-filled pioneers?

## Who's Who in AG of Singapore

The history of the AG in Singapore is God's story of people, events and dates. Here, we focus on the people – the early missionaries and those who played a significant role in AG Singapore's history.

**Rev & Mrs Cecil M Jackson** were the first recorded AG missionaries to Singapore. They were missionaries in China, learning Cantonese and pioneering God's work in Canton. By God's redirection, they came to Singapore as they were planning to go to Hong Kong for a temporary shelter from the Boxer Rebellion that lasted from 1899 to 1901. Many foreigners were targeted during the uprising, so they planned to go to Hong Kong till the situation improved. The Jacksons did not know the ship was heading to Singapore and arrived on April 1, 1928, on Easter. Rev Cecil Jackson was requested to conduct the Easter Service in the ship. After the service, the principal of the Methodist (ACS) asked him to teach a religious class. He was offered a temporary lodging before finding his own at 10 Newton Road.



The chapel in 1928

He started an "attap-roofed church" (AG Mission) at the Balestier plain to reach out to Cantonese-speaking people. He also started Berean AG Anglo-English School in South Bridge Road. When he was going for furlough with his family in the early part of 1931, Rev Carrie P Anderson and Esther Johnson came to take care of the school and mission. The Jacksons returned at the end of 1931. They started an English work in early 1932 in the home of AP Abisheganaden at 32 Buffalo Road. 18 months later, a new place was found at 486 Serangoon Road because of growth.



The chapel at 486 Serangoon Rd

Rev Cecil Jackson constructed a new church at 120 Balestier Road to house the Chinese and the English congregations. On January 1, 1939, the building was dedicated to the Lord.

**Rev Carrie P Anderson** and Esther Johnson were missionaries in South China. As Cecil Jackson had requested them to help him, they came in 1931 till the return of the Jacksons from furlough. She later went to Kuala Lumpur to pioneer a church.

**Ms Esther Johnson** was working closely with Carrie Anderson since they were in China. She also went to Kuala Lumpur with her after laboring in Singapore. She later was married to Rev Arthur Sandhal. It was said that they met in USA but married in Singapore at Elim Church before going to Malaya.



Arthur, Esther and Eva Sandahl

**Katherine Klaus** came to help Carrie Anderson and Esther Johnson when they were in charge of the mission and the school. Katherine Klaus gave a written report in Pentecostal Evangel of the work.

**Blanche Appleby** was hardly mentioned in the history of AG Singapore. There was a record of her writing an article in Pentecostal Evangel of her trip to Malaya and Singapore in 1930 with Carrie Anderson.

**Lawrence O McKinney** was a pastor of a sizable church in Hong Kong. As the Jacksons were going for furlough in 1937, he was invited to assist the church. But the furlough was delayed, so Lawrence McKinney was in charge of the English congregation while Jackson was in charge of the Chinese congregation. As the church building incurred much debt, the AG HQ told Lawrence McKinney to leave the church. Instead of the whole church, only the English congregation followed him to 531 Serangoon Road. Later another place was found at 1079 Serangoon Road and it was named Elim Church.



*The church at 531 Serangoon Rd*



*Lawrence McKinney and family*



*The old Elim Church at 1079 Serangoon Rd*

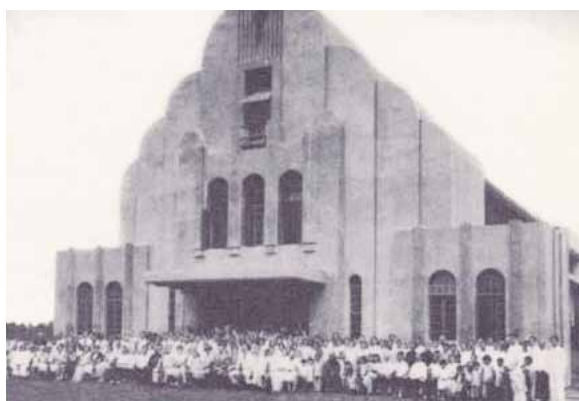
**Rev Lula Ashmore** was the first missionary to return to Singapore after the War. She returned in 1947 to pastor Elim Church from the local leaders who took care of the church during the Japanese occupation. She was the one who initiated a loan to buy the property of the church. As her heart was with the Chinese-speaking congregation, she requested the HQ to send a missionary couple and Rev Alfred McGrew came to take over Elim Church. She was married to Vallance Baird on November 13, 1948 at the Balestier building before she started Faith AG.



*Elim Church in 1947*



*Rev Vallance and Lula Baird*



*The church at Balestier*

Together with her husband, they applied for a shop house at E24 Rayman Avenue from the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT), the predecessor of Housing Development Board (HDB), to start Rayman Avenue Mission (the present Faith AG). The next year, she started Alexander Mission (now Grace AG) at 50 Odin Square. Then she was asked to take over the work at Kuala Lumpur. Later she pioneered an AG church in Ipoh. When she returned to America, she started five Chinese churches in San Francisco, Oakland, Stockton, San Jose and Modesto. She retired later and went to be with the Lord at 100 years of age.

**Rev Alfred McGrew** came to take over Elim Church in 1948 to release Rev Lula Baird for pioneering Chinese works.

**Rev Kenneth McComb** was an AG missionary who became the pastor of Elim Church.

**Rev D R Guynes** went to Penang as a missionary. He wrote to the Petaling Jaya authority for a grant of a land to use for Christian education, religious and philanthropic purposes since February 1955 which was eventually granted. The plan to build the Bible Institute of Malaya (BIM) proceeded. It was only completed in mid-1960. Rev Guynes was the Secretary-Treasurer of the AG Missionary Field Fellowship and the first General Superintendent of the AG of Malaya and Singapore. It was the Far East Director, **Rev Maynard L Ketchem**, who convened a constitutional meeting for the formation of the AG of Malaya and Singapore. At that time there were four churches in Singapore, Elim Church, Faith AG, Grace AG and Bethel AG, as well as two churches in Malaya, Kuala Lumpur and Penang Churches.

When the Bairds had to leave for KL, **Mdm Lau To Chan** was highly recommended by the Hong Kong Ecclesia Bible Institute principal to take over Grace AG. She came after the Bairds left in 1951. She served as a pastor in Grace AG. She was also involved in a rotation of pastors between Grace AG and Faith AG at that time. However, after serving a while, she came out and started her own church Kim Tian Church after the death of Rev Jean Wagner.

In Faith AG, **Rev Cyril G Francis**, a British missionary came to take over. Later he also served as a missionary to Malaya.



*Rev Cyril Francis*

**Mrs Jarmilla Wagner (Jean)** came from Czechoslovakia. She was a widow with a child. But she labored hard to build the church. She rented Prince Philip Avenue as the Alexander work was insufficient. Soon a place at 355 Tanglin Road was available for sale. She sacrificed much for the church and became ill. She died on Labor Day of 1961. The two works merged together in Tanglin Road and named Grace AG.

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