

Think Mission. Do Missions.

# national missions study report



#### the 2024 national missions study

Coordinated and Conducted by

The Singapore Centre for Global Missions

With the Generous Support of

Covenant Evangelical Free Church
Pasir Panjang Hill Brethren Church
Church of Our Saviour
Wesley Methodist Church
St Andrew's Cathedral
Kum Yan Methodist Church
The Fellowship of Missional Organisations Singapore

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'

Romans 10:14-15 ESV

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You have in your hands a very significant document!

This report is the work of the Singapore Centre for Global Missions (SCGM) and a team of dedicated volunteers and researchers.

It has long been one of the core aims of SCGM to provide informative and transformative research studies, thus improving the strength, scope and scale of participation of Singapore churches in global missions.

To this end, since 2009, we have been conducting a quinquennial National Missions Study (NMS). In 2024, the NMS consisted of both quantitative and qualitative research, involving surveys, personal interviews and focus group discussions.

It is a snapshot of where some churches in Singapore are in 2024 - whether we are talking about missions at our doorstep to missions abroad to the nations.

A picture only captures a moment in time, but it helps us see and appreciate our current reality. Used in the right way, this report can be a veritable tool for learning and growth, leading we hope towards a wholehearted response as God's people to His mission that must engage His whole Church.

The NMS study is not meant to be an end in itself. We, at SCGM, desire it to spur both reflection and action.

So read it and ask: what may God be saying to us as the Church? What areas are we strong and weak in? How are our current missional contexts different and changing? How do changing trends, times and focus affect areas like missions mobilisation, short-term missions, missionary training and care, and missions policies and practices in our churches?

Most importantly, how can we as the Church of Singapore - individual churches, agencies, para-church ministries, networks and theological schools - strengthen and develop our churches to be truly missions-centred, missions-sending and missions-supporting, each seeing God's mission as fundamental to the work and activity of God's people?

May God bring about much learning, motivation and clarified thinking, as you read and study this report. Soli Deo Gloria.

#### **Revd Manik Corea**

National Director Singapore Centre for Global Missions

### introduction



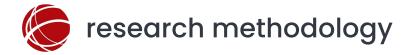
God's mission is a call to all God's people to take the whole Gospel to the whole world. Many Singaporean Christians and churches over the years have sought to answer God's call and command to join in His greater mission in the world by witness and work. We are thankful to God for many Singapore churches, organisations, networks, theological centres and missions agencies, not to mention faithful individuals who in the course of the last 80 years and more, have served Him missionally home and abroad.

However, there remains much that can and should be done to strengthen and grow our missions participation, so that more and more people encounter the good news of Jesus, and disciples are made. The Singapore missions workforce is also constantly in need of renewal, in terms of both raising up new generations and more diverse types of cross-cultural workers, and of using contemporary and contextually appropriate ways of engaging the unreached.

To these ends, the National Missions Study (NMS) aims to **inform** and **impact** the missions landscape in Singapore for the coming years. The NMS was first conducted in 1988, and subsequently in 1990, 1992, 2000, 2009, 2014 and 2019. The study objectives align with those of the Singapore Centre for Global Missions (SCGM), which now oversees the conduct of the study every five years and seeks to 'coordinate the efforts of local churches in missions and promote partnership in missions endeavours from Singapore' (<a href="https://www.scgm.org.sg/">https://www.scgm.org.sg/</a>).

As with previous studies, NMS 2024 evaluates **key demographic and ministry trends** (including across time), so as to **identify areas for development**. While many of the study questions are aligned with those of NMS 2019 to allow for longitudinal comparisons, the current study includes further questions to obtain more details on the missions workforce, church missions partnerships, and how churches educate, train, and mobilise their congregations and missions workers for involvement in God's mission to the world.

From the data which has been meticulously gathered and analysed, NMS 2024 provides a snapshot into the current state of missions in Singapore. It is our hope that the insight provided by this report will spur the Church towards greater involvement in God's mission and more fruitful cross-cultural work in the coming years.



The NMS 2024 was conducted by a study team from SCGM from June to October 2024. It comprises two components: a quantitative cross-sectional study and a qualitative component using focus group discussions.

#### quantitative study

This is a cross-sectional study which collected data from churches through an online questionnaire survey, hosted on Google Forms. The study team reviewed questions from the NMS 2019 survey, and included selected questions in the current study to compare and evaluate trends across time. New questions were added to the survey to detail certain aspects, which were decided upon through two focus group discussions with church missions leaders, missions agency leaders, and missiologists. Pilot testing of the questionnaires was conducted with five churches of varying denominations and church sizes. Feedback on phrasing and survey length were taken into account when developing the final survey for dissemination.

There are two survey forms: i) the 'Church Missions Survey' on churches' missions practices, which was completed by church missions leaders, and ii) the 'Missions Workforce Survey,' which was completed by missions workers who received the survey through their churches. Translated versions of these two forms into Chinese were also developed.

680 registered churches in Singapore were invited via email to participate in the survey. A number of denominational heads and/or heads of missions boards were approached to encourage participation. Invitation to participate was also done through telephone calls to church offices. Two rounds of reminders through email were done. Individuals were also sought to contact their personal networks to encourage study participation.

Data obtained from the NMS 2024 was analysed and compared with results from the NMS 2019 for selected questions. The majority of the results are from categorical data, reported as proportions and percentages, while some are from continuous data and reported as mean value and/or median value with interquartile range.

#### qualitative study

The qualitative study was conducted to enable more in-depth study into a specific area, which was determined by the study team after considering the quantitative survey results and churches' current interests and concerns.

The theme of the focus group discussions (FGDs) was the mobilisation of a diverse missions workforce, focusing on five types of non-traditional missions workers, namely:

- Tentmakers and bi-vocational missions workers
- Business-as-missions entrepreneurs
- · Returning Christian migrants
- · Non-residential missions workers
- Millennial missional professionals

In addition, FGDs were also conducted to discuss the current practices of short-term missions trippers and its potential to be deployed as part of the missions workforce.

For each of the six categories, two FGD sessions were conducted. Two separate one-on-one interviews were also conducted. A total of 34 church missions leaders participated in these dialogues. Church missions leaders were selected based on relevant experiences as reported from the Church Missions Survey and Workforce Survey. Selection was also based on the profiles of the churches so as to ensure representation from different denominations and church sizes. Confidentiality is observed in this study.

The interviews and FGDs were digitally transcribed and analysed through a data-coding method. The focus was to draw out common themes and innovative practices. The richness of the qualitative data is unfortunately not fully captured in this report.

Summaries of information from FGDs are included in boxes like this.

The data will be presented in greater detail at future SCGM events.

### demographics of respondents

Of the 680 churches in Singapore that were contacted, 98 churches responded and participated in the NMS 2024 Church Missions Survey. This represents an estimated total of 99,794 believers in Singapore. The majority (30%) of the respondents are smaller-sized churches, having between 200-499 members. The highest proportion of respondents comes from the Methodist churches, as well as Independent and Other churches (both 23%). 13% of the respondents have predominantly non-English congregations.

Although the study team encouraged all churches to complete the survey regardless of their current state of missions involvement, it is likely that churches that are more active in missions participated in the study. Compared to NMS 2019, the largest decline in participation comes from the smaller churches (i.e., those having less than 200 members, or between 200-499 members). Smaller churches may have faced more challenges resuming cross-cultural missions work in the post-COVID period, leading to decreased participation rates.

This snapshot of the Singapore missions landscape hence likely reflects a more ideal scenario of the current state of missions. Nonetheless, from the data collected, current missions-related trends may still be analysed, and learning points as well as existing gaps in church missions practices may be identified.

It is hoped that this report may help churches to critically reflect on their current missions practices and seek ways to improve their missions approaches.

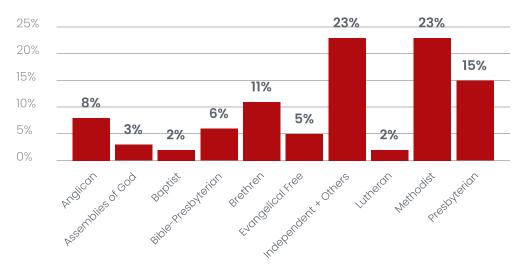


figure 1 - denominations of participating churches (N=98)

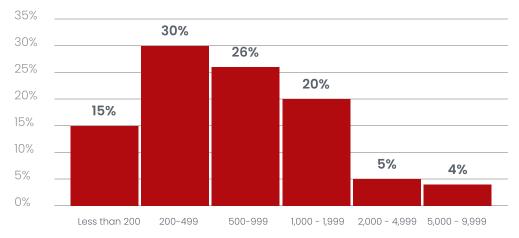
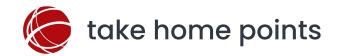


figure 2 - size of participating churches (N=98)



The National Missions Study 2024 shows a great diversification in many areas of missions, including the missions workforce, models for financial support, training and equipping of missions workers, partnerships, short-term missions trips, and mobilisation methods. Churches and agencies are moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach and exploring different ways to educate, mobilise, send, and support church members and missions workers in their missions endeavours.

These 10 take-home points offer a snapshot of the current missions landscape.

- 1. Geographical location of Singapore missions. The majority of missions partnerships and missions workers are in Southeast Asia. A significant presence is also found in East Asia and South Asia. More could be explored in Central and West Asia.
- 2. The strength of the Singapore missions workforce. The number of missions workers per church member decreased in the past five years, which coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic. Excluding megachurches', 1 worker per 109 members is reported in 2024 compared to 1 worker per 53 members in 2019.
- 3. Type of missions workers. There is a wide variation in the ways workers define themselves and the nature of their work. 43% are traditional missions workers doing church-based or non-governmental organisation (NGO) work; 28% are non-traditional missions workers, i.e., bi-vocational missions workers, tentmakers, business-as-missions entrepreneurs, and non-residential missions workers; and 29% are missions agency staff. 73% of the bi-vocational missions workers, tentmakers and NGO workers are under 50 years old, while 70% of non-residential workers are 50 years old and above.
- **4. Financial support of missions workers.** With increasing variation in the types of missions work, some churches have developed a dynamic and multi-tiered financial policy.
- **5. Training of missions workers.** While many traditional missions workers are theologically trained, other types of missions workers undergo varying training programmes. Non-traditional missions workers seek a more flexible and diversified curriculum.
- **6. Missions partnerships.** While 50% of missions partnerships with local entities have been for over 10 years, 42% of them do not have any specified plans. Also, 38% of the 98 participating churches do not collaborate with any other Singapore-based missions entity.
- 7. Short-term missions trips (STMTs). Mission trips can be more intentionally and strategically employed. Some churches have more structured pre-trip preparation and post-trip follow-up and do not take STMTs as an end in themselves. One of the larger gaps is equipping church members for cross-cultural engagement.
- 8. Missions education and mobilisation. About a quarter of the churches in this study integrate missions into the life of the church and encourage their congregation to participate in long-term relational programmes such as befriending people from different cultures and religions. 10% of churches conduct altar calls for missions workers.
- **9. Training of church leaders.** While most church missions leaders and committee members undergo some form of missions training, 22% of churches do not expose their missions decision makers to any missions training.
- 10. Missions at our doorstep. 57% of churches are involved in doorstep missions. 25% of these ministries started during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a need to develop culturally appropriate worship and discipleship so that migrants who return to their home countries may be able to do missions in their communities.



# global presence of singapore missions



#### 1.1 geographical location of singapore missions

Of the 98 churches who participated in the Church Missions Survey, 749 overseas missions partnerships, extending across at least 44 different countries, were reported. 88 churches (90%) reporting at least 1 overseas missions partnership. The median number of partnerships is 3 (inter-quartile range: 2 – 6)<sup>2</sup>.

From the Missions Workforce Survey, responses from 236 missions workers, from at least 39 different countries, were received.

The diversity of locations reflect the involvement of the Singapore Church in global missions. While the majority of Singapore missions are in Southeast Asia, there is significant presence in East Asia and South Asia.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of Singapore missions partnerships and workforce around the world.

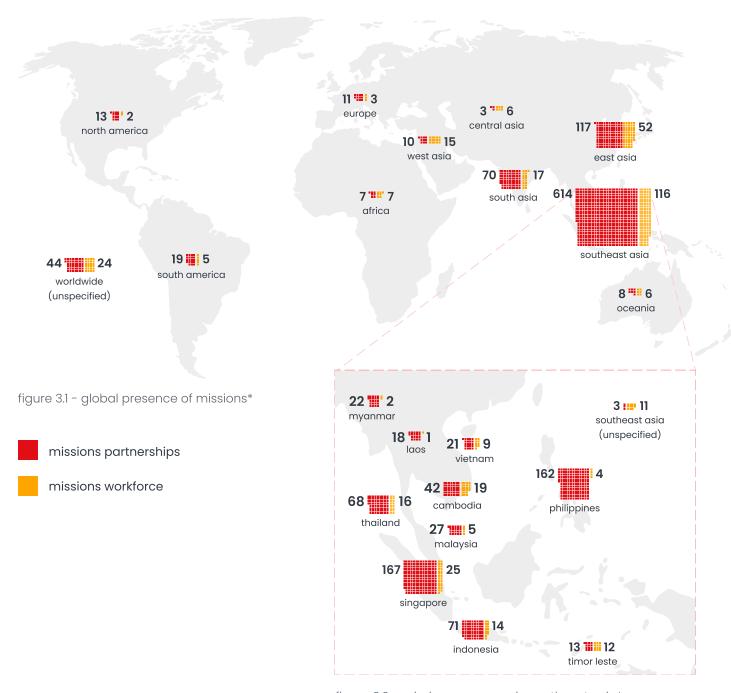


figure 3.2 - missions presence in southeast asia\*

<sup>\*</sup>some missions workers reported more than one primary country/region of ministry

#### further insights on the global presence of singapore missions

Unsurprisingly, the Singapore Church tends to be involved in missions within our own region of Southeast as well as in East Asia. There is strategic significance in employing the near-culture missions approach through which missions workers are sent to geographically, culturally, and linguistically proximate people groups.<sup>3</sup> However, missions workers in Central and West Asia attest to the immense need and vast opportunities for Singaporeans in these highly unreached regions.



# 1.2 singapore church engagement with unreached people groups (UPGs)

The NMS 2024 study, as with earlier studies, uses Patrick Johnstone's definition for unreached people groups (UPGs):

An 'unreached people group' is a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelise this people group without outside assistance.<sup>4</sup>

Of the 98 churches, 54% reported having at least one missions partnership reaching out to UPGs. Of the 749 partnerships, 34% are focused on ministries to UPGs, and of the 170 missions workers (excluding missions agency staff), 45% work among UPGs.

Compared to the NMS 2019, the proportion of churches and workers in UPG-related work seems higher in the NMS 2024. This may in part be due to the current study having fewer participating churches and favouring those more active in cross-cultural missions.

#### further insights on singapore missions among the UPGs

While the reported numbers appear encouraging, Singapore churches should take special note of the specific areas or communities that do not have a viable Christian presence. For example, Thailand is considered as a UPG because its national average of Christians is less than 2%, but the majority of missions presence is in three provinces, namely Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Chiang Rai where there are more than 5% Christians, contrasting with many other provinces where there are only 0.1% Christians.<sup>5</sup>

It should also be noted that despite missionary presence in countries like Thailand and Japan for two to four hundred years, people who identify as Christians are still very low because Christianity is largely seen as a foreign religion. The challenge lies in examining how we need to adopt more socially and culturally sensitive missions approaches.

- 3 The Bridges of God: Exploring the Strategic Significance of Near-Culture missions. <a href="http://ewcenter.org/?p=8786">http://ewcenter.org/?p=8786</a>
- 4 Patrick Johnstone, The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities (Authentic Media: Milton Keynes, UK, 2011), xiii.



## 1.3 the strength of the singapore missions workforce across time

Of the 98 participating churches, 79 of them account for a total of 730 missions workers.

- 38% are 'traditional' missions workers, sent out by a church and/or missions agency and doing church-based/church-planting work or working in a Christian non-governmental organisation (NGO).
- 32% are 'non-traditional' missions workers such as bi-vocational missions workers, tentmakers, business-asmissions entrepreneurs, non-residential missions workers, and doorstep missions workers.
- 30% are missions agency staff.

Section 2.1 details the description of the categories of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional.'

Compared to total congregation size across all churches in this study (99,794 members), these figures work out to an average of one traditional worker per 359 members, one non-traditional worker per 428 members, and one missions agency staff per 456 members.

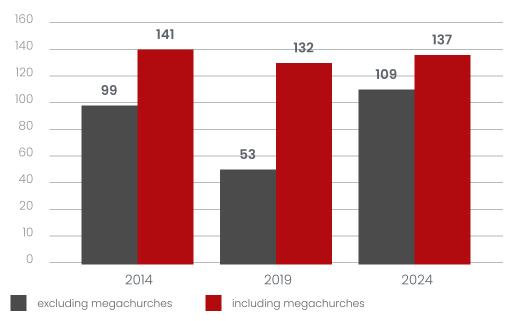


figure 4 - average number of church members per missions worker, NMS 2014-2024

As seen in Figure 4, the rate of sending missions workers from 2014 to 2024 is comparable when including megachurches (defined as churches with >2000 members). However, when excluding megachurches (which may distort the statistics by virtue of their sheer size, difficulty in tracking members, and unique practice of missions), the rates differ considerably across the years. The rate of sending missions workers in 2024 is one worker for every 109 members, a decrease from both 2019 (one worker for every 53 members) and 2014 (one worker for every 99 members).

	under 200	200 to 499	500 to 999	1,000 to 1,999	2,000 to 4,999	5,000 and above
no. of churches	15	29	25	20	5	4
total size	1,722	9,778	19,071	27,243	16,560	25,420
missions force personnel (MFP)	46	108	124	254	41	157
no. of members per MFP	37	91	154	107	404	162
mean no. of MFP	3.1	3.7	5.0	12.7	8.2	39.3
median no. of MFP	2	2	4	6	6	36.5

table 1: missions workforce by church size

Table I shows the breakdown of the missions workforce according to church size. The most 'efficient' sending churches tend to be smaller, i.e., with <200 members and 200-499 members, having sending rates of one worker per 37 members and one worker per 91 members respectively. Furthermore, the rate of sending missions workers does not directly correlate with church size. It is interesting to note that churches with 2,000-4,999 members in this study has a much lower rate of sending missions workers than all other churches (one worker for every 404 members), and even the largest churches with >5,000 members sent out relatively more workers than them. These observations are, however, limited by the small sample sizes and may not be reflective of all such churches in Singapore.

Overall, there has been a decline in the rate of sending workers for most categories of churches, when compared to NMS 2019:

- For churches with under 200 members one worker for every 37 members, comparable to the rate for NMS 2019.
- For churches with 200-499 members decrease from one worker for every 80 members to one worker for every 91 members.
- For churches with 500-999 members decrease from one worker for every 75 members to one worker for every 154 members.
- For churches with 1,000-1,999 members decrease from one worker for every 67 members to one worker for every 107 members.
- For churches with 2,000 members and above increase from one worker for every 241 members to one worker for every 212 members.<sup>6</sup>

#### further insights on the strength of the singapore missions workforce

The decline in the rate of sending workers from NMS 2019 to NMS 2024 is substantial, and the increased rate of sending workers by the largest churches (with >2,000 members) is insufficient to offset the decreased rate of sending by the rest of the smaller churches. The decline in sending rates might be explained in part by the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought travel to a near-complete halt globally for close to two years, and forced many field workers to return to Singapore. Some workers might have moved into other ministries after the pandemic and churches might not have fully ramped up missions engagement to raise up new workers. Going forward, it is vital to step up efforts nationwide to raise up a new generation of workers.

Furthermore, it is interesting to observe how large churches with 2,000-4,999 members have reported significantly fewer workers than all other churches. While we have no doubt that these churches are engaged in meaningful ministries to disciple their members and reach out to their local communities, we believe that greater emphasis could also be placed on mobilising and sending more workers to make disciples of the nations.

# the missions workforce



This section presents the findings of the 236 missions workers from 47 churches who responded to the Missions Workforce Survey. As reflected in Figure 1, 49% of them serve in Southeast Asia, with the highest numbers in Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Timor Leste. There are also missions workers in East Asia (22%), South Asia (7%), West Asia (6%), and Central Asia (2.5%).

In the NMS 2024, the categories 'Missional Professionals' and 'Others,' that were used in the NMS 2019, are expanded and re-defined. This expansion seeks to bring clarification to the different types of missions workers the Singapore Church is mobilising.

The different types of missions workers are:

#### 'traditional' missions workers

- 1. Missions workers who do church-based ministries, church-planting work, or disciple-making movements; they live outside of Singapore on the missions field for at least 2 years and are sent by a church and/or missions agency. Mid-termers are those serving between 1 month and 2 years.
- 2. Missions workers who work in NGOs, doing or supporting humanitarian or social welfare services, e.g., orphanages, women's shelters, schools etc; they live outside of Singapore on the missions field for at least 2 years and are sent by a church and/or missions agency. Mid-termers are those serving between 1 month and 2 years.

#### 'non-traditional' missions workers

- 3. Tentmakers do missions in the marketplace, (e.g. a teacher or a doctor at a government or private commercial school or clinic, or an administrative executive or insurance agent in a company). They express their missions calling primarily through their work and the people they engage with at work.
- 4. Bi-vocational missions workers have two 'jobs.' In addition to their marketplace work, they use a significant portion of their work-day time to fulfil a specific church or NGO responsibility.
- 5. Business-as-missions entrepreneurs (BAMers) set up missional businesses.
- 6. Non-residential missions workers (NRMers) are based in Singapore or another sending base but have a strategic role in overseas missions and travel regularly (at least 2 trips a year), e.g., an itinerant evangelist, teacher/trainer, or a livelihood project specialist. NRMers are differentiated from ad hoc short-term missions trippers; the objectives of NRMers' trips are targeted towards specific long-term objectives.
- 7. Doorstep missions workers serve foreigners/migrants or unreached communities in Singapore.
- 8. Seminary lecturers, missions teachers/trainers/consultants/researchers, and Asian theologians (teaching outside Singapore).

#### missions agency staff

9. Missions agency staff may have leadership, supportive, or technical roles in denominational missions agencies, international or local missions agencies.

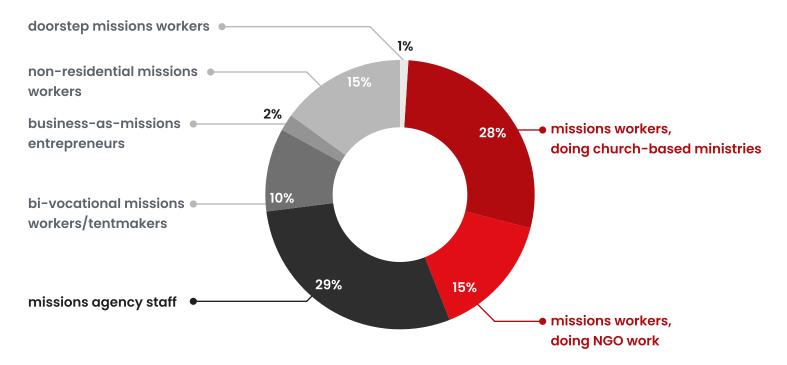


figure 5 - different types of missions workers

As seen in Figure 5, of the 236 missions workers who responded to the Missions Workforce Survey:

- 43% are traditional missions workers doing church-based or NGO work
- 28% are non-traditional missions workers: bi-vocational missions workers, tentmakers, BAMers, and non-residential missions workers
- 29% are missions agency staff

As with the Church Missions Survey (section 1.3), more traditional missions workers are reported than the other categories. However, an increasing proportion of workers are using their professional and technical skills to enter and serve in the missions field.

#### a glimpse into the work the non-traditional missions workers



**EY is a bi-vocational missions worker.** He spends 40% of his time providing business consultancy through which he earns his living and 60% of his time organising missional projects with a missions organisation.



**LK is a tentmaker.** She is a doctor in a private hospital in Southeast Asia. For her, being a good doctor and colleague is her Christian witness; befriending, sharing faith and life, discipling young believers, and accompanying them to local churches is her missions work.



**A & BC are business-as-missions entrepreneurs.** They run an agricultural-product business in Central-West Asia, buying locally grown produce, processing and distributing them locally and overseas. For them, the work they do and the people they meet is their ministry.



HC is a non-residential missions worker. He helps a stateless community in the Mekong region with hydro-farming. He goes to country A twice a year to train the stateless people from country B, and goes to country B once a year to share about the work and recruit volunteers.



#### 2.2 age profile of the singapore missions workforce

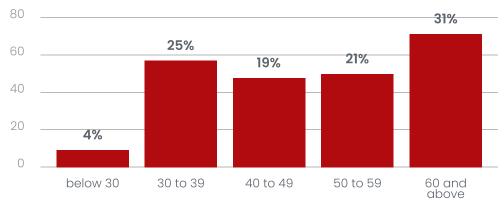


figure 6.1: age profile of missions workforce

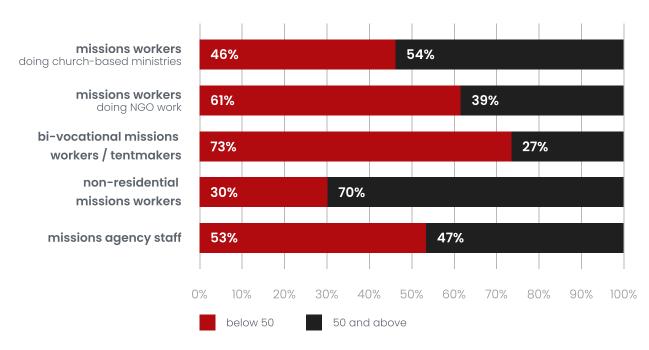


figure 6.2 - types of missions workers by age group

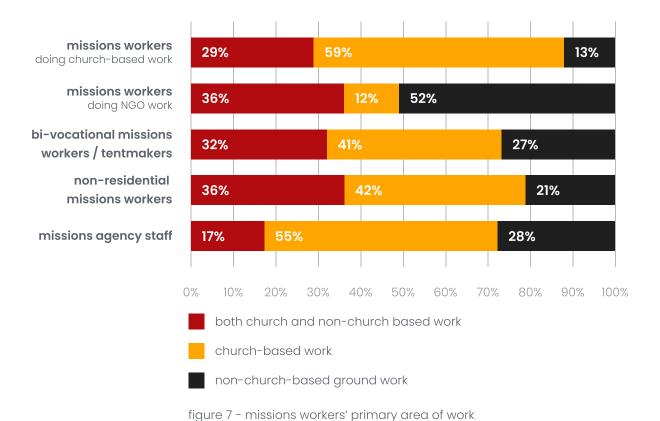
Figure 6.1 shows that 31% of the respondents are above 60 years old, while 4% are below the age of 30.

Figure 6.2, which presents the age distribution among different types of workers, shows a higher incidence of bivocational missions workers and tentmakers as well as missions workers doing NGO work among people who are under 50 years old, whereas non-residential missions workers are predominantly people 50 years old and above. The differences in age distribution among the other categories are small.

The data show that both the young and the old can significantly contribute to the missions workforce, with the younger generation mobilised into missions through professional routes.



#### 2.3 missions workers' primary area of work



In Figure 7, 'church-based work' is defined as work pertaining to establishing communities of faith, including evangelism, discipleship, training, leadership development, seminary, Bible translation, and missions agency work. It does NOT refer only to ministries within a church building, e.g., a tentmaker can be actively doing church-

'Non-church-based work' includes community development, social welfare projects, vocational training, livelihood, business, start-ups or missional professional work.

based work of evangelism and discipleship in his/her workplace.

The graph shows that while the majority focus on traditional church-based ministries (about 50% overall), a sizeable proportion of workers are involved in missions through their vocational and professional expertise. Furthermore, aside from missions agency staff, about a third of all Singapore missions workers do a combination of church-based and non-church-based work.

#### further insights on strengths of the missions workers' primary area of work

From the data, a wide variation in how missions workers define themselves and their work is observed. It is encouraging to note that a good number of Singapore missions workers envision missions holistically and integrally. In the decades ahead, churches' missions policies could allow for multi-prong engagement with an increasingly diverse world.



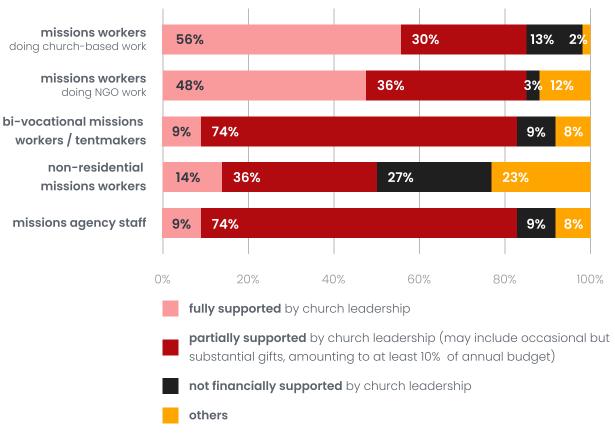


figure 8 - missions workers' primary area of work

As shown in Figure 8, missions workers doing church-based ministries (56%) or NGO work (48%) have a higher proportion fully supported by their churches, compared to the other types of missions workers. Of note as well is that only 9% of missions agency staff are fully funded by the church.

The category of non-residential missions workers has the most diverse range of financial support. It is noted that 27% do not receive any financial support from church; further studies are needed to understand whether this is because of financial independence or resistance to support.

#### further insights on money matters and different forms of support

The financial support model for missions agency staff is likely reflective of missions agency policies, which challenge them to obtain support both from their church and private supporters. Additionally, tentmakers and bi-vocational missions workers may have independent sources of income and may not need full financial support from churches, except for those who are remunerated based on local salaries. Nonetheless, churches should be mindful that maintaining support can be an ongoing challenge for some workers, and regular reviews are essential. It is underscored that all roles in missions are vital and cannot be undervalued.

Some churches have a dynamic and multi-tiered financial missions policy which could serve as a model for other churches. E.g. Church ABC financially supports her BAMers in the early stages of establishing their businesses, eventually cutting off support when their businesses become viable. (continued on next page)

#### (cont'd) further insights on money matters and different forms of support

In addition to financial support, some churches support the missions workers in various ways. Focusing on the support given to non-traditional missions workers, some churches:

- Celebrate the work of bi-vocational missions workers or BAMers at church services,
- · Help tentmakers or BAMers to establish business or professional networks,
- Mobilise targeted and well-defined objectives like 'short-term missions trips' to support the work of non-traditional missions workers.

For example: a small family church (200–250 ppl) came together to support a missions worker who used film production as a platform to reach the nations. The first film became internationally recognised and was later funded by investors. The church continues to support this project in various ways, e.g., members from the congregation with relevant skills render assistance to the business.



#### 2.5 training received by missions workers

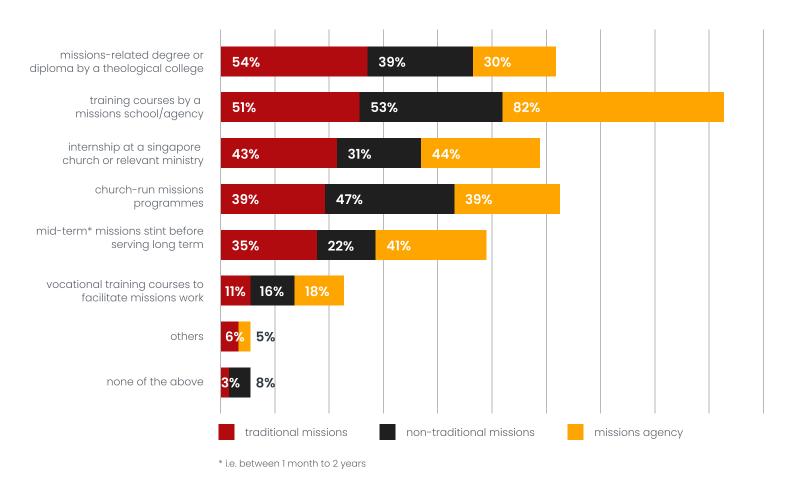


figure 9 - training received by missions workers

Figure 9 shows the training received as reported by the 236 missions workers who participated in the Workforce Survey. Slightly over half of the workers underwent formal missions training at a seminary (e.g. SBC, EAST) and/or a missions school/agency (e.g. ACTI, YWAM DTS). The remaining half did short courses and/or internships. However, from the Church Missions Survey, 10% of the 98 participating churches reported that their missions workers do not undergo any missions training or internship programs at all (data not shown).

#### further insights on missions training for non-traditional missions workers

Some suggestions for missions training are offered.

- Seminaries and missions-training centres in Singapore could diversify their curriculum and allow for a more flexible programme including continuing on-field modules for non-traditional missions workers.
- Singapore churches could also consider sending their missions candidates for seminary and/or missions training in a well-established school/centre outside of Singapore, where the socio-cultural context is more proximate to the candidates' future experiences on the field.
- Tentmakers and/or BAMer candidates could consider relevant internships in Singapore and/or on the missions fields. BAMers need to have business acuity and acumen and their enterprises need to be based on healthy business models and principles.
- Millennial missional professionals desire mentorship from missions workers with relevant experiences and support from their churches.



# long-term missions partnerships



#### 3.1 partnerships in the mission field

A total of 749 overseas missions partnerships were reported by the 98 participating churches who completed the Church Missions Survey, out of which 217 of them were described in greater detail. This section is based on the 217 missions partnerships.

'Long-term missions partnerships' is defined as:

- · Sharing resources, strategies, support structures with a church, organisation or individual,
- For a duration of at least 2 years,
- Formal or informal partnerships, as long as the collaboration is regular,

In this study, providing financial contributions alone is not considered a partnership.

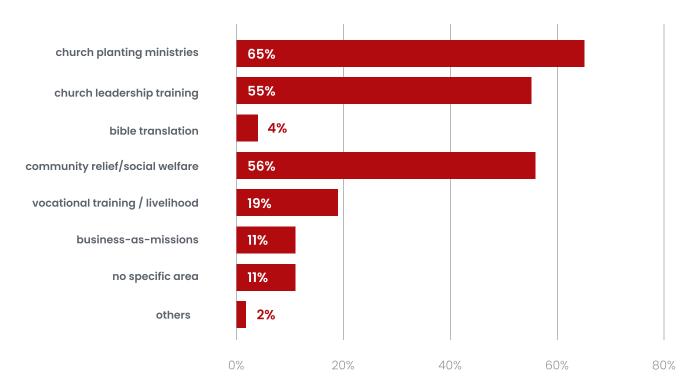


figure 10 - primary nature of work of missions partnerships

The missions partners Singapore churches work with on the missions fields are local churches (51%), missions agencies (32%), missions or local workers (29%), NGOs (22%), and other independent individuals (18%) (data not shown).

As seen in Figure 10, most partnerships relate to church planting (65%), church training (55%), and community relief and social welfare (56%). These forms of engagement are significantly more than developmental work through vocational training and livelihood (19%) and business-as-missions (11%). Only 4% of partnerships are related to Bible translation.

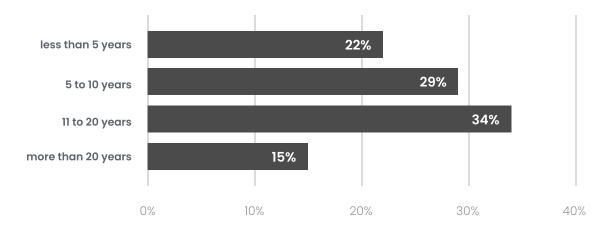


figure 11.1 - duration of missions partnerships

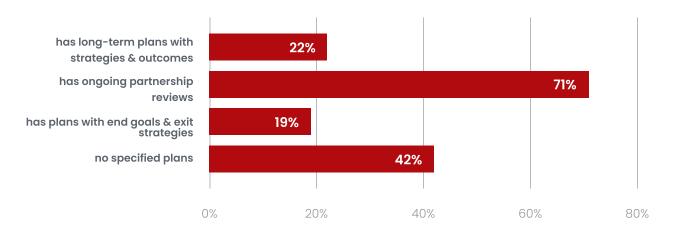


figure 11.2 - churches' approaches to missions partnerships

Singapore churches express their missions participation mainly through short-term missions trips by conducting events and programmes (85%), providing financial/logistics/administrative support (81%), and corporate prayer (74%) (data not shown).

As seen in Figure 11.1, almost half of the partnerships have been in operation for over 10 years, while about one-fifth are emerging partnerships of less than 5 years. Figure 11.2 shows that while 71% of churches have ongoing partnership reviews, only 22% of them have long-term plans with strategies and outcomes, and 19% have exit strategies with end goals defined. Notably, 42% of partnerships do not have any specified plans, of which half of these involve partnerships for more than 10 years (data not shown).



#### 3.2 singapore-based missions partnerships

62% of the 98 participating churches have at least one Singapore-based missions partner, either with a missions agency (e.g. OMF, Interserve), a denominational missions arm (e.g. Methodist Missions Society, Lutheran missions Board), a missions/Christian organisation (e.g. Praxeis, Our Daily Bread), a theological/missions training centre (e.g. SBC, ACTI), and/or another Singapore church. Conversely, 38% of the churches work independently and do not collaborate with any other Singapore-based missions entity.

Of the 167 Singapore-based missions partnerships reported by these churches, 46% of them revolve around sending missions workers, 37% on equipping missions workers, 31% involve collaboration and sharing of expertises, services, and products, and 22% consult with expertise on missions strategies.



# missions mobilisation



Short-term missions trips (STMTs), in this study, are defined as overseas trips commissioned by the church, lasting up to one month and having any number of persons.

From 1 Jan 2022 to 31 Dec 2023, respondents reported arranging a total of 947 STMTs involving an estimated 5756 church members. The number of STMTs and members involved in STMTs are more closely correlated to church size, compared to NMS 2019. In 2019, these numbers were more diverse and not tagged to congregation size.

It is encouraging to see the number of churches and members involved in missions after international travel restrictions were lifted in the post-COVID era. However, for most churches, the percentage of members who went on missions trips is still small (less than 10%).

congregation size	average (median) no. of STMTs per church per year	average (median) no. of members per church per year
less than 200	2	6
200 to 499	3	14
599 to 599	4	29
1,000 to 1,999	8	30
2,000 to 4,999	15	60
5,000 to 5,999	59	365

table 2 - frequency and extent of participation of short-term missions trips

#### desired outcomes of short-term missions trips

While the figures are promising, the desired outcomes and activities of STMTs would be a better reflection of the effectiveness of these trips in discipleship of members and support for the missions field.

Table 3 presents the desired outcomes of churches concerning STMTs. (found in the next page)

desired outcome	percentage
support the ministry of our missions partners	69%
give our members an experience of missions	54%
nurture long-term relationships in the other country	32%
deepen our members' discipleship journeys	31%
care for missions workers or overseas partners	29%
allow our members to explore their missions calling	21%
ministry / community-based work (aside from with regular partners)	17%
understand the culture and social context of the people	14%

table 3 - desired outcomes of short-term missions trips

#### main activities of short-term missions trips

Table 4 presents the main activities that churches do for their STMTs.

activity	percentage
conducting church events	69%
community outreach and improvement	50%
training ministry leaders	49%
no specific activities	20%
medical / dental / health clinics	18%
others	14%
life skills, vocational training	9%
livelihood projects	6%
crisis relief	3%

table 4 - main activities of short-term missions trips

#### further insights on short-term missions trips

STMTs are seen as a form of support for the work on the missions field. An important area for growth is for churches to see the importance of understanding the culture and social context of the local people.

With the most common activities being conducting events and community outreach projects, STMTs runs the risk of becoming an end in itself. STMT teams have to be careful not to be too focused on their programmes and goals on the trips, and instead be intentional in building relationships and understanding the local community.

Some churches do more in-depth pre-trip preparation and post-trip follow-up:

- Biblical and cross-cultural training are important to teach missions purpose and cultural understanding, alongside individual and team prayers.
- Pre-trip engagement with leaders in the missions field helps build relationships and prepare participants for their roles.
- After the trip, participants commit to follow-up actions, with leaders monitoring the progress.

Building missions communities encourage ongoing missions involvement beyond STMTs:

- Sustained prayer and continual engagement with the people and work.
- · Raising potential leaders for future trips, country coordinators, and prayer leaders.
- Organising annual gatherings to allow past and future trippers to share and strengthen relationships.

STMTs tend to be focused on the Singapore team. Churches should consider how to empower communities in the missions field, through the following suggestions:

- Setting clear objectives aligned with the field needs, and having the leaders of the field community take ownership of the trip, supported by the Singapore team.
- Repeat visits, maintaining communication and getting feedback from local partners.
- Providing support for field workers through resourcing and member care.



#### 4.2 missions education and mobilisation

Table 5 shows the frequency of various missions activities conducted in Singapore churches. While it is encouraging that 85% of churches preach about missions during Missions Sunday or Missions Month, only 20% do it throughout the year. It is also noted that while centrally organised activities such as preaching, teaching, and short-term missions trips are conducted with higher frequency, relational programmes such as reaching out to foreigners and befriending people from different cultures and religions are less frequently implemented. Notably, only 6% of churches give altar calls for missions at least once a year.

missions education / mobilisation activities	percentage
pulpit preaching about missions during missions sunday/month	85%
regular short-term missions trips	83%
regular prayer for missions and missions workers/partners	72%
teach about missions in children and/or youth ministries	55%
regular outreach programmes among foreigners in singapore	33%
teach members to befriend those of different cultures and religions	24%
regular missions-related preaching throughout the year	20%
others	12%
altar call for missions at least once a year	6%
no specific means of missions engagement	2%

table 5 - extent of engagement of church missions activities

Table 6 shows the methods churches use to help their members discern and confirm their missions callings. Cumulatively<sup>7</sup>, 69% of the churches have some form of in-house method of journeying with potential missions candidates (a-b), while the remaining 31% out-source the process or have no specific means of following up with potential candidates (c-e).

methods used to help members discern and confirm their missions calling	percentage
a. clear roadmap for candidates discerning and/or preparing for missions	46%
b. provide a missions mentor to counsel the candidate on an informal basis	61%
c. direct the candidate to a missions agency for follow-up	41%
d. encourage participation in missions-related training and events	60%
e. no specific means of identifying or following up with candidates	19%

table 6 - follow-up of potential missions candidates

#### further insights on missions education and mobilisation

Churches with a vibrant missions ministry usually integrate missions into the whole life of the church and not see missions as only a separate ministry for a select few. Regular preaching of the Scriptures using an interpretative framework based on a missional reading of the Scriptures is to be encouraged. Missologist Chris Wright has argued that we need to read and teach the Scriptures fundamentally as a missional text and story. Developing a robust Christian education curriculum to teach the children and the youth on missions and encouraging members to engage with people of other cultures and religions in Singapore serve to inculcate a missional mindset. In addition, strategically planned short-term missions trips and well-informed prayer guides encourage consistent whole-church involvement in missions. Some resources are available to develop missional churches.

Education is key to helping Singapore church missions leaders to understand the changing demography of the missions workforce, especially the impact of non-traditional missions. In focus group discussions with the millennials, several shared their struggles as they try to discern and find creative ways to express their missions calling.



#### 4.3 training of church missions leadership

Table 7 shows the different ways church missions leaders, committee members, and other decision makers are trained in missions. While it is encouraging that 69% of the churches participate in missions conferences or seminars and 46% run missions short courses in their churches, 22% of the churches do not have any training programmes for their decision makers on missions.

methods where missions leaders, committee members. and other decision makers are trained in missions	percentage
missions-related degree or diploma at a theological college (e.g. SBC, EAST, TTC)	20%
training courses by a missions school/agency (e.g. ACTI, YWAM DTS)	21%
church-run missions programmes (e.g. Perspectives, Kairos, Tentmaking)	46%
missions-related conferences and seminars (e.g. GoForth, Antioch21)	69%
join a missions community (e.g. SCGM, Interserve Learning Trail)	32%
none of the above	22%

table 7 - training of church missions leadership

<sup>8</sup> Christopher J. Wright, The Great Story and the Great Commissions: Participating in the Biblical Drama of Mission, (Baker Academic, MI, USA, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> See 'Church Mission Readiness Assessment' by Antioch 21 (<a href="https://bit.ly/Antioch21CMRA">https://bit.ly/Antioch21CMRA</a>); an online tool for churches to assess their church's strengths and weaknesses. Churches can request for a follow-up appendix with practical ways to move ahead in missions. See also <a href="https://saltandlight.sg/news/new-online-tool-to-help-churches-engage-in-missions-more-effectively-launched-at-antioch-summit-2024/">https://saltandlight.sg/news/new-online-tool-to-help-churches-engage-in-missions-more-effectively-launched-at-antioch-summit-2024/</a>



# missions at our doorstep



This section pertains to cross-cultural missions to foreigners living or working in Singapore.

Table 8 shows the data of 56 Singapore churches, out of the 98 participating churches, involved in doorstep missions. The communities whom these churches reach out to include: migrant workers from Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka; domestic workers from Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Sri Lanka; healthcare workers from Myanmar, Philippines, and Sri Lanka; international students and their mothers from China, Thailand, and Vietnam; as well as expatriates of various nationalities including Westerners (data not shown).

Of the 56 Singapore churches who do doorstep missions, a quarter of them (14 churches) began their ministries during the COVID-19 pandemic, while half of them (29 churches) have been reaching out to foreigners for more than 10 years (data not shown).

percentage of singapore churches doing missions @ our doorstep among the people of			
country/region	percentage	country/region	percentage
india	26%	thailand	3%
philippines	24%	bhutan	1%
china	17%	japan	1%
bangladesh	16%	malaysia	1%
indonesia	13%	nepal	1%
myanmar	11%	sri lanka	1%
vietnam	4%	africa	1%

table 8 - churches doing doorstep missions by nationalities/region

Figure 12 (on the next page) shows the nature of ministries conducted by Singapore churches. Some churches have established language-based fellowships/churches separate from their main services while other churches have integrated the foreigners into their main services. Some churches have not established communities of faith yet but are reaching out to the foreigners through various outreach activities.

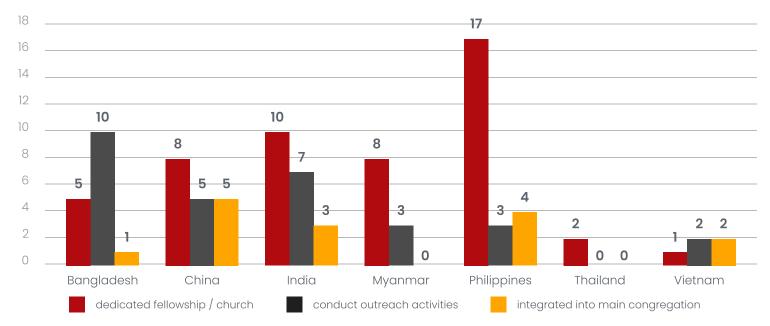


figure 12: nature of doorstep ministries by nationalities

### further insights on doorstep missions

A key concern is the question on how contextualised these fellowships are and whether the migrants who return to their home countries are able to find Christian fellowship and propagate their faith in socially appropriate ways. Singapore churches are encouraged to employ and model contextualised worship and culturally relevant discipleship so that returnees may find it easier to integrate back into their communities.





# forging forward together

## 6.1 forging forward together

Table 9 shows the key issues Singapore church missions leaders are concerned about, and they mostly pertain to missions mobilisation, missions methods, and cultural understanding.

concerns of singapore church missions leaders	no. of churches
mobilising and equipping missional professionals and businesspeople	42
stronger relationships between our church and the community in the missions field	40
helping missions ministries to be less reliant on foreign finances and resources	37
developing culture and context-appropriate evangelistic and ministry methods	31
declining interest in missions	26
developing sustainable community projects	21
implementing alternative church-planting and disciple-making models	20
doing missions in ethnically and religious tense contexts	16
doing missions via online platforms	7
declining giving towards missions	4
none of the above	4
others	7

table 9 - key issues of singapore missions

The word cloud in Figure 13 (on the next page) was generated from the open-ended responses to the question on support needed to help churches carry out missions more effectively.



figure 13 - the kinds of support requested by churches

#### further insights on forging forward together

Many churches desire to mobilise more of their congregations to be involved in missions. They seek support as to how to increase participation in short-term missions trips, encourage more prayer, and improve methods of equipping and training. There is also a yearning for renewal and succession, helping more young people discover their calling, be mentored, equipped, sent, and supported in the field.

Another area of support churches seek is the building of networks for partnership and collaboration in common areas of interests, such as reaching creative access nations, church planting, and doing business-as-missions. Churches seek to connect with other churches and organisations who do missions in the same countries to share resources and best practices and encourage each other through inspiring stories.

While exploring different church-planting and disciple-making models as well as reflecting on how to do missions in ethnically and religious tense contexts are not top of mind for most church mission leaders, these are crucial considerations especially for doing missions in Asian contexts.

Moving forward, one way that churches can collectively address these issues is to participate in learning communities, such as the Antioch 21 gatherings and the monthly SCGM Missions Conversations, where missiologists, missions practitioners, and church missions leaders come together to discuss missions issues, share best practices and resources and to co-create new missions methods together.



## conclusion



There was once a wise old man who seemingly gave correct, truthful and factual answers to almost any question posed to him. One of the village children decided to show the old man up to be wrong for once, so he came up with a cunning plan. He captured a small bird, and cupping it alive completely in his hands, he brought it to the wise old man. The old man waited for his question.

The boy asked boldly, "This bird in my hand, is it alive or dead?" The boy had decided that if the old man said it was alive, he would crush the bird and present it dead to the man. If he said it was dead, the boy would open his hands to let the bird fly free, proving the old man wrong in either case.

After a brief pause following the boy's question, the old man calmly replied, "It's in your hands." In God's divine wisdom, He has called and tasked His Church to join Him in missions to the world.

In this study, we sought to look at what is in our hands to do - to examine the relative health and strength of our missions movements from participating churches. We hope the data sheds light on both the bright spots and blind spots of our combined missional efforts.

As we conclude this report, we hope you will ponder long and hard on what it means to all God's people in Singapore, and in particular, to you in your local church or missional context. Our prayer is that you will be motivated to join in more fully and fittingly with God's mission in the world. Let this NMS 2024 be a call to action!

Here are some final possibilities to ponder. What if....

- 1. We were able to grow our capacity to work with and mobilise ALL our churches across EVERY generation to increase the number of missions workers across all missions force categories?
- 2. National bodies like EAS<sup>10</sup>, missions centres like SCGM and networks like Antioch 21<sup>11</sup> were successful in their goals to dramatically increase the scope and scale of missions participation locally and globally in this sotermed Decade of Missions (2023–2033)?
- 3. Missions agencies, para-church ministries and theological training institutions worked collaboratively with mobilising networks and coordinating bodies to create diverse and contextual missions preparation, resourcing and equipping platforms where relevant training, integral methods, passionate prayer and strategic partnerships were core?
- 4. Local churches were helped to adapt and expand their missions policies, vision casting and mobilising processes so as to be able to facilitate new and co-creative missions engagement among younger age groups in our churches who, by and large, are tending to prefer non-traditional missions vocations?
- 5. People in their senior years were mobilised to support and participate in missions, whether locally or even globally? What if we encouraged them to play an active role in tending and growing the missions contributions of our local churches?
- 6. Local churches and believers collaborated with city movements like Movement Day Singapore<sup>12</sup> and diaspora congregations and ministries, to exponentially grow our engagement and impact within the marketplace and among foreign residents in Singapore?
- 7. We re-examined and re-framed the purpose, preparation and execution of Short-Term Missions Trips (STMTs) in the life of local churches not only seeking to increase the current number of church members who participate in STMTs but also ensuring high-levels of pre- and post-trip engagement and follow-up, as well as ensuring STMTs truly enhance and empower field relationships and communities?

Let us turn these 'what ifs' into prospective testimonies and stories of great new possibilities that future reports will hopefully report on Together as God's people, we can do great things to further God's mission, as commissioned by our Lord Jesus, empowered by His Spirit and guided by His Word.

It's in our collective hands.

#### **Revd Manik Corea**

National Director
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#### special thanks to:

Angie Ng • Hanley Ho

Mervyn Lee • Sonja Chua • Manfred Ong

Yeoh Seng Eng • Kua Wee Seng • Amos Pang • Benjamin Soh • Shermin Tan

Cherise Tan • Christopher Magendran • Jabez Teoh

Joel Neo • Nicole Ong • Wong Lee Nan



THE NATIONAL MISSIONS STUDY 2024 REPORT

