Busy, Busy, Busy..., and Yet, We are Blessed

2009-2010 Quarter I has become one of the busiest quarters for our Houston Church. We thank God that so far all the planned events are completed: RETW (RE Teachers’ Workshop), GTF (Gospel Tea Fellowship), ESSC (Evangelical Service and Spiritual Cultivation) as well as our hosting of the National Ministers’ Workshop. Throughout all of these special events, we witnessed how God made things happen from an impossible start to finish, how we need to be mobilized and work together as one body, and how important it is to prepare and cultivate our younger generation, and equip them to carry on the duty of serving. If we stop and think for a moment, we will see that all these events actually have been very “educational” to our RE students by giving them the opportunity to listen to precious sermons and testimonies, to directly interact with several preachers and elders, as well as to observe and physically participate in the preparation of and serving in related holy works. We thank God for allowing all of us to have these great learning and serving opportunities, so that we will grow stronger and become more usable utensils for Him.

In this newsletter edition, we are very glad to be able to collect several articles of reflection from our teachers and students regarding these special events. Though we may all have been very busy from these events, we know our labor for the Lord will not be in vain, and we will surely be blessed.

2009-2010 Q2 – What’s coming up?

* The K and E2 Classes will cover several famous Bible characters’ stories during this quarter: Esau, Jacob, Joseph, Moses. The J1 Class will study themes regarding God’s nature and power. The schedule is now posted online at: http://docs.google.com/View?id=dhdt2mg_20cs9w7wdm

* We encourage our parents to share thoughts on related topics with the RE kids and to remind students to work on their weekly memory verses and any assigned homework. Please allow students to arrive on time for RE classes.

* RE Monthly Prayer is arranged for all RE students, teachers and parents. Please refer to whole church schedule and attend on time.

* We are glad that there will be 6 students attending Winter SSC this time. May God’s spirit lead all the attendees and the event.

* There will be an RE Teachers’ Fellowship scheduled at the end of this quarter. Details will be announced.
RETW Reflections

by Carol Partridge

Hallelujah! I confess that I was a bit skeptical before the start of RETW. As a trained teacher I thought what can I learn that I do not already know? But as Sister Janet took up the microphone and started to speak, I knew then that this workshop would be different from what I had expected. She began by going through the seven Elements of Teaching and the Purpose of Religious Education. We had to consider things like the student, curriculum, a good environment, teaching methods to name a few. But, the “glue” that binds all these elements together is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is central and vital to everything we pursue, so we must take time to pray before even preparing our lesson. I thought with slight dismay how on many occasions I just delved into the lesson plan without spiritual preparation. And what is the purpose of an RE teacher? To impart biblical knowledge to the children so they can build up a pure faith, good behavior to pursue a Christian life, and to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit in order to serve God and bear fruit. Up until then I had just wanted to deliver a good, solid lesson. I did not even think of the deeper significance!

Sister Janet then continued with lessons on the different learning styles: auditory, visual, kinesthetic; different teaching methods to liven up the lesson: use of puppets, audio/visual aides, role play etc.; classroom management and lesson planning. Not only was I reminded of concepts and methods I had long forgotten, but to my surprise there were theories and applications I had not even heard of.

Dr. Chiang provided a spiritual side to the workshop. He told us that church work stems from the inspiration of God so we need to “lead with our knees.” He quoted 1 Cor 3:6, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.” God is the underlying authority for our success and without Him, our work is in vain. He stressed that humility is key: after all we are only servants of God. Like the human body with its individual parts, we have different functions and cannot work independently from one another. Everyone must work together (1 Cor 12:20-21). As RE teachers we have different roles to play. We are parents to our students: we provide abundant love and spiritual knowledge so they can grow; our mentorship will last a lifetime. We are teachers: we pay attention to teaching techniques and pray that God move the students to understand the Truth; we teach with accuracy. We are shepherds: we are constantly vigilant over our sheep and lead them to green pasture. Finally, we are masters of the house: we survey the situation and provide materials that are appropriate for the children.

Thank God for this workshop. I learned a lot in this workshop, and I think the most important thing in RE is to pray for students and for the classes. As it is written, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.” (1 Cor 3:6). Before preparing for the classes, and before the classes start, it is important that we pray for God’s guidance. Also, we need to lead students with our knees: praying for them on a daily basis and asking God to guide them. We also need to pray for ourselves, asking God to give us His wisdom to lead His little sheep.

In addition to prayers, we also learned some teaching techniques. For example, we need to be in the classroom earlier than our students. If one student arrives early, the RE teacher is there for him/her. This way, students will not feel alone. Before the class starts, the teacher can chat with the students about what happened in the past week, such as student’s family and school life. This way, students feel welcome and warm in RE classes.

We also learned about maintaining the rule in the classroom. Sometimes students want to run to the bathroom and/or to get water during the class. This can interrupt the class, and students might miss material. They just need to be reminded that they should get water and go to the bathroom before the class starts. Inside the classroom, students need to know that the teacher has the authority, although outside the classroom the teacher and the students can be friends.

Finally, we want to be there for our students for a lifetime. Our relationship does not end when students graduate from a specific RE class. Just like parents always care about children (no matter how far away they are), RE teachers should also continue their love for the students after they graduate. If students trust the teacher, they will still go to the RE teacher for questions and problems they encounter in their daily life many years after they graduate. At this time, the RE teacher should play a role as a friend and as a counselor, helping the students, sharing the students’ joy and sorrow, and of course, continuing to pray for them.

by Iris Franz

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**Students' Reflections**

**Gospel Tea Fellowship**

_by Joshua Wong_

I'm glad to see that new people came to our church to hear the voice of God. I am also happy that my mother's mother came to church. All the testimonies were touching because of how they survived an accident or how they came to Christ. I liked the songs that our choir sung so beautifully. The Gospel Tea Fellowship is such a thrilling experience. I loved this day, such a wonderful and touching day for me.

_by Timothy Yen_

I attended the Gospel Tea Fellowship at Houston Church on Oct. 10, 2009. I noticed that we attracted some truth seekers. However, I think we should get the truth seekers more involved in our programs. For example, take them to church more often or give them more notices about church. The thing that touched me the most is knowing that God loves me. I figured this out because he protected Helen's mom when she was in China and taught Sis. Brenda that the true Sabbath Day was Saturday. If God loves them why can't He love me? In the final hymn we sang 331, I learned about God's mercy. In the duet I learned that we can rely on God. I hope I can help in the next GTF if I get HS.

**Do you know more than what our RE students know?**

(K) How did the visitors know that Sarah was laughing?

(E2) God promised Abram that He would make him into a great nation. God said: "I will bless those who ________ you, and whoever curses you I will ________; and all peoples on earth will be ________ through you."

(J1) Why did Jesus not pray for his disciples to be taken out of the world?

**ESSC**

_by Sophia Wong_

The thing I remember the most is when Elder Hsieh was telling us about how people received the Holy Spirit in unique ways. It really touches me that God listens to us in any way as long as we call on His name. This sermon made me think about the time I received the Holy Spirit. I felt the true joy and peace when I received it. I think something like that is one of the most greatest gifts in the world.

It has been a pleasure to have Elder Hsieh with us. He has brought joy and humor to our church. He made me realize how important God is in my life. His sermons are encouraging me to pray harder. I truly thank God that Elder Hsieh was able to come here. I can see that he is an important servant for God.

_by Deborah Lin_

I like the morning/afternoon sermon. I'm really thankful that I can see Elder Hsieh when he is at such an old age. What really touches my heart is when his daughters got healed and it tells me that God is the most powerful God, and it makes my faith grow stronger in God. I really liked the afternoon testimony even though I only listened to half and a quarter of the testimony. The morning sermon was a good service. I really like Elder Hsieh's sermons because some are interesting and some touch my heart. Some other testimonies are good, too. I bet he is a good Elder at the other places, too, even though I only had this morning/afternoon to listen to your testimonies/sermons. I hope he lives a long life. The Only True Church sermon really gave me a good valuable lesson. The morning lesson was a little more though. I really like him preaching in Houston, Texas. He are a good preacher. I really liked today.

**Kindergarten Class Q & A**

- Of all the fruit that God created, which is your favorite?
  - Naomi: Grapes
  - Faith: Purple grapes and strawberries
  - Grace: Purple grapes, strawberries, and purple plums
  - Hannah: Red grapes

- What's your favorite color from the rainbow?
  - Naomi: Blue
  - Faith: Red
  - Grace: Blue and green
  - Hannah: Red

- Which animal from the ark do you like the most?
  - Naomi: Horse
  - Faith: White bunny rabbits
  - Grace: Frogs because they are so cute
  - Hannah: Bunnies

- What are you thankful to God for?
  - Naomi: Be able to eat chips, ice cream, and hot dogs and play with spiderman, ironman, superman, and monkey king toys
  - Faith: Letting me be a princess walking into the white Castle in Sam's Wedding
  - Grace: Rainbows and making her mosquito bites stop itching
  - Hannah: Kindergarten teachers
Up Close and Personal -
A Chat with Elder Hsieh

Suli (Q): Elder Hsieh, Welcome to Houston Church. We have RE classes here, and I would like to ask you several questions. Have you had any experience in RE?

Elder Hsieh (A): Yes, I had been an RE teacher for a short period of time, perhaps 3 to 5 years. Before I became a pastor, I used to be an elementary school teacher. We had RE on Sundays, and I told bible stories to RE students. I don't have lots of experiences; just a little.

Q: Did you encounter different students then?

A: Some students are quiet, listening to the stories; others are not as well behaved, running around and not paying attention. But kids are so small, we should not scold them. If you scold them, they would not want to come to RE classes, or dare not come to classes. (Laugh).

Q: How do we apply RE classes to our daily life, especially to our friends and relatives?

A: My children participated RE classes, and they learned from the RE teachers that idols are not gods. My parents did not believe in Jesus. One day I brought my kids to my mom’s place, where there were lots of idols. My children (they were very small then) cried out: “False gods! False gods!” This is the outcome of RE. One time I gave a child some money, and he would not spend it. I asked him why, and he said “I will keep this money and offer it to God in our RE class. This way, I will have money to spend when I am in heaven.” They knew that idols are not gods and that they should give offerings to God.

Q: Do we have RE everywhere in our church?

A: Yes. The history of RE in Taiwan is about 50 years. Before I became a pastor there was already RE.

Q: What’s the difference between RE classes and sermons we have in the chapel?

A: Sermons are for many different kinds of people. They are of different age and status. Sermons have to be applicable to many. RE students are younger. For very young kids, you need to teach materials that are easier to understand. They will only pay attention to stories that are interesting.

Q: Would you consider teaching the RE students now?

A: Perhaps no. I am an old person now. This year I will turn 80. The RE students are at the age of my great grandchildren. I am really far apart from their age. Because they are so little, they are unable to understand what I am saying. I don't know what they are thinking about. Each new generation will have their own ideas and thoughts. What I thought when I was a child must be very different from the ideas of children nowadays. So I am not at an appropriate age to teach RE children. They will also think that I am an old man. (They might think) “You are an old person, I don’t want to listen to you.” So it is better for high school and college students to teach RE kids; their ages are not so far apart.

Q: Do you have any words of encouragement for RE parents and children?

The Bible records that Joseph was sold to Egypt as a slave at the age of 17. Because God was with Joseph, he was successful in everything he did and became the manager of the house. God was with Joseph because he obeyed God. God was pleased with Joseph because he obeyed God. Hence, Joseph was successful in everything he did. Later on the mistress tried to seduce him to commit a sin, but Joseph did not listen to the mistress. Why? Because Joseph has the word of God in his heart. He did not dare to sin against God. From this story we can tell that Joseph received very good RE before he turned 17. Otherwise, Joseph might not have known how to resist temptation. In this story, the mistress is like the master, and Joseph is the servant. The servant is supposed to listen to the master. There-
fore, it might be difficult to reject the request of the mistress. However, Joseph still said he would not sin against God. Mistress is of a high status, but God is even higher. As a result, Joseph did not sin. The mistress accused Joseph of misconduct, and Joseph had to go to the jail. Joseph was really wronged, but he did not murmur and he did not leave God. Joseph knows that God has His will; when the right time comes, God will vindicate him. When Joseph was in the jail, there were a cupbearer and a chief baker in the jail at the same time. They had a dream, and Joseph was able to interpret their dreams for them. The cupbearer will be released and get back to work, while the chief baker will be hanged. Later on, things happened as Joseph predicted. Joseph asked the cupbearer to mention him in front of Pharaoh, but the cupbearer forgot about Joseph. It is actually God’s will that the cupbearer forgot about Joseph. If the cupbearer remembered Joseph, then he would have gotten out of the jail and gone home. This way, Joseph would not have had the chance to become a prime minister. Because the cupbearer forgot about Joseph, he waited in the jail for two years until Pharaoh had a dream. This time the cupbearer remembered Joseph and recommended Joseph to interpret Pharaoh’s dream. Later on the interpretation of the dream was realized—that Egypt will have seven years of abundance and then seven years of famine. Not only Joseph interpreted the dream, he also suggested that food be stored up during the years of abundance. This way, when the famine comes, Egypt would not be ruined by the famine. Joseph could interpret the dream as well as make suggestions; he has the ability of being a prime minister. Therefore, Pharaoh made Joseph the prime minister of Egypt. Now, none of these things would have happened if Joseph had not received good RE before he turned 17. Joseph put God’s words in his heart, and he did not dare to sin against God. Therefore, God kept showing him with blessings. From this we can see the importance of RE. In Taichung Church, there was an old sister. She was of the first generation of the church. She mentioned that her older children and younger children had very different levels of faith. The older children did not have RE, so they followed parents to listen sermons on Sabbath days. Because the sermons were deeper and harder to understand for young children, after the children grew up, they stopped coming to church anymore. One of those children came to the United States and received a PhD, but this child did not come to church. The younger children of the old sister were different. They grew up during the time when there was RE. Therefore, the younger children had good faith. All these younger children later came to the United States, and they were all very fervent. This sister told me that RE indeed helped her children a lot. Those who participated RE are still coming to church; while those who did not participated RE no longer come to church.

Q: Do you have more words of encouragement for us?

For the RE teachers, you should know the mission God has given you. Your mission is great. If you teach well, children will have good faith in the future. Good faith will motivate the child to be fervent for church, to behave well, to bring truth seekers to our church. If each generation has good faith, we will all be blessed by God. God will surely bless those with good faith and good deeds. For instance, I have encountered one RE teacher who was reading the textbook while teaching the children. This way, children will not be interested in whatever you say, because you are just reading the textbook. Instead, the teacher should remember the bible stories by heart and tell children the stories. Do not read the textbook to children. Likewise, some pastors prepare sermon notes before giving a sermon. If the pastor writes too many details on the notes, he will have to frequently refer back to the notes. This way, he cannot pay attention to the audience and their reactions to the sermon. It is similar to reading a textbook to the audience, and this kind of sermon will not touch the hearts of the audience. Keep the notes simple and read it several times before the sermon. Remember the material in your heart and you don’t need to refer back to the notes frequently. In the same way, RE teachers should memorize the bible stories. Avoid reading the textbook to students; they do not like it. Spend some time and read the story several times. Read the Bible as well, because the stories come from the Bible. Read the Bible frequently and memorize the stories in your heart. This way you will give a more vivid bible story. Sometimes you can use hand gestures to enhance the story. This way kids like it all the more. If you just sit there still and give a speech, well, kids do not understand speeches, and they do not like to listen to you. You need to move a little and have some facial expressions, like the expressions of happiness, anger, fear…. Just like performing in a play. Kids like this more and your teaching will be very effective.

Q: Thank you very much, Elder Hsieh, for answering these questions. Thank you.

Are you willing to share your thoughts regarding RE?

We welcome articles from you—articles of reflections (100 to 400 words). We also welcome your suggestions and ideas regarding our RE Newsletter. Don’t wait!!
Answer for "What were they learning about?"

1. Because one of the visitors is God.
2. Bless; curse; blessed
3. It is God’s will for His disciples to remain as His witnesses in the world
4. Hymn 176

Answer for "Do you know more than what our RE students know?"

1. 81
2. The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit
3. Over 30 years
4. Hymn 176

Answer for "Elder Hsieh Trivia"

1. 81
2. The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit
3. Over 30 years
4. Hymn 176