



**Pastoral Letter from the President, Revd Tin Yau Yuen to the
Methodist Congregations of Hong Kong:**

A Church at Crossroads

Recently many members and friends have indicated their concern, as they heard a rumour saying “The police will clear out all the protesters resting in CMC and will talk to Revd Yuen, which may put huge pressure on him, so please pray for him.” I wish to clarify that this was only a rumour which was intended to cause panic. I have no hesitation in opening our church to those citizens as a resting and prayer place when they get hurt physically and spiritually. However, some church members may wonder if a church should be a place that provides shelter, medical care and supplies to protesters.

We do this not because we support ‘Occupy Central’ but because of our position as a Church in Wan Chai. Having been the Superintendent of CMC for more than 10 years, I often reflect what CMC can do in a society full of disunity and conflicts. CMC, for sure, is a place where Christians worship God, as well as a place to witness the mighty work of God. Meanwhile, here is an opportunity to serve the community in the name of Christ. Our church is becoming a church without barriers, welcoming people to pray, rest, enjoy their lunch box and use the toilet. Because our church is located at a road crossing, with lots of protesters with different political views passing by, we welcome them all in to have a short rest here.

Several years ago, the hotel near our church was sealed off because of H1N1. Lots of police were on duty nearby. We welcomed them to rest, dine and sleep here.

Some may ask, “The protesters are illegal, how can we help them?” Yet the concept of ‘Cities of Refuge’ is mentioned in Old Testament tradition (Numbers 35), and includes a place of refuge for offenders. Similar arrangements happened in church tradition, e.g. churches in the UK provide shelter to political asylum seekers; in the movie “Les Misérables”, the Bishop protects the guy who has stolen a piece of bread and, later, a silver candle stand from church. In fact, the church should endeavour to provide shelter, water, food, care and prayer to whoever is in need.

How can we practice our faith? We often stand as a Church at the cross roads. In the past year we have been under pressure as pastors leading our church to address the question: how can we respond to ‘Occupy Central’ and the Consultation of Political Reform?

We should not simplify it and say, “Church mission is to spread the Gospel and save souls. Politics is irrelevant to the church. The church should maintain political neutrality.” The pastors don’t feel this is the right understanding of Church mission and evangelism according to the Bible nor to Wesleyan tradition! The Gospel we believe in is a Gospel which redeems people from evil and sin, not only saving us from personal sin, but also freeing us from the suppression and binding of evil and sin caused by others, society and constitution. That’s the reason that the Gospel we believe in is necessarily related to social and political issues. It’s impossible to be politically neutral, as who can have no political view? Elie Wiesel, a Nobel Peace Winner, said, “Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” As Christians, we take sides according to Bible teaching and church tradition, rather than simply seeing things from the social perspective. However, we may make different judgments according to different experience and background, e.g. some may think the government is the oppressor while others may maintain the protesters are the oppressors. That’s why we always encourage our congregation to respect each other, listen to each other and be tolerant, so as to preserve our unity. Being a pastor, I should lead our congregation and go together with them through what is happening in society and help them to reflect on it.

A pastor cannot deny his/her personal opinion, so it's important for the pastor to think according to the Bible and church tradition, to follow the spirit, to understand God's word, and to follow Jesus. Meanwhile, we need to remind ourselves, the decision we make does not necessarily represent God's justice, so we should not command congregations to follow us.

The Ministerial Session has sent out a pastoral letter concerning 'Occupy Central', maintaining that we don't advocate or oppose it. Concerning Political Reform, we strongly hope that there is true universal suffrage in Hong Kong - not only the right of one person one vote for the chief executive selection, but also we are concerned about the method of nomination, which is also the expectation of the general public.

It's a pity that the NPC Standing Committee made the decision on 31st August, and limited/screened the nominees of selection. In a tea party celebrating National Day by people in religious sectors, I frankly told the Central and Hong Kong government officers that the political reform framework decided by the Standing Committee of the NPC's doesn't help social unity. As a result, "Occupy Central" is inevitable.

Someone may suggest that there are other ways to express opinion besides 'Occupy Central'. 'Occupy Central' certainly affects the normal life of residents. That's true, but we understand that the organizers of 'Occupy Central' don't want to occupy Central, yet their voice is not heard by the government through other ways. They feel helpless and have no alternative. We hope those who disapprove of 'Occupy Central' may have tolerance. Furthermore, the purpose of 'Occupy Central' is to strive for more democracy in Hong Kong, which is in accord with the long term benefits of Hong Kong citizens.

The participants of 'Occupy Central' want to appeal to the government in a 'Love and Peace' way. We are pleased to see the self-restraint of protesters. Yet it's not easy to be self-restrained in the confrontation with police. A few protesters may clash with police, and police may use moderate force to maintain order. However, we don't agree that the fully equipped and well trained police should have used pepper spray and teargas to disperse unarmed protesters, especially to those who didn't clash with police. The Ministerial Session has denounced the person-in-charge who had made such a decision, and appealed that police should no longer use excessive force. We also urge the protesters to express their views in a peaceful and non-violent way. We hope the police, especially brothers and sisters among them, understand that we are denouncing the decision maker behind the force, rather than any individual of them. We want them to realize that beyond their attentiveness to duties, they have a higher mission-- they are serving God, justice and Hong Kong citizens. We show our sincere respect to every member of the police who is loyal to and caring for citizens.

Our society is at crossroads - how will Political Reform continue? Our faith is also at crossroads and deeper reflection is needed. Our church should serve those who get hurt spiritually at the crossroads and also bear witness to the mighty work of the Gospel by our actions.

Let us pray for Hong Kong in unity.

Your servant,
Yuen Tin Yau
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