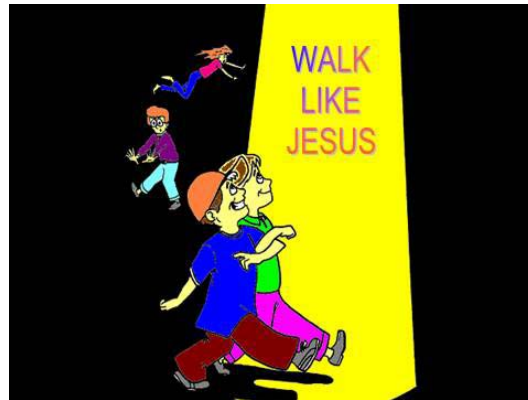


...and Jesus grew ... Vacation Bible School- Batam

Day 1: 7 July

The alarm roused me at 500 on Friday morning. I sleepily reminded myself to get ready for Vacation Bible School (VBS) in Batam instead of my usual gym routine. By 630 I had chomped through breakfast, caffeinated my system, packed, checked, double checked and waited for Elder Simon Goh and Wai Leng to pick me up along with Deacon KC and his wife Irene – the entourage from Jurong.



The theme this year was “Walk Like Jesus”. As I studied the English translation of the VBS workbook in the car, I noticed how carefully the material was put together and tailored to suit the Indonesian children in their preteens. They were to learn how to Obey, Care, Like, Walk, Serve, Trust and Walk like Jesus.

As I would find out later, the idea of conducting VBS was driven by a lack of children classes. The core team led by Deacon KC, comprises sisters Caroline, Irene and Wai Leng, has over the last 8 years, tirelessly laid the groundwork and did the seed planting in Cebu, Mumbai, Penang, Kuching and Batam. Back in Singapore, Sunday Bible classes for children are a given and for many of us, it is unthinkable for a church not to have them. Sadly, the unthinkable can be common in places like Batam. Our mission was to kick start a children’s program and ignite a spark for the local church to keep the flame burning.. Simple as it may sound, putting the plan into action was by no means easy. In fact, the actual plan has to be conceived as early as a year before the trip begins! This involves coordination between the brethren of the local church and PP, crafting and translating the lesson plans at a pace where the children can understand, with enough materials and activities to encourage their learning and keep them interested. An important part of the VBS was also to get the local brethren to take an active participation through observation of how we conduct the classes. The intent was to groom them to a level where they are not only able to take on the role of managing the children’s classes on their own confidently, but also to develop similar programs elsewhere as they reach out beyond their towns.

It was 700 when we got to Harbourfront where we met sister Caroline and Foon Yoong. In three hours, the six of us would reach Batam Centre where Brother Winston Bolt was expecting us. Armed with nothing more than bright eyes and a bushy tail with a big blue cookie monster staring out of my T-shirt, I was all set for my very first VBS!

The ride on a Suzuki APV was smooth until we reached the unpaved slopes leading to the Bible school where it got really jerky and we all had to cling on to something. Though I thought it was really fun, I resisted thinking aloud. Several handshakes and introductions later, we split into two groups with Foon Yoong and Irene taking care of the Beacon class with the 5 to 6-year-olds; and Caroline and Wai Leng, the Lighthouse class with the 7 to 12-year-olds. I was to assist with the older group. We were expecting 65 children in all - most of them non-believers. Only a quarter of them were from the church in Batam and the rest were either from the orphanage or Kampung Nias. As we got the classrooms ready, we could hear children singing loudly from the other rooms. They had already arrived a few hours early and were eagerly waiting for the classes to start at 1000. My first official task was to take attendance and distribute name tags to the 35 children in our class. A simple task that failed miserably at my hands. I completely underestimated the excitement of the little ones and my neatly laid out tags on the floor in alphabetical order was not very helpful in the distribution process as excited hands (and feet!) kept reaching for them. So much for being a help!



Joined by Brother Muller and Marcel, we started the morning by introducing the theme for this year which is "Walk Like Jesus". The plastic files and workbooks carefully prepared by Wai Leng and translated to Indonesian by Muller were distributed. Then a DVD depicting Jesus' birth and slides on how to Obey Like Jesus were shown. Since most of the children did not understand English, the lessons took twice as long as each English sentence uttered by Caroline or Wai Leng had to be translated into Bahasa Indonesia by Muller. Just as the children started to grow restless, we got



them to sing and act "And Jesus Grow". Their exuberance was infectious! The fatigue from having started the day so early was quickly extinguished. More songs followed and the children got to learn about how to Care Like Jesus while we waited for lunch to arrive. When the food finally arrived an hour later than scheduled, we were famished. Wow - chicken and vegetables never tasted that good! Turned out that the caterers were cooking manually (we take it to mean that they were using charcoal?) and were not used to such a huge order.

We spent the afternoon doing a collage of Zacchaeus on a tree and learning how to Walk Like Jesus. The children also took on the roles of the devil and Jesus in a skit based on Matthew 4: The Temptation of Jesus. We closed the day with the Temptation game where the children threw crumpled newspaper balls at another child shielded by a large piece of paper bearing "Word of God". It was a blast for the children which almost turned out to be a free-for-all.



Back at Foon Yoong's and Irene's class was a hive of activity. With Yunita who helped with the translation, they introduced the Bible to the children and taught them the story about creation. The children also learnt about several characters in the old testament like Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Joseph and Moses. They also got to know about the birth of Jesus and

Irene had flipcharts with pictures showing them how to be a good child.

We rounded up the day with dinner near our hotel & preparing the craftwork and materials required for the following day.

Day 2: 8 July

Brother Winston arrived on time as usual to pick us up from the hotel. He acted as our tireless chauffeur for the entire VBS, sending us from point A to B. He made sure all our needs were taken care of and even vacated his office so that our group could have lunch in air - conditioned comfort.

We began the day with songs and Caroline taught the children how to Serve Like Jesus and how Jesus humbled himself to wash his disciples' feet. We also watched a video on Jesus' death and resurrection. This was followed by craftwork where we fashioned Angel and the Tomb out of paper plates. Meanwhile at the Beacon's class, Irene was teaching the children how to pray. When tea time came, each child learnt to say a prayer before consuming the biscuit. It was interesting how Foon Yoong and Irene managed to keep the class in order by getting the children to place their name tags on each tile on the floor. Each child actually stayed in their own "territory" and moved around less. Simple and effective! Meanwhile, Deacon KC was busy in the background, snapping pictures, making all the logistics arrangements and technical setup so that all the teaching could go without a hitch.

In the afternoon, the Beacon class went outdoors and played a relay game where they made use of the toys Foon Yoong had brought along. Back at our class, Wai Leng taught the class how to Walk Like Jesus and how to shine like a light. We then made keys out of coloured paper with verses printed on them. It was a summary of the verses learnt in that two days. Before we knew it, day two quickly came to a close and we ended the day awarding prizes to the child with the best behaviour as well as those who got most answers right in a quiz.

It is always a little hard at the end when it was time to go. The smiles, the laughter, the way a child's eyes light up at the little things we shared with them really was so heartwarming. I was going to miss them. I don't think I will ever get to see that here in Singapore where the children are so much more blessed materially. There, the children rushed to get a little sticker or a smiley

stamp on a completed piece of work. You could just feel sense their joy & pride. It made me feel a little nostalgic. It was reminiscent of my childhood ... well not SO long ago...

As the children left the school, I thought about what else they brought home beyond the colourful keychains, the yoyos, the rotocrafts, the lollipops and chocolates they have brought home. Did they remember the story of Jesus? Would they (and we) learn to walk a little more like Jesus each day? Would they tell their friends and family what they have learnt from the VBS? I pray that these two days would not be just a nebulous memory in their minds. Perhaps not all will understand and accept Christ right away but like what one of our group members said, perhaps one day when the children are older, they will remember the VBS and be reminded that there is but one God and will want to learn more about Him.

Day 3: 9 July

So, the final day before we head home. We visited the Church of Christ there and had another adventure ride on the muddy slopes. I was impressed at how people made their way there on time despite it not being the most accessible of all places. I am sure I would have found excuses!

The Church building is itself simple – just a hall with four walls and large windows for ventilation. There is no air conditioning. There are ceiling fans but there is no electricity so imagine the tropical heat in there. There are no projectors, no slides, no videos, yet people listened attentively. How blessed are we to be able to exploit the use of technology!

As we made our way home, I felt blessed to be part of the VBS even though my role is tiny compared with the teachers who had spent so much time putting all the materials together. I have learnt a lot from these experienced and spiritually mature Christians who are ever so willing to share. God certainly hears and answers our prayers! More importantly, I pray that our work at Batam will encourage the little children to desire to find out more about God. I also pray that our Indonesian brethren will be encouraged to conduct classes on their own in reaching out to other parts of Indonesia. I am praying that when the next opportunity comes, I would have the time off from work to serve on the team. The VBS was designed for the children but I think it is also a helpful reminder to us that we need to Obey, Care, Walk, Serve, Trust and Walk like Jesus.

