

# <For Your Advantage>

(By Pastor Raymond; 8/30/2009)

In 2004, Dr Cheung Kwok Ting advised me to keep up a writing routine to communicate with the congregation. I have since tried my best to do that. Sometimes I could not keep up; others I managed. I hope I have wasted neither paper nor patience (yours of course). By next Sunday we will have a Senior Pastor amongst us. This insert, therefore, will also be the final one that I write from the position I occupied for the past few years.

Last week I requested you to attend the September 20 Installation Thanksgiving Ceremony. I repeat my request here. But more, let me share with you some thoughts about thereafter. I do not have any Bible chapters or verses to back these up. The following represents some of my perceptions having been a pastor for the past few years.

- Be nice to Mrs. Tong. No single person can make or break a pastor like his wife can, and no single person is more persuasive in his decision to leave or to stay. I know full well that contractually only Rev Tong is on staff. But I know just as well that some unspoken cultural norms invisibly tie Mrs. Tong intimately to the workings of the church. If Rev Tong sees and feels that his wife is in a secured and supportive environment, he will serve with undivided attention and gratitude. Remember: we get what we deserve.
- Open your house to Rev Tong. I am not asking for free rent for Rev Tong. I mean when he calls to visit you, do not use excuses of your untidy house or your spouse' dislike to decline. He doesn't know you and if he wants to, he will have to go to your house. Give him the opportunity. In fact, I would suggest that you invite him to come over to dinner proactively. Feed him with the best cooking and intoxicating friendship. If he feels at home and welcomed, he will see SFEFC as his home. No one wants to leave his home.
- Speak to Rev Tong, not behind. To assess is human. We assess the restaurant food, a movie, a movie star, a preacher, and of course a new pastor. But to do so behind his back opens yourselves to gossips and will also open wounds. Scientists say that metal is a good conductor of electricity. So is a church for gossips— somewhere somehow Rev Tong will pick it up. If you have a view, it is best if you speak to Rev Tong directly and I am sure he will appreciate your honesty and courage, much more than when he hears from 3<sup>rd</sup> hand sources. Try to hold to this rule: never speak anything to someone else about Rev Tong which you have not spoken to Rev Tong directly first. And, directly doesn't mean confrontationally or necessarily publicly. A one on one talk is good.
- Adopt the default of YES. Our culture trains people to act with suspicion. We do so to our politicians, colleagues, the Bible and even our spouses. But let me urge you instead to respond to Rev Tong with trust. If Rev Tong seeks you out for a certain task in a ministry, adopt "YES" as the default, and only say "NO" when you have searched your hearts and found a really good justification. Why? This is because your Senior Pastor needs your support, and you need his spiritual insight to identify and develop the potentials of your spiritual gifts. I am not asking for blind obedience. I am asking that the benefit of doubt be given to Rev Tong, and to the calling he has received to minister to you in this congregation. A default NO is humanistic. It acts against the good grace of God.
- Let him pray for you. It is a very bad feeling for a pastor, whose primary ministry is in Word and prayer, to realize that he hasn't prayed for his members when they were in hospital, going through divorce, having a miscarriage, or unemployed. It is not that a pastor wants to be all-knowing, or is a nosy person. It is just that there is a tremendous burden laid with him as a pastor to pray for the sheep. The sense of lost opportunity and negligence in prayer is hard to bear and difficult to describe. Rev Tong is here to serve not just in exposition or strategizing. He is here to lift the saints up to God. Give him the opportunity. Let him know your difficulties and crisis. I am not encouraging you to spill your guts; neither am I suggesting therapy sessions. Just consider him God's servant to pray for your needs and tell him before you check into a hospital or whatnot.

Why do I tell you all these and say it is "for your advantage"? I took it from NIV:

*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Heb 13:17)*