

Sisters' Fellowship 20Th Annual Retreat 2017

By Lanny Widjaja

The Sisters' Fellowship 20th Annual Retreat was held on 22 April 2017 at the Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer.

Bishop Terry Kee, pastors and members from all the congregations of the Lutheran Church in Singapore supported the event. It was very meaningful, educational and entertaining.

The climax of the event was a message on "Women of the Reformation", in keeping with the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

The message was shared in Mandarin by Dr Christopher Lee from Singapore Bible College and translated into English by Mrs Grace How.

History of the Reformation

This year we celebrate 500 years of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther (1483-1546) nailed his 95 Theses in Latin on the door of the Castle Church on 31 October 1517. He intended to stimulate scholarly debate on indulgences, divinity of the papacy and promise of salvation. He was against the prevailing practice of selling indulgences by the Roman Catholic Pope Leo X (to finance the rebuilding of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome) in exchange for the promise of salvation (without necessarily true repentance and penance). Luther would never have thought that with the help of the newly invented printing press by Gutenberg, his Theses and their German translation would be circulated widely, even up to the sphere of higher church and state politics. These eventually angered the Roman Catholic Pope Leo X, deacons and the Emperor Charles V. Luther defended himself by saying that "the only authority was the Bible and his conscience was captive to the Word of God". He was declared a heretic by the Pope. The Papal ex-communication of Luther was followed by an imperial ban by the Holy Roman Empire on him. While under the protection of his prince, Luther translated the New Testament into German and thus contributed greatly to the development of German literature. Luther's contemporaries also contributed to what later became known as the Reformation. Dr Lee shared the stories of a few remarkable women who were involved in the Reformation. The most noteworthy was Martin Luther's wife - Katharina von Bora (1499-1552). Born into a middle class family, Katharina was

sent to a monastery to become a nun at 5 years of age. She became interested in the growing Reformation activity and escaped at age 24 with other nuns from the monastery, after Luther's preaching on the weakness of the teaching in the monastery. Within two years, Luther was able to arrange marriages for all runaway nuns, except Katharina. His friends persuaded Luther to marry Katharina.

Luther was reluctant, as his life was in danger during the Reformation and he did not want his wife to become a widow. His friends urged him to be a model for other monks to give up celibacy. Eventually Luther married Katharina.

Katharina immediately took on the task of administering and managing the vast holdings of the monastery, breeding and selling cattle, and running a brewery, in order to provide for their family and the steady stream of students who boarded with them, and also the visitors seeking audiences with her husband. Luther called her the "morning star of Wittenberg" for her habit of rising early to take care of her various responsibilities.

Katharina cultivated Christian family values and biblical teaching. She and Luther had six children and adopted four orphans. Their youngest biological daughter Margareta was married into a noble Prussian family. One of Margareta's descendant - Paul von Hindenburg (1847-1934) was the elected President of Germany from 1925 until his death on the eve of Hitler's totalitarian rule.

Argula von Grumbach (1492-1554) was the first Protestant female theologian and author who supported the Reformation from 1522. A Bavarian noble woman from Munich in Germany, she openly rebuked the persecution of the reformers and wrote long letters to express her views. They eventually became bestsellers.

Marie Dentiere (1495-1561) was a Swiss Protestant reformer and theologian. Born into a relatively well-off family of nobility, she entered an Augustinian nunnery at a young age and eventually became an abbess.

Luther's preaching against monasticism led her to flee the monastery. Marie advocated that women and men were equally qualified to interpret Scripture and entitled to practise religion. She was the only woman whose name was written on the Reformation Wall in Geneva.

Margaret of Angouleme (1492-1549) was the Queen of Navarre and the sister of Francis I (King of France).

She was called the Ambassador of the Reformation, because she used her royal status to protect and provide refuge to the reformers.

She was the first of a feminine dynasty of evangelical reformers.

I was impressed by the courage, intelligence, passion and contribution of these women of the Reformation.

Although not as well-known as Martin Luther and some of his contemporaries, these women have also left us a legacy.

Dr Lee concluded his sharing by saying that God's blessing is for both men and women.

Agnes Loo was an excellent Master of Ceremony for the event.

The retreat was very lively, with the worship and praise of the Lord and some performances.

Mrs Eric Chan led the worship songs and was accompanied by two dancers.

The Senior Citizen Fellowship from the Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer sang a few songs, while some members played the ukulele and the "Sure Foundation" Choir also sang a few songs.

Members from the Bedok Lutheran Church danced and sang, while those from the Queenstown Lutheran Church performed a dance of praise.

All the songs and performances were very inspiring.

An offering was collected for the rebuilding fund of the Jurong Christian Church. The participants enjoyed the retreat very much, helping themselves to a sumptuous dinner before leaving for home.

