

Community Reflections

Interviews with
Ezekiel Seah and Nicholas Ong

There is an immense difference in how our men live, work and play at The New Charis Mission (TNCM), compared to the regular Singaporean. They engage in what is known as communal living, a concept we usually associate with National Service, Prison and Singapore in its nation-building days. It is by no means an easy feat.

Our brothers live in an imperfect but love-infused community at TNCM. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, they experience how communal living sets the stage for both camaraderie and conflict. Ezekiel and Nicholas get real with us on what makes communal living tick at TNCM.



We were featured in 'On the Red Dot: Unique Communities'!



Ezekiel Seah & Nicholas Ong



Why did you choose to come to TNCM?

E: I was a participant of the Intensive Religious Counselling Programme while serving my sentence. I came to TNCM immediately after my release because I was inspired by the leaders who helped me believe that change is actually possible.

N: I did not want to go in and out of Prison but I also knew that I cannot change just by my own strength. I needed support. Hence, I decided to come to TNCM.

What was your greatest concern when you came into TNCM?

E: I wondered if I can blend into this community. Will people here accept me? I was both anxious and excited. My parents were also not very pleased as TNCM ran a faith-based programme different from the faith they had. They're okay now! They saw the difference in me after all this time.

N: Will I be able to catch up with the pace of the others here? Will I be able to persevere through and complete the Programme?

What are some challenges of communal living at TNCM?

E: All of us come from different backgrounds, have different values and opinions. Misunderstandings are bound to happen. Unlike being at home, I cannot do everything as and when I want to. I have to be conscious and sensitive to others.

N: We need to get used to one another. It is not just about our own needs and our own. Everyone also has their own ways of doing things. Ways which we will not always agree with.

How do you all overcome these challenges?

E: Putting myself into the shoes of others. As the Bible says, "Do to others what you would have others do to you", I would think how the other person would feel if I were to say certain things.

N: I will pray about situations I am not sure of managing. Through prayer, God will always bring about reconciliation and restoration in unexpected ways. I will also talk to other brothers who will offer a more objective point of view which helps open up my perspective.

You experienced communal living in Prison. What is the difference between Prison and TNCM?

E: In prison, if we cannot get along with someone, we can avoid him. Or we can try all ways to change the cell we are in. At TNCM, it's not about avoidance. It's about acceptance of one another.

N: In prison, we are usually trying to survive and tend to be more self-centred. At TNCM, it is about loving one another, giving to one another and meeting one another's needs out of personal initiative. We learn to serve one another.

On the other hand, what are some joys?

E: TNCM is like a home to us. We live as a family, believing in the same faith and have the same purpose in mind. We have plenty of fun together and when I see other brothers doing well, I myself am encouraged.

N: We serve and have fun together. For example, we work alongside one another in the Elderly Ministry, go on mission trips and go on retreats together. This is joy that money cannot buy.

What is one thing you appreciate about staying at TNCM?

E: In times of need, we can relate to one another and support one another. We are all there for one another.

N: The opportunities given to us to learn what serving and being a contributor means. I am also thankful for the exposure to various community work. It has opened my eyes to see that I am more than a recipient of second chances. I can also be a giver in my own capacity. I am also thankful for the leaders' mentoring and advice.



Dining together



Recreation time

Teambuilding fun



Can you relate any incident during your course of stay which left an impression on you?

E: Once, Nicholas came to my dormitory and I noticed a toothbrush in his pocket. Thinking that he took my toothbrush to tease me, I demanded it back from him. Naturally, he refused to and insisted that it was his. We started chasing after each other in the room, snatching the toothbrush from each other. When I finally gave up, I found my toothbrush in my toiletries basket. Turned out that our toothbrushes were exactly the same. It was a hilarious incident. No hard feelings!

N: When we went for our Disciple Group retreat at Sentosa, I hid behind a wall with the intention to “scare” my disciple group brothers who were walking over. However, as I jumped out, it was not my brothers who I shocked. It was a couple in their twenties who just stared at me. My intended targets witnessed the whole thing and couldn’t stop laughing at me. It was so embarrassing!

What would you say to someone contemplating admission to TNCM Residential Programme?

E: Don’t be anxious about anything that will hinder you from realigning your life. TNCM is a place where we learn contentment, acceptance of ourselves and how to accept others. Take a step of faith to do something different and receive a different result. I have received a different result. I have a new group of friends, no longer live in fear and am confident to live a life of inspiration to others.

N: If you really want change, TNCM is a good place. You will be able to build your spiritual life with the support of other brothers here. There is love and care like a big family. I have gained peace and joy. I hope you can have it as well.