

# A Passion for Education

Dr Kim Phipps, President of Messiah College in the US, was in Malaysia early this year to raise awareness on Christian tertiary education. She shared with Asian Beacon her love for education and students.

By JUSTIN OOI T Y

**W**HAT BEGAN AS child's play grew into a calling. "I've always loved teaching," says Dr Kim Phipps. "I loved to play 'school' as a child. I'd make my friends and brothers as my 'students' while I 'taught' them using a blackboard."

Today, Phipps has reached the pinnacle of academic success. She is a professor with a Ph.D. in Communications and is also the first female chairperson of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities in the US.

"I praise God for great mentors even when I was an undergraduate," says Phipps. "People who encouraged me to use my gifts included my predecessor, the late Messiah College President Rodney Sawatsky."

On the way to becoming the President of Messiah College, her responsibilities included overseeing academic programmes, and the welfare of students living in dorms and sports development. Clearly, academia and students are Kim's passion.

Phipps, who grew up in New York, came from a non-Christian family. She accepted Christ at 14 when her friend in high school, whose father was a pastor, shared Christ with her.

When asked about the purpose of her first trip to Malaysia and Asia, Phipps shared that it was to explore possible partnerships with the local colleges and universities in the region and to raise awareness among Malaysian parents about a viable option – Christian tertiary education.

"Parents who send their kids abroad for further studies should consider Christian tertiary education," says Phipps. "The academic quality of Christian institutions of higher learning, like Messiah College, is on par with large state universities."

An added advantage is that the teaching staff are committed Christians who enjoy

mentoring students. The campus life in such colleges promotes Christian values. "Courses are not only academic in nature but also ministry-oriented. We challenge our students on how they can serve God, whether as a pastor, banker or biologist," adds Phipps.

Like other Christian universities in the US, her institution provides more than just theological courses. You could also opt for liberal arts or other fields found in 'secular' universities such as engineering, computer science or nutrition.



Dr Kim Phipps

Messiah College, she stresses, is committed to providing Christian liberal arts and professional undergraduate education to students from all over the world. It aims to increase the number of Asian students in the college. The college provides financial aid to 100% of its international students.

"Over the last decade, we have had 11 students from Malaysia. I am impressed by two important values that they live out. First, hospitality. They make others feel welcome. Second, harmony. The fact they can live peacefully with people of other races and religions makes me want to visit this country."

"Malaysian students are among the leaders in Messiah's College International Student Association," Phipps says. "They participate in Service Learning, an educational outreach to underprivileged

children living in the inner cities. Some are active leaders in campus for our worship concerts and events while others participate in our overseas mission trips."

"Despite its relatively small student population (about 2,800 undergraduate students), big events have taken place at Messiah College," Phipps says. In 2008, it hosted the Compassion Forum which featured conversations with presidential candidates, then Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama, on issues related to faith and public policy. CNN covered it live. "The students who helped to organise this event were absolutely thrilled to be involved," she recalls.

"International students adjusting to US campus culture can approach our friendly staff for assistance," says Phipps. "Messiah College is located in Pennsylvania, near the capital city of Harrisburg (with Philadelphia, Washington and New York nearby). As such, students have ample opportunities for internship in fields of their choice. They may even apply for practical training in other countries."

Messiah College students have often proven themselves to be a caring, competitive and fun-loving bunch. "Take Sunrayce for example," Phipps says. "It's the annual national race to build a better solar-powered car for the good of the environment. Messiah College participated in Sunrayce from 1997-2005. Despite formidable competition, Messiah consistently placed itself ahead of teams from Ivy League universities like MIT, Stanford and Yale."

What is her parting advice for potential students and parents who are facing the tough decision of selecting a university? "As a mother myself, I tell the parents to gather as much information as possible and ask relevant questions before making decisions. As for the students, I advise them to seriously consider a Christian education in order to develop holistically as a person." **ab**