

Chemoil has new chief

CHEMOIL Energy Ltd, the world's largest independent supplier of marine fuels, has appointed Mr Clyde Bandy as chairman and chief executive to replace Mr Robert Chandran, who died on Jan 7 from injuries in a helicopter crash in Indonesia.

Mr Bandy, a former Chevron Corp executive, has

AFTERNOON EDITION

EXPO, THE WAY TO GO

Centre making a name as a church hub

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IT HAS always been a venue for conventions and exhibitions, one of the top in the region. But strange as it may seem at first glance, this same site looks to be South-east Asia's hub for churches as well.

Whether attending youth rallies, outreaches or weekend services, a sizeable number of church-goers have religiously flocked to one of the few places that can accommodate their numbers – the Singapore Expo.

Which says as much for the Expo as it is a sign of the growing numbers attracted to churches in Singapore and their subsequent need for space.

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EXPO, THE WAY TO GO

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It is “one of the busiest and most popular venues for church and religious events”, said a spokesperson.

Each weekend, as many as 27,000 church-goers head for the Expo, and could contribute to as many as 90 per cent of its visitors on a non-event weekend.

From 2005, three of its 10 multi-purpose halls have been leased to two churches every weekend.

The City Harvest Church (CHC) holds three services on Saturdays and Sundays at hall 8 for its 17,000-strong congregation. The Faith Community Baptist Church (FCBC) rents the Max Pavilion and hall 9, drawing about 10,000 attendees over the weekend.

When TODAY visited FCBC’s youth service, parked cars lined the roads leading to the Max Pavilion. The auditorium was about half-filled but the remaining seats, yet to be filled, were reserved.

Smaller-sized Bethesda Community Church, which has held its Sunday services at the Expo for the last seven years, occupies about half of the total conference and meeting rooms at the centre.

CHC’s executive pastor Reverend Derek Dunn said his church chose the Expo for its

large hall size and long-term availability. “There isn’t another venue with more than 10,000 sq m of floor area that could offer that to us,” he said.

CHC had “maximised” usage of its Jurong West building and needed more space for its English-language service.

Expo officials would not reveal lease or rental costs but a regular user of the centre told TODAY the daily cost for the use of an empty 10,000-sq-m hall could start from about \$50,000.

A hefty sum to pay to worship in airconditioned comfort?

Perhaps, but the tithe and donations from worshippers undoubtedly help foot the bill.

The CEO of a medium-sized company told TODAY she contributes 10 per cent of her monthly salary – about \$1,000 – every month.

Mr David Chew, 56, who attends FCBC with his wife and three children, said the move to Expo was “practical”. FCBC has held many smaller services at Marine Parade in the past.

FCBC provides shuttle buses from Simei MRT station, he added, to make it easier to travel to the Expo.

Mr Jonah Wang, 26, an FCBC member who spends about an hour travelling to the Expo from Yishun, said the distance was “not an issue”.

“My spiritual family is here,” he said referring to his church at the Expo.

According to the Expo spokesperson, CHC and FCBC each hold about five additional annual events annual and other churches, hold a total of about 15 events at the Expo.

The Catholic Archdiocese Youth Centre (CAYC) held its youth rally at the Expo last year.

Citing economical pricing as one reason, CAYC’s youth coordinator Edwyn De Souza, said CAYC also chose the Expo because of its big bus bay.

Members of the various congregations also liked the Expo’s relatively isolated location as it reduced distraction and the halls being on “ground-level made it safe and convenient for the elderly, the handicapped and children”, the Expo spokesperson said.

Church-goers, by their sheer numbers, also served as a draw for event organisers

planning to use the Expo to stage exhibitions, she said.

Miss Ng Xuehua, 19, told TODAY she would visit exhibitions at the Expo after attending FCBC’s Mandarin service, “especially if it was an IT fair”, while Mr Calvin Hue, 53, said car exhibitions and computer fairs attracted him.

The Expo plays host to about 700,000 to 800,000 visitors on a weekend when big events are held.

Can Singaporeans expect more churches to hold their services at the Expo?

Cornerstone Community Church will be hosting its second event at the Expo this month.

A church official said: “There is a shortage of medium to large facilities in Singapore and halls that can hold 2,500 to 5,000 people will be in great demand.”

One mega-church, New Creation Church, however, has chosen another way to house its large congregation – it will be moving to an integrated lifestyle hub at one-north in three years.

Now holding its Sunday services at Suntec City’s the Rock Auditorium, it attracts a congregation of over 15,000 and many members have to be “directed to our overflow rooms where they can follow and participate in the service via simultaneous telecast on projection screens”, a church official said.

Each weekend, as many as 27,000 church-goers go to the Expo, and could contribute to as many as 90 per cent of its visitors on non-event weekends.