

# Berita NECF



## Editorial

### Towards Christian Unity

**T**he call for Christian unity seems to be a top agenda in most Christian circles. There is a great yearning of God's people to break barriers within or around and to seek to work together in unity. Christian leaders can subconsciously, in seeking to protect their interests, distinctiveness or identity, be separated by individualism or be torn apart by doctrinal differences and internal dissension. This affects the integrity of their calling to be God's revelation to the world and jeopardises their efforts to convey the reality of peace and love to a sceptical world.

The evangelicals are constantly plagued with theological disagreements and suspicion, and positions tend to be held with quite a lot of ill-feeling. At worst, we consider one another to be unbiblical, narrow-minded, unspiritual and even heretical. There is this attitude of "unholy alliance" that hinders cooperation and working together.

The attitude of so many Christians is that unless something represents our views, or conforms to our position, it is to be rejected. We seek to hide behind our own

denominations or labels. We seem to think that by tying a certain label around us, we can define ourselves. Labels can be dangerous; they always fall short of what they intend to do. Some of us, who have been damaged by their careless use by others, must in Christian charity also be careful how we use them.

Even though we share a common goal of Church ministry and mission, many of us continue to minister from a platform of isolation. There is a great sense of separation and this subconsciously develops a barrier within and around our ministries. We are unable to listen to others and are divided from one another by resentment and inhibitions.

The cause of such separation or isolation is often the strong and gifted leaders who are not always good at working with those who have a slightly different vision. Those who are more established and developed can subconsciously become superior and domineering in their attitude. They relate mainly within their own structure and set-up, eventually retreating into their own particular ghetto.

Church leaders have tended to be caught up with their own

congregations; the more radically independent groups have "done their own thing" without reference to anyone else, particularly if they have a strong doctrinal or financial axe to grind. We tend to be very ignorant about one another's ways of thinking and acting, and this leads to prejudice.

Deep in the heart of individualism and isolation is the sin of pride. We are usually convinced that our way is the best. This is particularly the case if we are deeply entrenched in our self-centredness.

The psalmist speaks warmly of believers living together in unity (Ps. 133:1-3), and Jesus prayed that His disciples shall be one as

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Printed by Akitiara Corporation  
1&3, Jln TPP1/3, Tmn Perindustrian Puchong  
Batu12, 47100 Puchong, Selangor



## Chairman's Message

# Complexity of Unity

By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

Unity is one of the key watchwords today as we approach our nation's 50th Anniversary this coming August. It's definitely a prerequisite as we seek to rally churches to embrace an evangelical Nation Building Policy for the ensuing years.

There are invaluable lessons on unity from the familiar story of the "bringing back" of the ark by King David in 1 Chron. 13 to 15. The Chronicles detail for us the divine editorial on the history of God's people, written from a priestly and spiritual perspective.

Three main groups of characters emerge in this story, and are worth noting. They speak of the complexity of unity.

Firstly David, in wanting to bring back the ark, did "everything right". He consulted the key leaders (13:1); got the people to agree and involved (13:2-5); got the "harps and bowls" going (13:8). He even got the two key men involved, Uzza and Ahio, whose names respectively mean "strength" and "brotherly".

Nothing could seem to go wrong with such a strong team and "oneness of purpose".

With hindsight, we know the missteps and setbacks. David "did not consult Him about the proper order" (15:13b). Not only that, there were the things he "did not do... the first time" (15:13a) viz Zadok and Abiathar the priests and the Levites were not sanctified.

In our zeal for the nation and to build His House, there is the danger of al-

lowing "corporate apostles" to sideline God's servants and priests called to serve Him. Community leaders I am sure, were invited, marketplace leaders in the forefront, and financiers given prominent place – all these happen so often. But in unity, it's not just everybody that God wants, it's the "proper order" and the issue of sanctification. The danger of overlooking "holiness" is rife.

All these oversight occurred in the bustle of "moving forward" and the grandiose scheme of a "national project". We do well to take heed, as we are equally prone to repeat these mistakes. The Uzza incident is a clear indication that God is in the details.

When bringing the ark back the second time round, David, prepared a place for the ark (15:1), something he did not do the first time round. We can just want the Presence for the sake of blessings. Until God struck Uzza, you couldn't convince anyone there was no unity. Leader "strength" and co-leader "brotherly" and everybody were working together under anointed leadership!! But "unity" is futile if we don't consult Him and covet His presence without ulterior motives.

Then there is the second group, the Philistines. Before the second and successful attempt of restoration of the ark, the Philistines came to hear that David had been anointed king, and they attacked him. The unclean always attack the anointed.

Subsequently, David "inquired of God" twice (14:10, 14). This shows us David indeed learned the lesson well. How obvious it must have been. With

# Unity is not unison. “Joining hands” with everyone is not unity.

the Philistines at the horizon, and when you are the anointed king, it is so natural to defend oneself and attack the enemy. But in our zeal to unite the body, we often fail to recognize the obvious that we cannot “unite” the unclean and the anointed (14:8). Presently, amongst mainline churches, a clear divide is coming about over the homosexuality issue. There is never going to be an acceptable compromise in the sight of God. We can have all the “unity week” and “unity services” we like, but its not going to make a difference. Unity is not unison. “Joining hands” with everyone is not unity. Modern day unity proponents would have no doubt rebuked David for not working towards unity with the Philistines.

Finally after defeating the unclean Philistines, David proceeds to bring the ark back, following the “proper order”, and consulting God. There was much jubilation, celebration, loud music. But “it happened, as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came to the City of David, that Michal, Saul’s daughter, looked through a window and saw King David whirling and playing music; and she despised him in her heart”. (1 Chron. 15:29, NKJV)

Michal was not “united” in heart, mind and purpose, because there was no “union” in her marriage to David. It was a great breakthrough for David and the nation, and her husband David, was the man God used. But she despised David. It could have been because her father Saul died unceremoniously, it could be because God has chosen to bless David and not another man of her personal preference. Whatever “legitimate” reasons she may



have had, she forgot her place, and she lost her place in the history of the nation. She forgot that her husband was God’s chosen king.

She could have become a “mother of Israel” but instead, she became barren till her day of death (2 Sam. 6:23).

It was not criticism of David’s dancing per se that God was dealing with. Michal mistook her privileged position as wife as having the right to deride the anointed king publicly. How true that familiarity breeds contempt. That day, in mocking David, she could not see the larger picture of what God was doing in the nation, and that the ark was indeed “moving into the city”.

In her bitterness and anger, she lost more than she bargained for. In making her point, she missed the point. David and Michal could not agree on what God was doing.

The churches in our nation are one, in Christ. I pray that we would remain one, to see the larger picture of what God wants to do in our land and then truly u-n-i-t-e to invest in our nation.

Many are misinformed about one another's intentions, and when they hear the facts they become much more gracious and accepting.

He and the Father are one (Jn. 17:21-23). The prayer was for unity among believers. The unity for which Christ prayed was not a matter of external church union. Rather it was a unity based on common moral likeness. He was praying that believers might be one in exhibiting the character of God and of Christ. This is what would cause the world to believe that God had sent Him. This is the unity which makes the world say, "I see Christ in those Christians as the Father was seen in Christ."

We are to witness to all that God is and our expectation is that in every place God will raise up the Body of Christ to be this witness. Individual witnesses have their place, but the power of corporate witness is so much greater as the life of Christ is shared and flows out. When "the presence" begins to live and act as a body, people will begin to take notice. Thus Christian unity is essential to bring forth the Christian witness and integrity of our calling to be God's revelation to the world.

Undoubtedly, this shared experience of the unity of Christ through the power and love of the Holy Spirit can have the effect of drawing together Christians of widely differing denominations and traditions in an unusually powerful way.

The different churches need to develop a corporate sense of identity – the Body of Christ universal, a sense of belonging and caring for one another, and an openness to one another and to the Holy Spirit. We are to learn together to open up to the Lord the things that hinder openness and oneness, to confess these things and to claim together the cleansing of the Lord. Out of this pursuit a common vision shall

emerge, for a body of people growing together, sharing together, bearing one another's burden, loving one another in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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that find their  
humility tested  
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spiritually.

In order to improve working relationships among different churches, it is vitally important, first, that we get to know one another. I believe that we should take every opportunity to meet together, to engage in dialogue with one another, and to courteously put forward a truly biblical form of Christianity. This is not easy, as we move in very different constituencies. But that's all the more reason why we should make the effort!

Then, as we begin to know one another, we will sense the Lord's presence in the Body of Christ and are enabled to share in prayer and worship together. Other possibilities would be the exchange of pulpit ministry, speaking at pastors' meetings, etc.

Next, we should be prepared to communicate openly with members of other churches or denominations. If we are church leaders, we should make an effort to go to the pastors' fellowship meetings. We should be prepared to listen, ask questions, look ignorant, and be vulnerable to others' probing questions. Many are

misinformed about one another's intentions, and when they hear the facts they become much more gracious and accepting. We have to learn to step outside mainstream church life. But whether people are accepting or not, we have to learn to take the criticism meekly, knowing that in doing so we are sharing in the vulnerability of Christ himself. Any Christian could find himself in a similar position. We can either react self-defensively or with an openness that is in fact the only way to a greater depth of reality.

Depth of commitment and fellowship is not reached easily. It takes time, prayer and patience. The leadership of pastors of different churches needs to recognize its value and be determined to participate. Only then will the separation or isolation mentality fade away, and in its place some steps will have been taken towards integrating everyone into a caring family of God.

Finally, we need to learn humility. In our search for unity, we all need to come to the place where we can sincerely repent of our feeling of superiority and self-righteousness. We need to realize that however correct our doctrine is, we have often missed out on the love of God; however exciting our worship is, we have sometimes been too noisy to hear Him speak; however many miracles we have seen or done, we are usually far from holy. Churches that find their humility tested to the utmost are those that really are getting somewhere spiritually. We all have to learn that we haven't really got very far unless the humility of Jesus has been worked into the fabric of our lives. It is not easy for us to admit that we need each other, but the Lord will not be satisfied with anything less than perfect fellowship in the Holy Spirit.



# 25th Anniversary Celebration

**N**ECF Malaysia is 25 years old in 2007, and we are going to celebrate! Exciting events have been lined up to make the celebration a memorable one. Joni Eareckson Tada shall be the key speaker at the various events. (The March-April issue has a write-up on Joni.) The theme of the celebration is “Church – the Transforming Agent”.

## NECF 25th Anniversary Banquet

Day: July 30, 2007 (Monday)  
 Time: 7.00-10.30 p.m.  
 Venue: Dewan Wawasan (Level 4),  
 Menara PGRM, Cheras,  
 Kuala Lumpur  
 Speaker: Joni Eareckson Tada

Invitation cards to the banquet are priced at RM70 each / RM700 per table (10 cards). Please use the enclosed order form for reservation. No. of seats / tables must be confirmed, with payment, by June 30, 2007.

*\* Please book soon because space is limited. Available on a first-come-first-served basis. Contact Simon/Kathryn @ 03-7727 8227 / 016-3308126 for further information.*



## National Pastors & Leaders Consultation on Nation Building

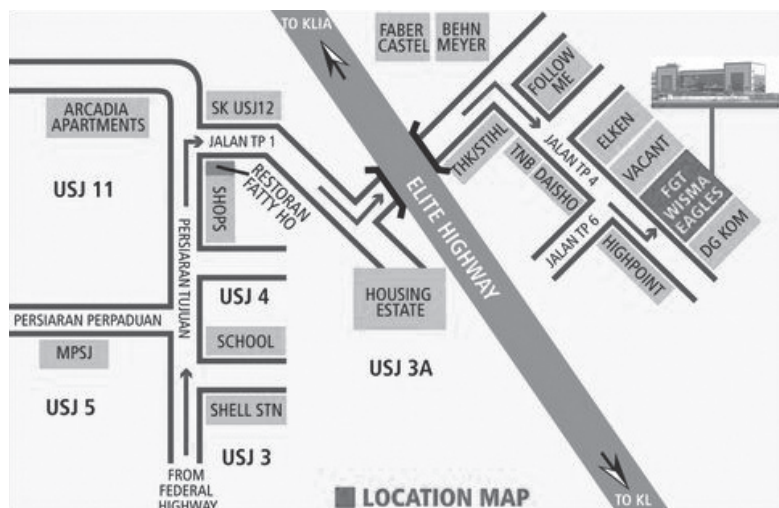
Day: July 31, 2007 (Tuesday)  
 Time: 9.00 a.m.-5.00 p.m.  
 Venue: Vistana Hotel, Kuala Lumpur

*\* Strictly by invitation only*

## PUBLIC MEETING WITH JONI EARECKSON

Day: July 31, 2007 (Tuesday)  
 Time: 8.00-10.30 p.m.  
 Venue: Full Gospel Tabernacle  
 Wisma Eagles,  
 5 Jalan TP4,  
 Taman Perindustrian  
 UEP, Subang Jaya,  
 Selangor  
 Speaker: Joni Eareckson Tada

This session is open to the Christian public. Please refer to the location map.





# Keeping the Malaysian Church Malaysian

Missionaries first came to our shore several hundred years ago, bringing the Good News packaged in their own cultures and tradition. Hence, the early Malaysian Church's tradition and spiritual practices were very much influenced by the missionaries who introduced the gospel to the area. As the Malaysian Church comes of age, it realizes the need to contextualize its message to effectively reach its pluralistic society. But has it done enough to create a Malaysian Christian identity? LIM SIEW FOONG, NECF Malaysia Executive Secretary (Research), asks \*TAN KANG-SAN for his views on this.

**While local churches are beginning to recognise the importance of cultural sensitivities and the pluralistic nature of Malaysian society, the general church culture – English-speaking in particular – is still pretty much influenced by American “Christianity” in terms of structure, operation, evangelism style and missional perceptions. Some believe that Americanization is one of the greatest hindrances toward local outreaches. Your comments, please.**

The learning church can benefit from foreign influences particularly in opening up new ideas and offering healthy critiques against parochialism. However, you have rightly raised possible dangers of copying foreign structures, methods of evangelism and church growth without critical reflections. I offer two specific examples to support these concerns.

A friend of mine did a research into evangelistic and discipleship training methods used by local churches in a neighbouring country and discovered that the vast majority of these materials and programmes are imported, and used without any consideration to unique problems of the local church, such as the spirit world, corruption, poverty, and interfaith issues. My second example comes from foreign “feedbacks”.

Foreign visitors to Malaysia are often impressed by the rich and diverse cultures represented in Malaysia. However, they are often disappointed that the Malaysian Church's worship styles, celebrations, church structures, weddings, funerals and outreaches have tended towards Western rather than uniquely local expressions. What happened to rich resources such as community spirit, colourful festivals, local arts and “oriental wisdoms”? It seemed that the Church is more interested in things foreign rather than Malaysian.

This is not just a problem originating from America but is a delicate balance between the need to learn from the global church and contextualizing Christianity to local contexts. There are formidable forces at work against “localization of Christianity”. Some come from foreign enthusiasm to export their products while others come from local mentality that our “non-Christian” cultures are completely tainted with sins and therefore, should be rejected.

**There are many indigenous groups in Malaysia. To be effective and culturally sensitive, local churches can either focus on establishing indigenous churches with indigenous leadership or simply contextualizing its method, moral**

**principles and message to fit the indigenous culture. Which do you think is the better way and why?**

We are grateful to God that Malaysian churches are now involved in both local outreaches and mission work beyond our shores. We have much to contribute to Christianity globally as well. From foreign missions into Malaysia in the 1950-60s, to the growth of East Malaysian churches in the 1970-80s, we now have both SIB churches and West Malaysian churches establishing outreaches among the Orang Asli, new villages and reaching out to immigrant communities. While missionaries are cross culturally quite acquainted with the need for cultural sensitivity, dangers of foreign imposition of leadership and control, it is possible that we don't apply the same level of cross cultural approaches in our outreaches among many indigenous groups in Malaysia.

Clearly, mission studies are strongly in favour of contextualization approaches rather than establishing new communities patterned after “mother churches”. The goal of mission work is to yield self-supporting and self-propagating local communities.

Although most churches are in agreement with established mission wisdoms – such as the need for independence rather than dependence and the priority of indigenous leadership rather than outside controls – it is much more difficult to do this in practice.

Here are possible ways forward. We need to recognize that cross-cultural trainings are needed for both workers and leaders of this work; work towards the models of longer-term incarnational workers rather than weekend trippers; move towards indigenous leadership and self-governing churches.

Taking mission work among the Orang Asli as an example, we need to ask the following questions:

1. Have we produced dependency among the Orang Asli churches?
2. Do these churches model after English-speaking urban churches in terms of worship style and congregational life?
3. After a decade or two, is the leadership of these churches still dominated by “outside” groups?

The situation can be improved if there is willingness to learn from each other through national forums, accountability structures and research into problems and challenges, whereby the views of the Orang Aslis are sought and taken seriously.

**While we cannot deny the sovereignty of God even over all religious teachings and practices (believing that God prepares the world for the Good News), there is always the danger of compromising biblical principles. What are the cautions? What are the guiding principles if one is to reach out to a person of another faith?**

Genuine religious encounters must include both proclamation and dialogue. Dialogue must include openness for God to speak to the Christian through non-Christian neighbours regardless of their religious backgrounds. The local community (instead of individuals or foreign missionaries) can discern these truths by studying scriptures as a community (instead of prejudices) and looking to the Holy Spirit (instead of traditions) to illuminate our perspectives of these truths. Scriptures, Holy Spirit and the Church as the hermeneutical community are sufficient guards against syncretism. More often than not, it is easier for us Christians to reject “truths” from other religions without really studying and understanding their roots and meanings. It stems from a lack of understanding of the beliefs of other religions.

Discerning what is cultural from what is religious can be hard work, and we prefer to be safe than taking risks!

In each case, we need to discern and arrive at some form of judgments. Genuine inter-religious encounters must result in Christians discovering some truths which are a) incompatible with the Gospel, b) clearly compatible with the Christian gospel and c) foreign to Christianity, but on closer examination, enrich Christian worship, fellowship and practices. As long as this last category of truths does not contradict scriptures, we can learn from our non-Christian friends; as though “Christ grew deeper and richer” through our multi-religious encounters!

**For years, many evangelistic endeavours of the Malaysian churches have tended to focus primarily on converting non-believers. It is like what Franklin Graham said, “I would like to convert every person I meet... through persuasion.” While some consider such approach to be noble, others deem it as offensive. Perhaps this is why some non-believers are skeptical of the motives behind Christian events, especially Christmas evangelistic meetings. While we should not overlook the advantages of such endeavours on church growth, or rather expansion, they may not be considered as effective. Your opinion.**

I personally think organized mass evangelism in public stadiums and emotional evangelistic events designed to secure a decision are less helpful than ongoing, small group events such as evangelistic bible studies or Alpha courses. Folks who have been to these study groups may be invited to a public Christmas events held in the church within contexts of friendship and growing interests in Christianity. The verse, “God added to their numbers those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47), seems to indicate that the early church grew over a period of time through the transformation of individual lives, demonstrated in sacrificial services and overall witness of a loving Christian fellowship.

To some extent, part of our problem is we have a fairly limited “picture” of the church as a castle (orthodoxy), “building”, “rescue station” which contributes to a church-centred view of evangelism. Therefore, our dominant evangelistic strategies tend to be “come to us”. In contrast, we need other metaphors of a “kingdom-centred” view of the church. If we view the church as a light (or lighthouse), embassy (ambassadors), halfway house (for the sick and needy), or Servant (of the community), imagine the shift in the way we would relate to, and evangelize our non-Christian neighbours! The maturing church will be more interested in serving the real needs of the community than merely adding numbers to the church membership. To such a vibrant community, God will add to their numbers.

**The world has shrunk with increasing interconnectivity, but it does not seem to make it easier for missionary work in general. With rising religious tension on this side of the pluralistic world, it can be said that the resistance towards Christianity is greater. What is the role of the Malaysian Church in peacemaking?**

Increasing connectivity is no longer confined to media, travel and communication, but has resulted in “new social conditions” whereby distant events have local impact almost immediately. So, modern Christians feel the resistance against Christianity is “greater” from this sense of immediacy and awareness of alternate responses from people of other faiths. Just as Christian persecutions in Muslim countries were reported internationally, sufferings of innocent lives in Muslim countries have caused inter-religious conflicts globally. Silent apathy and “minding our own business attitudes” are becoming less of an option because this religious tension is felt within our neighborhoods.

Peacemaking is integral to the mission of the Church and the Church has

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# TOXIC LEADERS (PART 2):

## Symptoms of Toxicity?

By John Ng, Ph.D

This is a continuation of Toxic Leaders (Part 1): How Not to Lead, published in the last issue.

Here are seven questions to evaluate symptoms of leadership toxicity in the workplace.

### Do our followers live in fear and guilt?

Toxic leaders lead by fear and guilt. They instil fear among their followers and threaten them with job loss, wage freeze, uncertainty, estrangement, emotional blackmail, and severe punishment. They promote “group think”, stifle constructive criticism, promote mindless compliance and play to the followers’ basest fears and needs.

They divide and conquer for they fear consolidation of power and influence among the ranks and file. Fear in itself is not a bad motivator, but used as a primary form of motivation, it subsequently destroys trust. Used constantly, it creates uncertainty and dependency.

### Are our followers worse off now than before?

Toxic leaders tend to leave their followers worse off than they found them. They wear people out. They create suspicions among rank and file. They poison people by propagat-

ing fraudulent values. They promote incompetent loyalists and corrupt people.

Most of all, they manufacture a culture of mistrust. They do so sometimes by eliminating, undermining, firing, or dividing to conquer. The result is that their biggest asset – people – live in perennial fear and guilt. They impair followers’ capacity for truth, honesty, respect, kindness, excellence, independence, and fairness.

Worse still, their followers will never blame their leaders for their depraved condition. When things turn sour, the leaders and their cronies will proclaim, “It’s nothing wrong with the milk – it’s your mouth.”

### Do we subvert the structures of justice, transparency and excellence?

Toxic leaders disdain any systems and processes that prevent them from consolidating their power, aggrandizing themselves, and accumulating their wealth. They promote incompetence and inefficiency by encouraging a patronage system. There is a growing propensity to conceal. They confide only to a trusted few. Their greatest confidant is usually the finance person. Together, they do some creative accounting. This is where they reward those who “cooperate” with them. They also subvert structures of fairness. Their performance management system tends to be driven by personal fancies than a transparent system.







### **Do we use dishonest means to justify our ends?**

In his book, *Battle for the Soul of Capitalism*, John Bagle, a 50-year old Wall Street insider and Founder-CEO of Vanguard International, abhors the rampant cheating among his peers, and makes this astonishing remark, "I believe the barrel itself - the very structure that holds the apples - is bad."

He concludes that it is not just a handful of notorious companies like Enron and WorldCom that have overstated their profits. He notes that up to about 60 major corporations will have to restate their earnings as their stock market value equaled \$3 trillion! That is "an enormous part of the giant barrel of corporate capitalism".

Toxic leaders can become obsessed with the bottom-line, forgetting about the through-put line, the performance rather than the process. They will not hesitate to mislead by giving misinformation or misdiagnosing issues and problems.

### **Do we shabbily treat those at the bottom of the heap?**

One significant indicator of toxic leaders is how they treat those at the bottom of the totem pole in the organization. They usually see them as means to their own corporate ends rather than treating them with respect.

If they do treat the marginalized people well, it's part of a PR "kiss-the-baby" type campaign to bolster their own image and strengthen their base of support. In other words, toxic leaders use people for their own selfish ends. One corporate leader once intimated to me why he had treated a handicapped person in the office well - "It's good PR!"

### **Do we only nurture leaders and successors of our own kin and kind?**

Toxic leaders seldom nurture their leaders, except their own kin or kind. They rather concentrate their resources to strengthen their base, build monuments for themselves, and enrich themselves rather than build the organization through strong value-centered, competent leadership.

They prefer building a totalitarian or dynastic regime. Often, they leave behind incompetent leaders and successors because they have put in little effort or time to nurture them. Further, they ensure that the cost of overthrowing them is so much that it is cheaper to keep them than to dispose them.

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*John Ng, Ph.D is the President of Meta HR & Communication, a ministry of Eagles Communications in Singapore. Toxic Leaders first appeared in the March 2006 issue of MetaTrends, the organization's leadership publication. Printed with permission.*

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### **Do we as leaders often claim to speak on behalf of God and tend to behave like God?**

Toxic leaders are unfortunately imbued with such powers that they often think that they speak on behalf of God and tend to behave like God. Sometimes, their followers are even embarrassed because they find their leaders are unable to grasp the real issues, act competently and effectively in leadership situations.

The scary part is that the leaders invoke God's name for their inept behaviors. They believe that they are right. And when they are proven wrong, they blame others or the situations. They almost never admit their errors. Their enormous egos have limited their capacity for self-renewal and learning. Toxic leaders forget that they are human first, and then secondly, leaders.

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### **The goal of mission work is to yield self-supporting and self-propagating local communities.**

much to offer in terms of fighting against injustices regardless of race and religion. We can do this nationally, so that the dissenting Malaysian Christian's perspectives on war and conflicts are heard in local media, and eventually it will contribute to the general discussion globally. We can do this locally, whereby our prayers, relief efforts, and compassion transcend race and religion. I find Walter Wink's *Engaging the Powers* quite insightful. The powers are not simply human structures or demonic in nature, but they possess an inner spirituality or corporate culture that dominates and controls. Extremism and fundamentalism seem to be the dominant players in religious conflicts while the silent majority is helpless because the enemy is not so easily identifiable.

Finally, there is also a place for intra-dialogue within the Christian Church globally, whereby Western Christians discover diverse Christian positions from Asia or Latin America on the issue of global conflicts.

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*Tan Kang-San, Ph.D is Head of Mission Studies at Redcliffe College, UK and is the Official Spokesperson for World Evangelical Alliance on Interfaith Issues. Previously, Kang-San served with OMF International. Kang-San will be teaching a course for pastors/lay leaders on "Old Testament Theology for Christian Ministry and Mission" at Bible College Malaysia from Aug 5 to Aug 10. For further details, contact Registrar at maybcm@yahoo.com.*

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### Wildlife Crossing

Wildlife smugglers are using Peninsular Malaysia as a transit point to transport pangolins, freshwater turtles, monitor lizards and snakes worth millions of ringgit by land to China, where these animals are in high demand as exotic food.

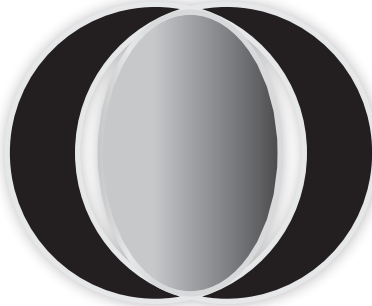
Although Customs and the anti-smuggling unit at the Malaysian-Thai border have stepped up checks and confiscated consignments of these animals, they believe the illegal trade continues daily.

Investigations by wildlife trade monitoring network Traffic – a joint programme of the World Wide Fund for Nature and the World Conservation Union – have revealed that wildlife traders from Sumatra and Borneo regularly smuggled the animals by sea or air to middlemen in Malaysia, who then packed them in crates, boxes and gunny sacks for transport into Thailand. (The Star, May 12)

Pray for effective monitoring and enforcement so as to protect the biodiversity of our region which is a great asset for the future.

### Bumiputra Share

Recently, a controversy arose over Maybank's requirement that legal firms dealing with them must have a bumiputra partner with at least 50% stake. The move sparked criticism from various groups including the MCA, the Bar Council and the Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi responded that there had been no government directive on the matter and that the bank should be "fair and just". In fact, the Cabinet later directed the bank to reverse its policy. Maybank said it would now elect its panel of lawyers based on efficiency, performance and merit,



not ethnic composition. However, a Malay newspaper reported that Malay intellectuals were asking for Maybank to retain the requirement. (The Star, May 12)

Pray for wisdom and understanding for all parties. Pray that a healthy balance shall prevail between fairness/justice and helping the Bumiputras.

### Commercialization of Charity

At least 10 organizations and societies of "prominent and reputable standing" are being investigated following public complaints about their fund-raising activities, particularly on claims that third parties are being used to solicit funds. According to Deputy Home Affairs Minister Datuk Tan Chai Ho, in some instances the split of donated funds between the NGOs and the middlemen were as unreasonable as 40% for the charity and 60% for the middlemen.

In light of the increasing commercialization of charity and the lack of regulations over it, the ministry has proposed amendments to the Societies Act 1966 to streamline the activities of charitable bodies and allow for stricter enforcement of the Act. Still, the Act does not cover all NGOs because not all are registered as societies. There is also concern that the step may lead to overregulation. (The Star, May 13)

Pray for wisdom and a good resolution to the problem. Pray that NGOs are guided by principle and conscience as they seek funds from the public.

### Religious Authorities Breaking Up Families

In 2004, Suresh Verrappan married Revathi in a Hindu ceremony. In January this year, his wife and his daughter were forcibly taken away from him. Discovering that Revathi was born to an Indian Muslim family, the Islamic authorities in Melaka sent her to an Islamic religious rehabilitation centre in Ulu Yam. Her baby was then handed over to her Muslim mother.

In April, Marimuthu's wife of 21 years and their 6 children were taken away by the Selangor Religious Department. Although the custody of the children was later given to Marimuthu, the wife Raimah Bibi was not allowed to return to him. However, Raimah Bibi who decided to continue professing Islam would have unrestricted access to her children at all times.

On May 14, V. Suresh filed a habeas corpus application seeking the release of his wife Siti Fatimah Abdul Karim whom he claimed had been illegally detained at the Baitul Aman Faith Rehabilitation Centre since January 8. They married on March 10, 2004 according to Hindu rites and have a daughter.

Pray for compassion and sensitivity on the part of the religious authorities. Pray that all the families broken up shall be reunited. "In the matters of religion, the naked, criminal power of the state should not be employed." (Dr. Shad Faruqi, The Star, May 3).

The Christian Federation of Malaysia held its Biennial General Conference on April 14, 2007.

The following were elected to the Executive Committee 2007-2009:

Chairman	Bishop Dr. Paul Tan Chee Ing (RC)
Vice-Chairman	Bishop Datuk John Lee (RC)
Vice-Chairman	Rev. Dr. Thomas Philips (CCM)
Vice-Chairman	Rev. Eu Hong Seng (NECF)
Hon. Secretary	Bishop Dr. Hwa Yung (CCM)
Asst. Hon. Secretary	Mr. Kong Yeng Phooi (NECF)
Hon. Treasurer	Mr. Samuel Ang Eng Hoe (NECF)
Asst. Hon. Treasurer	Bishop Antony Selvanayagam (RC)
Committee Member	Fr. Michael Chua (RC)
Committee Member	Mr. Anthony Row (CCM)
Committee Member	Bishop Philip Lok (CCM)
Committee Member	Dr. Khoo Kay Hup (NECF)
Committee Member	Ms. Ee Joo Lian (NECF)
Committee Member	Ms. Rosemarie Cho (RC)
Committee Member	Ms. Margaret Engduyan Kunchit (CCM)

**Note:** RC stands for the Roman Catholic Church of Malaysia. CCM stands for Council of Churches Malaysia. NECF, CCM and RC form the CFM.

NECF Malaysia welcomes 17 churches as Ordinary Members:

- Gereja Charis, pastored by David Wong Loo Pang
- Canning Garden Baptist Church (Tronoh), pastored by Chan Theam Lai
- Harvest Generation Church, pastored by Ryan Foo Say Liang
- SIB Klang, pastored by John Sigar
- Bethany Church, Segamat, pastored by Epafra Djoan Handojo
- The Word Centre, Mantin, pastored by James a/l Isaac
- The Word Centre, Slim River, pastored by Sarah Palmapathi Sinayah
- Petra Centre, led by Elder Thomas Lim Kok Beng
- Antioch Revival Sanctuary, Kulim, pastored by Annadass a/l Nayagam
- City Harvest Christian Fellowship, Sibul, led by Elder Ngu Meng Ching
- Church of Glory, Penang, pastored by Lim Swee Tat
- Alpha Fellowship Church, pastored by Silas Joshua Subramaniam
- Tabernacle of Christ, pastored by Rev. C. Paul Arputharaj
- SOS Assembly, pastored by Samuel Wong Tin Soon
- Persatuan Persahabatan Kristian Charis Mantin, led by Elder Zhang Zhi Meng
- City Church KL, pastored by Mark Varughese
- SIB Brickfields, led by Elder Edwin Agong

**NECF also welcomes 6 people as Associate Members:**

Pr. David Goh Kah Poh, Habakuk Hwang Seck Nam, Pr. Ooi Kean Lye, Pr. Tan Chee Hiong, Pr. Mailer @ Andrian bin Ansawang and Fabian Tew See Bin



# Prayer Calendar

Prayer has been a cornerstone of NECF's ministry and shall continue to be. Here are the "prayer events" from May to August 2007.

## **May 17-27**

**Global Day of Prayer (GDOP) 2007** preceded by 10 days of Watch & Pray in 40 cities nationwide  
Theme: Pray toward a Greater Pentecost (Main event held on May 27 at Full Gospel Tabernacle, Subang Jaya)

## **June 8-9**

**East Coast Children's Prayer Camp 2007**, Kuantan

## **July 22-Aug 31**

**Nationwide 40-day Fast & Prayer** with prayer guides in 4 languages  
Theme: Church – the Transforming Agent

## **Aug 20-21**

**National Children's Prayer Conference**  
Venue: Petaling Jaya Evangelical Free Church  
Speakers: Brendon & Cathie Clancys, Jeffrey & Irene Chew, Pr. Andy Loh  
Registration Fee: RM40 before July 23/ RM45 after July 23

## **Aug 22-24**

**Bahasa Malaysia National Prayer Conference**  
Venue: Cornerstone Glory Centre, Petaling Jaya



*Praying for the nations*

Speaker: Rachmat T. Manullang  
Registration Fee: RM50

## **Aug 29-Sept 1**

**National Prayer Conference**  
Venue: Petaling Jaya Evangelical Free Church  
Speakers: Luis Bush & Lai-Kheng Pousson  
Registration Fee: RM60 before July 31/ RM70 after July 31



*45 children attended the Children's Prayer Concert at St. Paul's Church, Petaling Jaya on May 12*

*For further information, please contact NECF Malaysia.*



# An Opportunity Not to be Missed!

## NECF-GELA GROUP INSURANCE PROGRAMME

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- Critical Illness coverage of RM30,000
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- Total Permanent Disability (due to accident) of RM60,000
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Participants must be below 55 years of age. In order to enjoy free underwriting, we require a minimum participation of 100 members.

*For further information, please contact :*

Lawrence	019-338 2687
Laura	013-336 7088
Sharon	012-659 6216
Office	(03) 4294 7673

*Promotion Ends  
15th July 2007*





## Historical Brief

Perak's history began with the installation of Sultan Muzaffar Shah I, who was a descendant of Sultan Mahmud Shah of Melaka, in the year 1528. In 1816, Siam forced Kedah to invade Perak and made Perak acknowledge Siamese suzerainty. However, the British, through 1826 Anglo-Thai Agreement, secured the independence for Perak.

With the discovery of tin in Larut in 1848, Perak's economy boomed and became a multicultural society with the coming of Chinese migrants. Since then, tin mining became British's greatest investment.

The succession wars among the Malay chiefs and the Larut wars resulted from the fighting among Chinese secret societies had created political and societal instability. It eventually led to a political opportunity for the British. It was Raja Abdullah who agreed to a British Resident. He signed the Pangkor Treaty in January 1874 to accept British administration and was installed as Sultan of Perak. The treaty set the first Residential System and effectively gave the British a foothold in the Malaya while ensuring the power of the sultans over cultural and religious matters. The treaty was also said to be the historical genesis of the problematic dual-legal system in Malaysia.

The state is governed by the Barisan Nasional with the Opposition DAP holding 3 parliamentary seats and 7 state assembly seats. Dato' Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali from UMNO is currently on his second term as the Menteri Besar. He has vowed to wipe out poverty.

## Perak



**(Taken from the Malaysia Statistics Department, 2005)**

**Population:** 2,256,400 (est.)

**Ethnic Groups:** Malay 52.07%, Other Bumiputera 2.4% (Semai, Siamese, Temiar, Jahai, Mendriq, Kintaq, Lanoh), Chinese 30.2%, Indian 12.48%, Others 0.35%, Non-citizens 2.49%

**Religious Breakdown (2000):** Islam 53.9%, Buddhism 24.0%, Taoism/Confucianism 5.9%, Hinduism 11.0%, Christianity 3.1%, Tribal 0.6%, Others 0.6%, No Religion 0.8%, Unknown 0.1%

**Incidence of Poverty (2004):** 4.9% (Hardcore: 1.1%)

**Capital:** Ipoh

**(Royal Capital:** Kuala Kangsar)

**Sultan:** Sultan Azlan Shah Muhibbuddin Shah

**Menteri Besar:** Dato' Seri DiRaja Mohamad Tajol Rosli Ghazali

## Islamization & Religious Freedom

### An overzealous Mufti

A Mufti is held in high regards and has substantial influence in the Muslim community. Datuk Seri Harussani Zakaria, the Perak Mufti, is known for his controversial and overzealous religious statements. He once warned the Muslims that they could be considered apostates if they celebrated Valentine's Day (The Star, 13 Feb 04), and that Hindi movies on TV led to "indecent behavior among family members". He had also decreed TV3's Sure Heboh concerts as haram (malaysiakini.com, 30 July 04) on grounds that they were detrimental to Malays' faith, causing them to neglect religious responsibilities. Last year, the Mufti criticized the joint celebrations such as Kongsiraya and DeepaRaya, saying that it was against Islamic tenets (malaysiakini.com, 6 Oct 06). The Mufti was also one of those who actively spoke against the Article 11 forums, believing that seeking continuation of Islamization process was the right of Muslims (malaysiakini.com, 24 July 06). Many Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, were perturbed by his remark.

### Moral policing

In 2003, the enforcement officials of Ipoh City council were severely criticized and ridiculed for playing "moral

custodians" by giving summons to those whom they deemed behaving indecently (including holding hands in the park). A couple filed a civil suit against the council. The issue caused such an uproar that the federal government had to stepped in. The Housing and Local Government Ministry was given the task to draft guidelines and define "indecent act" (NST, 19 Apr 06). The city council was urged to keep the city clean and prioritize its duties.

Raja Nazrin, the Regent of Perak, has recently called Muslim scholars to be open-minded, not focusing on legalism, proscriptions and prescriptions (The Star, 9 Feb 07).

### Apostasy

In 1988, the state government enacted the Control and Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions Bill. Section 13 of the 1992 Crimes (Syariah) Enactment says that "word/action importing apostasy is an offence" (fine not more than RM3,000 or imprisonment not more than 2 years or both). Section 12 of the same enactment states that "declaring oneself to be a non-Muslim to avoid action taken is an offence" (a penalty of not more than RM5,000 or imprisonment not more than 3 years or both). A Muslim law professor felt that such laws against apostasy severely challenged one's freedom of conscience.



According to NST (14 Feb 06), the Mufti had announced that there were close to 100,000 Muslim apostates in the country (Harakah reported 250,000). His allegation sparked an alarm and aroused the sentiment of the Muslim public. The federal government had to step in to investigate and explain.

Most recent controversy would be the mobile text message (SMS) that claimed Malays were going to be baptized at a church in Ipoh. Believing the rumor, hundreds of Muslims converged at the church attempting to stop the alleged mass conversion, only to learn that it was a "first holy communion" ceremony for 110 Indian children. Few people, including the Perak Mufti, were called in by the police to give statements. The SMS, almost causing a "racial/religious incident," was deemed by many as malicious. The Sultan of Perak intervened to ask for tolerance and moderation over the false and malicious news.

### Corruption

The outrageous request of RM51.5 million under 9th Malaysian Plan by Kuala Kangsar Municipal Council for a landscaping project was heavily chided, even by the Deputy Tourism Minister himself who said that money should be put in better use, e.g. poverty eradication and rural infrastructure projects.

The AG report 2005 disclosed that 159 states projects were delayed and money was wasted. The report said that the State's treasury was struggling with its poor financial management (NST, 6 Sept 06). According to the Menteri Besar in tabling the state's deficit budget, the state will face another year of deficit (approx. RM34.78 million) in 2007 (NST, 21 Nov 06).

The newly-appointed Perak Anti-Corruption Agency director, Samsiah Abu Bakar, has vowed to take firm action against corrupt staff or those who fail to act (NST, 4 Feb 07).

## Social Ills

### Youth problem/Crime

It was reported in 2006 that 3 out of every 200 criminal cases in Perak involved students. There were 1,042 cases of truancy in the state's 845 primary schools and 450 in 212 secondary schools. 5026 disciplinary cases among primary school students and 8,186 case among secondary school students (NST, 19 Dec 06).

Perak has also recorded the 3rd highest number of drug addicts in the country (The Star, 24 May 06).

### Poverty

Perak was said to be one of the three states with high number of hardcore poor households. 6,130 families (out of which 4,026 were OA families) in the state were under the hardcore poverty line. To address the issue and achieve zero poverty by 2010, the state government has begun to develop its oil palm plantations (Bernama, 21 Jan 06).

While the urban poverty in Ipoh may not be seen as a serious problem, it is prevalent.

## The Church

During the colonial period, the Christian community was largely an expatriate community. The ancestors of the Chinese Christians in Sitiawan were the Methodist Foochow migrants. The Pangkor Treaty in 1874 effectively discouraged Christian evangelization among the Malays. Such trend continues on until today.

To date, the NECF databank records the existence of 254 churches in Perak. Corporate prayer initiatives appear to be active among the churches in the capital, Ipoh. At the recent Central Regional Prayer Consultation in March, Perak Christian leaders who were present concurred that the issue of future leadership (i.e. passing on the mantle) posed the greatest challenge, besides the need for spiritual

breakthrough. There was also the concern for the Church's general lack of influence in the community.

## Pray

- State government and local councils: men and women of integrity and character; prudent in spending and wisdom in managing state funds; effective and efficient implementing policies; prioritise public interests
- Corrupt official and overzealous religious officials to be removed
- Commitment and effective in eradicating poverty especially among the Orang Asli families
- The sanctity of family institution to be upheld and preserved
- Against the threat of immorality among the youth
- Wisdom and vigilance for police force in combating the rising crime
- State education ministry, schools and parents unite to address rising disciplinary problem among the school children and youth
- Against the spirits of religious overzealousness and extremism
- The spiritual stronghold rooted in Pangkor Treaty to be broken, religious liberty for all to be upheld
- The Church:
  - Passion for Jesus
  - Renewed zeal in the Great Commission, discipleship in particular
  - Unity among churches
  - Strong relationship among pastors and kingdom-mindedness
  - Raising a generation of godly and competent future leaders
  - Salt & light in the community

# For Your Prayers

**UZBEKISTAN** in Central Asia is one of only two doubly landlocked countries in the world. It has a population of nearly 28 million, 88% of which are Muslims (mostly Sunnis) and 9% are Eastern Orthodox. More than 10% of its area consists of intensely cultivated, irrigated river valleys while more than 60% of its population live in densely populated rural communities. Uzbekistan is the world's second-largest cotton exporter and fifth largest producer. It relies heavily on cotton production as a major source of export earnings.

During the Soviet era, intensive production of "white gold" (cotton) and grain led to overuse of agrochemicals and the depletion of water supplies, which have left the land poisoned and the Aral Sea and certain rivers half dry. Water pollution from industrial wastes and the heavy use of fertilizers and pesticides is the cause of many human health disorders in the country. Since independence in 1991, the country seeks to gradually lessen its dependence on agriculture while developing its mineral and petroleum reserves. However, the government's imposition of a command economy with strict price and currency controls continue to stifle economic activity.

More than one-and-a-half years has passed since the government suppression of the popular uprising in Andijan. Since that event, the politics of Uzbekistan have turned, and the government has begun a new period of heavy persecution against the Christians. The people in Uzbekistan consider Christians as followers of a western religion or members of an extremist sect. In 2006 many expatriate Christian workers were deported from Uzbekistan. In June of that year, the government launched a

new law that punishes printing of religious books with three years in prison. Christians from an Islamic background in remote parts of the country also encounter resistance from fundamentalist Muslims and are put under pressure to return to their former faith. They are publicly humiliated and hounded out of their homes and jobs for converting to Christianity. According to Open Doors International, Uzbekistan is one of the countries where the situation for Christians deteriorated.

Pray for Uzbekistan. Pray that the government shall have the wisdom to seek a more balanced approach to managing the economy. Pray for sustainable development of natural gas, petroleum and other minerals. Pray that foreign investment will pour into the country. Pray for the abatement of persecution against Christians. Above all, pray that the Christians will receive grace to stand firm in their faith.

**COMOROS** is geographically very different from Uzbekistan. It is made up of a group of islands (three main islands of Grande Comore, Anjouan and Moheli and others) situated about two-thirds of the way between northern Madagascar and northern Mozambique in South Africa. Its small population is predominantly Sunni Muslim. Roman Catholics make up 2% of the population.

Comoros has its own set of problems of which political instability is one. Since gaining independence from France in 1975, the nation has endured 19 coups or attempted coups. In December 2001, voters approved a new constitution and presidential elections took place in the spring of 2002. Each island in the archipelago elected its own presi-

dent and a new union president took office in May 2002.

The economy poses another problem as Comoros is one of the world's poorest countries. The unemployment rate is 20% while 60% of the population live below the poverty line. The country has few natural resources and the education level is low. The country imports rice, its staple food and depends heavily on foreign aid. Agriculture, including fishing, hunting and forestry, contributes 40% to GDP.

The situation for Christians also deteriorated in Comoros in 2007. In May four men were sentenced to prison for being involved with Christianity. Three of them were arrested when the police barged into a Christian meeting place that a young Christian convert from Islam had been forced to show them. They were brought to court and sentenced to three months' imprisonment. During the trial, Muslim fundamentalists allegedly demanded that the accused be killed for the "crime" of being involved with Christianity. Two of them have reportedly endured physical and verbal abuse. Pray for Comoros. Pray for wisdom as the government seeks to upgrade education and technical training, privatize commercial and industrial enterprises, improve health services, diversify exports, promote tourism, and reduce the high population growth rate. Pray for more foreign investment. Pray for religious freedom for everyone. Pray that the Christians will stand firm.