

Berita NECF

Editorial

Great EXPECTATIONS

The close of 2009 with the High Court judgment of the 'Allah' issue was not well received by certain quarters and immediately the Government filed and won an appeal for a stay of execution pending further hearing.

The subsequent events of fire-bomb attacks at nine churches led to press statements released by both Christian Federation of Malaysia and NECF Malaysia (see page 3).

Churches were urged to pray for the peace and well-being of the nation and certainly much prayer is critically needed this year.

One of the major events that will take place in 2010 is the Global Day of Prayer (GDOP) on Sunday, May 23. This happens to fall on Pentecost Sunday and we hope the Christian community will come together to intercede for the nation which is at its critical juncture in its history.

To cater to the expected large turnout, NECF Malaysia has booked Stadium Melawati in Shah Alam, Selangor, which can seat up to 15,000 people. This will be the first time the yearly GDOP is held in a stadium since it was launched in Malaysia in 2004.

The year 2010 will also be the

10th year since NECF launched the annual 40-Day Fast and Prayer. To celebrate this milestone decade, NECF has chosen to adopt the theme "Uniting the Generations" for this year's event.

And to commemorate the day Sabah and Sarawak became part of Malaysia on Sept 16, it has been decided that from this year henceforth, the 40-Day Fast and Prayer will start on Aug 8 and end on Sept 15.

The celebrations will coincide with "One Malaysia Day", a historical event when the churches from West and East Malaysia celebrate and proclaim "Yesus Engkau Raja, Engkau Perwira, Engkau yang Teragung." (Jesus, You are King, Mighty Warrior and the Supreme One)

In support of the prayer emphasis, we will launch the NECF Prayer Vision for Transforming the Nation, through Prayer Cells and hope to achieve the following:

- To manifest the Kingdom of God in the world through concerted and intentional prayers;
- That the power of the Kingdom of God will be released and established in the various

spheres of the public domain; and

- To connect believers in the public domain to intercede at their workplace, schools and homes.

The NECF Nation-Building Team (see page 5) will share through the various pastors fellowships on the five 'I' strategy as seen in the diagram on page 4.

To ensure that we saturate the nation with prayers and action, we want to welcome Andy Chi as Executive Secretary of Prayer, Evangelism and Discipleship. He will

Continued page 4...

Inside this Issue

Chairman: The Best of Times...	2
NECF & CFM Statements	3
Good Out of Evil	4
The N-Team	5
Reaching out through reading	6
Fallen Leaders, Vacant Positions	8
Critical need for body	9
Nothing Personal: More on Allah	11
Critical Need for Body	13
Start the wave with a ripple	14

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Chairman's Message



By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

THE BEST OF TIMES, THE WORST OF TIMES

The events of the past weeks—the acts of arson on churches in different cities in our country— remind me of the opening lines of “A Tale of Two Cities” by Charles Dickens: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

As I write this, nine churches have been attacked over a period of four days; attacks of such magnitude and violence are unprecedented. Calculated to impose fear and intimidation, it also caused damage and inconvenience in some instances.

It would appear to be the worst of times for the Christian Church in this country. The nation's international standing too, will suffer with each passing day, if there is no quick solution in sight. So, it's the worst of times for Malaysia as well, the land so affectionately described as “truly Asia”.

But it is also the best of times for the Church. Amidst pressure to abandon the use of the word ‘Allah’, the Church across denominational lines has become more knowledgeable of the ‘Allah’ issue besides being better informed of the plight of our Bahasa Malaysia-speaking brethren and the constitutional challenges the Christian community in this nation is facing.

It has resulted in more prayer as we realise the ‘spiritual battle’ we are in. It

has caused the Church to search her hearts to truly exercise forgiveness.

Ask any believing Christian how he feels about the attacks on the churches and his response would be one of sadness and disappointment that fellow Malaysians are capable of such despicable behaviour. But there is no cry for retaliation and violence; only calls for reason and peace. There is no hatred detected at all. The testimony of the Church shines bright.

It has also brought church leaders closer together to present a united view and a firm stand on mutual respect for the Scriptures of our faiths.¹

It is also the best of times for our nation — it has compelled the voice of moderate Muslims to speak louder.

Kind, sympathetic, respectful Muslims seem to be crawling out of the woodworks to stand with Christians. Muslims and Christians seem to be more intentional in forging closer ties, contrary to what bigots and radicals have attempted to sow in this land.

In the worst of times, we have discovered it is the best of times.

Indeed, the Church is on the road to becoming stronger ...

¹ The Sikhs also uses ‘Allah’ in their Scriptures.

NECF MALAYSIA STATEMENT

ARSON ATTACKS ON CHURCHES

The National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) of Malaysia is saddened by the events of the last 24 hours affecting our churches. We regret the irresponsible actions of certain extremist elements for the recent spate of fire-bombs thrown into church premises. These actions display their immaturity and intolerance towards others within a multi-racial society.

Though to date, no casualties have been reported, we want to commend the swift actions taken by both the Police and Fire Department. We hope that with adequate investigations they will be able to probe into the blaze and speedily bring those responsible to justice.

We call on our government to take the necessary steps to educate those who lack understanding and are “easily confused” to be mature minded in a progressive democratic society.

With the Prime Minister’s national agenda of 1Malaysia,

we regret to note that these irresponsible actions will bring much setback to the desired goals and derail the country’s effort to move out of recession.

As Christians and responsible citizens of this country, it is our desire to see all quarters promote peace and harmony. We therefore appeal to all communities to exercise practical rationality and to listen to the “voice of reason” and strive to make all efforts to foster a sense of greater unity and harmony within all races and religious community groups.

NECF calls on all parties to learn to respect each other’s basic constitutional and human rights to practise one’s faith and religion, recognising the fundamental boundaries in not interfering with the Scriptures of other faiths.

NECF further calls all Christians to pray for the peace and well-being of the nation.

Released on 8 January 2010

CFM STATEMENT ON ATTACKS ON CHURCHES

CFM CONDEMNS FIRE-BOMBING OF CHURCHES

The Christian Federation of Malaysia strongly and unreservedly condemns the violent attacks and attempted ones of fire-bombing several churches in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya in the early hours of this morning (8 January 2010).

We are against such actions that seek to intimidate people and also to rend the fabric of peace and goodwill in our country.

Thus far this afternoon, we have been informed that there were three torching and attempted torching of churches. The administrative office of Metro Tabernacle in Desa Melawati was completely gutted. The Molotov cocktail thrown at the Church of the Assumption along Jalan Templer in Petaling Jaya did not explode. But The Life Chapel in Section 17 Petaling Jaya suffered some damage to the church’s front porch area.

We call on the Government and all peace-loving Malaysians to stand against such violence and not to give way to extremists in our midst who would want to throw our country into chaos.

We call on the police to continue to maintain the peace

and security of our land in which all of us so cherish and love. May the police bring to justice quickly those who have been involved in such acts of torching churches which is a violation of the houses of God in our land.

Christians are a peace-loving people and so we will remain calm and rely on our police officers to investigate and to arrest the criminals involved and to protect all Malaysians against violence and criminal intimidation. We are concerned that the hacking of the judiciary website is an act of criminal intimidation against the judiciary and this shameful act along with the acts of violence against churches must not be condoned.

Let us as Christians and with our fellow Malaysians pray that despite such atrocious acts perpetrated upon the churches good sense will prevail in us. Let us not allow those who want to foment animosity among the peoples and the religious communities to triumph in their dastardly plans. May we stand together against the tide of violent people and their evil plans.

We will continue to pray for peace in Malaysia.

Released on 8 January 2010

Good out of Evil

We truly praise God for His hand over our nation these past weeks. Good seems to have come out of the evil intents, as we have seen in the response to the attacks on the ten churches and one Sikh temple.

Malaysians from all walks of life, persuasions and faiths were horrified at the attacks and promptly reacted with strong words of condemnation and calls for peace and prayers for calm and for quick, firm action from the Government.

We are thankful that the Government has taken proactive action in handling this whole ugly episode with its promise of a full and quick probe into the attacks. Just days after the attacks, police said several suspects had been identified.

In the meantime, top government officials have been meeting with church leaders to find an amicable solution to the matter.

And to assist Metro Tabernacle – the worst-hit church – the Government has pledged a grant of RM500,000. During his visit to the church, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the grant was the Government’s way of showing sympathy and support.

The public also donated to a fund set up by a Muslim blogger for the church and the sum of about RM8,500 was given to the church as a show of support not only for Metro Tabernacle but for the church at large.

At the same time, 130 Muslim non-governmental organisations have come together to patrol churches within



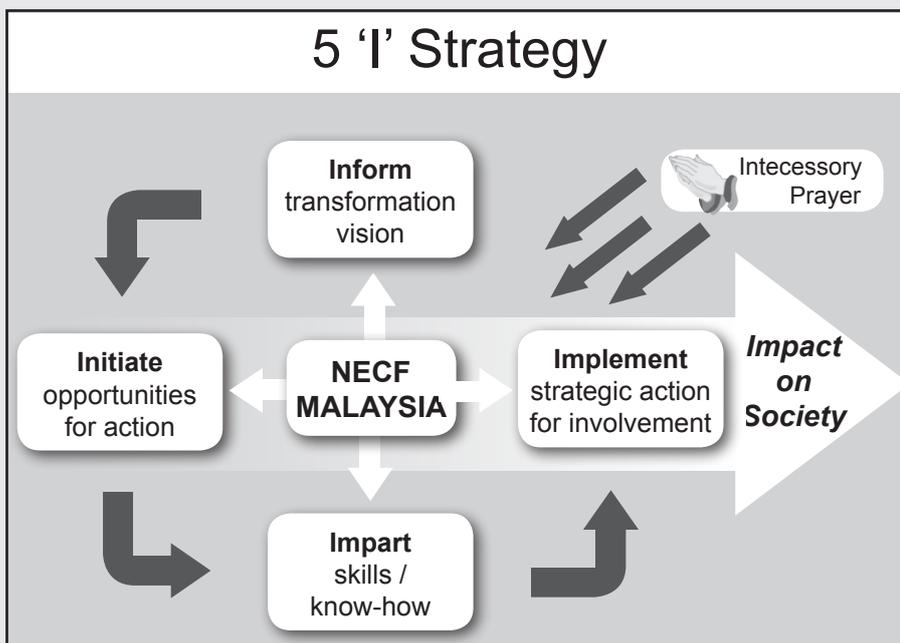
Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak visiting Metro Tabernacle. On his left is the church's Senior Pastor, Rev. Ong Sek Leang, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Kob Tsu Koon is on his right.

– Photo courtesy of The Malaysian Insider.

the Klang Valley. That the Muslim NGOs are extending their hand of assistance and showing solidarity with other faiths at such a time is probably the most heartening and eye-opening news to the nation.

While we quietly rejoice for the positive outcome from these attacks, let us continue to be vigilant in prayer, for God’s sovereign hand to stay on the nation and for the Government to act wisely and courageously in the interest of all Malaysians.

From front cover...



be assisted by Lucrece Loo who is currently our Executive Secretary on Prayer.

NECF’s role is to facilitate and empower Nation Building through the local church.

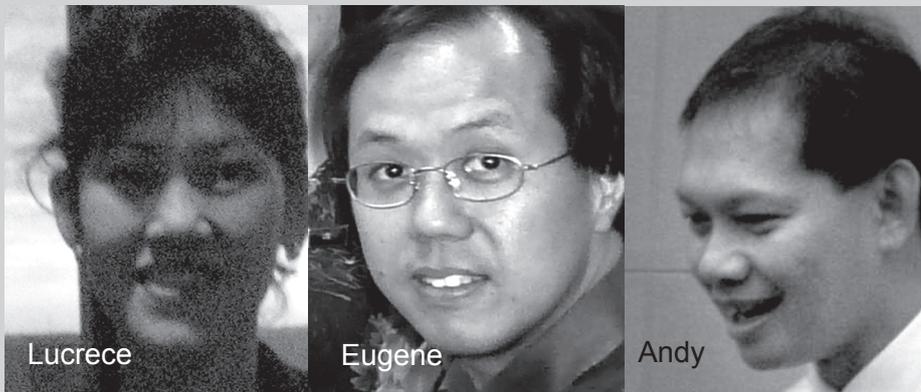
Our desire is know what God is doing in the nation. We are aware that many churches have embarked on community and social work. We would like you to share your resources and expertise that would encourage others to take up the challenge of impacting the community.

The year ahead for the nation and the church is very exciting and challenging. We need your support and partnership.

For this reason our emphasis for 2010 is also to encourage the church to enlarge the place of your tent and be a missional community.

Pray with us, as we look to God’s favour for our beloved land of Malaysia.

The N-Team



Lucrece

Eugene

Andy

Rev. Andy Chi joined NECF Malaysia on January 1, 2010, as Executive Secretary for Prayer, Evangelism and Discipleship. Andy has been actively involved with the work of NECF, having served in our Prayer Commission.

With his wealth of experience as a pastor for 20 years, he brings the much needed connection with pastors' fellowships. He is passionate for both the prayer and evangelism ministries, which will be two of NECF's main thrusts for 2010.

Andy will be part of the NECF Nation-Building Team comprising Eugene Yapp and Lucrece Loo (Executive Secretaries – Research and Prayer respectively).

The team will be doing vision casting on the NECF Prayer Vision, together with strategies for nation building. They will be available to speak in churches and provide updates on the latest happenings within the Malaysian Church and the nation.

Meanwhile, Lucrece, who joined NECF last February, will continue her key role in networking with intercessors and preparing Prayer Alerts to churches.

With the launch of the Prayer Vision, she becomes the contact person to collate reports and testimonies to encourage the Malaysian

Church.

NECF Malaysia Prayer Vision

Christians all over Malaysia engaging in prayer for the Malaysian society (1) within their local churches' corporate prayer meetings and (2) through Prayer Cells (PCs). This is the NECF Prayer Vision in line with NECF's nation-building agenda – Transforming the Nation through the Local Church.

What are Prayer Cells?

While the local church prayer gatherings are held in the church, PCs are groups of Christians in every sphere of society coming together to intentionally and regularly pray outside their churches – in places such as homes, schools, campuses, business premises, offices and factories.

The focus of PCs is to manifest the Kingdom of God in the world through concerted and intentional prayers. As Christians pray together in PCs, the power of the Kingdom of God will be released and established, thus bringing transformation to every sector and institution of society.

PCs connect believers and empower them to be agents of transformation to the nation and the world.

PCs also sensitise, mobilise and move believers towards fulfilling

their calling and purpose to bringing transformation to the nation and the world through the 'Greatest Commandment' and the 'Great Commission'.

How can Prayer Cells benefit the Local Church and Society?

PCs imbibe believers with a sense of urgency and a spirit of transformational prayer. This will lead believers to pray intentionally and strategically, thus benefiting the Church and the nation as a whole.

It must be categorically stated that PCs do not substitute the local church's prayer meetings or cell groups. The local church must continue to encourage, nurture and equip believers for focused and intentional prayer.

However, when Christians pray together in intentional and strategic intercession in their local church as well as PCs, it will lead to actions of influence and outreach in the nation and the world.

On NECF's part, it will continue to instill a sense of urgency for His Kingdom and foster a spirit of prayer in the local church.

NECF through the services of the Prayer Commission will provide consultation, facilitation, assistance, networking, training and other services to churches and individuals who are interested to initiate PCs within their spheres and realms of influence for the purposes mentioned above.

NECF invites believers to participate in the PCs movement. For enquiries and sign-up, please drop an email at prayer.ll@necf.org.my

Reaching out through Reading

Teachers Cheli Tamilselvam and wife Lai Mei have education coursing through their veins.

Passionate about educating children and teens, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, they founded Bethany Home in Kuching seven years ago, a centre that provides needy students a place to study and get free tuition. So committed are they to helping the underprivileged students that they even feed and transport the students.

Recently, this Cameron Highlands brother and his Ipoh-born wife kicked off another project – a mobile library called the “Reading Bus” that reaches out to the rural villages near Kuching.

Besides bringing English books to the villagers, the Reading Bus also conducts English language classes and organises programmes to enhance the English language competency, such as reading competitions, among the children and youths.

But the crucial component of the ministry is the Alpha Course, which is conducted for the adults in the villages. (Alpha Course is an evangelistic

programme.)

Cheli shares the story of the Reading Bus with Berita NECF and testifies to God’s divine providence for the much-needed books and facilities required to help marginalised students living outside the cities.

How does the Reading Bus work?

We started with one Reading Bus last year and we now have three Reading Buses. Reading Bus 1 covers the Lundu

and Sematan region, Reading Bus 2 covers the Padawan and Penrissen Region and Reading Bus 3 covers the Saratok and Sri Aman region.

The buses travel out of Kuching every fortnight, leaving at 3p.m. on Friday and returning to Kuching on Sunday morning. The volunteers spend two nights running the Village Alpha Course at night and running the Library cum Reading Programme

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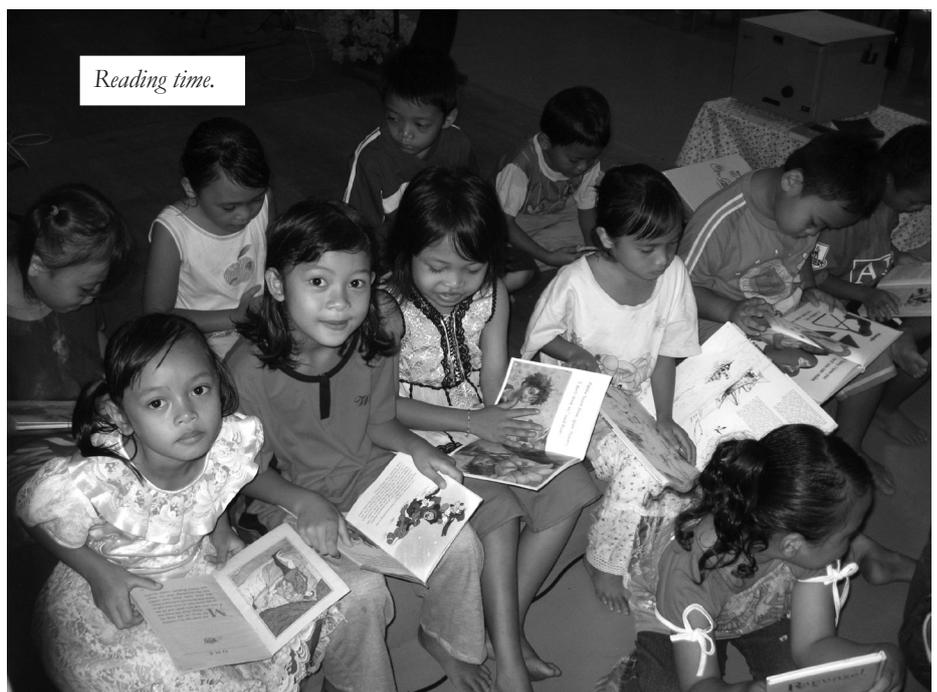
Children patiently waiting to get their books.



An assortment of books for the library.

The Reading Bus Programme

Event	Time
Reading Bus	3:00pm - 5:00pm
Alpha Course	7:00pm - 9:00pm
Prayer	9:00pm - 10:00pm
Worship	10:00pm - 11:00pm
Prayer	11:00pm - 12:00am



Reading time.

Continued from previous page...

on Saturday morning and afternoon.

What inspired your idea of having this mobile library?

In November 2008, someone from Alpha Malaysia gave me a contact of a publishing company in the Klang Valley which had books to give away and asked if we had need of them. In February 2009, the books arrived in the thousands and we took them to the villages to bless the village folks. We initially used our vans and when the vans got back to Kuching, we found that they were a little noisy and the absorbers were weaker.

We saw students in Bethany Home teaching their younger peers using these books and so we prayed and asked God to provide us a strong four-wheel vehicle if He wanted us to continue taking the books to the villages.

We prayed and spoke to about a dozen of our friends and within a week, the Lord gave us enough funds to buy a good second-hand Toyota Land Cruiser. We made our first trips to Kampung Pasir Ulu and the response from the villagers was overwhelming.

In June, we bought Reading Bus 2 and the momentum began to pick up, more villages heard about the Reading Bus and asked for us to visit them.

The local churches were also very keen to know more about the Alpha Course. In November, we bought Reading Bus 3 to cater to the growing needs.

What kind of response have you received to the Reading Buses?

We have, at an average, 40 children and schoolgoing teens who turn up for the Library cum Reading Programme. In the evenings, the Reading Bus runs the Alpha Course in the village.

The adults turn up in the local church to go through the course which is in BM. We have made it such that the visit of the Reading Bus to any village must comply with two basic conditions.

Firstly, they must allow us to run the Alpha Course in the local churches (this is to empower the church with a basic tool for evangelism).

Secondly, they must provide a cupboard to stock up about 400 books which will be left behind at the end of the Alpha Course and the completion of the Reading Programme (this is to empower the local community to carry out their own library as an outreach to neighbouring villages).

What do you hope to achieve with the Reading Bus?

We aim to:

- Motivate young people and children to take an interest in the English

Language;

- Teach them how to read and enjoy English Language books and to help build their confidence when they return to school;
- Equip the students and the villages with the Alpha Course so that it could be used as an evangelistic tool in their respective schools and neighbouring villages;
- Empower urban youths to be involved with rural ministry in loving and sharing their time and knowledge with youths and children of other ethnic races and cultures; and
- Close the gap between the academically marginalised (due to the lack of proficiency in English Language) and the academically privileged by teaching them basic English Language and helping them to enjoy school at least.

How are the churches and Christians in Kuching responding to this ministry?

The response from Christians has been encouraging. We also get a lot of support and encouragement from the Methodist churches and friends from the Anglican churches.

Most of our support has come from friends whom we have known in ministry for a long time. More than 80 percent of the support for the work has come from outside of Kuching.

How can we be of help to you?

To enable the Reading Bus to go beyond Kuching and even to West Malaysia, we will need NECF to help champion the cause for us.

This is a very easily duplicable project and if one church can own and run one Reading Bus, then the nation's poor and academically marginalised can be re-duced phenomenally.



← The Reading Mobile Bus

Fallen Leaders,

Not long ago, the media was abuzz with juicy scandals of two prominent politicians – one for sexual misconduct and the other for corruption.

The first was the MCA EGM last October which voted to overturn the party's decision to suspend its then Deputy President Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek over DVDs showing sexual acts between him and his mistress.

The second was the Bagan Pinang by-election, also in October, which was overwhelmingly won by Tan Sri Mohd Isa Samad, the former Negri Sembilan chief minister who was suspended for three years from his party, Umno, after being found guilty of money politics during the party polls.

Prior to the election, former Umno vice-president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah had said that if Tan Sri Isa won the election, it would mean an endorsement for corruption within Umno and the government. Many concurred with his view.

The issue of restoring tainted politicians to position has been a divisive one, as the two cases have shown. Many have objected to having leaders found guilty of wrongdoing, be it corruption, sexual immorality or criminal offences.

These two incidents seem to point to a society that has no issue electing tainted leaders, especially if they have a good track record of service.

Online news portal *The Malaysian Insider* observed, "When a candidate is a local boy who has not forgotten his roots and has a good record of service to his constituents, people tend to be forgiving of his mistakes and indiscretions, however grave they are. Think of Chua Soi Lek, the sex clip and the fact that he still managed to obtain enough votes to become MCA's deputy

president." (13 Oct 2009)

Within the church

Like the rest of the world, the church has had, and will continue to have, its fair share of fallen leaders. In his article "Should fallen pastors be restored?"* (adapted from his book "The Master's Plan"), John MacArthur expressed his shock at how frequently Christian leaders commit gross sin. However, what was more shocking to him was how quickly the fallen leaders are allowed to return to their leadership position once the publicity has died down.

"Gross sin among Christian leaders is a signal that something is seriously wrong with the church. But an even greater problem is the lowering of standards to accommodate a leader's sin. That the church is so eager to bring these men back into leadership is a symptom of rottenness at the core," he lamented.

Make no mistake – MacArthur is all for restoring fallen leaders but he calls for a proper restoration process and accountability to ensure the sincerity of repentance.

Berita NECF asks NECF Malaysia Chairman Rev. Eu Hong Seng and Executive Adviser Rev. Wong Kim Kong for their views.

Should fallen leaders be restored to their positions?

EHS: Restored? Yes. To former positions? This depends on circumstances and the person's response to the disciplinary actions. Usually a period of 12 months is the acceptable norm for discipline.

The church is at liberty to review and extend the period because we are looking not so much at a 'time sentence' but the restoration of the person. The

issue here is not 'is the 12 months served' but rather 'is he repentant and restored?'

WKK: When we deal with fallen leaders, we must not view their situations from the human perspective because if we do, we will be governed by our



emotions and experience based on our relationship with them. Rather, we should look at their situations from the biblical perspective which is that forgiveness and restoration are part of God's nature.

The doctrine of salvation is restoration through repentance and forgiveness by God's grace. Matthew 18 sets out the process for disciplining the fallen that will lead to restoration. Paul's Galatians letter directs the strong to help the weak.

And let's not forget that King David fell in adultery and murder but he repented and was restored. Peter is also another character who portrays the pattern of forgiveness and restoration.

But this doesn't mean we should rush to restore an offender to his

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Vacant Positions

Continued from previous page...

position. Restoration has a process and it may take years to complete or not at all if the fallen drops out (of the process). The failure of the church in managing the restoration process is that



many do not know how to handle it.

On the part of the offenders, many are not willing to go through the process. They want shortcuts or they want to save face so they run to other places to undergo the restoration process.

So, on the offenders' part, they must be willing to humbly undergo the restoration process where the offence took place. On the part of the church, they must assure the offenders that they can be fully restored if they humbly go through the process.

Are there 'lesser' or 'greater' sins that the church should consider when deliberating on whether the fallen leader should be restored to his leadership position?

EHS: Definitely. There are 'lesser'

and 'greater' sins, for example one caught in adultery and one caught misrepresenting an opinion or one caught giving a bribe. Though all sins are sins and serious, common sense dictates that the consequences should be different.

WKK: Whether big sin or small sin, repentance is the key factor. When Jesus died, He didn't just die for certain sins. It was for all sins. Is sexual sin worse than murder?

Sometimes, I think cheating is worse than sexual sins because cheating may affect many people's lives whereas sexual sins may only affect just the two people. It's all very subjective.

So I think the issue of whether the fallen is restored to his position depends on whether he has repented. Now, how do you assess whether he has truly repented? The criteria are up to the church leadership to decide.

In your opinion are churches today more tolerant of leaders' wrongdoings to the extent that they are willing to overlook their sins? If yes, why is it so?

EHS: The issue is not whether churches are tolerant. I find quite a few either lack boldness to discipline or lack the balance in disciplining and being redemptive in their approach. Some just want a pound of the man's flesh.

WKK: Nowadays, people seem more fearful to deal with sin either because they don't want to be the bad guy, or they don't want trouble, or they don't know how to handle the problem or it's too time consuming.

I suspect many churches are not equipped to deal with fallen leaders

or even fallen members. They don't have guidelines on the discipline and restoration process and so, when a leader falls into sin, the church has little idea what to do. So, they let the offender carry on until the problem goes way beyond redemption.

Churches must have proper processes set in place to deal with this kind of problem so that it can be nipped in its bud.

Any other comments?

EHS: It's very easy to 'step down' and discipline an erring brother but it's not so easy to restore him. I find many 'know' how to do it and the Church is not 'lacking in advice' when a brother falls, but far too few know how to love and nurture that brother back to spiritual health and ministry with dignity and in mercy.

I suspect many 'die' in our 'spiritual hospitals' due to wrong care.

WKK: We have to be careful not to fall into pre-judging a situation. Very often we do not have adequate information to substantiate our comments or remarks.

Further, we do not know the process in which one or the leadership has taken. We only hear from the grapevine or perceive from our own observations.

The unjust view is that once you have sinned, you are forever a sinner.

Let's exercise grace and give the fallen a chance to be restored. If they refuse, then we know what to do but until we have given them that opportunity to change, we have no right to write them off.

**Read the full article on http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/Grace_to_You/Article.asp?article_id=771*

COMING UP

Missional Church Conference

The Missional Church – How It Can Transform Society

Date: **26–27 August, 2010**

Venue: **Full Gospel Tabernacle, Subang Jaya
Petaling Jaya**

Missional Church. Is this some new expression for doing church or is it another catchphrase or newest gimmick to attract believers? Well, the expression was first used sometime in the late '90s to denote the church as God's missionary people for everyone, everywhere and for everything. In short, it means that every Christian is a missionary!

Startling, isn't it? Come and be enlightened as to what a missional church is, what is her purpose and role and how she may be organized to fulfill the intentional mission that God has called us to participate in. Look out for more details in the next Berita NECF issue.

TOPICS

- Missional Church – The Shape of the Church
- Missional Church – The Shape of the Leader
- Missional Church – The Shape of her Mission

Hope for Bible Knowledge

Now that the Government has raised the limit of the number of SPM subjects from 10 to 12, there is hope that the number of SPM candidates taking the Bible Knowledge (BK) subject will be sustained.

Previously, when the limit was capped at 10 subjects, there was much concern among Christian teachers that the number of SPM BK candidates would drop significantly. The concern is that if the number is too low, the Government may remove the subject from the SPM exam list.

"Parents ought to pray about this instead of reacting," said Kua Kun Han who coordinates the teaching of BK in Malaysia.

According to her, the discipline of studying God's Word is the important thing. "There are clear-thinking teens who

still attend BK classes although they're not sitting for the paper next year," she said.

Kun Han urged churches and individuals who are running BK classes to press on in teaching BK. In fact, she is calling for more churches and individuals to start BK classes, even if there are only one or two students who want to study the subject.

She also requested that all BK teachers inform the Teachers' Christian Fellowship (TCF) of their class location and time so that TCF can direct enquirers to the suitable classes.

TCF's contact is 03-5637 5623 or email tcfmy@pd.jaring.my



Nothing Personal

M O R E O N A L L A H

By Eugene Yapp

Once again, Dr Ng Kam Weng has given a compelling argument on why the word 'Allah' should not be a forbidden word to non-Muslim Malaysians.

In his response to a previous comment by Kristian Sugiyarto (at <http://www.krisispraxis.com/archives/2009/11/allah-is-not-a-definite-name/>), the Research Director of Christian research agency Kairos said 'Allah' must not be understood as a personal name of God.

He urged, "We should not perpetuate such misunderstandings by avoiding sensitive religious disagreements. It is important that proper instruction pertaining to the linguistics/semantics of the words be given to clear up such misunderstanding".

What's this misunderstanding really all about and why the need to clear this "misunderstanding" as Ng put it? Let's look at what he said before we offer some salient observations.

Ng began his comments by explaining from Arabic grammar that 'Allah' is a generic word and therefore follows the grammatical rules of other generic words when it comes to determining a second noun.

By following this grammatical rule, Ng argued that 'Allah' was never construed as 'the Allah' and hence refuted the notion that if 'Allah' was not a personal name, it must have the article 'the' before 'Allah'. Such a grammatical rule is also reflected in Hebrew where the word in a construct state never takes the article but only the genitive, e.g. the man of (genitive) God (construct).

The upshot of this analysis is that when it comes to the name of God, it is overly simplistic to determine if a word is a personal name or otherwise by simply looking at whether the article is present. The determination of that issue must be gleaned from its historical, grammatical and linguistic/semantics usage as a whole rather than on one particular factor.

In the case of 'Allah', Ng pointed out from linguistic/semantics usage that 'Allah' as a generic name for God, and not 'Tuhan', should be rendered the right word to translate as God. The confusion as Ng said, was simply due to the fact that the Malays in this land are not familiar with Arabic and the Arabic usage of the word. Perhaps adding to the confusion is the translation of God's personal name in Hebrew to 'Lord' in the Greek Old Testament.

In any case, Ng perceived there was also the element where the misunderstanding had become so ingrained in the thoughts and minds of the Malays that it has become difficult, and indeed sensitive, to point out the truth.

Hence, proper instructions are needed in this regard as sensitivity towards religious matters is not confined just to the Malay/Muslims but to other non-Muslim religious

groups as well.

What shall we make of these comments?

One may say that Ng goes right down to the root of the controversy. He makes no attempt to detract from the fact that the misunderstanding or lack of understanding in the use of the word 'Allah' stems from an inadequate understanding of the Arabic language. However, it is clear to us that language is not the only hindrance.

After all, and to be fair, it is true that there are many among the Malays who are familiar or even skilled in Arabic.

The more pertinent and probable cause seems to be what Ng termed as 'inculturation' – where the majority who may not be familiar with the language and controversy have uncritically accepted and adopted within their knowing and beliefs that 'Allah' is a personal name of God without investigating further the truth and merits of the assertion.

In light of this, there is an urgent and critical need for a broad-based 'public culture' where there is open discourse, deliberation and exchange on the claims of both Muslims and Christians to seek the truth and build consensus.

This is necessary as any cultural-religious community may have 'blind spots' and to avoid exploitation by some insidious elements or by some political bureaucrats out to further their own agenda.

Only with such a broad-based public culture in which all parties come together to seek truth and consensus in objective terms and rationality can space for religious understanding and acceptance be preserved and enhanced.

At present, this seems farfetched given the Government's stand on the matter. But Christians, as the eschatological people of God, do have hope – that our God is a God of truth and every culture and sphere of influence is already being redeemed for and by Christ in truth! For us to reclaim the truth of 'Allah', Christians must be informed and interested.

Are we aware and interested enough and can we agree with Ng that "imposing a linguistic taboo that bans the use of the word 'Allah' by non-Muslims is an act that offends the sensitivity of non-Muslims"?

According to Ng, "The present Muslim act is to make it a taboo to use the word 'Allah' as a magic symbol since it attempts to nullify a concrete historical tradition and render it non-existent by a decree/mantra."

Let's pray for illumination of minds and transformation of hearts so that this "Muslim act" does not become a reality. Then, let's share and express this concern with the public. The call for prophetic voice has been issued and one that the Church must heed for its continued purpose and survival!

Use it or *Lose it*

Recently, this article appeared in the online news portal The Malaysian Insider, “Malaysia’s next export: Maids?”* which cited comments by Lim Tze Cheng, Head of Research at Corston-Smith Asset Management. Lim gave Malaysia a 70 percent chance that it will be exporting maids in 20 years’ time if we as a nation did not get our act together.

He said the issues plaguing Malaysian included its “problematic” education system and distressingly low ability to retain talent. This was confirmed by Malaysian Employers Federation Executive Director Haji Shamsuddin Bardan who said that Malaysia was currently a net exporter of talent with outflows exceeding inflows.

Statistics reveals that 785,000 Malaysians are working abroad, two out of three of which are

professionals.

Though the Government is trying its best to check this outflow, in reality, globalisation has opened greener pastures for our youths. They no longer find it a constraint to work anywhere as long as the conditions of the playing field are fair and just.

Talking about talents, we have “The Parable of the Talents” recorded in Matthew 25. The parable teaches that God’s servants must be faithful by promptly and efficiently administering what has been entrusted to them until

the day of reckoning.

We can mismanage our God-given talents and face serious repercussions.

It is obvious from the parable that we have two options – invest the talents so that we will see results and bless others, or deposit the talents safely in a hidden place, because we fear to account to

the master.

The Lord has bestowed many talents upon her Church. The Church will need to give an account on how she has used the talents. If the Malaysian Church is to rise and make an impact on the community and the nation, it must be willing to share its resources and work together with a Kingdom mindset.

However, if we choose to deposit our talents in a hidden place, we can expect our Master to dismiss us as wicked and lazy servants and chide us for indolence and faithlessness.

Just as the above advice from the consultant is for the nation to get its act together before it falls behind its neighbours, we too as a Church are called to be faithful.

The Kingdom has been entrusted to us. It is our responsibility to use its spiritual benefits faithfully until the Kingdom comes in fullness when Jesus Christ returns as King.

**<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/index.php/malaysia/44439-malaysias-next-export-maids>*



Tamil Pastors Gathering

The recent NECF Malaysia Northern Region Tamil Pastors gathering late last October has greatly impacted the participants comprising pastors, full-time workers and leaders of Tamil congregations.

NECF Chairman Rev. Eu.Hong Seng in his keynote address challenged the pastors to think deeply about nation building, while Rev.Gabriel Jabanathan’s teaching on “Responsible Vision Building” strengthened pastors to stand strong in their God-given vision and to strive harder to fulfill God’s Great Commission.

Rev. Azariah Rajendran’s emphasis on administrative leadership helped

participants to sharpen their skills in church administration and finally evangelist David Ramesh’s inspiring message called on the participants to be effective shepherds. Additionally, the gathering encouraged and motivated the participants to serve more effectively in their ministry.

The response of the participants was overwhelming. One pastor from Teluk Intan said it was truly a meaningful

gathering and he wished to work with the NECF Tamil Commission to organise a similar gathering for the Tamil congregations in his town.





Critical need for Coordinating Body

There is a critical need for more Christian teachers within our education sector due to the realities and challenges we Christians faced in society today.

This urgency was raised at a recent meeting organised by NECF Malaysia which was attended by 18 educators, including six principals from prominent mission schools in the Klang Valley and several administrators, school counsellors and retired teachers. Also in attendance were representatives from Teachers' Christian Fellowship and Malayan Christian Schools' Council.

This same message of urgency was later presented to the executive committee of the Teachers' Christian Fellowship (TCF) at a separate meeting. At both meetings, the message is loud and clear – the Church needs to raise 'teachers of tomorrow' not just for the Christian community but for betterment of society and the nation.

To raise more Christian teachers, the meeting agreed that firstly, churches and parents must be encouraged to influence their youths to consider taking up the teaching profession.

Secondly, to assist Christians in their application and training to be teachers and eventually be assigned postings as teachers, there is a need to set up a coordinating body.

This is necessary as thus far, no one body or entity is looking into this urgent and critical matter. There may be many Christian youths who desire to become school teachers but have little inkling how to go about it.

Where do they start? How do they go about the application process? What can they do to enhance their chances of getting their application approved?

This coordinating body, comprising people within the system who are well-versed with the process, will promote teaching as a profession, clarify, follow up and walk the applicants through the process.

In order for the coordinating body to function effectively, it needs passionate people to drive its operation and function. Hence, NECF is now calling on educators to consider being part of the coordinating body to raise Christian teachers for tomorrow.

The coordinating body also needs people to conduct roadshows to churches and pastors' fellowships to share the urgent need for more Christian teachers, render advice and consultation of the various options and processes in

teachers' applications and nurture and encourage future teacher aspirants/candidates.

Those who feel a sense of calling to this invaluable ministry, please contact Kun Han via email at mk964@streamyx.com

Meanwhile, concerned Christians can do their part by praying, but specifically through prayer cells. What are prayer cells? They are Christians belonging to a particular sphere and institution of society coming together to initiate, meet and pray intentionally and regularly for the purpose of witnessing to the kingdom of God and to transform the sector of influence they are in.

In the case of education, teachers, administrators, principals, counsellors can come together and pray for God to raise more Christian teachers and for existing Christian teachers to make an impact in the schools they are in and to society. NECF therefore strongly encourages all to engage in this specific step in strategic intercession for education for the future of our nation.

If you desire to start prayer cells and do not know how it can be done or if you need further clarification or information on the concept and formation of prayer cells for the purpose of influencing the education sector or schools that you are in, please contact NECF via email at prayer.ll@necf.org.my or visit <http://www.necf.org.my>

Besides the coordinating body and prayer cells, NECF also hopes to kick off several networks – such as the "Guru Besar" (principals)/Administrators Network and School Counsellors' Network – for the sharing of information, vision and prayer alerts.

Meanwhile, NECF Malaysia values readers' prayers as it seeks to (1) cast this vision and critical concern to Christians all over the country, and (2) be a catalyst and to mobilise concerned parents and educators – teachers, retired teachers, principals, administrators, school counsellors etc. – to be part of this coordinating body to raise the teachers of tomorrow.

The effort to influence the education sector by increasing the pool of Christian teachers is part of NECF's nation-building agenda to impact and influence every sphere of society.

START THE WAVE WITH A RIPPLE

By Eugene Yapp

This year – 2010 – is a momentous year as it marks the close of the first decade of the 21st century. Mankind has moved well into the 21st century depicted by technological advances in a global world that cuts across traditional boundaries and cross borders.

In Malaysia, the progress of modernity and development has not been able to seal a more cohesive society in terms of national aspirations. In fact, the converse is happening – we seem to be more polarised and segmented than ever.

In many people's mind, the Malaysian society isn't going to be any different from previous years as its matrix and social evolution have proven otherwise. So, can Christians speak of a transformation vision? If yes, what form and shape will it take?

Oliver O' Donovan (Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at Oxford University) postulates that for a free liberal society to flourish, there must exist four aspects in her national life and social ethos.

In the context of Malaysia's multi-cultural, -linguistic and -religious society, the Church should take cognizance of these four aspects and strive towards actualising them in order for societal life and interest to benefit.

That the Church has had its shortcomings in this area is something we must note with all humility.

The cause, as Bishop Hwa Yung of the Malaysian Methodist Church observed, may be due to our 'identity crisis' in terms of who we are and our role in public life and mutual society.

What are the four aspects in which the Church must now take hold of and create a ripple effect for mutual edification?

1) Freedom

This aspect is not to be conceived as individual, subjective liberty premised on moral individualism. It is liberty from control and service to society by challenging the social realities of the day. It is freedom in "what we are and corresponds to what has been given us to be and to do".

If necessary, it entails being defiant to the "idols" of our times – the old lords of government, institution and structures that arrogate power unto themselves and see itself as absolute. This new paradigm, grounded in recognition of a supreme transcendence authority, renders all other authority and structure as relative and provisional.

Such an aspect is consistent with the proclamation of the cross. The cross has unmasked all spiritual powers and authorities to be and has disarmed them putting them to open shame, by triumphing over them. In Christ, they have been stripped of any false pretensions to Lordship (Col.2:15).

This then is the meaning and significance concerning the announcement that the "Kingdom of God" has come. Such a proclamation must certainly lead to the fact that "existing centres of community no longer have a prescriptive right now that they are confronted with this new and more authoritative one".

The Church has therefore been invested with the call to exercise her prophetic right of witness, speaking against the tyranny of the powers that be and the maladies plaguing and bringing society into disrepute and decay.

2) Mercy

The cross is where mercy and judgment meet. At the centre is the act of

judgment and an act of reconciliation as well.

In judgment and reconciliation, redemption of society and culture is secured (2 Cor.5:18-19). In redemption and reconciliation, acts of mercy issue forth which serve as an assurance that God's free gift of forgiveness is available to all who chose to embrace it.

Hence, mercy as exercised by the Church cannot and should not only be confined to acts of compassion for the needy and downtrodden, but by demonstrating truth and making distinction between right and wrong to purge out the 'old leaven' by confronting offenders and inviting them to penitence with the aim of securing forgiveness and restoration.

3) Natural Rights

This claim is by ordinary men and women for a class of special rights which has come to be called human rights. Implicitly, it is a call for equality, affinity and belonging into families, homes and community. This claim is not grounded upon some abstract principle either in humanity or history.

The proper grounding for recognition of such right is based on the biblical understanding of human personhood. That all persons irrespective of race and religion are created in the image of God is borne out from the creation account (Gen 1-2).

It is God's action that confers human dignity and worth to all humanity. In redemption and reconciliation, this image – the worth and dignity which have been marred by sin – is restored.

"The God who expresses solidarity with us by taking on human flesh relativises all differences of ethnicity,

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education, class, gender or citizenship. There is in a sense in which humankind is one family”, writes Vinoth Ramachandra. And this is the good news the Church must demonstrate to those who are downcast, laid aside and marginalised.

In speaking of equality, humankind does not exist in isolation as bare individuals, in atomistic disassociation from one another and from communities.

Human dignity presupposes that we live in homes, community and on a wider platform, a community of communities we call the nation-state. As we live in and within communities, it is the Creator’s will for us to engage publicly with those of other communities (Matt.5:13-14).

Herein, lies respect for and acceptance of one another, being sensitive to each other’s likes and dislikes, perspectives and points of views, and agreements and disagreements with a view to building understanding and overlapping consensus.

4) Openness to Free Speech

The Church as the community of God’s people enjoys free speech in our address to God and to each other. Its premise is on the basis that as human beings created in the image of God, we are all creatures of communication and discourse.

“The Church’s openness of mutual address and the assuming of mutual responsibility itself constitute an address to society, summoning society to admit the free passage of the Word of God and to response to it in its turn in speech”.

The Church should therefore inspire modern society to espouse and put into practice the idea of free speech intrinsic in our modern notion of democracy. The value of our modern democracy lays not so much in the election of representative or even the idea of rule by the people but

in the opportunity and the platform for public deliberation to explain and subject whatever issues of contestable nature to critical interrogation and scrutiny. We are however mindful that the Malaysian Parliamentary system has failed in this respect and is in need of critical restoration.

History has revealed that these four aspects or elements are difficult to attain. But try we must lest the Church becomes a dormant voice in terms of her prophetic witness. What can and should be done?

NECF Malaysia on our part seeks to be a catalyst and to inculcate such a vision and God willing, mobilise churches to reclaim and rediscover our participation in civic public life.

Phase II of our nation-building agenda calls for Christian involvement whether as individuals or collectively in every sphere of society and within the institutional structures to experience personal transformation for societal transformation.

In practical terms, the following initiatives may be explored:

- **Restoring Moral Citizenry.** In many ways the social ills and dilemmas we are facing is reflective of a crisis of morality. Citizens of this nation, whether Christians or non-Christians, must live and demonstrate exemplary lives as moral citizens. In this respect, there is an urgent task of raising Christian teachers of tomorrow who can be role models and exemplary citizens.
- **Creating a culture of truth and integrity.** The freedom of expression must not be an end to itself. Its value lies in the service of facilitating truth. That the mainstream media has not been able to convey all that is truth is obvious. It is therefore imperative to have other forms of media that seek to promote truth and abiding universal values and norms. For such an enterprise to birth forth,

huge amount of investments, both in terms of resources and finance, is necessary.

- **Instilling a ‘Christian Political Vision’.** The need for a broad-based vision premised on biblical principles and understanding is necessary as an alternative to partisan party-based politics, both for the benefit of our Christian politicians and the Church at large. This platform or forum requires Christians to come together for the purpose of formulating such conceptions and hopefully for dissemination and education.
- **Pressing for Community Transformation.** Social work and actions must not only be confined to meeting the essential needs of the needy but breaking the cycle of impoverishment through awareness and education. In this respect, we call for those who are willing and able to contribute to social projects such as micro-financing and establishing community and vocational schools.
- **Seeking Constitutional Reforms.** To ensure that legal and juridical instruments are tools of justice and not oppression, there is a need to identify and seek reforms against unjust laws. This includes monitoring amendments to be in line with the prevailing conditions and circumstances consonant with principles of equity and morality.

May God bless Malaysia and the Church as we embark on this transformation journey in the year ahead!

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Iran The Christian population of the Islamic Republic of Iran is estimated at less than 1%.

Most Christians are from the historic churches of the region, but there are also churches comprising converts from Islam. Religious freedom in Iran is very limited, and Christians from Muslim background face particular persecution.

One convert was officially executed in 1990 and others have been mysteriously murdered, apparently by government agencies, as have Christians who are active in ministry or outreach. There remains the possibility of further executions for apostasy.

Two young Christian women from Muslim backgrounds, Marzieh and Maryam, were imprisoned last March but were released last November.

It is common for government spies to be present at Sunday services and for the phones of church leaders to be tapped. The pressure is such that many have fled Iran to live in other countries.

Pray for Iran's Christians, that they may be protected from harm and that the Gospel may be heard and received by all. Pray for church leaders and Christian workers, converts who are the main focus of government monitoring, harassment and persecution.

Pray that they will remain steadfast, never shaken by threats to their lives and that God will meet all their needs.

Pray that a provisionally approved Islamic Penal Code Bill, prescribing the death penalty for those who leave Islam to follow Christ will not be passed into law. At present, Iranian judges have to refer to sharia in order to apply the death sentence for apostasy, but having such a law within the Iranian statute books would make converts even more vulnerable.

Afghanistan While the military conflict with Taliban insurgents continues to make headline news, the persecution of Christians does not.

Afghanistan today is virtually 100% Muslim but in pre-Islamic times, there was a substantial Christian presence. Now the tiny Christian population consists mainly of foreigners.

It is said there are around 1,000 Afghan Christian converts though only God knows the actual number. There is just one church building, and that is within the grounds of a European embassy.

The converts are vulnerable, especially since the case of Abdul Rahman who was denounced by his family as an apostate in 2006. He was charged with apostasy, threatened with a death sentence, but finally released after international pressure.

Sadly, it is feared that this reaction has increased the likelihood that subsequent accusations of apostasy will be dealt with through unofficial executions before going to court.

In the last 30 years, Afghanistan has endured invasion by the Soviet Union followed by a *jihad* to oust them; five years of oppressive Taliban rule which has caused many women to commit suicide; and the 2001 American-led invasion to oust the Taliban and introduce democracy, a mission which is now looking at the possibility of failure.

Yet the flight of refugees created by these years of conflict has produced one unexpected effect – some have become Christians outside the country and a few of these are returning home!

Praise God for the returning Christians. Pray that with their new-found sense of mission and calling, they will not be disillusioned when troubles assail them as they share the Gospel.

Pray they will press on in their service for God to their own kin. Pray for the protection of Afghan Christians in the chaos and war that continues to afflict their homeland. Their small number makes them extremely vulnerable.

Pray they will have opportunities to meet together for fellowship and encouragement.

Zimbabwe Once the 'bread basket' of Africa because of its large food output, Zimbabwe is now in the grip of long-term poverty and starvation caused by massive inflation and the destruction of the country's agricultural sector.

Zimbabwe has one of the lowest life expectancies in the world and Christian leaders and congregations have been among the many victims of President Mugabe's brutal oppression.

Barnabas Fund is supporting Christians in Zimbabwe in a number of ways: providing food parcels to alleviate the starvation among the Christians; supplying seeds and training local people how to farm their land in a more productive way; and providing equipment, uniforms for staff and funding for maintenance at a care home for elderly people.

The feeding project provides parcels of rice and other necessities to thousands of Zimbabwean Christians every month. The agricultural training project assists people who used to receive food parcels to move on to becoming self-sufficient.

Pray for protection for the courageous South African Christians who are driving food in to Zimbabwe to distribute it to the poorest. Pray for Christians being trained under the Barnabas Fund's agricultural training project to effectively share their skills with the other farmers.