

berita **NECF**



Making BREAD Together

2011 was challenging with many issues confronting Christians in both East and West Malaysia. There was never a dull moment and each month saw the church dragged into the social and political arena.

Despite this, we continue to persevere in faith that God has a destiny for Malaysia, taking comfort in Psalm 20:7 "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."

For 2012, there are positive as well as negative outlooks. Some say the financial collapse in Europe will hit us around the second half of the year. Others have implied that Malaysia's 13th General Election will have surprising results. There are other more sinister predictions including that the world will end this year.

How does NECF as a national organisation chart our direction for 2012?

We need to go back to basics. For NECF, it is to be the handmaiden to the local churches and to provide an evangelical voice. Our nation building agenda will be an on-going mission but we want to re-emphasise that we need to partner with the local church.

That was exactly what the apostle Paul did. He went to Philippi as part of a team when he was refused entry into Asia. He considered the believers he met in Philippi as partners who were able to provide him with resources and understanding of the local context. That was why in Philippians 1: 4-5 Paul penned these words "In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now..."

Partnership is the ability to accomplish more together than separately. It recognises that a team is stronger than an individual. Mother Teresa said, "You can do what I cannot do. I can do what you cannot do. Together, we can do great things." John Wooden, perhaps the greatest basketball coach of all time, reminded his team, "The man who puts the ball through the hoop has ten hands."

Call it whatever term you want - teamwork, association, synergy - partnership is the remarkable ability of two or more people working together to accomplish more than what each could have done alone. When we work together in harmony, our combined talents and gifts minimise our respective weaknesses and shortcomings. Together, we become a stronger unit.

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The model NECF strives for is one of “servant-partnership”. We see ourselves as a partner to churches even as we carry out the role of handmaiden by providing resources, guidance and fellowship to empower churches both spiritually and in facing national issues of the day. And we rely on churches to be our partners, for it would not be possible for NECF to conduct these servant roles without the resources provided by the churches.

How can we strengthen our partnership? We don't desire to exist or function alone at the top, or in a vacuum. To be an effective partner, we continually need to hear and understand the needs of the local church. We need to hear what God is doing within your community, so that we can share resources and testify that God is at work in our nation.

“...so that we can share resources and testify that God is at work in our nation.”

What do we desire from our partnership? To work with you for the Gospel and be involved in good works. To share God's heart for this beloved nation so that you can join us corporately and pray in alignment with His will. To see both East and West Malaysia as one Church, the Bride of Christ. She is a reminder of our covenant relationship with God and that our physical existence on earth is meant to bring Him glory. We are not yet perfect but we are a work in progress.

Let us stay united, drawing strength and wisdom as we journey and co-labour for God's glory. Have a Blessed 2012.

NECF Malaysia welcomes new members:

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1. The New Covenant Church, Petaling Jaya (Pastor Peter Sze)
2. Cheras Xi An Shan Church, Cheras (Pastor Kong Ming Kiong)
3. Calvary Discipleship Centre, Johor Baru (Rev. Chan Hin Kee)
4. Great Joy Baptist Centre, Sungai Petani (Elder Tan Chin Seng)
5. Shekinah Grace Church, Bangsar Baru (Rev. Christopher Raaja Wilson)
6. Shekinah Community Centre, Pengkalan, Ipoh (Pastor Goh Ah Fah)
7. Evangel Assembly Tambun, Ipoh (Pastor Selvam Joseph)
8. The Awesome Generation, Klang (Pastor Albert Ong)
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By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

A Godly Witness In Ungodly Times

THESSE days, most Malaysians on the street can easily wax indignant on what ails our nation. The slide of our country's rating on the Corruption Perception Index (CPI); the irrational belief that the rights of the majority group continue to be under threat even after years of protective policies; the sporadic reminders of May 13 by political warlords; the long outstanding court decision on the right to use the word "Allah"; illicit capital outflows and accusations of proselytisation - these are just but a few of the issues percolating in the nation's cauldron of problems.

Naturally, temperatures are rising as tempers fly like 'angry birds'.

No thanks to the seemingly state-sponsored forms of harassment and tacit endorsements through the government's deafening silence, many are averse to being seen or associated with any pro-government agencies and personalities. Furthermore, rumors of general elections around the corner have caused many, including the Church, to take sides and dig their heels in on where they should stand.

When globalisation first hit our shores, NECF published a booklet *Engagement or Isolation?* No doubt, today many would similarly agree that we must engage. Unfortunately, not all agree on how to engage. There are predominantly two camps. One is found on the streets protesting, while the other believes they should be in the palaces like the proverbial spider².

The Christian activist and the statesman unfortunately do not always see eye to eye on how to engage the State. We all assume we know what to do. A boxer boxes, a prophet prophesies, a righteous man does right things. But to be salt and light to the unbelieving and anti-Christian in an ungodly environment is no easy task.

The activists disdain almost all forms of public association with the government of the day, not wanting society to misunderstand that all is well when attacks on the Church go unabated. The spider gang, whilst agreeing with the sentiments of the activists, nevertheless supports engagement with the government, publicly or otherwise.

We need to remind ourselves of biblical models of engagement. Foremost is perhaps Daniel who served under wicked despots and was no stranger to the burning furnace and lions' den. When he came to know of God's impending judgment on King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel cried "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!" (Dan 4:19b)

King Neb was no angel for sure. Having mass murdered God's people in his early invasions, he was about to be dealt with sovereignly. Hence, Daniel's response would seem so inexplicable. Today, such kindness and grace toward a wicked regime would have been condemned by both God's people and the masses as naïve and as sheer betrayal.

Then there was the great patriarch Joseph in the court of the idol-worshipping Pharaoh. If the Malaysian Church had been there, the Church would have chided Joseph for sharing the secrets of economic success. They would have argued that such "gems" should be kept within the Christian community for the benefit of the kingdom. Why help a wicked, ungodly regime prosper?

Having seen the acts of God, I suspect the Church today still does not fully appreciate the ways of God³.

Perhaps one of the worst scenarios that can happen to any people group is depicted in the book of Judges - seen in the days of Gideon. There was no 'connect' between leaders of the Midianites⁴ and the leaders of the people of God. Fighting and fear-mongering were the order of the day. The ruling populace believed it was their right to 'swoop' onto the minority and take whatever they fancied. And the people of God, together with other non-Midianites, found themselves hiding in dens and caves, living fearful and faithless lives. This is what has happened in many nations where corruption thrives and where there is no meaningful engagement. State hooliganism sets in. Modern day restrictive *dens and caves* can take the form of discriminatory licensing, selective awards of major contracts and the like. Clearly, disengagement, deliberate or otherwise, does come with a price.

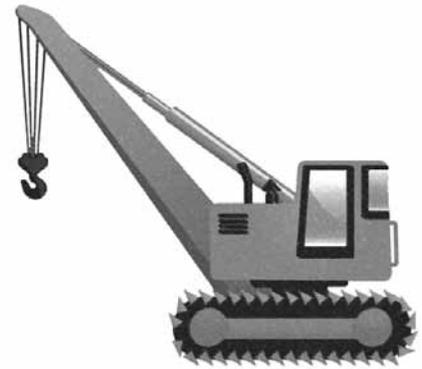
The New Testament also lays out rules of engagement, albeit on a personal level. The apostle Paul in his address to the Corinthian church reminds them about associating with immoral non-believers but *not* the immoral believer (1 Cor 5 : 9-11). In another discourse to the Church at Galatia, he rebuked both Peter and Barnabas who did not want to *publicly* associate with Gentiles⁵.

Engagement is not an automatic endorsement or compromise. Whether the Church is so immature that she cannot discern this, is an important question the activist needs to answer. Disengagement is too simplistic and is not always the best way to be salt and light. More often than not, we end up misunderstanding each other too quickly.

Continued on page 5...

Where Are We In Nation Building?

By Eugene Yapp, Executive Secretary, Research Commission



RECENTLY, my colleague, Pastor Andy Chi, asked me this probing question, “Where do you think our nation building agenda is, given our efforts in this direction the past few years?”

As I heard the question, I couldn’t help but wonder about the unspoken perception behind the question that perhaps, Christian contribution to nation-building and national transformation has not reached full potential. Our motto which has been “Transforming the Nation through the Local Church” compels us to reevaluate how we can more fully mobilise the church to reach its maximum potential.

NECF commenced the nation building agenda with the view that we ought to centre on infrastructural development, such as purchasing land to build a vocational school, or having our own online media portal. But God has His own timing and purposes. Through circumstances, He has led us to focus more on public issues that potentially define the character and destiny of our nation. The events of the last two years have been most unexpected and challenging, to say the least. The Christian church experienced arson attacks over the “Allah” issue, bore the brunt of allegations about a Christian state conspiracy, and one church has been subjected to an illegal raid. At the same time, Christians have also been blamed for apostasy cases among the majority religion.

All this demonstrates that Malaysia is at the crossroads of a defining or *kairos* moment. If so, the stakes are high and Malaysian Christians need to work at and engage these issues to determine the country’s path.

The chart below illustrates the areas NECF has been engaging with in terms of our nation building agenda.



Presently, our focus has been in the two broad areas of social-public engagement and empowering churches. Encapsulated within these broad spheres are the twin initiatives of the quest for greater religious freedom and empowering churches to engage public life issues of concern to both society and nation. What are some of these initiatives in practical terms?

In terms of the quest for greater religious freedom, NECF will continue efforts at education and awareness. These include organising seminars on political engagement and constitutional rights. We especially wish to work with churches from Sabah and Sarawak to spread greater awareness about their historical heritage and civil rights.

In empowering churches to engage public life, NECF will continue teaching and encouraging churches to rethink the witness of the church as one involving more than just a proclamation of the Gospel to include living as a missional community. A missional community is one that brings kingdom values such as truth, justice and righteousness to bear upon critical areas such as corruption, systemic racism, ethnocentrism, abuse of power, religious marginalisation and poverty eradication. In this respect, NECF seeks to partner with churches to develop initiatives that will enhance their public role in these matters so that Christians may contribute towards enhancing a truly democratic way of life for Malaysia.

As our tag line goes, we are seeking to transform the nation through the local church by imbuing the nation with economic sufficiency, social peace, public justice and national righteousness. The key to this sort of transformation is not via NECF per se but through the local church. Hence, for the nation to experience actualized transformation, the church of Christ in Malaysia needs to arise to meet the challenges and to build a nation that is premised on the kingdom of God (Micah 6:8).

Personally, I believe we need to engage on all fronts.

To be sure, the ills of our nation are real. Even if all the views and allegations (of the wrongs) are correct⁶, we still should ensure our responses are not "activist-oriented" but God-inspired. Both camps are *right* and each has a unique role - one on the ground carrying the placards protesting and the other in palaces, speaking prophetically with utmost respect but without compromising.

The Malaysian Church is best depicted as two groups of drivers at a traffic light junction. Both want to go to the same destination. Both want to move forward. But when the light turns green, one chooses to move straight ahead, the other to the right, each believing he has chosen the better path.

I believe both *modus operandi* need to be respected – the activist group and the spider group who are placed by God on the street or in Putrajaya respectively.

The issue is not about who is better or right. The focus must be to ensure that the Church never compromises her *apolitical* stand. In the midst of battle cries for justice and righteousness, sometimes it is not enough to be Christian.

It is being Christ-like that makes all the difference.

¹ Published by NECF in 2001.

² Prov 30: 28 *The spider skillfully grasps with its hands, And it is in kings' palaces.* NKJV

³ Psalm 103:7 *He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.* (NKJV)

⁴ *Interestingly, Midianites were also descendants of Abraham*

⁵ Galatians 2:11-13 *Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.* (NKJV)

⁶ *Common perception assumes they are correct, because of lack of credible response.*

Christmas High-Tea

IT was NECF's turn to host the annual Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) Christmas Hi-Tea for 2011. Around 250 attended the event which was held at the Full Gospel Tabernacle Church in Subang Jaya on 24 Dec 2011. Guest of honour, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon (first photo, second from left), urged Christians to continue engaging other communities as a way to curb religious and racial extremism. With Koh were NECF Chairman Rev Eu Hong Seng (left), Seputeh MP Teresa Kok, Bro. Augustine Julian from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia and CFM Chairman Bishop Ng Moon Hing. Opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and wife Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail also attended the event (second photo). A sumptuous spread of Christmas food was served and guest enjoyed carols sung by children and youths.



TAMIL church pastors were kept abreast of current issues facing the Malaysian church at special Christmas gatherings organised by the NECF Tamil Commission in late November and early December last year.

Issues Facing Tamil Churches

They also discussed the concerns of Indian congregations. Pastors raised the need to focus on the Indian grassroots and those living in estates and plantations, many of whom are marginalised, poor and isolated from mainstream development.

A continuing concern is the growing disconnect between English-speaking youths and the grassroots caused by language and communication problems. More and more youths no longer read Tamil and are not aware of the issues facing the community that are reported in the Tamil press. Tamil churches ought to address this gap if the church is to continue ministering to grassroots communities.

NECF executive secretary of the Research Commission Eugene Yapp briefed the pastors on national trends and patterns with regards to religion, nationalism and competition for resources. The gatherings were held in the Klang Valley, Taiping and Mentakab to reach pastors from the surrounding regions. Some 150 pastors and leaders attended in total.

Developing Local Christian Counsellors

FOLLOWING the launch of the National Association of Christian Counsellors Malaysia (NACC) and the inaugural annual National Counselling Conference in October last year, more training is available for professional and lay counsellors to equip them for Christian counselling. Training seminars are held on the last Saturday morning of every odd month. Details are available at <http://nacc-malaysia.org>.

The annual conference for 2012 is scheduled for 14-15 Sept 2012. On 13 Sept, there will be a pre-Conference seminar on "Lay Counselling in Churches" to be conducted by Rev Dr Tan Siang Yang, Professor of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary.

NACC was launched by NECF Malaysia chairman Rev Eu Hong Seng last year, who said that NECF was "110 per cent in support of NACC" because its formation was both timely and needful since Malaysia lacks trained Christian counsellors. To date, some 300 people have become NACC members.

NACC President, Edmund Ng, said one of the association's main objectives was to voice the interests of those practising Christian counselling in this country. Ng said NACC also aims to articulate Christian counselling on an authentic biblical basis in a culturally sensitive context. "We want to set the standards in our country for knowledge, skills and ethics in Christian counselling, as well as provide resources and networking."

NACC also aims to promote care and counselling as missions, whereby Christian counsellors are also seen as ambassadors for Christ.



The NACC was registered as a national association on 9 May 2011 under the Societies Act 1966. It is governed by a seven-member Executive Committee with an eight-member Council of Reference as oversight.

For 2012, NACC will focus on fine-tuning its vision, mission and core values, its articulation of Christian counselling, a code of ethics for Christian counselling, establish an office, build up a resource centre for members, issue quarterly newsletters, publish an annual NACC national magazine, and establish a Find-a-Counsellor listing on its website.

Father's Heart Children's Prayer Conference: Raising Child Intercessors

CHILDREN'S Houses of Prayer (C-HOP) will soon be a reality following the second Father's Heart Children's Prayer Conference in Malaysia held last year.

A group of young intercessors has already been started in Sibu, with plans for similar C-HOPs in Penang, Johor and Selangor.

These initiatives came about after over 200 children of primary school age to age 13 attended the conference at the GA611 Bread of Life Prayer Tabernacle in Petaling Jaya, in November 2011. They came from different churches across Malaysia and in Singapore.

The C-HOP ministry was started by Rev Anton Cruz of the Royal Kids Ministry in India with the goal of raising child intercessors. The Malaysia conference was held to teach children ministry leaders and pastors about grooming children in prayer.

"The children were taught about praying for other children - Orang Asli and other people groups – as well as for the nation," said prayer conference assistant coordinator Chong Lei Wah.

Chong said the children learnt about five prayer focus areas: salvation of family members; prayer for other children; for the pastor of their church or welfare home leader, since many of the participants were children from orphanages; for the nations; and, for the current needs of people around them.

"Our vision is to see houses of prayer by 2,000 children praying for the nation across Malaysia," said Chong. She said this included plans to eventually organise round-the-clock or 24/7 prayer chain sessions.

Conference DVDs are available at RM30 each if collected from the NECF office. Postage will cost an additional RM5. Place orders by calling NECF at 03-7727 8227.



Rev Anton Cruz speaking.

Photos courtesy of the National Children's Prayer Conference



40-Day Fast & Prayer on Jubilee

A key event in the NECF calendar is the 40-Day Fast and Prayer in August and September which culminates in the Malaysia Day Prayer Rally. This year, in line with NECF's emphasis on 2012 as Malaysia's Jubilee, the theme for the 40-Day Fast and Prayer is "Hope of Jubilee: Restoration, Liberation, Rest".

Why this theme? In the Bible, Jubilee is the year for national restoration, liberty and rest. It is God's desire for every nation and individual to experience Jubilee. The article *'The Year of Jubilee in the New Testament'* on page 10 is a helpful read to give us the context of Jubilee in this day and age.

On the national level, Malaysia enters her 50th year as a nation on 16 Sept 2012, the anniversary of the date when the Malay Federation and the sovereign states of Sabah and Sarawak (and Singapore, until 1965) came together as one nation.

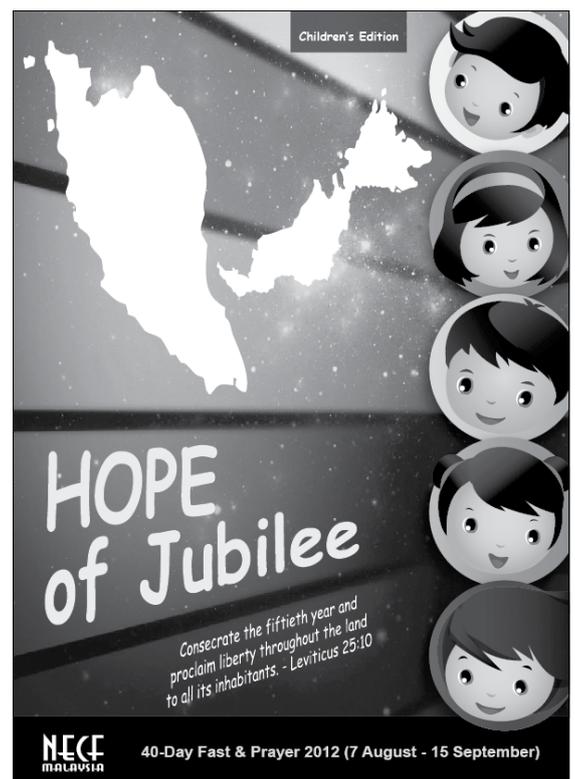
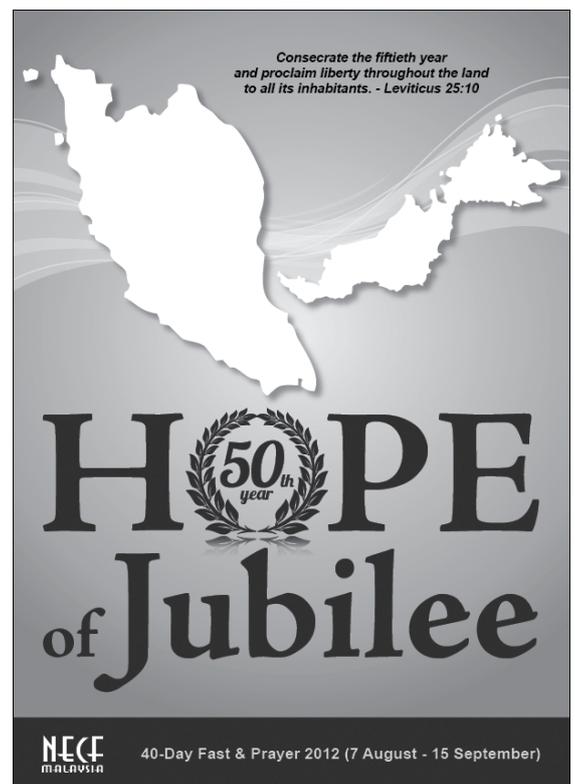
Christian leaders in Sabah, Sarawak and West Malaysia have grasped the spiritual significance of Malaysia Day in 2012 and see a correspondence between Jubilee and the Malaysian Church's desire for national transformation.

The 40 Days of Fast and Prayer will continue the Church's cry for transformation and nation-building with the Jubilee framework in mind.

It is also a platform to educate Christians about the importance of building up the Bahasa Malaysia-speaking native congregations of Sabah and Sarawak which, combined, form more than 60% of the country's Christian population. (See article *The Significance of Sabah and Sarawak for Malaysian Christians.*)

Through Jubilee, may the churches of East and West Malaysia be united in purpose, and through prayer, may the Church of Malaysia realign herself and the nation with God!

The 40-Day Fast and Prayer will be held from 7 Aug to 15 Sept 2012. Prayer rallies in different languages will be held on 15 and 16 Sept in conjunction with Malaysia Day. Prayer booklets can be ordered from NECF from April.



The Significance Of Sabah And Sarawak For Malaysian Christians

THROUGH much prayer, some pastors and Christian leaders in Sabah and Sarawak have come to believe that there is spiritual significance in the history of these two states. This has prompted a cry for national transformation in their homelands and a call for greater partnership with west Malaysian churches.

Following the Alkitab and "Allah" episodes in 2010 and 2011, Christian leaders in East Malaysia revisited the Sabah 20-point and Sarawak 18-point agreements which both states issued as conditions to Malaya as part of their pact to form Malaysia together. This led to greater understanding and appreciation of God's hand in nationhood development. For instance, what might be God's kingdom perspective on the legacy of the British Brooke family which ruled Sarawak for 105 years? Understanding the Christian influence on the land at that time as a heritage is part of understanding God's plan for Malaysia.

History shows that Sabah and Sarawak formed Malaysia as autonomous entities. Sabah, then known as North Borneo, was a British crown colony after World War II till it attained self-governance on 31 August 1963. Sarawak obtained its independence from Britain on 22 July the same year. When the two states formed Malaysia with Malaya and Singapore, they came to the table as independent entities.

The agreements guarantee Sabah and Sarawak's inherent rights to self-determination and governance. They cover a wide scope of issues to ensure that Sabah and Sarawak have full authority to protect and determine their interests with regards to religion, language, education, immigration, economy and finance, governance and more.

Some Christian leaders see these rights as blessings and responsibilities given by God to Malaysia for His glory. But are these rights still intact? Recent years have seen a growing awareness about corruption which has caused unequal development and wealth inequity among the native tribes, and the extreme poverty that many continue to live in.

With regards to religion, neither Sabah nor Sarawak have a state religion under the agreements. This supposedly ensures their religious freedom. However, more careful research will reveal the erosion of rights under the agreements in religion and several other areas. If we are discerning, we should be able to grasp the implications of the current scenarios:

- The majority of Malaysia's Christian population come from these two states. What kind of impact will poverty and marginalisation have on the rural native churches there?
- The freedom of religion in Sabah and Sarawak, as provided under the 18- and 20-point agreements which Malaya's leaders signed, is essential to the survival and growth of the native church in these states. Are Christians there aware of their right to freedom of religion?
- The strength and future of the Malaysian Church as a whole rests on the shoulders of the native church in Sabah and Sarawak. How will Peninsula Malaysia Christians respond?

It is for these reasons that Jubilee 2012 is important. Community and national revival must first begin with unity of the body of Christ between East and West Malaysia.

The Year of Jubilee

In The New Testament

When the government decided that Malaysia Day would become an annual national holiday, the Pastors' Fellowship Kota Kinabalu sensed a response to their prayers for the nation and started an initiative to mark 16 Sept 2012 as the start Malaysia's Year of Jubilee. Why have they done so and what does it mean for each of us? **SIB Sabah President Rev Jerry Dusing** explains in this article.

In Luke 4:14-19, Jesus read from the book of Isaiah about one sent to "proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Luke then captures the suspense of the listeners in v 20: Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.

What would Jesus say next? His next words were surprising: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (v 21).

What a bold statement! Jesus is saying that what Isaiah had written in chapter 61 about himself, had now been fulfilled. In this powerful statement, Jesus had declared the Year of Jubilee.

What is Jubilee?

For us today, Jubilee may not mean much. But for the Jews, Jubilee Year was foundational in the formation of the Hebrew faith.

In Leviticus 25:10, we read the instructions: "And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family."

Behind this concept is God as owner of the land and his people as stewards. In the 50th year, they could neither sow nor reap what grew of its own accord nor gather the grapes of their untended vines (v 11-12); they had to set free their slaves, cancel debts and return land that was purchased in the preceding 49 years. This was part of God's laws for the newly-formed state of Israel. God's laws were to permeate all spheres of life – spiritual, cultural and economic. God is sovereign over His people and the land, and the people of God should live in harmony with the character of God.

When Jesus spoke about Jubilee, what did he mean? We need to look at his words in the context of his three-year ministry on earth.

When Jesus spoke about the poor, he was referring to people from all social strata who had failed to know God's love and mercy, and who were instead prideful in their own abilities and accomplishments. The prisoner referred to those who went about their own business in an apparent

"And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family."

Leviticus 25:10

state of freedom but were unknowingly bound by greed and lust for worldly things. The blind not only included those with the physical ailments but those who did not live by faith – who had eyes but did not "see". The oppressed were victims of evil spirits and false religions that exploited them and led them astray.

Jesus had a holistic view of a person's humanity – body, soul and spirit. He met physical needs through healing and feeding the people. He fulfilled spiritual needs through his offer of repentance and forgiveness. Jubilee, as proclaimed through his teachings, was the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Prepare for Jubilee today

Some pastors in Sabah have recognised that Malaysia, which was formed in 1963 through the joining of Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak and Singapore (until 1965), will enter its 50th year as a country on 16 Sept 2012. We see this as



an opportunity to declare a Year of Jubilee upon Malaysia and to seek a revival for this land. In the build-up to that, it is important to prepare ourselves. What can we do to usher in the year of the Lord's favour? What are our responsibilities as Christians? What does Jubilee have to do with each of us on a personal level?

Essentially, there are three elements of Jubilee:

Release

Liberty was proclaimed to all inhabitants of the land. Slaves were freed. Today, liberation implies that we as Christians in Malaysia need to be the bearer of the Good News of Release to all. The world does not know it is enslaved, but we preach the news of release in Jesus Christ. Real freedom is being released from the bondage of sin to freedom in Christ.

Return

Under Jubilee, land was restored to the original owners. In our context, what are we required to return to the Lord? We can return our lives to our Creator and God, for we are HIS possessions. He is our original owner! This includes our careers, families and all that we have. Our lives are not our own. We are only stewards of the blessings God has given us in our task to care for his Kingdom.

Renewal

In Jubilee, the land was left idle for a year in order to rest and be renewed. The people only ate what grew wildly.

What are the biblical analogies for today? Our faith is like the land or ground on which seed is scattered. In Jubilee, we can allow our faith to "grow wild" for a year by releasing ourselves from the comforts of life that we obtain through our own strengths and efforts. We can instead place our full reliance on God. This releases us from the pursuit of material wealth to seek the Kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33-34). By doing this, we also find rest. Jesus said, "Come to me and I will give you rest". Are you taking time to rest in the arms of Jesus to let him renew your spirit?

Despite the language of rest and renewal, Jubilee is not passive but is about moving forward in faith. It is more than just accepting Christ as King and Saviour but about making him King in every area of life. It is about taking radical steps to give our all to him in full dependence and trust.

Indeed, living out the year of Jubilee is full of risks! It is about moving forward by taking risks in our lives in order to know the great grace of God.

(This article was edited and adapted with permission from Rev Dusing from the full version in Bahasa Malaysia that was published in Bangkit, Malaysia! Sambutlah Kedatangan Tahun Jubili by the Pastors' Fellowship Kota Kinabalu. The full English version can be found at www.jubileemalaysia.com)

Ibans Rise For The Nation

THE 14th Gempuru Besai Iban, an annual gathering of Iban Christians in November 2011, saw renewed focus on national transformation as a missional purpose of the Church.

In the past, the focus had been on developing church and personal spirituality. But events of the past year had shown many Sarawak Christians, including those from tribal communities, about the need to protect the indigenous people of East Malaysia as provided under the agreements that Sarawak and Sabah signed when they joined Malaya as sovereign states to become Malaysia. The rights of the indigenous people include full freedom of religion and autonomy over native lands.

NECF secretary-general Sam Ang and executive secretary (Research Commission) Eugene Yapp addressed the gathering on current trends and concerns in national developments. They recapped the theme of the 13th Gempuru Besai in 2010 which was "Christians and Politics" and encouraged the Ibans to move to the next level of taking their faith into the public sphere for nation-building.

About 4,000 Ibans attended the gathering, held in Miri, of which 1,000 were youths who re-dedicated their lives to God.



Ang (left) beating a traditional gong to mark the opening of the gathering.



Iban Christians in prayer and worship at the gathering.

Machap Umboo Chapel



THE Machap Umboo Orang Asli Chapel in Malacca will know on 23 Feb 2012 if it can proceed with a judicial hearing to quash a demolition order by the Alor Gajah Municipal Council (MPAG). The chapel committee has been fending off demolition threats by the MPAG since August 2011 over their chapel which was completed in March. In Sept 2011, MPAG issued a formal demolition notice. The Orang Asli say their chapel is on aboriginal reserve land and its construction had never been objected to by the MPAG. On 25 Nov 2011, the Malacca High Court granted a stay of the demolition notice pending the application for a judicial review. This chapel is under an NECF-registered church in Malacca. Pray for the Lord's divine favour and justice for the Orang Asli. Pray for the protection of Orang Asli believers in Machap Umboo.

Coming Events...

8th Tamil Pastors and Leaders Conference

Date: 13-14 March 2012

Theme: "Be Prepared and Prepare" (Ezekiel 38:7)

Venue: Full Gospel Tabernacle, Subang Jaya, Selangor

NECF Biennial General Meeting and 30th anniversary

Date: 12 May 2012

Venue: PJ Gospel Hall, Jalan Gasing, Petaling Jaya

The 30th anniversary commemorative book An Evangelical Footprint: Leaving A Spiritual Legacy for Future Generations will be launched. A free talk on Beyond Finishing Well by Dr David Wong of the Haggai Institute will be held at 11am.

10 Days of prayer before the Global Day of Prayer

Date: 17 - 26 May 2012

Global Day of Prayer

Date: 27 May 2012

Venue: At different churches for different language groups - to be announced.

Theme: More People, More Places in prayer

Eagles Leadership Conference Malaysia

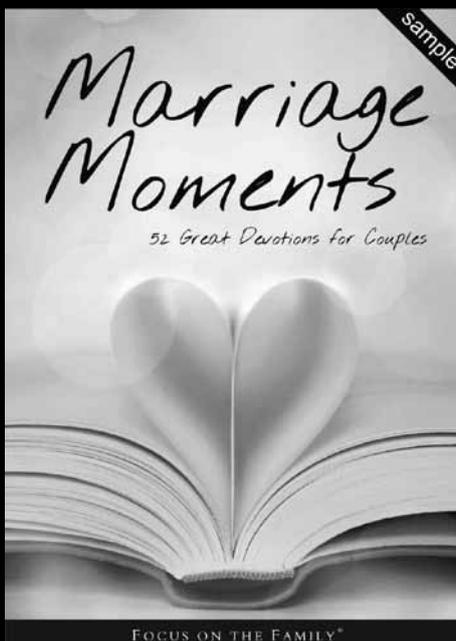
Date: 21 - 23 June 2012

Venue: First Assembly of God, Kuala Lumpur

Full-time Single Women Ministers' Retreat

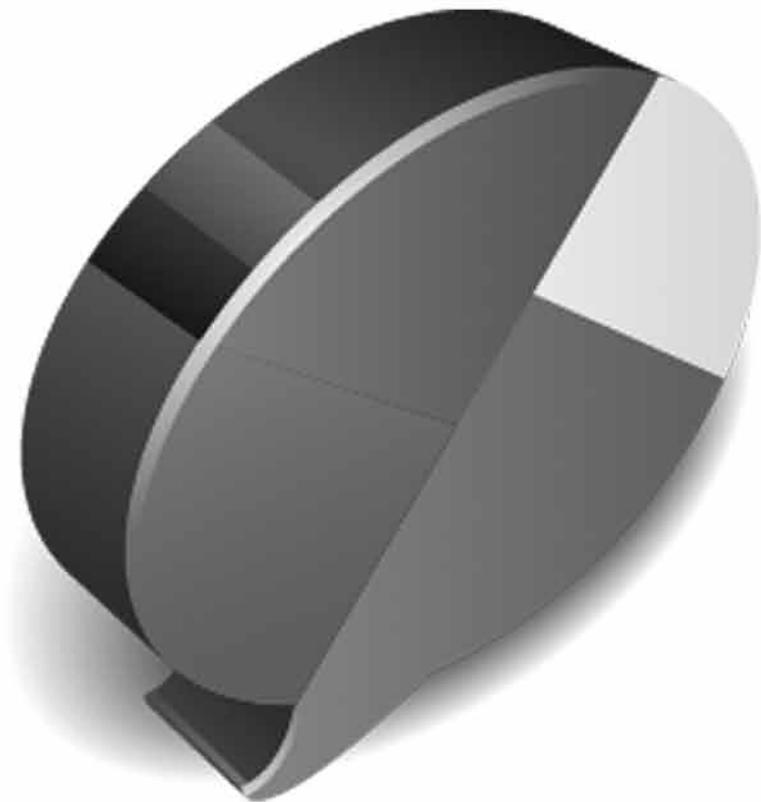
Date: 19 - 20 July 2012

Venue: Port Dickson



Couple Devotions Book

Marriage Moments: 52 Great Devotions for Couples is an undated 52-week devotional specially produced by Focus on the Family Malaysia with support from NECF. It was done in conjunction with International Marriage Week 2012 on 12 February, a global campaign by the World Evangelical Alliance to celebrate and promote marriage. At RM10 per copy, it is a great buy for personal use or as a gift. Place your orders with Focus on the Family (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd by calling 03-7954 7920 or emailing focus@family.org.my. You will be advised on shipping costs if applicable.



Churches and Social Media

By Eugene Khoo

THERE are two types of people in this digital age: Digital immigrants and digital natives. Digital immigrants are those like myself, who grew up without most of the technology that digital natives, like children today, are accustomed to. They have a myriad of gadgets at their disposal and many use more than one.

I like to call digital natives the i-Generation. They are all about connecting and networking through media channels, expressing feelings and personal opinions with a candidness many from the older generation are not used to. The latest of these media channels is social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Google+ (that's Google Plus, for the uninitiated).

It is no surprise then, that Facebook, the popular social networking site, is the third largest "country" in the world by population count. Malaysia is one of the leading countries in terms of social networking with almost 13 million Facebook users. According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), this 13 million represents almost half our internet users and over 46% of the population. The average Facebook user spends over 16 hours per month, has 130 friends and is connected to over 80 groups or events. They also create or share almost a hundred pieces of content monthly. And Facebook is only one network. What about blogs, Twitter, YouTube, Google+ and more?

Where's the church?

The new media frontier is where the church needs to make its presence felt. How does the church today compete for attention with everything else available through these devices and media? Many pastors are unsure of the new media and where to even start. I personally feel that churches ought to at least experiment with the new media. It is a new frontier and the Great Commission did call us to go to the ends of the earth. False teachings, false religions and misinformation are moving in quickly online and gaining followers. The global nature of this new frontier makes it even more important for churches everywhere to plant their stakes.

Today, it is entirely possible to connect with a complete stranger with a sermon via audio or video streaming and then “connect” with them on social networks like Facebook to follow up with a conversation. As social channels were created for connecting and befriending, ultimately, these channels can be used to share the Gospel.

Engagement

Today, it is no longer enough to just have a church website, assuming your church already has one. The key word from social media experts is “engagement”. Online engagement via the new media is one way the Word is spread. The possibilities in bringing your church into the digital age are endless, from web-cast sermons to connecting church members and seekers online. But how long will all this take and who will do it? Should we be looking at developing new media pastors and full-time workers?

Understandably, investing time and resources to engage through social media is a big challenge with pastors and church resources already spread thin. There are no easy answers nor a one-size-fits-all solution. However, even if you ask large corporations, you'll find that most of them are also experimenting with new media. It's uncharted territory where users define the rules and strategies.

Here are some simple options that can be starting steps for any church. Not all will apply and churches will need to decide what is most appropriate for them:

1. **Podcast or stream your sermons.** This is a simple way to have your message online and it's easily shared with friends.
2. **Blog.** A blog can keep congregation members up to date with various happenings in church. Regular updates also raise your church's website rankings on search engines like Google. This makes your church website easy to find in online searches.
3. **Facebook.** The 13 million Malaysians on Facebook mean that one in three Malaysians you are trying to reach will be using this platform. Consider these reach

statistics. A local Petaling Jaya church initiated their Facebook page and gathered just 120 fans (people who 'liked' the page). With this number of fans, they could already potentially reach 42,000 people (friends of fans). If Lady Gaga can go viral and spread on Facebook, why can't we make the Gospel go viral, too?



4. **Twitter.** Used by about half a million Malaysians, Twitter is good for issuing alerts on new postings to your blog, website, new sermons and more.
5. **YouTube.** This video-sharing site is great for spreading video messages, special services or even trailers to invite people to that special Easter play your church worked so hard to produce.

The human touch

For all the exciting possibilities of new media, it is important to retain the human touch and to remember that there is a real person with feelings and a free will behind an avatar or an online pseudonym. In the social media context, it means that Christians should be mindful of the language or “Christian-speak” that we so easily slip into within church circles. People want to be treated and spoken to as people; we can't keep on referring to non-Christians as “lost” anymore than we ourselves would like to be called “infidels” by another religion. And connecting over social media should not be a substitute for personal fellowship that is so much a part of being a community of believers.

The role of social media in the church's context is to “connect” people who know and love Jesus to those who don't. The uniqueness of social media is making this personal connection with individuals in full view of a public, mass market audience.

For churches to navigate the online frontier, I find wisdom in Matthew 6:33 which calls us to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness. For churches, social media platforms are just tools to be used ultimately for God's kingdom, and not as an end in itself.

Eugene Khoo is a hyperactive-creative who can't really sit still. He has over 15 years in all things technology, web and customer experience management (now extending to Social Media). His passion is visual story telling in a visually rich world created by our God. He believes churches should do more to engage the online world where some people now spend more time in than in the real world. He is the owner of Xenitude Sdn Bhd and co-owner of EKML Visuals. His free time is mostly spent with his lovely wife and little son.



Looking Out Looking Up

ERITREA There have been more incidents of persecution involving the Protestant evangelical minority. Back in 2002, the Eritrean government had closed down all independent religious groups not operating under the Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran or Sunni Muslim faiths. These are the only religious groups recognised by the government and those practicing other religions face imprisonment. Human rights groups have reported violations of the right to freedom of religion by the state through indefinite detention without charges.



PRAY - for Eritrean Christians to be faithful in their witness and for God to work in transforming the nation despite the difficulties. – OD

INDONESIA Acts of intolerance increased in 2011. The Indonesia Protestant Church Union counted 54 acts of religious freedom violations against Christians last year, compared to 30 acts in 2010. These include church closures and harassment during Christmas services. These acts are allegedly instigated by certain groups who whip up anti-Christian sentiments where none existed before. At the same time, intolerance grew against other minority religions including Muslim sects, from 198 cases in 2010 to 276 in 2011. Interfaith organisations in Indonesia have criticized the government for inaction.



PRAY - for law enforcement authorities to act justly and without bias. For the government to be God-fearing and to uphold the rule of law and Indonesia's Pancasila which emphasises justice and humanity. – CD

LAOS Seven Christian leaders were arrested in Dec 2011 for holding a Christmas service in Boukham village. The village chief had asked the authorities to raid the house where the service was being held. The Christians were accused of having offended the village's traditional spirit religion. They have been asked to admit guilt but have resisted. They remain in prison and need prayer to remain strong in their faith.



PRAY – for their release and for a time of experiencing close communion with God even while in prison. For believers who face opposition from village members and the authorities. – HRW

NIGERIA Christians in the northeastern part of the country have been caught in the crossfire between the Boko Haram militant sect which seeks to overthrow the central government in favour of a syariah state. Since the Christmas Day 2011 bombings at two churches which killed around 40 people, Christians in the largely Muslim north of the country have come under more attacks. After the bombings, Nigeria's Christian president declared a state of emergency which the militants took as an opportunity to give an ultimatum to all Christians to leave the north. More attacks have followed after the New Year's Day ultimatum and the Christian community there is reportedly split between taking up arms in self-defence, while others believe they must steadfastly turn the other cheek even in the face of death.



PRAY - for political will, courage and the right strategies for the central government to reign in the militants. For divine intervention against further attacks. For Christians as they struggle with the dilemma of taking up arms, and for God's perfect peace to fill their hearts and cast out all fears. – VOM, BBC

IRAN Imprisoned since 2009 for apostasy and sentenced to death, Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani's appeal against his sentence in Sept 2011 remains in limbo. The judge presiding over his appeal has delayed his

verdict which religious watch groups say is an excuse to make the international community "forget" about Nadarkhani. They also believe that he is being deliberately kept in prison pending the verdict to force him to recant Christianity. Christian watch groups say the world must not forget Nadarkhani and must continue to pile international pressure on Iran by writing to its embassies and lobbying their respective governments.



PRAY – for Nadarkhani's conviction to be overturned. Pray that he will remain steadfast and joyful under the circumstances in prison. Pray that God will protect and provide for his family. – VOM

VIETNAM A gang of men attacked a group of pastors and leaders from Agape Baptist Church who were meeting at a house at Lai Tao village near Hanoi in November 2011. One pastor was left unconscious and several more were injured, including women and teenagers. The gang also ransacked the home, smashing chairs, overturning a pulpit and removing a cross before throwing it into a nearby pond. They also stole the pastors' valuables and smashed some of their motorcycles. While Vietnam's policies towards religion have become more tolerant over the years, gangs are reportedly employed to incite anti-Christian sentiments and to carry out attacks. Perpetrators are rarely identified much less prosecuted.



PRAY – for Vietnam, that as it grows and prospers economically, it will also grow in democratic maturity, justice and fairness for all citizens. Pray that Christian leaders, their families and congregations will not be discouraged but continue to labour for the sake of the Gospel. - CD