

berita **NECF**

EDITORIAL

What JOB understood

RIGHT after the 13th general election, a Christian brother told me he had never fasted and prayed so much in his life before. “Now that the results are out,” he said, “I don’t feel like talking to God anymore!”

We may laugh or sympathise with such a remark, but this outburst probably reflects the inner state of the hearts and minds of most Christians, particularly in urban areas. These feelings may stem from both disappointment and grave concern at the same time, over the affairs and future of our nation.

In this season, many perceive our nation to be in a state of uncertainty. The UMNO General Assembly and internal party elections are due by the end of the year and politically, the ruling coalition needs to consolidate its position in the light of their most narrow margin of victory. The government needs to convince the rakyat that it is a government for all people. Only time will tell whether it is successful.

Post-election, the government is already facing challenges to its authority and credibility. There are legal challenges in the election court for alleged fraud and electoral manipulation. In Parliament, a one-sided bill, the Administration of the Religion of Islam (Federal Territories) Bill 2013, drew public outcry when it was introduced. It has since been withdrawn, but the issue of converting a child to Islam by one parent is far from over, since other States have similar laws.

The nation is in a transitory state. But in the midst of this transition, one is reminded of Job’s declaration in the midst of his suffering, and when God spoke to him out of the whirlwind:

*“I know that you can do all things
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2).*

Job reminds the church in no uncertain terms of the sovereignty of God. God can do all things, including establishing the government of the day and bringing it down tomorrow.

But the emphatic point in Job’s declaration is that behind God’s sovereignty, there are the mysterious purposes of God. Purposes known only to God and though hidden from mortals, will definitely be fulfilled. Such is the awesome and great God that we worship. And as we behold this majestic God, we are to be assured and confident to go forth in the mandate that Christ has given the church – that Christians are to be His witnesses in times such as these.

The church therefore needs to be encouraged and strengthened. This will require stronger churches helping the weaker ones, including the rural and Bumiputera churches, in areas of discipleship that leads to robust social witness.

Continued on next page...

What’s Inside?

- 3 *Chairman: A Tale of Two Queens*
- 5 *Withdrawing Conversion Bill Is Not Enough*
- 6 *NECF Under Scrutiny*
- 7 *Malaysia Global Day Of Prayer 2013*
- 8 *Misreading REVIVAL*
- 10 *Healing A Divided Nation*
- 11 *A Barnabas Role For The Chinese Church In Malaysia*
- 12 *Don’t Just Vote, Jom Pantau!*
- 14 *Tamil Commission Forges Ahead*
- 15 *Take A Stand Against Corruption*



Main feature: ‘Misreading REVIVAL’ on page 8 & 9.

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...continued from front cover: *What Job Understood.*

The church also needs leaders who are dynamic and effective. Leaders need to put in place a holistic leadership development and nurturing programme for younger, emerging leaders by identifying a talent pool and providing opportunities for learning, exposure and development.

Constant and consistent engagement within the public sphere on public life issues is also of utmost importance during this season. Maintaining and preserving the freedom of religion not only for Christians but for other religious minorities is essential and critical in order for evangelism, church growth and church planting to flourish.

And finally, the church needs to mobilise her members for nation-building by addressing issues that are bringing ill and contempt to Malaysian society. Corruption, national polarisation and political hegemony – these require the church to pursue an agenda for national reconciliation, truth, justice and righteousness. And she must do so with boldness, courage and with all wisdom. For this to materialise, churches should not only pray but release their resources, their talented and gifted men and women to contribute positively and to be seen impacting these issues.

Let us do all this bearing in mind what Job has declared, that God has a purpose for the church and this nation, and that no purpose of His may ever be thwarted!

*God has a purpose
for the church and
this nation, and
that no purpose of
His may ever be
thwarted!*

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By Rev. Eu Hong Seng



A Tale of TWO QUEENS

AFTER enduring oppressive rule by the Babylonians brought about by their own sins, idolatry and refusal to listen to the prophets, the Israelites' persecution continued under their new Medo-Persian masters. It was during this period that Esther emerged on the scene to bear influence upon the regime of the day to save God's recalcitrant people from destruction.

The book of Esther depicts literal events from which we can draw parallels on the relationship between the King of Kings and His bride, the Church.

In the first two chapters, we read of the tale of two queens – Queen Vashti and Queen Esther. These characters appropriately serve as a precursor to the two brides mentioned in Revelation - the Harlot Church and the True Bride.

It began with the feast hosted by King Ahasuerus (Xerxes). The King's objective throughout the feast was to show off "the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty" (Esther 1:4). His realm was indeed vast: 127 provinces stretching from Ethiopia to India, covering the greatest portion of civilization. The feast lasted 180 days! One grand week of festivities at the palace was held at the close of the feast, for both the rich and poor, all at the king's expense. The grand finale of the whole event was to be the presentation of what he treasured most - his queen. Queen Vashti was to come before the king wearing the royal crown and the finest royal garments that the king had provided for her to show his people and the princes her beauty. But she refused (1:12).

Vashti was the king's wife, but she refused to wear his crown before him. She refused to wear his royal apparel before him. She refused to show her beauty to the people and the princes. Her insolence causes the feast to unexpectedly end in chaos. The king was more than dismayed – he was angry.¹

Similarly, the modern day Church has been ignoring God's call to His bride to come before Him "without spot or wrinkle." Like Queen Vashti, she has no deep honour for the King and her refusal to come reveals an ignorance of the consequence of "contempt and wrath" in the kingdom.²

Vashti had status, but was imprudent about her relationship with authority. She had beauty, but did not

possess the attractiveness of submission. She had counselors, but was not able to receive wise counsel. She had royalty, but had no sense of destiny. She had everything, but carelessly forgot that her king was sovereign. What an indictment that was on the queen's attitude.

Consider young Esther when she was brought into the king's household. In the palace, she was given whatever she needed to please the king and to potentially become queen. She was given things for purification, received new belongings, provided with seven maidens to assist her and stayed in the best place in the house (2:9).

Her preparation to become queen took a year (2:12). If it takes a year to become a queen for an earthly kingdom, should we be surprised of the extended seasons of maturity tests, and the many spiritual battles that the Church has to undergo, in order to be prepared to become the Bride of the King of kings in the everlasting kingdom?

After the preparation, came the evaluation by the king (2:15-17). When Esther went in, we are told that "the king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti" (2:17).



Esther's secret - her hidden life of faith. She could transcend the material trappings – the food, drink and costume. Surrounded as she was by the luxuries of palace life, she maintained her Jewish faith. As queen, she had access to the riches of an entire kingdom and could have easily chosen to give up her identity for the sake of riches. Instead, she kept God's law in secret and, ultimately, risked her life in order to save her people.



Esther's character – her hidden beauty. Scriptures tell us that Esther was unaffected by her own physical beauty and that she was extremely modest. The word "beautiful" is used four times in the book of Esther and the word "beauty" is used three times. Once in the palace as a candidate to marry the King, Esther had one year's access to the latest and most elaborate beauty treatments. While other female contestants indulged, Esther accepted

...continued from page 3: *A Tale of Two Queens.*

only the minimum prescribed treatments. She did not aspire to either the title or the comfort that would soon be thrust upon her. Instead, Esther wanted only to understand why God had placed her in such a difficult position, and what service He wanted of her. As such, Esther used her modesty to maintain her simplicity, successfully avoiding the distractions of vanity.



Esther's destiny - a hidden vehicle for redemption. While in captivity as a Persian queen, Esther prayed for the redemption of the Jews and spoke boldly to the King on behalf of the people.³

Esther risked her life to maintain her faith in God.⁴ She ultimately triumphed, in great part, because she knew when to speak out and when to remain silent.

Esther was no pretty ding-a-ling who got her way by crass manipulation. She was a woman who made an impact on the nation like no other, because the king loved her more than any other (2:17). That was to be her biggest edge. She did mighty things, not because she was queen, but because the king loved her.

So, is the Church in our nation more like Queen Vashti or Queen Esther? Today, God is calling His Church to be His obedient bride who will bring glory to the Lord. But all too often, the Church clearly lacks comeliness, no thanks in part to her tactless outbursts in the name of social injustice and her continued stubborn insubordination, like Vashti's.

The Bride of Christ needs to repent.

The New Testament is full of exhortations to the saints on what we are to put on – the garments at the wedding

feast⁵, the armour of light⁶, the new man⁷, tender mercies, kindness, humility, love⁸ – to be ready for the crowns that will be bestowed.

The King wants His Bride to be sanctified, washed and cleansed, and finally crowned. If she refuses to show her beauty to all; if she refuses to wear the royal crown and clothes provided; if she refuses to show that she is changed, beautified, and prepared to live as the Bride of Christ in a glorious kingdom, what would happen then? Vashti disobeyed the king to her detriment. The modern-day church could face a similar fate.

Is it not time for the Church to “ubah”? We need to come back to a place of obeying and honouring God, watching our conduct before all. The litmus test rests on whether our God loves us, like the way Ahasuerus loved Esther. That would be the difference between the Harlot Church and the True Bride.

One bride is presumptuous; the other is ready to enter in. The harlot is lost in her own beauty; the other has a different beauty that the King desires. One, like the foolish virgins, is cast out; the other like the wise virgins, enters in with the Groom. One cannot be commanded to come; the other desires to enter although the sceptre has yet to be extended. One, the people are happy to see rid of (they celebrated the departure of Vashti); the other, they joyfully celebrated.

Which Queen, then, shall we be?

¹ *Esther 1:12*

² *Esther 1:18*

³ *Esther 4:16*

⁴ *Esther 7: 3-5*

⁵ *Parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22*

⁶ *Romans 13:12*

⁷ *Colossians 3:10*

⁸ *Colossians 3:12-14*



Withdrawing Conversion Bill Is *Not* Enough

AFTER much outcry by civil society groups, the government retracted the Administration of the Religion of Islam (Federal Territories) Bill which allowed only one parent to decide the religion of their children under Section 107(b).

Kudos to the Cabinet for this brave move. But withdrawing the bill is not enough. It doesn't solve the problem of unilateral conversions, which are still allowed under the Administration of Islamic Laws (FT) Act 1993 that the new bill was supposed to replace.

In Section 95 of the current Act, the words 'ibu atau bapa' (mother or father), instead of 'ibubapa' (parents), are used. Similarly, in several other State Enactments on the administration of Islam, the word 'parent' in the singular is used. Besides the FT Act, 'ibu atau bapa' is also in the laws of Kedah, Perak, Melaka, Sarawak and Negeri Sembilan. But in Selangor, Terengganu, Penang, Sabah and Johor, a minor needs the consent of both parents to embrace Islam.

Laws on Islam across the states are not streamlined and there have been calls for greater uniformity. In 2007, the Attorney-General, Abdul Gani Patail called for civil and Syariah laws to be harmonized.¹ Recently, following the government's withdrawal of the bill, the Mufti of Pahang, Abdul Rahman Osman said "perhaps the Constitution should be amended if it doesn't follow syaria' or Islam".²

There are clear intentions for Malaysia's laws to be more Islamic in nature.

The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) has highlighted the stealthy manner in which Section 95 of the 1993 FT Act was changed in the final version that was gazetted as law. The version of the bill passed by Parliament in 1993 read 'ibubapa atau penjaga' (parents or guardian). But the gazetted Act read 'ibu atau bapa atau penjaga'. This minor change has far-reaching consequences.³

Given these undercurrents, it is insufficient for the government to merely withdraw the recent bill and say that it will only be re-tabled upon further study and consensus. To truly resolve the problem of unilateral conversions, the government must:

- Amend Section 95 of the existing Administration of Islamic Laws (FT) Act 1993.

- Amend the State Enactments of Kedah, Perak, Melaka, Sarawak and Negeri Sembilan so that consent by both parents is obtained before a child's conversion.
- Uphold and make as policy the Cabinet decision of April 2009 that the children of an estranged couple should remain in the religion of both parents at the time of their marriage.
- Most crucially, amend Article 12(4) of the Federal Constitution to clearly state both parents in the plural. The current wording uses 'ibu atau bapa atau penjaga' in the Bahasa Malaysia version and the singular 'parent or guardian' in the English translation.

The Christian community along with other minority religions in Malaysia would do well to stand together to oppose one-parent conversion of children. This is an issue of common ground that erodes religious liberty and dangerously promotes inequality, to the detriment of children and the anguish of non-Muslim parents.

As noted by activists and as evidenced in the custody cases that have come before the court, this law has been used as a weapon of spite by one spouse against the other in estranged marriages. This law also denies the converted minors the freedom of conscience and of religion when they eventually come of age and want to choose a religion for themselves. Legally, they can never convert out of Islam.

Controversy over unilateral conversions appears to be at rest for now, but only on the surface. For Christians, it means at least three things: Firstly, continued prayer for this nation. Then, greater vigilance by way of engagement and conversation with Members of Parliament and civil society. And thirdly, stronger discipleship of our young people to choose wisely in marriage and family matters.

¹ *Harmonisation of Civil Laws and Syariah: Effective Strategies for Implementation*, Abdul Gani Patail, Keynote Address at the 3rd International Conference on Harmonisation of Civil Laws and Syariah, 4 Dec 2007.

² *Tweak Federal Constitution to be in line with Islamic law*, mufti suggests, *The Malay Mail Online*, 7 July 2013.

³ *Media Statement: Gazetted Provision of Bahasa Malaysia Version of Section 95(b) of the Administration of Islamic Laws (FT) Bill 1993 not passed by Parliament*, 5 July 2013.

NECF Under Scrunity



ON 3 June 2013, a story was published by The Malay Mail Online portal on 3 June 2013, 'Church group under probe for "Allah" Facebook post' with regards to NECF.

We refrained from giving new comments to the media on the issue but we want to give our members and churches a clear chronology of events and to seek your prayers for wisdom and boldness as we deal with the authorities in the coming days.

- 30 April** NECF launched the prayer initiative 'Malaysia My Home' on Facebook.
- 9 May** E-flyers urging Christians to "embrace, love and bless the country with God's presence and power" were translated into Mandarin and Bahasa Malaysia, and posted on the Facebook page. The BM translation used the word "Allah".
- 14 May** A Muslim NGO, JATI, lodged a police report in Shah Alam against NECF for using the word in the Malaysia My Home' Facebook page.
- 14 May** The Muslim Lawyers Society of Malaysia (PPPMM) accused NECF of "criminal blasphemy" against Islam. Its comments were published in The Malaysian Insider.
- 15 May** NECF responds to PPPMM's accusation with comments by Secretary-General Eugene Yapp, to The Malaysian Insider.
- 27 May** The Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) issues a letter, calling Yapp and NECF

Chairman Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng for an interview at their office.

- 25 June** NECF meets JAIS. In the meeting, both parties reiterate their respective positions on the use of "Allah". No official statement is recorded.

At the time of writing, we are still waiting for further developments and are being advised by legal counsel.

In reflecting on this episode, we have asked ourselves if there are some occasions when it is "not worth it" to use the word. But then, our BM-speaking colleagues from East Malaysia will remind us that the BM churches have for so long understood and worshipped the Almighty, Creator God with this word.

As we have expressed before in many of our other articles, we believe BM-speaking Christians have the historical, linguistic and textual basis to use the word "Allah". And beyond these reasons is the larger principle of the freedom of religion that we uphold, not just for Christians but for all citizens regardless their faith.

Malaysia Global Day Of Prayer 2013

SNAPSHOTS of the 2013 Global Day of Prayer at FGA Kuala Lumpur on 19 May: In the wake of the 13th general election, the message at the GDOP was for the church to “ubah” itself first before expecting any sort of positive change in the nation. NECF Chairman, Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng, who delivered the message at the event, called on churches to get right with God in order to play an Esther role in this nation. “When an unchanged church tries to change the nation, God have mercy on us. We need to ‘ubah’ ourselves first,” he said.



NECF and church leaders in prayer.



Rev Eu speaks about Esther



Misreading REVIVAL

By Rev Loh Soon Choy

“SEND revival, O Lord!” You may have heard this cry at many a prayer meeting, both before and after the 13th general election.

Before, GE 13 was hailed by many as the harbinger of change for Malaysia. Among some Christians, the election was also inadvertently equated to bringing spiritual “revival” to the nation. This may not have been the literal meaning or intention of those who expressed it, but such are the limitations of language – words and their assigned meanings can at times trap us into understanding things in a limited way.

GE 13 was also in the 50th Year of the merger of Sarawak and Sabah with the then Federation of Malaya to form the Federation of *Malaysia*. This excited many churches to claim for Malaysia 2013 as the biblical, Old Testament Year of Jubilee when debts and slaves would be set free and ancestral lands returned to the original owners’ families (Leviticus 25.1-55).

Although not legally applicable today – since Jesus has announced Himself as the spiritual fulfilment of that OT Jubilee in Luke 4: 18-19 – the same *moral* principles of ultimate social justice and God’s concern for the poor (forgiveness of debts, redistribution of land, sharing of wealth) in the Jubilee still apply. This spiritual application was made clear by many church leaders when using the Jubilee Year as a powerful symbol to mobilise and direct prayer and intercession for the nation in light of GE-13.

But *after* the GE, instead of submitting to God’s sovereignty when the elections results were out – granted the various disputes about their fairness – there were reports of deep disappointment among churches and Christians that the political opposition had failed to form the majority government.

A fellow-Christian even lamented that the Jubilee Year for Malaysia would literally end on 12 September 2013 without his prayers for a Pakatan Rakyat victory being answered! These incidents are anecdotal, and hopefully, they are isolated.

In the months post-GE 13, we have heard of a number of believers calling for a spiritual revival for the churches. Perhaps, this is to deal with the disappointment over the

results. Seeking revival has become the new priority to replace the earlier fervent prayers for a national Jubilee transformation.

Now, desiring revival for the Church is right and good. But it is superficial to seek revival on the grounds of our supposedly “failed” Jubilee prayers, or as an alternative to the on-going work needed for national transformation!

There are various notions of revival but true spiritual revivals in the Old Testament and in history were always so profound and powerful that they unflinchingly also *transformed* communities and nations.

The New Testament and the Early Church (till the 3rd Century AD) did not speak of revivals because New Testament Christianity (largely practised also by the Early Church) was *already* “Revival Christianity” and Spirituality. The New Testament Church was *living out* a spiritual revival.

Hence, the apostles and believers were charged for “turning the world upside down” (Acts 17: 6, NRSV). By the 4th Century, they had even managed to transform and “Christianise” the mighty Roman Empire despite 300 years of sporadic but fierce persecutions.

We do well to consider a challenge from James Burns, a student of revivals, if indeed we would pay the price for a true Revival:

“To the church, a revival means humiliation, a bitter knowledge of unworthiness and an open humiliating confession of sin on the part of her ministers and people. It is not the easy and glorious thing many think it to be, who imagine it filled the pews and reinstated the church in power and authority. It comes to scorch before it heals; it comes to condemn ministers and people for their unfaithful witness, for their selfish living, for their neglect of the cross, and to call them to daily renunciation, to an evangelical





poverty and to a deep and daily consecration. That is why a revival has ever been unpopular with large numbers within the church. Because it says nothing to them of power such as they have learned to love, or of ease, or of success; it accuses them of sin; it tells them they are dead; it calls them to awake, to renounce the world and to follow Christ.” (Burns, *Revival, Their Laws and Leaders*, 1909, *out of print*).

Thankfully, many who have experienced true revivals also believe God can still grant the Church true Revival in His sovereign grace and mercy as the Church seeks it

ferently, even if imperfectly. And that may not just be for the sake of the Church alone but for the sake of the communities and the nation He also loves and wants to transform!

A look at Christian revivals throughout history starting with the Early Church in Acts should make us reconsider our understanding of revival and transformation: Are we *living out* revival or merely waiting for it? Are we, so to speak, “turning the world upside down” as did the apostles in Acts? In other words, post-elections or not, may we as a positive community of Hope, courageously work for a new politics for Malaysia, one that is founded on moral values as an integral part of our total responsibility to a holistic Gospel.

Healing A Divided Nation

By Chris Chong

“National reconciliation” was the buzzword for a short time after the latest general election. But it lost meaning quickly under a cloud of racial rhetoric by figures in authority and certain media. As Christians, we are called to the ministry of reconciliation, not just for the spiritual salvation of people, but in building the common good for all citizens. Chris Chong writes about the road less travelled in reconciliation – that of inter-faith dialogue.



EARLY this year, Malaysians were outraged by a video which showed a speaker shouting down a university student at a forum with the now infamous phrase “Listen, listen, listen”.

This video demonstrated an ugly truth about ourselves: We are indeed a nation divided. We are divided along racial and religious lines which have led us, particularly in the past few years, to start shouting “listen, listen” without attempting to truly listen to those who are different from us.

Listen, if I may be permitted to use the word, we are divided because we have built walls that insulate us from those who are different from us. We built those walls so that we can remain comfortable as to who we are. Those walls insulate us from listening to what others have to say about us and also about themselves. To listen to others is an uncomfortable exercise. It’s uncomfortable because it forces us to re-examine the picture we have of ourselves. It forces us to face the fact that we are part of the problem as to why the nation is divided.

Let me now shift the “we” as a nation to “we” as a community of faith, i.e. Christians.

In this time when walls are being built, we are called to the ministry of reconciliation. Although the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) and NECF have been involved in this ministry at the national level, more can be done particularly at the community level. The local church needs to be involved in this ministry in their communities.

It could be argued that the local churches are involved in this ministry through outreach which focuses not only on meeting spiritual needs but also physical needs. And through its outreach ministry, the church becomes an agent of reconciliation between God and man. For most Christians, the practice of reconciliation is often limited to salvation.

However, there is another dimension to reconciliation. Reconciliation is also about engaging with people of other faiths. We live in a country that is multi-religious, and are

familiar with the challenges that this poses. Yet, somehow we don't engage fellow citizens enough on a religious and cultural level to seek common ground. Is it because we build walls around ourselves due to our fears and ignorance of those who are different from us? Perhaps we need to rethink our theology with regards to reconciliation as not just being merely about salvation but also one that seeks to advance the **common good**.

Indeed, seeking the common good is biblical. For example, in Genesis, we observe that all people, made in the image of God, are endowed with dignity. Preserving this dignity entails a pursuit of the common good. This includes things like the freedom of worship, the right to life, to be treated equally under the law, to justice and other democratic values which enable all persons to live with dignity and flourish to their full potential.

Do we care enough about the common good or are we at risk of insulating ourselves behind our walls? Now, more than ever, we need to create spaces for people from different faiths to come together to share a conversation on common challenges. We each, whatever our religion, struggle with being faithful to one's faith and with being a citizen of Malaysia. Through such conversations, we can learn much from one another and start the process of tearing down the walls that separate us.

Such conversations are crucial as they lead not only to mutual understanding but also to finding the common good which binds us together as a nation. No doubt such conversations are difficult to begin because it requires an openness and humility to learn from those who are so different from us. It also requires willingness to take the first step to initiate such conversations at a time when walls surround us.

*And the second is like it:
'Love your neighbor as yourself.'
(Matthew 22:39)*

As Christians, the task of listening is made more challenging because it forces us to examine ourselves in the light of Christ's commandment to "love our neighbour" (Matthew 22:39). For how can we love our neighbour if we are ignorant as to how they define themselves in terms of their religious and/or racial identity? How is love possible if we do not understand their fears and hopes?

Yet, we are called to this ministry of reconciliation because we are reconciled with God and with each other (2 Corinthians 5: 17-19). And as Malaysians, we live at a juncture of our nation's history where reconciliation is urgently needed. This then is the challenge which confronts us today.

Note: Chris Chong is a member of Friends in Conversation, a Christian interfaith group. He teaches at a private university.

A Barnabas Role For The Chinese Church In Malaysia

CHINESE and indigenous congregations from East Malaysia and the Peninsula held a joint prayer conference at the end of May in a powerful testimony of reconciliation and unity.

About 2,000 participants from more than 80 urban and rural churches from almost every state, including Orang Asli and Orang Asal Christians, attended the Chinese Jubilee Celebration Camp at Bukit Gambang Resort, Kuantan. Pastors and leaders from Canada, Taiwan and China were also there. Worship and services were conducted in Mandarin, English and Bahasa Malaysia.

The camp's theme of Jubilee and reconciliation came about because of the NECF Chinese Commission's vision for the Chinese-speaking church in Malaysia to be like Barnabas, encouraging and building up other churches.

"This is the first time we are seeing such a complete Malaysian Chinese Church," said Elder Thomas Lim, the chairman of the camp organising committee who is also a member of the NECF Chinese Commission.

The commission believes that reconciliation among the ethnic groups, between pastors and marketplace leaders and between East and West Malaysia, were part of God's desire for Malaysia, Lim added.

Throughout the two nights and three days of the camp, participants also took turns to hold round-the-clock prayer sessions.



Enjoying the presence of God at a worship session.

Don't Just Vote, Jom Pantau!

By Rick Benjamin Lye and Vivien Chong

Rick was team leader for the Pemantau group at Bandar Tun Razak, Cheras, in the 13th general election. With his wife, Vivien, they share their experiences as election observers and why they believe Christians must get involved in civil society. Rick and Vivien lead a home group for people exploring Christianity.



AFTER a full day of Pemantau work on polling day, we were physically exhausted, but our hearts were satisfied. Not just because we had accomplished our tasks as election observers, but because we had also seen churches mobilizing volunteers to take up this important role. To our knowledge, there were at least 300 believers from 10 churches who participated in the Pemantau programme.

Following the election, there were plenty of allegations of fraud in the results. Some friends have asked us, what was the point of being observers without any authority to catch and stop fraudulent practices?

Our answer is that we are just at the beginning of a very long journey as a citizen watch movement to improve the election process in our country.

Pemantau took a preventive approach. Its purpose was to create a public presence to deter acts of fraud as much as possible, and also to send a message to the authorities that the rakyat want clean and fair elections. We volunteered because we felt that we had a role to play as citizens. For the next election, the GE 14, citizens again must play their roles to improve democratic processes in Malaysia.

There is a biblical worldview behind all this. As Christ Followers, we believe that the Gospel of Salvation is not just limited to evangelism (Ephesians 1:13) but also includes declaring the Gospel of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is **here** and **now**. God's people have been set free to be salt and light and to fulfil their roles for the good of Malaysia. This includes improving the electoral process as part of the "good works" God has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2: 10).

We also believe God is love. He loves Malaysia and Malaysians. So do we. God is just and truthful. Therefore, we want to play our part in ensuring a clean, fair and free election. And we believe in prayer. But we also believe in

taking action and in being obedient to the wisdom that says, "Evil triumphs when good men do nothing".

Pemantau was formed in January 2013 and is a citizen-based campaign under Bersih 2.0 that focuses on election observation. We conducted monitoring of the election campaign during the campaign period and on polling day from outside the voting centres. Monitoring involves the simple task of making observations and filling up a report form. Nevertheless, it is a very important role.

"Will all these efforts work?" many have asked us this question. To which we answer that we must do whatever we can and leave the rest to God. "Doing whatever we can" means that we must follow through from our Pemantau experience and continue our engagement in the public sphere. Reforming and improving processes for the next election must begin now. For one, we can educate and invite more of our friends and relatives to be observers in GE 14.

So what's next? There are at least two broad areas we are thinking about:

Engagement: Prepare yourself to engage with your elected representative, community and people of other races and religions.

Reconciliation: This can only happen if we take the initiative to engage others. Let's discover the things we have in common with each other. We may be of different racial and religious backgrounds, but all of us love and want the best for Malaysia.

For the church, it must empower members to be active citizens. Many youths care about the future of Malaysia. As spiritual leaders, we should do our best to help them discover biblical truths to apply to our contemporary Malaysian context, so that they can interpret the current situation through a Godly lens and act accordingly.

Q&A With Pemantau Trainer And Full-Time Pastor, Alexa Ho.

NECF: What made you become a Pemantau trainer?

Alexa: At a Pemantau training I attended, the organizer announced the need for more trainers. Since my passion is talking and training people, I thought that I might as well sign up as a trainer and get churches involved.

NECF: What are the challenges as a pastor, in balancing your spiritual role as a shepherd and as an activist in society?

Alexa: It is a privilege to be in both roles. An activist promotes and advocates good causes, in this case, for free and fair elections. A pastor should do no less. So, both roles complement each other. I think social activism has enhanced my spiritual role to be a promoter of justice and righteousness.

NECF: How do you deal with accusations that pastors or Christians are becoming “too political”?

Alexa: I responded to this by posting a status on Facebook: “Many Christians still see politics as a dirty game and for this reason are disengaged from the political process.”

They reckon that the church must be apolitical at all times to be impartial. I differ with this view. I may be partisan in my personal capacity; however, this doesn't mean I cannot be impartial. When pastors or preachers preach against injustice, they sometimes inevitably talk about politics or name the corrupt people, political party, or corrupt practice, but it doesn't mean that we are mixing religion with politics.

As a pastor/preacher, part of the mandate given to me is to educate the church about our responsibilities – in working with (and voting for) a government that is just and that mirrors God's ways of doing things. Of course, no earthly kingdom can mirror that exact level of perfection.

But there are obviously better practices that need to be affirmed and corrupt ones that need to be exposed. As Christians, we have a responsibility to bring God's standards of righteousness and justice to bear upon institutions, including the government, that shape our earthly lives. Someone is going to influence society. Someone is making laws and policies to regulate how we live. Someone will dictate the culture of our times. Why not Christians be that 'someone' to wisely and boldly speak and act for the greatest good of others and fulfil our role as salt and light?

As the columnist Michael Gerson observes, ‘The alternative isn't to not do politics. The alternative is to do it better.’ So, shouldn't our faith transform politics too?

NECF: Post-GE 13, what do you believe churches ought to be doing in terms of public engagement beyond Sunday Service and internal programmes?

Alexa: The church ought to first be educated about the importance of public engagement because for far too long we have confined God's word within the church's four walls. We need to redefine our missions and nation building concepts to include the public square. Second, know the issues of our day. Get informed and promote what is right in whatever capacity we are in. Start creating safe spaces where Christians can engage one another in healthy dialogue on everyday issues that concern all people, such as freedom of expression, freedom of religion, human rights and equality, politics and governance, education, economy, media, and so forth.

Following that, we can engage other NGOs and the public to collaborate for the common good. It's a healthy trend that more Christians are participating in politics and governance, by either becoming activists, public servants or even holding public office. I believe the church needs to support them in prayer, and encourage more young people to participate in the political process.



Alexa (back, standing) with a Pemantau team. NECF Youth Commission Executive Secretary Larry Lee (second, right) and NECF Research Assistant Mable Leong (left) were also part of the team.

Tamil Commission Forges Ahead



Rev Simon (left) handing the leadership of the commission to Rev Gabriel.

IT'S been an exciting first half of the year for the NECF Tamil Commission with a new chairman and inspiring programmes to spur Tamil churches to greater heights.

Rev Gabriel Jabanathan, the Senior Pastor of Charis Word Centre, became the commission Chairman in May. He was previously the Vice-Chairman. He succeeds Rev Simon Chandran, the Senior Pastor of Emmanuel Christian Assembly, who led the commission for eight years. Under Rev Simon, the commission was revived and played a crucial leadership role among the Tamil churches.

In May, the commission held its first conference just for Tamil pastors, their wives and children. More than 250 people were ministered to at the conference in Ayer Keroh, Malacca. Rev Benedict Rajan, Senior Pastor of Calvary City Church Johor Baru, was the speaker. He spoke on the struggles of balancing ministry and family demands and encouraged the pastors and their wives to find rest and refreshment in the Lord. It was a rare opportunity for busy pastors to spend time with their spouses and go away together for rest, recreation and spiritual nourishment.



Rev Benedict and wife Pastor Betty Rajan ministering to the pastors and their wives.



In the months to come, the Tamil Commission is looking at the Pastors' Prayer Shield programme to teach and stir churches to pray for their pastors. Our shepherds need encouragement and protection as they minister to their flock.

Take A Stand Against Corruption

THE countdown to make our voices heard against corruption is on – in the week of 14-20 October 2013, Christians and churches will be holding vigils, meetings or a special event against corruption as part of the global EXPOSED campaign.

This global campaign against aims to mobilise 100 million Christians in 100 nations who will commit to promoting ethical behaviour in business, government, the Church and society.

In Malaysia, EXPOSED is coordinated by CANOPI (the Christian Advocacy Network on Poverty Issues) and was launched here in October 2012.

Your church or cell group can join forces with other churches or groups in your area to make a public stand against corruption. Tips on how to organise your own vigil in your area can be found at <http://canopi-msia.org/#take-action>.

Instead of a vigil, you can also hold a special prayer meeting, prayer walk or run. Use the action kits to make your anti-corruption event more festive, with car stickers, buntings, t-shirts, videos and more. Download the toolkits in English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin and Tamil at the CANOPI website. Publicise your event by taking and sending photos to the media, and posting them on social media channels – this is a public stand, after all!

Besides holding an event, add your name to the EXPOSED Global Call – a petition for financial transparency between business and government - to the leaders of the G20, the group of finance ministers and heads of central banks of 20 major economies. The sign up page is also at the CANOPI website. The goal is to collect one million signatures and to date, the petition has gathered nearly 8,000 signatures from 108 countries, with more than 1,000 from Malaysia.

Most of all, the commitment to fight corruption must start from within. The people of God must first be holy if they are to be agents of change and blessing. Make your personal commitment to ethical living under the “Light My Heart” action through the website.

The EXPOSED resources on CANOPI’s website are ideal for churches, cell groups and youth groups to devote a session or more of their regular meeting schedules to the topic of corruption and our response as Christians. Resources in hard copy can also be obtained by calling Joyce or Keith at Malaysian Care, at 03-90582102.



SHINING A LIGHT ON CORRUPTION

“CANOPI’s ‘EXPOSED: Shining a Light on Corruption’ is a call to every person serious about the Bible and about following Jesus to speak and act against corruption, not just for the evils it wreaks on society but because it has the greatest effect and consequences on those who are poor. The Bible always has a special place for the poor and we, whom the Bible calls on to speak up and judge fairly for the poor, must act against corruption and all forms of evil related to it.”

Eugene Yapp, Secretary-General, NECF Malaysia

SPEAK UP

Sharing our experiences in dealing with corruption is a powerful tool in the fight against corruption. Have you received a bribe or been offered one? Have you given a bribe or been asked to give one? By exchanging stories, feelings and struggles, we give one another courage and assurance that we are not alone. Write about your experience – where, the situation, who and what were involved, how you responded, how you felt then and now. You can stay anonymous. The stories will help anti-corruption advocates lobby the relevant authorities for reforms. Selected stories will be posted on the CANOPI website and Facebook page, in Malaysian Care’s newsletter and in EXPOSED email updates to inspire others. Email your stories to canopi.msia@gmail.com or post to CANOPI c/o Malaysian Care, 15 Jalan Tasik Selatan 3, Bandar Tasik Selatan, 57000 Kuala Lumpur



Looking Out Looking Up

BELARUS A young Christian man who turned his home into a shelter for the homeless is facing a two-year jail sentence after being accused of leading an unregistered religious organisation. Aleksei Shchedrov, 28, faces criminal charges after police raided his home in February and April of this year. He is being investigated under a law that punishes "organisation of or participation in activity by an unregistered political party, foundation, civil or religious organisation." Aleksei's shelter has helped almost 100 people since he set it up in 2011. He insists that he is running a charity and not a religious organisation.



PRAY that Aleksei stands firm in the faith and trust in the LORD. Pray for an impartial and just investigation into the allegation. - WEA

INDIA Hindu extremists assaulted Christians and torched a church in Narasipura, Karnataka state, in June. The pastor and five other members of the Zion church were assaulted and the church burnt down. The attackers reportedly threatened to harm the Christians if they continued holding worship meetings. The pastor reported the threats to the Evangelical Fellowship of India.



PRAY for God's protection over Christians and the pastor and congregation of the Zion church in Narasipura. Pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance upon the pastor to discern the appropriate response to the situation. - WEA

SRI LANKA A pastor and his congregation were violently assaulted by a mob led by a Buddhist monk in Hanwella in June. The pastor was out on a personal errand when he was confronted by a Buddhist monk.

Fearing an attack, the pastor fled to the church. However, there he found a mob of around 20 people already gathered outside the church premises waiting for him. They surrounded him and began attacking him on the pretext that the pastor had earlier assaulted the monk. The mob also assaulted other Christians who were gathered at the church. According to the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL), there have been 45 incidents of Christian persecution between January and May this year. In 2012, there were 52 incidents of persecution.



PRAY for God's protection over the pastor, his family and the congregation. Ask the Lord to enable persecuted Christians in Sri Lanka to stand firm in the faith and to respond to persecution with a Christ-like attitude. Pray that the authorities will act swiftly and decisively to curb this rise in anti-Christian violence. - WEA

EGYPT This nation has been on a roller coaster ride politically. The democratically-elected president, Mohammed Morsi was deposed by the army following protests against his government by millions of Egyptians. Many suspected that he and the Muslim Brotherhood wanted to turn Egypt into a strict, conservative Islamic state. There was also extreme frustration and disappointment over the continuing weak economy, prolonged electricity cuts and long lines at petrol stations. Hundreds of Brotherhood leaders, including its spiritual leader, Mohammed Badie, and eight other supporters, have since been arrested.



PRAY for peace to come upon Egypt and for great wisdom and favor for the Interim President, Adly Mansour, and his administration as they work towards restoring the nation through new elections. Pray that the people of Egypt will come together and support the new government. Pray against further violence. — IPC

SYRIA The nation continues to be torn asunder by civil war. More than 90,000 people have lost their lives. Here was request for prayer from a local Christian leader in July: "For the last week, the city of Aleppo is surrounded

heavily and all its exits and entry roads are closed. No way to come in or out. There is no fuel for cars. One litre of benzene is about 24 USD\$, if you can find it. Diesel is 8 \$ for one litre. One kilo of bread is about 8-10 \$. Bread is hardly to be found. Each egg is half a dollar. All shops are running out of stuff. We are in a big prison. All over our areas daily shells are exploding. Many have been killed and hundreds injured. In the last four days, all communications have been cut off. Internet, mobile phones, and even water hardly reaches us for weeks. A few Christian areas receive these services twice monthly and only for a few hours. Now, we are working on supplying water to many of our areas."



PRAY Please uphold our Christian brothers and sisters in Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria. Pray for their protection and that the Lord will use their lives and witness for His glory amidst the chaos and suffering. Pray for effective peace negotiations to happen and that God will move the hearts to desire peace and end the war. – IPC

ERITREA Thirty-nine high school students were arrested for their Christian faith and sent to do hard labour at a national military centre in July. They were also beaten and prevented from graduating "for their commitment to Christ" as they purportedly belong to church groups that are not sanctioned by the government. Eritrea has a 47% Christian population but only government-approved denominations are legal. Renewal movements and Protestant worship are criminal offences. The Marxist government began its crackdown on Christianity and other fundamental liberties around 2001 following a war with Ethiopia. Eritrea is considered by international freedom groups to be one of the world's top ten worst violators of religious freedom.



PRAY for Christians in Eritrea to remain bold and courageous. Pray that the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and new life in the Holy Spirit will be poured out on many more. Pray for a return to fundamental liberties and human rights by the government that peace may return to Eritrea. – CT, OD