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BeritaNECF

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Chairman's Message

My House... your house

By Rev. Dr. Eu Hong Seng



Persistent idolatry characterized the history of Israel. Though there were times of reform, Israel seemed bent on rejecting God and worshipping idols. The problem of idolatry continued right up to Jesus' days when He found them selling oxen and sheep and doves, with money changers doing brisk business in the temple.

Instead of solemn dignity and the murmur of prayer, there was bellowing of cattle and bleating of sheep. Instead of brokenness and contrition, holy adoration and prolonged petition, there was noisy commerce.¹

Jesus decried what He saw, "Take these things away. Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise" (John 2:16).

This was not just a denunciation of worship that was not pure. The temple – the focal point where the people met God – had been corrupted from its God's given purpose to be the House of Prayer. Jesus' reproof was not a cruel act, but a zealous one. The disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten me up" (John 2:17).

No one can deny that many continue to come to trade in our churches today. With zeal missing in our hearts, we too are guilty of defiling His house and offering tainted worship. God wants relationship but His people are bent on making money. God desires worship but we are more bemused with ritual and ceremony. Sadly, His house has become like a country club.

The purging that is missing today

The Bible says that when Jesus went into the temple, He reminded the people, "This is not your house. This house does not belong to you. This is my Father's house."

And Jesus said, "*My house shall be called a house of prayer.*"² He wants us to understand this - what defines His house is prayer. Prayer is that which distinguishes His house from other houses of worship. His house is to be a place characterized by people opening up their hearts and coming to the Father in adoration, in petition and in supplication. Jesus Christ was adamant to purge His house then, but the question remains, would we purge ours today?

The predisposition to love the world and all things in the world characterize too many churches today. Our sense of identity, our values and our understanding of current affairs are often skewed by our worldliness and idolatry. The influence of the world on us has become so insidious and pervasive that a prayer-less people and an empty prayer hall have become acceptable and even normal for many believers.

The present-day dilemma

There is a major disconnect between what we believe in our heads and what we feel to be true in our hearts. God's people have become so focused on the temporal rather than the eternal. Having adopted a worldly outlook on life, we are more concerned about our (and our children's) athletic events, our recreation time, protecting our comfort zone rather than pursuing spiritual disciplines. Naturally, personal Bible study, prayer and church attendance cease to be of priority.

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“My House... your house”

This results in spiritual backsliding and ineffectiveness in ministry, leading to a Church that continues to bemoan the dearth of cross-bearing disciples.

The prophetic message to the Church

Jesus spoke of the temple as “My Father’s house” in John 2:16 and as “My house” in Matt 21:12, 13. But in Jesus’ final discourse and lament over Jerusalem in Matt 23:38, He no longer called it His house but “*your*³ house”. “Your house,” He said, “is left to you desolate.”

Such sad words! God actually withdrew Himself from His people and His temple.

Would He say the same today if He were to walk through the Church and witness the idolatry and worldliness that permeate His temple? There is an unseen line. His house can become *our* house, where we are left to our devices, steeped in delusion, destined to be indisputably deceived in the last days.

The power of the praying Church

Power without glamour. Miracles without advertisement. Mass revival without media promotion. The early Church did not have multimillion dollar budgets and websites to spread the Gospel. Yet, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ went out from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the world.

This clearly shows God’s house was not only to be a house of prayer. Isa 56:7 extends it as “a house of prayer *for all nations*”. The Malaysian Church cannot be contented to merely share our faith with fellow Malaysians. We must rise up to affirm His universal purpose, to demonstrate afresh the power of the Gospel to the rest of the world. What better place to start, but to learn from Jesus’ early disciples?

They saw firsthand how religious manipulation in the temple robbed widows and the poor to make the rich richer. Yet they understood the solution lay not in sanctimonious discourse, clever human strategies and power play. No, the secret of the early disciples’ feat was simply in being with Jesus and being students of prayer.

They learned that to change the course of history, they needed to be in the place of prayer. Undoubtedly, the Malaysian Church has yet to fully understand and internalize this truth. We need to make our house *His* house of prayer.

¹ *WikD. A. Carson, The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 179.*

² *Italics mine.*

³ *Italics mine.*

CFM’S New Executive Committee For 2017-2019

The Christian Federation Of Malaysia (CFM) which comprises the Catholic Church of Malaysia, the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) had its 17th. Biennial General Conference on 24th. April 2017 at the CCM Ecumenical Centre, Petaling Jaya. The following were elected as members of the new Executive Committee for 2017-2019:

Chairman	: Archbishop Julian Leow Beng Kim
Vice-Chairman	: Archbishop Simon Poh Hoon Seng
(Sabah / Sarawak)	
Vice-Chairman	: Bishop Dr. Ong Hwai Teik
Vice-Chairman	: Rev. Dr. Eu Hong Seng
Hon.Secretary	: Dr. Khoo Kay Hup
Assistant Hon.Secretary	: Bishop Melter Tais
Hon.Treasurer	: Bishop Aaron Yap Chuan Ching
Assistant Hon.Treasurer	: Rev. Ong Sek Leang

NECF will be initiating another season of fasting and praying for our nation from 7 August 2017 for a 40-day period. Why do we need to set aside time (40 days annually) to fast and pray for our nation? It is not for God to be informed as to what He needs to do with our nation, for He already knows His plans for us. Yet, we need to come humbly and earnestly before Him to seek His face, to discover the plans that He has in mind for our nation, plans to prosper and to give us a hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

The Bible is replete with examples of people who fasted and prayed before they embarked on any given task by God. Moses fasted for forty days by abstaining from food and water when he went up to Mount Sinai in response to God's call. God did not hand him the Ten Commandments until he ended his fast (Deuteronomy 9:9-12). The Author of Life had His Law in mind beforehand, yet He waited patiently for the carrier of His all-surpassing glory to be prepared in order to launch His long term project of nation building.

Jesus was empowered by the Spirit of God when He went through 40 days of fasting in the wilderness before He embarked on His important ministry work (Matthew 4:2, Luke 4:2). Indeed, it was the Spirit of God that led Him to the desert (Matthew 4:1, Luke 4:1), a desolate place where all the comforts, certainties and necessities of life were stripped completely, and one could rely on no one else but God alone. Jesus prevailed over the temptations with complete confidence in God, as we see a hungry man refusing to yield to His physical needs, but instead declaring firmly that *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4).

The Church in Antioch was fasting and worshipping the Lord when the Lord instructed them to set apart Paul and Barnabas for the work He had called them to do (Acts 13:1-3). Paul excelled in his missionary work ever since that time. It was the Spirit of God who had ignited the missionary fire in the

It's Time To Fast And Pray Again For Our Nation

By Tan Poh Kian

early church, and Paul was the vessel who was ever ready to transport the weight of His presence.

Moses rose up from his fast as the humblest servant who did the will of God. Jesus came out from His temptations in the wilderness ready to crush the kingdom of darkness head on. Paul was filled with His power as he set out on a journey of turning the cities of the Roman Empire upside down with the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Fasting and prayer allows us time to empty ourselves, to avail ourselves, to be filled with His Presence, to know His heartbeat and to say "yes" to the Master whenever He reveals His will to us.

God has to change us before He uses us to make an effectual impact on our nation. Transformation and revival do not occur when we present our fervent petitions out of fleshly and carnal minds. Transformation comes when we do the will of God in His time according to His ways.

It is now time for us to get ready to fast and pray for our nation. It is time to seek His face so that we can be prepared to contain His glory that will be poured out on us who are bearers of His image on earth.



Tan Poh Kian is the Assistant Executive Secretary of the Prayer Commission, NECF.

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- Dato' Lily Zachariah
- Ms. Christine Khaw Yew Mei
- Rev. Fr. George Harrison
- Mr. Arokiadass Anthonysamy
- Rev. Datuk Jerry Dusing
- Mr. Gopala Krishnan K. Sundaram



Photo: The new CFM's Executive Committee for 2017-2019

Digital Transformation: Disrupting Businesses And Potential Disruption To Churches

By Dr Ng Boon Beng

Scope of this article

This article highlights current pervasive changes brought about by digital and information technology to the business community and postulates that similar technologies may potentially be sculpting how churches operate in future. The article commences with a summary to introduce the current digital and information technology trends. Then it selectively examines how application of technology has transformed business operations and uses the indicated developments to visualise how churches are already being compelled by their surrounding environment into technology adoption. A summarised prognosis is provided at the end of this write-up. Readers are invited to provide feedback to the NECF Business and Economy Commission.

Introduction – The World driven by Digital and Information Technology

Application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes has been driving advancements in human living, arts, engineering, medicines, society, etc. Since the convergence of information and communication technology, the analog signals represented by a continuous stream of electrical messages had been replaced by the digital signals in the form of a series of digits readable by devices. The sophistication of digital technologies and their applications to business processes have driven ways of conventional business execution into a different dimension. The term 'digital business disruption' was coined to describe this transformation. Words like: digital, digitizing (*process of converting analogue data into digital form*), digitization (*conversion of text, pictures, or sound into a digital form that can be processed by a computer*), digitalization (*adoption of digital computer technology*) and cloud computing are now common business terms.

Cheap availability of digital tools and digitization has made it possible for more businesses to remodel their competitive strategies based on digitalization, leading them further into more extensive digitization of their products and services. Availability of computing resources "as a service" (cloud computing) has negated the need for businesses to buy physical computer systems. Businesses could now be incorporating more digital offerings to keep pace with process changes in the industries. Prevalent changes caused by technology deployment pervade every business process and are redefining value propositions on goods and services. Digitalization has enabled businesses to collect data online on their customers' buying preferences for analysis and for construction of their customers' profiles, with which they are able to measure their customers' buying experiences and in turn implement new strategies to drive business agility and efficiency.

Cloud computing lessens initial cash outlay on capital expenditures and significantly reduces complex project

management and implementation costs. The same computing power can be acquired on-demand for access to a shared pool of configurable computer networks, servers, storage, applications and support services. They could be set up rapidly and provisioned with minimal management efforts and costs. Since 2013, the concept of cloud computing has become a highly demanded utility, as it is high in performance, scalable, and accessible from anywhere. Cloud computing that relies on sharing of resources to achieve coherent economies of scale is similar to the supplying of electricity over an electricity grid. The inexpensive nature of cloud computing has facilitated growth of business processes in digitalisation.

Digital Business Disruption - Changes in Industries

Industry sectors in media, banking and finance, telecommunication, broadcasting and healthcare lead the forefront of digitization. The process has enabled many phenomena known today as the 'Internet of Things', 'Industrial Internet', 'Industry 4.0', 'Big-data', machine to machine communication, 'blockchain', 'cryptocurrencies', etc. Consumer purchasing behaviours have been shifted by the said digital disruption; varieties of products and services can now be purchased and paid in full over the internet. The customers no longer have to go to the shopping centre; instead they can simply wait for the delivery of goods in their own homes. Digital business advocates time efficiency and effortlessness in shopping. Booking a taxi, reserving holiday accommodation, securing the best value flight, shopping online for groceries, borrowing money and ordering a meal are as simple as tapping the screen on a smart phone. These phenomenon have changed the ways people live, behave, think and how they relate to each other.

Mobile devices are increasingly being built-in with more robust multimedia capability and bigger storage capacity and their processing power has also swelled. Mobile computing power has become so affordable that it is at the disposal of everyone. As reported in the World Economy Forum's white paper in January 2016 – in 2005, there were 500 million devices connected to the Internet; today there are 8 billion and by 2030 there will be 1 trillion. Innovative deployment of digital technology, now facilitated by cloud computing, has shifted the way business transactions are executed as administrative works are now performed in the virtual office.

Digital Business Disruption – new level playing field

Digitalisation has enabled businesses to gain better insights on their operations as the outcomes of goods and services sold and delivered can now be measured. It opens up holistic views to businesses on 'social' demands, organizational development and pin-pointing to lucrative areas for potential gains. Thus, new business models are often designed to sell "results or

experience”, as they appeal far more to customers than those that are designed to sell products. Consequently, demand for digital literate talents, competencies and support services have emerged as a new spectrum.

As large companies compete in the digital space, many small and medium enterprises are noticeably increasing their participation, taking advantage of digitalisation and deployment of cloud computing. Digital companies that surfaced over the recent years have been exceptionally successful; these include Uber, Twitch, Tesla, Hired, Clinkle, Beyond Verbal, Vayable, GitHub, WhatsApp, Airbnb, Matternet, Snapchat, Homejoy, Waze, and the list goes on.

Essentially, deployment of digital technology does not necessarily require more computing power. Digitalisation stimulates new innovative business ideas and present ways to make salesforce work more effectively through mobile applications. Advances in data science, cognitive technology and processing power have combined to open up the possibility of ‘intelligent enterprises’, building around smart machines and software intelligence. By turning big data into smart data, businesses have attained higher levels of operational efficiency and innovation. During 2015, around 70 new start-ups achieved the “unicorn status” with each attaining a valuation of \$1 billion or more.

Social effect of Digitisation

Digitalisation has given rise to alternatives for managing organisations’ values. Many organisational controls and integrity checks are now embedded in computerised processes. The phenomenon includes business model metamorphosis, evolving socio-economic structures, re-enactment of legal and policy measures, reconstruction of organization structure and dismantling of cultural barriers, etc. It is on this premise that society has been irreversibly transformed on how people deal with decision making, sell and buy things and the way services are served and goods are delivered. Digitalisation impact on society is eminently visible in Gen-Y behaviours.

We frequently hear about successes in the digital world. Digital economy has bred many multi-billionaires who created new business processes. They changed the way businesses advertise, exchange messages and enable people to buy and sell at a fraction of the costs. Logistics and courier companies support digital economy via innovative supply chain management - more people are employed in logistics to deliver suppliers’ commitments. In the banking sector, digital financial advisers are faceless, interacting with their customers online to serve their needs; and to evaluate lending and investment proposals and financial commitments.

The digital society diminishes the need for direct human interaction; people communicate with each other through electronic gadgets. In the digital world, people have many friends and yet remain lonely – friends are so far away. There is little compassion and human touch in the cyberspace – the “self” culture is apparent. People tend to administer self-help by looking for answers online. The outcome may be undesirable. Those who experience misfortune or incur monetary losses in cyberspace may be suffering silently. The digital world is a big vacuum; few churches have the ability to reach out to broken-hearted people online.

Potential Digital Disruption to how Churches Operate

Almost everyone attending church is carrying a mobile device

– a sign that digital disruption has followed your congregation into the church environment. The mobile device could generate instantaneous insights via ‘Google’ for answers to every question. It assists people’s search for ideas to get out of difficult situations. The instantaneous response setting diminishes the requirement for pastors’ guidance on spiritual and moral matters. The need to delve deep into the Bible for answers about life becomes secondary. The Bible says that “Faith comes from hearing the Word of God.” In the digitalised world, the Word of God is displaced. Church isn’t the only source for answers to hard questions about life. Without being filled by the Word of God, faith just doesn’t mean anything to anyone, as first-hand faith in God is absent. Church may not be a valuable asset in people’s lives anymore — one that impacts how they live, how they relate and how they grow. Does it even make any sense if Jeremiah 33:3 is quoted to them: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” Will the digital community seek God’s Word first?

Young people these days are better informed via digital channels and are more inclined to cling on to the “in” thing. The trend suggests churches may have to be more vigilant and conscious about the sermons they preach. The message has to tickle the mind of young people and challenge their sense of reality. A survey by *Christianity Today* in December 2014 showed that 18 percent of young people attending church disagreed with their church’s stance on political or social issues, 17 percent said they were only going to church to please others anyway, and 16 percent said they no longer wanted to be identified with church or any organized religion.

Anticipated Impact to Churches

Arguably, the reported statistics may not be absolutely correlated to the trend of digitalization in society. However, a recent survey done by the Christian polling firm, Barna Group in November 2016, has again indicated that church attendance is dropping, particularly among the young people – 59% of people ages between 18 and 29 who identify themselves as Christians are not attending church regularly. Carey Nieuwhof who wrote in his blog on February 16, 2015, asserted the point “people are looking less to churches and leaders to help them grow spiritually, and more to other options. We live in an era in which no parent makes a visit to a doctor’s office without having first googled the symptoms of a child’s illness and a recommended course of treatment. Just ask any family physician. It drives him nuts. (Google, doctors will tell you, is not a complete replacement for medical school.) Similarly, when was the last time you bought a car without completely researching it online? In an age where we have access to everything, more and more people are self-directing their spirituality...for better or for worse.”

Carey has succinctly summarised the implications of digital disruption to the church setting. It is real and requires church leaders to consider how to transition their presence in the cyberspace. Should churches go online to meet where their members congregate, to address their critical and essential needs on spiritual and mental health? In this aspect, the Church of Scotland appointed Mr Bogle, 69, as their first digital minister. Mr Bogle commented in an interview in January 2017 that there is a growing worshipping congregation of the Church of Scotland on the internet and Christian audiences online who seek quality content to nurture their faith.

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“Digital Transformation: Disrupting Businesses and Potential Disruption to Churches

Concluding Summary

The current trend of technological usage leaves churches with limited options to circumvent the impact of digital disruption. Churches may have to consider technology deployment to stay connected with their online members. Many churches are already posting their recorded sermons on YouTube, teaching Bible lessons on Facebook, sharing short messages via Twitter and exchanging experiences via WhatsApp. Some churches are already broadcasting their services online for the benefit of those having mobility difficulties.

The irony of the current 24x7 work culture has led to many people having to work for a living on Sunday. Churches need to reach out to these people. It is an opportunity for churches to deliver services directly to their home environment digitally and to be connected with their members anytime and everywhere. People could be at home or anywhere while having virtual presence in their church and to be ministered without coming to church. Such a virtualised church environment is not far from reality.

Church digitalisation will probably have an immediate impact in the following four areas:

- **Tithing and offering.** Churches may have to rethink how to collect tithes and offerings electronically. Committed online Christians may be aware of their obligation to tithe but the new digital Christians may neglect their duties due to being non-present in church. Brian Kluth, the founder of Christian research firm Maximum Generosity who conducted the “State of the Plate” survey, said, “Millennials are not check-carrying, they’re not cash-carrying. If churches aren’t creating digital opportunities, Millennials won’t give.”
- **Potential dwindling church attendance.** Christians are reminded to meet regularly as in Acts 2:42. A survey confirmed that Christians who stay away from church will eventually be withdrawing from the Christian community. Online Christians may have lots of friends on Facebook and WhatsApp, and yet are less connected to the church community.
- **Survival of smaller churches.** It is expensive to organise a digital church; only the wealthier churches may have the resources to implement digital strategies and stay connected to online communities. What should the smaller churches do if their members also go digital?
- **The future and relevance of cell groups or home fellowship ministries.** The small group ministry is the anchor of the big church community. It is a fact that people are communicating more frequently via electronic devices. They are already chatting, talking and fellowshiping with friends online. Is it necessary to come to meetings? How should churches monitor their members digitally?

Towards Building The Church Of Tomorrow Through The National Youth Convention 2017

By Rev Andy Chi

The National Youth Convention 2017 was held at Full Gospel Tabernacle, Subang Jaya, from 21-22 March, 2017.

A total of 205 participants from 36 churches and 12 guest speakers attended the event. The key speakers who spoke at the main sessions were Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng, NECF Chairman; Pastor Steve Murrell, head of Every Nation Churches and Ministries in the Philippines; Rev CB Samuel, itinerant Bible teacher and Micah Global Advisor from India and Brother Craig Greenfield, International Director of Alongsiders International from Cambodia.

Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng took the opening session and he spoke on the topic, *Five Ways to Become the Next Generation Leader*. He shared five key lessons from the life of Joshua that had made him into an effective and successful next generation leader.

Pastor Steve Murrell shared from the book of Daniel. His message title was *Ten Seven Three (10-7-3)*. He shared how Daniel and his friends were Ten Times Better as a result of their devotion, how Daniel’s friends encountered God in the fire that was made Seven Times Hotter and how Daniel prayed Three Times a Day which was the secret of his faith.



Photo: Q and A session with the speakers. (L to R) Rev CB Samuel, Bro Craig Greenfield, Pastor Steve Murrell and Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng.

Rev CB Samuel took two sessions. In his first session he gave a detailed explanation of Postmodernism and how ‘truth’ has become relative. In his second session he shared on what it means to follow Jesus as narrated in the gospels.

Bro Craig Greenfield took the final session. He shared about how God is raising a movement of young people all over the world to disciple children with the love of God. These are the ‘Alongsiders.’ He highlighted that children make up a big percentage of the world’s population and many are in need of someone to walk alongside them.

Besides the morning sessions, there were also workshops which were conducted in the afternoons.



Dr Ng Boon Beng is the chairman of the Business & Economy Commission. He worships at Full Gospel Assembly, Kuala Lumpur.



Rev Andy Chi is the Assistant Secretary-General of the NECF.

How A Minority Church Impacted Wider Society

By Dr Ng Kam Weng

Standfirst: This is a reprint of an article as it appeared on February 20, 2017 on the ETHOS Institute for Public Christianity of Singapore's website. It is reproduced here with permission from the ETHOS Institute.

The early church avoided active engagement with Roman politics, where the contestation for power was brutal and political fortune was fickle, brutish and short. The bedraggled religious community was already leading a precarious existence since it lacked political patronage. As such, it would be wise for it to avoid getting entangled with mighty Caesar who would not hesitate to snuff out any potential challenge to his throne. However, political realism did not mean that the church retreated into a cocooned existence in the ghetto. Instead, it sought to serve wider society by building effective social-economic networks for social renewal.

A Social Message of the Power of Love in Action

Lucian (a non-Christian) was impressed by the solidarity among the Christians. He testified that "their original lawgiver has taught them that they were all brethren, one of another . . . They become incredibly alert of anything . . . that affects their common interests."

The love of Christians was exceptional in times of plagues and calamities. Eyewitnesses reported that when an epidemic struck, the populace rejected the sick and abandoned unburied corpses in their desperate attempts to avoid infections from a contagious and fatal disease. In contrast, Bishop Dionysius described how Christians "held fast to each other, visited the sick without fear, ministered to them assiduously, and served them for the sake of Christ . . . many did die, after caring for the sick and giving health to others, transplanting the death of others, as it were, into themselves."

The impact of such selfless service was highlighted by the early Church historian Eusebius. He wrote, "Then did they show themselves to the heathen in the clearest light. For the Christians were the only people who amid such terrible ills showed their fellow-feeling and humanity by their actions. Day by day, some would busy themselves with attending to the dead and burying them (for there were numbers to whom no one else paid any heed); others gathered in one spot all who were afflicted by hunger throughout the whole city, and gave bread to them all. When it became known, people glorified the Christians' God, and, convinced by the facts, confessed the Christians alone were truly pious and religious."

It must be emphasized that for the early church Christian social welfare was not merely an emergency service but an ongoing mission expressing itself in several ways:

First, *the church was at the forefront of private charity*. In AD 250, the Roman Church distributed alms and supported about 1,500 widows and poor and disabled persons. There was no other equivalent charity in the Roman world.

Second, *the church cared for slaves and poor people needing burial*. Converted slaves were granted equal dignity and fullest rights in church. Indeed, slaves could become clergymen or even bishops. Christians extended burial services to strangers because they share a common humanity. Undoubtedly, such care comforted grieving relatives and cultivated sympathies for Christianity.

Third, *the church provided employment and insisted that every able-bodied person must work*. The church formed guilds to provide work for any brother in need. We can only admire its balanced social policy: "For those able to work, provide work; and to those incapable of work, be charitable."

A Refuge and Haven of Peace in Times of Social Chaos

Roman cities had an average population density equivalent to that found in modern industrial slums. Given the absence of social welfare in Roman society it was no wonder that crime was rampant.

As one contemporary witness testified, "Night fell over the city like a shadow of a great danger, diffused, sinister, and menacing. Everyone fled to his home, shut himself in, and barricaded the entrance . . . if the rich had to sally forth, they were accompanied by slaves who carried torches to light and to protect them on their way . . . Juvenal sighs that to go out to supper without having made your will was to expose yourself to reproach of carelessness."

In contrast, the church was a haven of peace and support amidst urban lawlessness and insecurity. The church provided the essentials of social security and, more importantly, a sense of belonging in a city of strangers.

Neighbourhoods were transformed when neighbours were bound together not only by common rites but by a common way of life. Admittedly, social compassion was not a virtue found exclusively among Christians, but in those days Christians appeared to have practised it more effectively than any other group.

Rodney Stark aptly captures the social impact of early Christianity, "Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems."

To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family.

To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing service."

In summary, the church became an institution for social renewal—the new civilizing and cohesive power that could unite and care for the diverse races of the Empire.



Dr Ng Kam Weng is Research Director of Kairos Research Centre, Petaling Jaya. He worships at Petaling Jaya Evangelical Free Church.

Positive Thought On The East Coast Pastors' And Leaders' Retreat

By Wrutheran Sinnadurai



Photo: Pastors and leaders at the retreat.

More than 25 years ago, when I explained to my church the need for us to be part of NECF, the question on most members' minds was, "How can a small church on the East Coast benefit from being a member of NECF?" It took a while to convince them that though the benefits may be minimal, support for NECF was for the greater good of the Malaysian Church as a whole.

Although, for years, we had been receiving NECF newsletters and occasional visits from NECF staff or representatives, there was a general feeling that the churches on the East Coast of West Malaysia were 'forgotten'.

Then in late 2015 Rev. Andy Chi contacted the Pastors and Leaders of the various churches to attend a meeting with him in Kuala Terengganu at the Lifeline Assemblies of God. Hence on 12 January 2016 at the first meeting convened, the NECF East Coast Commission was officially formed. The churches (congregation sizes ranging from about 10 to not more than 100) are from Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang – the Malay-Muslim heartland. It is because of the large distances separating these churches that a feeling of isolation is inevitable.

The formation of the Commission marked not only the beginning of a more 'intimate' relationship between the churches on the East Coast with NECF, it also established a platform for the churches to meet and encourage and pray for one another as well as discuss the challenges faced by each church.

A very pleasant surprise emerged when NECF sponsored a retreat for the Pastors and Leaders of the East Coast churches on 13-15 February 2017 in Cherating, Pahang. It now became evident that NECF had the East Coast churches very much on its radar. A bigger surprise was in store for us – most members of the NECF Council were present too. I was thrilled to meet these servants of God (some for the first time) who have

faithfully laboured for the Malaysian Church. I have seen the photographs of the Chairman, Rev. Dr. Eu Hong Seng countless times in the NECF newsletters but on that occasion I got to see him and talk to him in person.

The Retreat itself was very encouraging. The vision and mission of NECF were explained in great detail and the East Coast churches were assured of NECF's concern and support. Through the messages shared at the retreat, we were reminded that all churches, big or small, shared the same obligation to be witnesses for Christ and to invest in the next generation as we seek to build the nation according to the 'Hezekiah Model'. We were also reminded of the centrality of prayer and the prayer altar in the on-going spiritual battle that we are engaged in. With persevering prayer, faithful 'sowing' will bear fruit in due time. The Word of God is also central to our faith and we need to diligently study it to understand God's heart and mind and His purpose for ourselves and the church.

Meeting and talking to pastors from the different towns was also an encouragement. Some of them are faithfully serving even under trying conditions. One pastor I met had been threatened many times and beaten up on a few occasions. Marks of permanent injury to his body are quite evident. Yet, he has resolved to march on faithfully. Many also contend with financial challenges and are thankful that God meets their needs in marvellous ways.

I came away from the retreat feeling encouraged and assured of God's providence to supply all our needs. We only need to be faithful and obedient to Him, trusting Him to build His church through whatever we may render to Him.



Wrutheran Sinnadurai is a member of NECF's East Coast Commission and Elder of Kuala Terengganu Baptist Church.

Great Start For REEP In 2017

By Jack Cheah

REEP made a great start in the year 2017 with its first training session of volunteer tutors in Ipoh at First Assembly of God (AOG) on 7 January. The session was an eventful one with the participation of 17 people from four churches from Cameron Highlands, Gopeng and Ipoh. Here is the feedback from some of the participants, and their plans for implementation:

"Overall, the training was very good as it gave me understanding about the study materials. They are suitable for students, especially in building strong foundation in English. The programme focuses on English and Mathematics subjects which are very useful for students in Standard 4, 5 and 6 and even in secondary school later. Students sometimes do not understand these subjects when they are taught in schools and as a result find it difficult to complete their homework. REEP meets the needs of the students in Cameron Highlands where many students do not go for tuition classes. The programme also enables students to acquire knowledge in a more relaxed and fun way of learning. Furthermore, they can bring along their school homework to the REEP class to be helped if they do not know how to do it. We plan to have REEP classes in our church every Tuesday at 7.30pm and we'll begin with ten children on 17 January 2017." -- Sis Chan Yuet Ping of Cameron First AOG

"The REEP training session has made us more aware that free tuition can be an effective method to help and reach out to needy children. The session has also stirred the hearts of some participants to want to become teachers in order to reach out to this needy group. All those who attended have truly learnt a lot and were truly blessed. The church plans to implement REEP soon and a committee will be formed to look into this." -- Sis Ho Mei Yoke of First AOG Ipoh

The second REEP training session was held in Petaling Jaya at Wellspring Baptist Sanctuary on 14 January. The session was attended by nine participants from the host church and a Christian organization. Here is the feedback from some of the participants, and their plans for implementation:

"In 2015, we got to know a rural village in Ranau, Sabah, where the nearest primary school is about 5 km away. Every day the children need to walk for 1½ hours to the school and another 1½ hours back from the school. Hence many of them show little interest in learning and could not

catch up with the teaching pace in school. We introduced an education programme named "Kelas Teman Baca (KTB)" for them by engaging local teachers to provide after school tutorial class. However, the class lacks teaching materials. After attending the session, I am convinced that this is the right programme to introduce to KTB. The REEP module materials are designed in such a manner that they can be used according to the level of understanding of the students in English and Mathematics based upon carrying out the diagnostic tests. Serious consideration will be given to implement REEP in KTB in Ranau." -- Sis Ruth Chiok Ann Nee of Holistic Integrated Services (HISTEAM)

"The first half of the training emphasised the importance of journeying with the students and the best approach to teaching them, especially those who do poorly in schools. Testimonies shared by the trainer about the positive impact of tuition were encouraging. Suggestions for allocating time under REEP to help with homework, to include ice breakers and Bible reading to the classes are good for consideration. REEP may be adjusted to fit our tuition centre's needs, for instance, the diagnostic tests to place the students in the right groups. Rewarding students for the successful completion of a REEP module is another idea we intend to implement, as we have already rewarded them for regular attendance. Our tuition centre will be using REEP study materials for our new and existing students this month of January. All new students will be given the diagnostic tests in order to get a rough idea of their proficiencies in English and Mathematics. Once that is done, they will be placed in the right groups." -- Bro Ngeow Yee Kang of Wellspring Baptist Sanctuary

NECF conducted its third REEP training session for the Bahasa Malaysia Service of the Agape Presbyterian Kluang, Johore at its Service Centre on 18 February 2017. Feedback of the session from its pastor is as follows:

"The training, although short, was very practical in introducing REEP as a relevant programme to raise the quality of education of children of the Orang Asli in the Peninsula and non-Muslim Bumiputeras in East Malaysia. It is greatly needed by parents of these children who could not afford to send them to private tuition centres. Children taking tuition under this programme will not feel stressed as they will be rendered help according to their level of intellect by non-intimidating tutors who act as friends. REEP also allocates time to develop the mental and social dimensions of the children through its creative and fun activities as well as the spiritual aspect through Bible reading and prayer.

Our church will be starting REEP tuition classes for English and Mathematics on 4 March 2017. The tuition classes, to be held once a week, will have four tutors attending to 17 children." -- Pr Setiyono Sualman of Bahasa Malaysia Service, Agape Presbyterian Kluang



Jack Cheah is the Executive Secretary of the Business & Economy Commission and the Education Commission, NECF.

Equipping To Handle Child Safety

By CLEMENT TAN



Photo: A member of the floor raising a question.

On the 7th of March 2017, NECF organised, for the second time, the Child Safe Training Programme which saw an attendance of 48 participants. The speakers were Dato' Dr Amar Singh, Bro Scott Wong and Bro James Nayagam. It was intended to be a follow-up training to the previous introductory seminar held in September 2016, but due to a significant number of participants who were new, Dato' Dr Amar had to go through an overview of:

- The purpose for this training,
- The importance and the steps required for a premise to be Child Safe compliant.

Immediately after Session 1, we had a Question and Answer (Q&A) session with the panel of speakers. Participants raised pertinent questions like:

- How can we know that a child has been sexually abused because we only see them on Sundays?
- What can we do when we suspect that a child has been abused?
- Is it advisable for us to handle such cases or should we obtain help from others with the required expertise?
- How sufficient is this training today for us to handle children who have experienced abuse?

In Session 2, Dato' Dr Amar covered extensively on topics with reference to the training manuals that were handed to the participants. During the session participants were taught on:

- How to identify a child who has been sexually or physically abused.
- How to teach the children under their care the various forms of touch.
- How to teach children about protective sexual behaviour, in particular, when they come into contact with strangers.
- What to do in the event that a child discloses instances of abuse.

The importance of routine vetting for new staff and volunteers.

Bro Scott Wong took a session on Cyber Safety covering areas like cyber bullying, cyber grooming and cyber porn that are prevalent among the teenagers and children of today. Cyber Safety has become an issue in light of reported cases of

cyber bullying in our country. What is alarming is that many of the teenagers or children who face this issue often suffer in silence and are reluctant to disclose the matter to their parents.

The participants were therefore urged to pay close attention to what their children view online and if possible, to find out who their children are communicating with in the cyber world. This is to ensure that precautionary measures would then be taken to protect the children from being victims of cyber-crimes.

The training concluded with a second dialogue session with the panel of speakers who challenged the participants to begin to implement and prepare the SOP for all that they have learnt during the training. The speakers said that they would be available to help participants who are interested to implement the program.

For a premise to be certified as Child Safe, an auditing process is necessary to see if the steps stated in the training manual have been complied with. The audit will take place once a church/home adopts the Child Safe programme and it will have to comply with the steps stated on page six of the manual which covers the following areas: staff training, training of children, safe disclosure of abuse, reporting all the abuse noticed, safety rules with children, the vetting of all staff.

The audit will take into account all the steps mentioned above and once the auditors are satisfied that a premise has complied with all these, only then will it be certified by NECF as a Child Safe premise. Once a church/home accepts the programme and decides to draft child safety guidelines to abide by, they can consult Dato' Dr Amar/Bro James for advice in the months leading up to the time when they will be audited.

NECF is greatly encouraged by the good response received for this Child Safe Initiative programme and hopes to see the participants implement what they have learned in their churches or children's homes that they are involved in. For those who are interested to have such training, please contact NECF to indicate your interest.



Clement Tan is the Assistant Executive Secretary of the Legal and Research Commission, NECF.



Photo: Opening the seminar with a prayer.

Transforming Lives Through Faith Comes By Hearing Ministry

By Jack Cheah

A seminar on Faith Comes by Hearing was held at the Christian Training Centre (PLK), Mentakab, Pahang, on 8 April. The event, jointly organised by NECF and Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship (FGBMF), was attended by 26 participants comprising Orang Asli students of PLK and nine Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB) churches from Mentakab, Jerantut, Gambang and the nearby areas. NECF had conducted the Rural Educational Empowerment Programme (REEP) training of volunteer tutors at PLK on 9 April 2016.

Faith Comes by Hearing is an international ministry with a mission for every person to hear the Word of God in his own language. Since 2013, it has worked with FGBMF Malaysia to distribute audio Bibles. Dr Anthony Ng, locally called the Proclaimer Man has been a spokesman for FGBMF Malaysia since 2014. He conducted the seminar at Mentakab.

At the seminar, Dr Anthony stressed the importance of the Word of God through speaking, reading and hearing in order to strengthen one's spiritual life. The audio Bibles in the form of the Proclaimer sets are solar powered and suitable for remote areas in Peninsular and East Malaysia which have no electricity supply or have difficulties getting electricity. The sound volume of the sets is programmed to be loud and can be used in places where many people gather together like longhouses, halls and even open markets. Five important aspects need to be considered when using the sets:

- Primarily to hear the reading of the Bible
- Group setting
- Discussion involving the heads, hearts and hands (application)
- Follow up by those in charge for e.g. pastors
- Testimonies of transformation of lives.

The session became lively when Dr Anthony shared testimonies of how people have been impacted through



Photo: Group photo of participants with some holding the Proclaimer sets.

hearing and receiving the Word of God. There are cases of Bible illiterate people who have been greatly inspired and strengthened as well as instances of healing of infirmities and salvation through the ministry of the Word.

Many participants were greatly encouraged by the talk and demonstration of the use of the Proclaimer sets by Dr Ng. A number of the sets were distributed for free to the participants and orders were placed for more sets to be used by SIB churches for the ministry to the Orang Asli communities in Mentakab and other areas in Pahang.

The seminar concluded with a special talk on nutrition for primary school children by Sis Usha Lydia Paul. Sis Usha emphasised the benefits of proper and good nutrition for the children's health and for this purpose she is actively involved in distributing a special nutrition product for free. The product is fully sponsored by the Reliv Kalogris Foundation for distribution in Malaysia and other countries in South East Asia. Distribution of the product, however, is only for children in the villages who regularly attend Sunday school and tuition classes at the frequency of three times a week.



Jack Cheah is the Executive Secretary of the Business & Economy Commission and the Education Commission, NECF.

Young Generation Retreat (Retreat Gen Muda) 2017

By Rev Samuel Surendran Krishnan And Pr Alfred Tais



Photo: Retreat participants lining up during the outdoor activity.

NECF organised the Retreat Gen-Muda under its Bahasa Malaysia (BM)-Orang Asli (OA) Commission in Penang from 9-11 February 2017. A total of 30 participants attended the training event at Lost Paradise Resort.

Lost Paradise Resort offered a serene environment with a cozy ambience for the young people to huddle and enjoy the presence of God. The training was divided into two major categories:

- Church and Personal Leadership Development
- National and Religious Issues affecting the BM-OA Churches.

Rev Sam Surendran, the Chairman of the BM-OA Commission conducted the training for the Church and Personal Development and Pr Alfred Tais of NECF conducted the training for National and Religious Issues affecting the BM-OA churches. The training was not just geared to be a one-sided classroom style instruction, but was designed to stimulate discussions, sharing of opinions and development of programmes that can benefit the participants and their churches.

The purpose of the retreat was to prepare the next generation of leaders in the BM-OA churches to be well-informed, creative and secure in their faith in Christ. The sessions were also to prepare them to be resourceful, effective decision-makers and to be relevant in these changing times to

face the challenges that are affecting their churches. This is the 4th. Gen-Muda Retreat which has been organised to benefit the BM-OA churches in Malaysia. Here are comments from some of the participants who were greatly helped by the retreat:

"I am grateful to be able to join the retreat. The retreat is different from other retreats or camps that I have attended before. Besides providing me the opportunity to fellowship with youths from different churches, we were taught to know who we are and how to value our church leaders. We also had opportunities to exchange ministry experiences and insights which really were an eye opener for me. Young people should not only know about churches but need to be more aware about current developments in our country.

What impressed me most is how to work under a difficult leader. For young people, it is hard to accept criticisms of a leader. It is a process of being groomed to become a true "servanthood leader" for the glory of God. More importantly, do not consider oneself as nothing because each and everyone is precious in the sight of God. Definitely, I will use what I had learnt from the retreat with the youth in my church. I hope that many more young people will have the opportunity to attend the retreat in the future.



Photo: Preparing to play during the outdoor activity.

One will never regret in attending as he/she will be blessed tremendously. Thank you to NECF's BM Commission for organizing such a wonderful and insightful retreat." -- Sis Juliana Jumi, a youth leader of Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB) Bandar Ipoh

"I am very grateful to be given the opportunity to attend the retreat. The retreat has helped to prepare me to be a more complete and equipped leader for the future. It has enabled me to solve problems especially relating to challenges that are faced by youth in each church.

Personally, I have greatly benefitted particularly on planning and management of activities to serve the youth better. The group session has been most helpful by giving me new inputs and I hope to be able to implement what I have learnt in my church. -- Pr Yehezkiel Yarun of Shalom Fellowship, Kuala Lumpur.

During the testimony time of the retreat, there were many requests for more of such types of training to be conducted for young leaders. There was also a request to extend the length of the retreat to cover more topics.

The benefits of the training retreat were the formation of networks of friendship and connection with church leaders. The training allowed young leaders to build new contacts and share resources which they will be able to use for future ministry purposes.



Photo: Sis Juliana Jumi of SIB Bandar Ipoh.



Photo: Pr Yehezkiel Yarun of Shalom Fellowship, KL.



Rev Samuel Surendran Krishnan is the chairman of NECF's Bahasa Malaysia and Orang Asli Commissions and Senior Pastor of Excel Point Community Church, Penang.



Pr Alfred Tais is the NECF's Bahasa Malaysia and Orang Asli Commission Executive Secretary.

Tamil Commission's Call To The Youth To Rise Up In Missions And The Pastors Of Its Urgent Tasks

By Rev GABRIEL JABANATHAN



Photo: Meeting the Penang Pastors' Fellowship.

GO Youth Missions Conference

This is an urgent call for youths to rise up to enter the vast missions fields. In line with this, the Tamil Commission, for the first time in its history, is organising a Global Missions Conference exclusively for youths and young adults on 3 June 2017 at Full Gospel Tabernacle, Subang Jaya. An estimated turnout of 1,000 youths is expected for this conference. An all-out massive drive has been launched to bring the Tamil youths to this conference. A special task force has also been formed to organise this much anticipated historic event. The purpose of this mega event is two-fold: Firstly, to present the mandate of the Great Commission as stated in Matt 28:19-20 with its global missions challenges and secondly, to challenge the youths to consider the vast opportunities available in the world missions arena.

There will be a two-fold emphasis on missions at the conference. Firstly, a global mission's perspective will be presented by Rev. Dr. Augustine Jebakumar, the founder of Gospel Echoing Missionary Society (GEMS), India. Dr Jebakumar has been instrumental in establishing numerous missions stations in Bihar, India, once called the graveyard of missions. He has raised more than 3,000 workers in Bihar. Secondly, Malaysian Care will present the local missions challenges which will include missions to indigenous people in Malaysia and Sarawak and other locally related missions challenges.

This Conference will bring a much needed, new and dynamic paradigm shift of focus to the Tamil churches which will challenge them to boldly engage in the global missions' field. An active promotional programme has been launched by way of a soft launch which brought together about 100 key pastors and church leaders. There are also an on-going road show to promote the Go Conference at regional levels and the making of a promotional video.

There is a tremendous sense of hope and expectation amongst the organisers that this GO Conference will impact the Tamil Church in such an unprecedented manner, whereby, many young people will be challenged to seriously consider

going into the missions fields. It's a call for them to respond to these open doors! The time is now!

Road Shows- Raising the awareness at the Regional Tamil Pastors' Fellowships on the urgent tasks of the Vision and Mission of the Tamil Commission

The Tamil Commission has undertaken a drive to promote its vision and mission. For this purpose, a team of Tamil pastors vigorously set out on road shows which took them to four strategic towns – Simpang Empat (Perak), Sungei Petani, Ipoh and Malacca. The fifth town, Mentakab, will be covered in due course. The purpose of these road shows is two-fold:

A. To explain the five urgent tasks of the Tamil Commission

- Caring and ministering to 28 Tamil pastors' widows.
 - A retreat for the "Widows with Mission" on April 21-23, 2017
 - Launching of the "Widows with Mission" on 17 July, 2017.
- Visits to the regional Pastors' Fellowship meetings to promote effective networking and partnership
- Prayer Altar Meetings-regional prayer altar meetings are held periodically to mobilise the Tamil Church be more intensely engaged in broadening and deepening its national prayer commitment.
- Global Missions – for youths on 3 June 2017.
- East Coast Tamil Pastors/Leaders Retreat – planning is underway to bring together Tamil workers in the East
- Coast for the purpose of creating a bigger East Coast missions' vision.

B. Discussion on current social and religious issues in the nation



Rev Gabriel Jabanathan is the Chairman of the Tamil Commission, NECF and Senior Pastor of the Charis Word Centre Networking Churches.

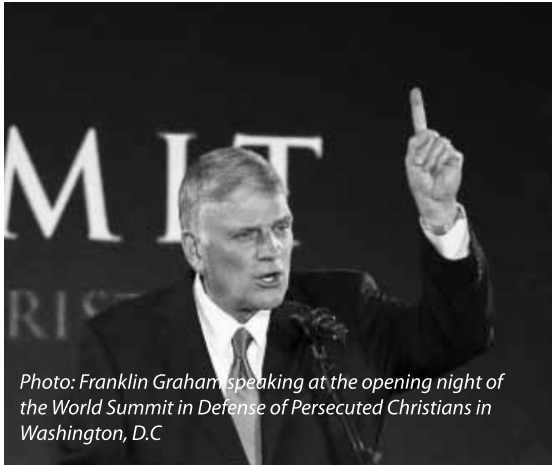


Photo: Franklin Graham speaking at the opening night of the World Summit in Defence of Persecuted Christians in Washington, D.C

Standing In Solidarity With The Persecuted Church

By REV ANDY CHI

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) held its first World Summit in Defence for Persecuted Christians in Washington DC, USA from the 10-13 May, 2017. Over 600 people from 130 nations attended this Summit which was held at the Mayflower Hotel Washington DC. Among those present were Church leaders, International Church representatives, persecuted Christians, Advocates for persecuted Christians, US and Foreign Senators and Congressmen, and BGEA's leadership and its international representatives.

The Summit was held to highlight, stand in solidarity and to defend the 215 million Christians who are suffering systematic oppression ranging from nonviolent discrimination to acts of extreme violence. Close to a 100,000 Christians are martyred every year for the sake of Christ. In places like Syria and Iraq, Christian persecutions are at genocide levels. Even the abduction of Pastor Raymond Koh was mentioned and highlighted in the Summit.

US Vice President Mike Pence was among the many speakers of the Summit. Speaking on behalf of President Donald Trump, he said America will continue to stand for religious freedom of all people, of all faiths, across the world. Protecting and promoting religious freedom is a foreign policy priority of the Trump administration.

Persecuted Christians were also given the platform to share their stories and experiences. Some were survivors while others were family members of martyred Christians. Despite the violence and loss suffered, they chose to respond with forgiveness and steadfastness.

At the conclusion of the Summit, a declaration¹ was made ending with the following pledge:

- WE PLEDGE TO PROMOTE awareness of persecuted Christians worldwide and work to help in their hour of need.
- WE PLEDGE TO PRAY unceasingly, urging other believers throughout the world to pray for those being persecuted, that the whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless. (1 Thessalonians 5:17, 23-24)
- WE PLEDGE TO PROVIDE practical assistance, whenever possible, to the persecuted church. (Philippians 2:4)
- WE PLEDGE TO WORK with individuals, organizations, and government agencies encouraging them to act as advocates on behalf of the persecuted because of their faith in Christ Jesus. (Proverbs 31:8-9)
- WE PLEDGE TO FOLLOW the biblical mandate to comfort and edify one another so that we exemplify Christ's love and transforming power, even in the midst of hardship (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- WE PLEDGE TO STRENGTHEN the worldwide witness of the church around the world through biblical proclamation-evangelism, and to do so boldly, unapologetically, and without compromise (Mark 16:15; Romans 1:16)

¹ <http://bgm-cdn.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Final-Declaration-World-Summit-Declaration.pdf>



Rev Andy Chi is the Assistant Secretary-General of the NECF. He was the sole Malaysian representative at the Summit.



Photo: World Summit in Defence for Persecuted Christians in Washington DC

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SESSION 2
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SESSION 3
9th June (Fri)
8.00pm - 10.00pm

SESSION 4
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Yeheskiel 37:1-14
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தேவன்மேல் நம்பிக்கையாயிரு
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