

BERITA NECF

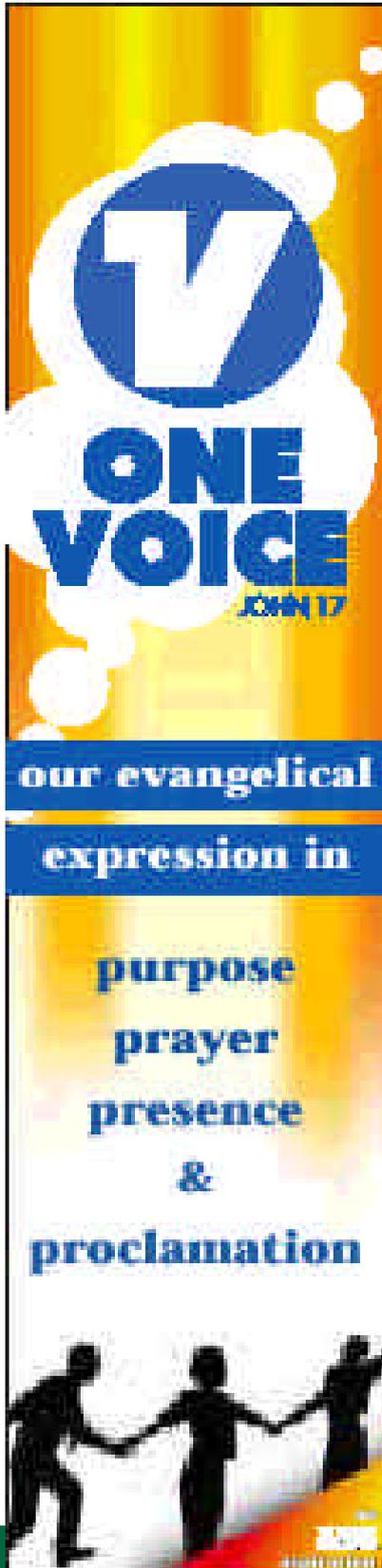
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E D I T O R I A L



One Voice

“... that they may all be one; as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” (Jn 17:21)

The Malaysian Church has come of age in terms of spiritual maturity, and over the last decade, it has become increasingly effective and independent. Nevertheless, the need to press on to spiritual perfection (Heb. 6:1) has been NECF Malaysia's constant message to the churches.

The evangelical community has been blessed with resources, knowledge and a positive attitude, and we believe these are gifts from God for the furtherance of His Kingdom and His glorification. However, we must recognise that along the way, we have also become too independent and, sometimes, inward looking.

This situation is likened to that of the American nation during the Civil War that prompted Abraham Lincoln to call for a national fast to repent of the nation's arrogance and self-sufficiency. He was quoted as saying, “It is the duty of the nation, as well as men, to owe their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon ...”.

Church unity, purity and steadfast faith in the blessed hope of His coming and our preparation for that day become today's priority.

Though we have been blessed with good gifts from God, many Christians, in particular the leaders, have become 'intoxicated with

unbroken success' and we have been too self-sufficient to feel the necessity to work alongside one another as one body to present that ONE VOICE of God.

Let us be reminded of Jesus' desire in His supplication on our behalf in Jn 17:21 that we “all may be one” (as the Father, Son and Spirit are one). For the Church to speak with that one voice, King David (Ps. 133:1) gives the cue that God wants “... brethren to dwell in unity”. In these perilous times, it becomes even more compelling that spiritual unity cannot remain only a rhetoric. Efforts need to be made to reinforce this spiritual

see page 3

ONE VOICE

Our Evangelical Expression in **Purpose, Prayer, Presence & Proclamation**

- Perfecting the saints
- Building Strong Families
- Caring for Pastors and Leaders
- Strengthening Unity of the Church
- Impacting Communities
- Engaging in Nation Building
- Reaching Out to the World

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Unity In Diversity

By Rev. Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam,
NECF Malaysia Chairman

A saint once wrote: "The continuous thread woven into the fabric of the divine purpose and plan of God for the salvation and restoration of man emphasises the great importance that unity holds in the Christian faith and life."

Unity is God's Divine Purpose

Unity of the Church of Jesus Christ has been God's concern and divine purpose throughout biblical history. Since Genesis days, His purpose has been slowly unravelling in man's harmony with himself, with nature and with God, and it will culminate in the vision of nations together worshipping the Lamb in the Holy city as depicted in Revelation 5:12-13.

God's concern for unity is confirmed by Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in John 17 "... that all of them may be one ... in Us" (vs 21) and that the world would know that the God who loved them sent Jesus to love them too (vs 23).

The work of the Triune God – where the Father elects, the Son redeems and the Holy Spirit regenerates and indwells, anoints and sanctifies us (Jn 17:19) – is our example of unity that works out spiritual perfection and preservation of His people.

Visible unity – as seen in cohesion, cooperation and 'organic union' between Christians in local, regional and global movements – alone cannot bring about "being one". Professor Thomas C. Oden (in one Christianity Today issue) opines: "The

only unity desirable for serious evangelicals is based on the truth of the gospel, not on denominational diplomacy."

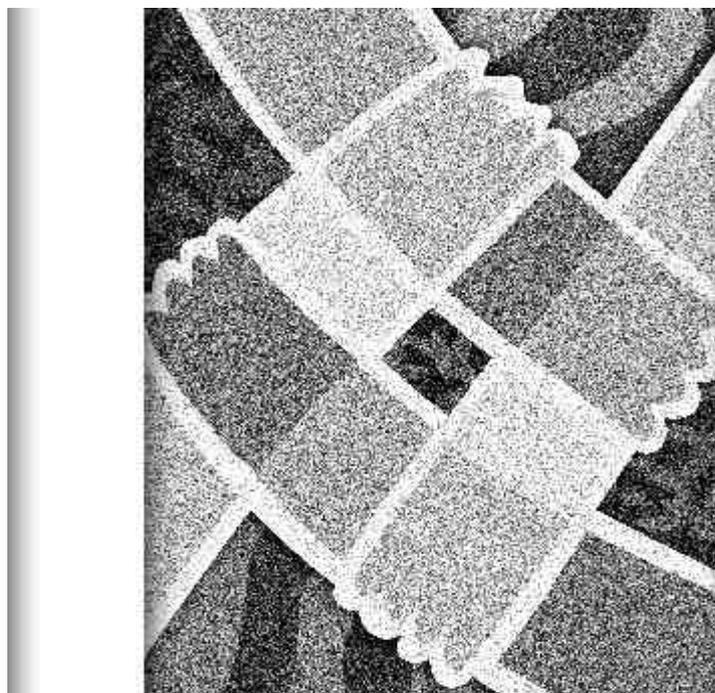
For the Church to grow in unity, it is therefore essential to understand and adhere to the fundamental doctrines of Christ and the Apostles, and to a passion for holiness.

Challenges Facing the Church

It is vital for church leaders, as shepherds of the flock entrusted into our hands, to be watchful and wary of the divisive work of the devil who seeks to bring confusion by giving false interpretations of the gifts and manifestations and blinds our eyes to the wonderful uniting work of the Holy Spirit. We must be united to be effective salt and light and be witnesses for His glory.

The embodiment of the Lord's High Priestly Prayer that we may be one must be evident in us. With wheat and tares growing alongside each other, shepherds need to ensure that trends which divide are promptly weeded.

As we enter 2003, let us do His will by giving pre-eminence to the counsel of the Holy Spirit, so that this diversity of gifts, manifestations and operations work in us the perfect oneness and unity that God desires from us. Believing that the Holy Spirit forms the transmission line along which the enabling power of God flows, let us pray for the work of God's Spirit until the strengthening of the unity in the body of Christ is brought to fruition.



Uniting Pastors to Unite Churches

Pastors play a key role in uniting and mobilising churches to come together. As Pr Bakar Mogot commented: "Pastors are very influential. Their members listen to them and so, if they are not open to working with other churches, their members will also be closed."

Speaking from his decade-long experience in the ministry to the Orang Asli (OA) Mah Meri tribe, the recently-appointed chairman of the NECF Malaysia Orang Asli Commission observed that some pastors of OA churches, particularly those attached with the mainline denominations, are reluctant to work with other churches.

"Perhaps they are too busy with their ministry within their own denominations that they have no time to mingle with those outside of their circles. Maybe they are self-sufficient and do not need help from others. So they keep their churches and their members to themselves."

However, the good news is that there are not too many pastors like this, he said, adding that he hopes the NECF OA Commission will be able to influence those stand-alone OA pastors into adopting a unity mindset.

He believes that when the OA pastors – and therefore their churches – are united, they can better demonstrate their sincerity in wanting to help the OA community.

Sharing Pr Bakar's view (that pastors play a key role in unity) is Rev. Victor Wong, a pastor who had been actively mobilising his congregation to participate in the *Love Cheras* movement involving 19 churches in the Cheras region of Kuala Lumpur.

Together, the pastors of these churches have had retreats, games and monthly prayer meetings, and organised combined-church Christmas gatherings, rallies and seminars. The pastors also exchanged pulpits regularly, and even refer their members who need counselling to the other churches who have the expertise to help.

"Last Christmas, my church (Agape Touch Community) combined with a nearby Anglican church (All Saints Cheras) for a midnight Christmas service. It was so hilarious to see my own members fumbling through the Anglican style of worship but they enjoyed it so much," Rev. Wong recalled.

"Another AOG church, Glory AOG, used my church premise for their own Christmas service. The members are encouraged when they see their senior pastors coming together for fellowship and fun time."

This bonding among the pastors involved in the *Love Cheras* movement has 'moved' their wives to come together regularly for fellowship. "I am predicting a strong pastors' wives ministry to come forth

soon," Rev. Wong believed.

Bearing a vision of the Church of Malaysia rising and being a blessing to the nation, he urged pastors to "come together and start praying together for ourselves and for the land. We can have different styles and anointing, but nothing is better than coming together to seek the face of God."



"The members are encouraged when they see their senior pastors coming together for fellowship and fun time." - Rev. Victor Wong

One Voice: from page 1

injunction with concerted and God-guided action.

With the increasing challenges ahead of us, we have no alternative but to put our shoulders together to usher in revival and renewal in our land. For this reason, NECF Malaysia has prayerfully chosen the theme ONE VOICE for the next two years. The theme covers a broad spectrum of church life – from individuals to families, to churches, to the nation and to the world (see page 1 for details).

Our evangelical expression in ONE

VOICE will be translated into tangible spiritual initiatives (see pg 11 for details of our proposed programmes). The day of Pentecost reminds us that the disciples of Jesus being "... all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1) were able to witness God's miracles.

The Church has, therefore, to be in a state of readiness to work together with one mind, one accord and one spirit for God to manifest His power and sanctify the Church. With the blessed hope that "... when he shall appear, we shall be like him", we need

to purify ourselves even as He is pure (1 Jn 3:3).

Our imperative is, therefore, to act together in oneness to voice our evangelical expression. We hereby urge pastors, elders and church leaders to gear all efforts to help share the "ONE VOICE" vision to the entire church fraternity – that we may be one. We would like to urge the initiation of prayers by churches to make this vision for the next two years a reality in transforming the nation through the local church.

Churches Unite to Bring Christ's Love to Communities

Greater Impact with Combined Effort

Much more can be accomplished through combined efforts than if the work is done individually. Basically, that's synergy – a theory that is proving true for a group of Christians who have been going to Pulau Ketam every year for the past four years to render free medical and legal services.

The outreach was spearheaded by some Christians from the Klang Chinese Methodist Church who initially got together some doctors, dentists and lawyers from within their midst to reach out to residents in the fishing village, an hour's boatride away from Klang. From one church, the ministry grew to attract medical professionals from other churches including those from the SIB, Full Gospel Assembly, Lutheran and Baptist.

According to Andrew Ng, one of the pioneers of the outreach, the group believed that presenting a 'whole' gospel – one that ministers to both body and soul – was more effective than just plain preaching. In the outreach, the 'preaching' was done by 'befrienders' – Christians who stood by to chat with the residents waiting their turn to be examined.

Their first outreach not only impacted the residents but the volunteers themselves – Christian doctors and lawyers from other churches who heard about the work asked to participate.

Today, the outreach has a pool of about 30 professionals from various churches in Klang and Petaling Jaya. With this number, the organisers were able to increase the number of visits to the island.

Last year, the outreach was conducted every Sunday for the whole month of October. The professionals were divided into four groups, with each group working one Sunday. While the medical professionals demonstrated Christ's love through their skills, some 40 befrienders mingled with the crowd and 'spoke' His love.

"The befrienders would gently remind the residents that the event was organised by churches and Christians. When the opportunity arose, they would share the



*Pulau Ketam Outreach:
All ears ... young befrienders chatting up senior citizens.*

gospel," Andrew said.

Besides individuals, the outreach has also drawn in support from some churches, and their combined effort has produced a more effective and coordinated project. For example, one church organised the transport to the island, another church took care of the volunteers' meals, while another provided medical supplies.

The outreach was not confined to contribution from churches; the organisers also drew the partnership of the Klang General Hospital Christian Fellowship (who sent their nurses), pharmaceutical company Pfizer which provided some medical supplies, and the OUG Lions Clubs which organised free eye-checks. Another company came in to help organise activities for the children waiting in the rented hall.

"If we were to do this alone, we wouldn't have been able to touch so many lives. By combining our efforts, we could really impact the whole community," Andrew said.

Spurred by the response in Pulau Ketam, the organisers extended the outreach to another nearby village, Kapar. Again, the outreach was a combined effort of several churches – Kapar Methodist Church, Gospel Community Centre, Kapar Tamil Methodist Church, Klang Chinese Methodist Church – together with the Klang GH Christian Fellowship and several corporations.

The team operated from the Kapar Methodist Church every Sunday for the

whole month of August last year.

Andrew reckoned the ministry reached about 1,000 people at the villages during the two months. He stressed that the gospel is the heart of the outreach and the residents are continually, albeit gently, reminded that the project is run by churches.

"What we are doing is planting seeds. We know we may not get immediate results, that's why this (outreach) is not a hit-and-run affair. We are in this for the long haul," he said.

For Andrew and the many volunteers involved, the outreach has been an eye-opening experience at inter-church partnership.

"Personally, I have seen churches responding to the challenge to be the salt and light and because of our partnership, we were able to impact a whole community. For this, I must thank my church, particularly the senior pastor, and the other (participating) churches who have supported the project."

see page 5

Touched by the doctor's hands ... and sacrifice.



Churches organise Christmas lunch for Nepalese

About 280 Nepalese were treated to a Christmas lunch last year, thanks to the combined effort of three churches in Klang – Klang Wesley Methodist Church, Tamil Methodist Church and Klang Chinese Methodist Church – together with some individuals from Klang Glad Tidings and Klang Gospel Hall.

Most of the Nepalese are working in factories surrounding Klang with a small number from factories in Shah Alam and Nilai.

The meeting started off with a time of singing led by several Nepalese Christian

brothers. They then watched the ‘Jesus’ film (in the Nepalese language), after which a Nepalese brother shared the gospel, followed by lunch. Before leaving, each guest received a Christmas present and a gospel tract.

According to Andrew Ng, a member of the organising committee, many of the guests indicated in their response forms that they wanted to know more about Jesus.

The churches are now working together on the follow-up.

Indeed, the harvest for foreign workers in Malaysia is great, and churches are beginning to respond to this opportunity.

“God is fair. We are not going out to them in their countries, so He’s sending them to us. It’s still cross-cultural missions because communication is a big problem,” Andrew quipped.

He quickly added that



Standing, squatting, sitting ... any way will do and the churches’ members are thoughtful enough to join in.

God had already prepared Christians who are conversant in both English and Nepalese and by divine leading, brought these people into their midst.

In fact, for the last two months, a sister, who had served as a missionary in Nepal for a few years and who speak Nepalese, has been conducting bible lessons for a few Nepalese believers.

Andrew revealed that his church is planning to start an English class and a Hokkien class for the Vietnamese workers in the vicinity.



The food’s worth the wait ... the churches provided a memorable buffet spread for these Nepalese workers.

Churches Join Hands to Bring Christ’s Love to Communities: from page 4



Kapar Outreach: The banner at the entrance of the Kapar Methodist Church attracted many residents.

It’s a back-breaking job without the dentist’s stool.

Rich Nations in Fear

It used to be that poor nations were plagued with insecurity, due to their inability to protect themselves as a result of poverty. However, today the rich nations are also covering in fear, and perhaps even more so, no thanks to Sept 11.

Prof. Joseph A. Camilleri of La Trobe University, Australia, made the observation at a recent seminar on global politics organised by the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations Malaysia.

The events of Sept 11 were neither new nor surprising considering the pattern of terrorism targeting the U.S. and its allies, the professor of International Relations said. “What was different was that the U.S. lost its sense of invulnerability and joined the world of insecurity.”

Prof. Camilleri also shared his observations on the current trends in global politics at the seminar entitled “Current Trends in Global Politics and Diplomacy: An Ethical Perspective.”

For further reading, see NECF Malaysia website www.necf.org.my under Conference Reports, Signs of the Times – Research. More reports on conferences and seminars relating to politics and religion are posted on the website to keep Malaysian Christians abreast of the current local and global scenario. The reports are provided by NECF Research Commission Executive Secretary Lim Siew Foong.

2ND ROUNDTABLE DISCOURSE

National Service

About 20 people weighed the pros and cons of the government's proposed national service at the 2nd roundtable discourse on Nov 27 organised by NECF Malaysia Research Commission.

NECF was given the task of gathering more information from Christian military personnel in Singapore on the national service in Singapore, as well as information about the Malaysian army from Malaysian Christians who are holding senior positions in the army.

The information gathered will be discussed at the next discourse, after which the commission hopes to organise a forum with influential speakers such as social activist Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye and politician Datuk Dr Ron Tan. The ultimate aim of these various activities is to present the evangelicals' position on the issue to the

government and the public.

During the discourse, some participants voiced their concern about the danger of teaching youths to handle arms and ammunition. They fear that the youths may wrongly use their newfound skill for criminal activities or religious purposes. There was also concern that the national service may be a school for political or religious indoctrination.

However, these concerns were overshadowed by the advantages of national service, such as instilling discipline and cultivating responsibility among our youths; and racial integration.

The participants agreed that the Christian community should present its concerns and make definite proposals to the Government before the programme is tabled at the cabinet. The proposals should include time-off for church meetings, access to the

Bible and pastoral counselling. In short, all provisions in the Federal Constitution with regards to religious rights must be observed in the NS programme.

The discourse observed that the Prime Minister appears sincere in the issue of racial integration; the government seems to be consciously moving towards secularism and appears interested in involving the Christian in its efforts to build such a state. The Church must therefore respond by constantly and consistently relaying our concerns and proposals.

On the issue of education, participants reiterated the call for more Christians to join the teaching force.

The roundtable discourse is held monthly to develop a Christian worldview and biblical framework on the current issues in Malaysia. Participation is by invitation.

PM Attends CFM Christmas Reception

Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad attended his last CFM Christmas tea reception in his capacity as the Prime Minister. The reception is a yearly event organised by the Christian Federation of Malaysia and held on Christmas day.

For the past four years, the Prime Minister and his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti

Hasmah, have faithfully graced the occasion, signalling their commitment to building a harmonious religious existence in the nation.

Last year's reception was hosted by NECF Malaysia – one of CFM's three component bodies – and held at the church of CFM cum NECF Malaysia Chairman Rev. Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam.

Among the 150 invited guests present were foreign diplomats, leaders of other religious communities, as well as leaders from churches and Christian organisations.



Dr Mahathir (2nd from left) sharing the yuletide joy. Standing on his right is CFM Executive Secretary Rev. Dr Hermen Shastri. From his left: Rev. Datuk Dr Guneratnam, The Most Reverend Archbishop Soter Fernandez, of the Catholic Church, and Land and Cooperative Development Deputy Minister Dr Ron Tan.

Appreciation Day

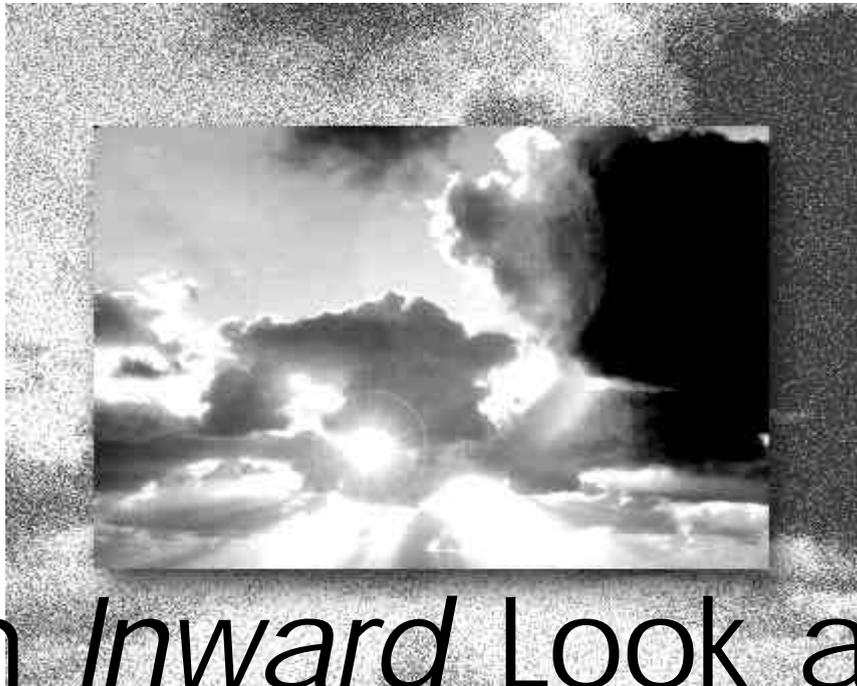
Churches are encouraged to designate one Sunday this year to appreciate and honour their pastors, full-time workers and leaders.

Depending on their needs, congregation members may consider holding a special service of affirmation or a dinner event, or personal touches such as babysitting their children or pledging to pray for them.

This special Sunday is initiated by NECF Malaysia as a follow-up to the Pastors Prayer Shield programme that was launched in 2001.

I S S U E 6 5

Women to Women



An *Inward* Look and an *Upward* Hope

By Goh Hai Bee

We may not be teachers but we walk the same path as disciples of Christ. The truths and insights shared in this article apply to our lives, whatever our career/calling may be.

One of my delights is reading biographies and autobiographies, prayers and epitaphs. A recent character study on the life of Elijah has helped me explore the inner landscape of my present experience as a Christian teacher. "Elijah was a man just like us" (James 5:17). That was encouraging and it helped me appreciate God's dealings with me.

God's Chosen Hideaway

I WAS to stay in my "*Kerith Ravine*" (1 Kings 17:3,5) for three-and-a-half years. In Hebrew, *Kerith* or *Cha-reth* means to *cut off from blessing* or to *cut down tall timber*. Upon completion of my M.Ed., I had to start all over again as an ordinary teacher in another school. Just as Elijah depended on God's ravens to feed him, I had to depend on God's promises and the sufficiency of His spiritual resources to enable me to face the upheavals in a new school. My 21 years

of experience as a classroom practitioner and my newly acquired academic qualification proved inadequate to meet with the harsh realities there.

God's call to "*Leave ... , turn ... and hide ... drink from the brook*" (1 Kings 17:3) and be fed by His methods was a painful and perplexing period. God moved Elijah from the *palace* of King Ahab to His chosen hideaway, "from public forum as a prophet to a private haven, from the sunlight of activity to the shadows of obscurity" (Swindoll, 2000).

God moved me from the office of afternoon supervisor to the staffroom and the library, from centrestage as an English resource personnel to the classroom, from the limelight of activity to the shadows of obscurity.

Did God make a mistake? I do not think so. God's boot camp is designed for my development towards maturity, not for my

comfort. Moreover, the Lord declares, "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways ... as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts*" (Isaiah 55:8-9). God seems to say, "Get away from those things that satisfy your human pride and ego and go live by the brook. It was a period of renewal, remoulding, reshaping and realignment to His purposes. It was a season of learning how to abound and abase by His grace.

How then can I be a light of the world, so dimmed by such setbacks? God reminded me that Gethsemane came before resurrection, darkness precedes the dawn of morning light and ravine experiences are necessary for mountain top vistas.

Have our brooks dried up in our lives as Christian teachers "*because there had*

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An Inward Look and an Upward Hope: from page 7



been no rain in the land" (1 Kings 17:7)? Let us remember that the God who gave us water to drink from the brook can also withhold water. The God who blesses us can also withhold His blessings when He tests us through the baptism by water and fire.

God's Redirections Include His Provisions

Elijah was commanded to "Go at once to Zarephath... and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food" (1 Kings 17:9). In Hebrew, Zarephath means "smelting furnace". At the end of January 2002, I got a transfer back to Wilayah. To me, it seemed the beginning of perhaps another three-and-a-half years of waiting upon the Lord to fulfil His Refiner's plans and purposes for my life. The future is unknown to me but known to God.

God knows that in the routine of life and its seemingly mundane tasks, I still need someone to "bring ... a little water in a jar so I may have a drink ... And bring me a piece of bread" (1 Kings 17:10b-11). Here I learnt that "Only little people will (not ask for or) do little things". As a senior DG2 time-based teacher, I have to learn humility and teachability in each new place. Indeed, God's redirections include His provisions. Hence, my teaching career has been enriched and enlarged through interactions with different junior colleagues. It was not a "them-us" relationship but rather a "one of us" relationship.

The widow at Zarephath recognised Elijah as a "man of God" (1 Kings 17:18, 24). How then can Christian educators be recognised as triumphs of His grace amidst such situations? Like the widow who questioned Elijah, I too asked God, "What do you have against me ...? Did you come to remind me of my failure as a teacher and kill my spirit to teach?"

Elijah replied the widow, "Give me your son!" (1 Kings 17:19) God seemed to say, "Give me your classes, your career, your

subject and rest not upon your recipe knowledge and years of teaching experience."

Through pain and plain exhaustion (1 Kings 19:3-5) in the teaching profession, I have to learn afresh like the Apostle Paul to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4) even though my wings are clipped and mobility is limited. Oftentimes, we only rejoice in the right circumstances. Like the Apostle Paul rejoicing in the prison cell in Rome, I too am learning to 'celebrate what is right' in my world from God's perspective instead of harping on what is wrong with our school or education system.

Develop Depth in the Inner Terrain

This year's theme for Teachers Day "*Guru Berkualiti, Aspirasi Negara (Quality Teachers are the Nation's Aspiration)*" can only be possible when educators develop a sustainable depth in the inner, rugged terrain of their lives as teachers. Truly, "How sad it would be if God allowed our present trial or suffering with all the experience of pain but you and I lost God's blessing through it because we refuse to receive from it the lesson or key to trust God in the midst of it, which He purposed for our development and to be used to help others" (Crabb, 1993).

Life is lived forward but is understood when I look backward. Therefore my Kerith Ravine and Zarephath journeys have taught me that not all is wasted. They enabled me to appreciate the value of the hidden life. They afforded me the time to look after my

Life is lived forward but is understood when I look backward

late father and presently my ageing mother. They gave me the opportunity to be involved in the Bible Study Fellowship International. They served to teach me what it means to abound and abase and appreciate Christ's condescension and exaltation by God (Phil. 2:5-11).

They reminded me that teaching and praying go hand in hand. They exposed me to diverse teaching situations and relationships. They helped me to empathise with others who are similarly bruised and battered in the teaching profession and be engaged in the ministry of encouragement. They taught me to be determined to be contented in Christ and not to crave for what I think is my due. Truly I will not be able to talk the talk if I have not walked the walk. These are some of the insights gained from an inward exploration to an upward acknowledgement that the Lord does all things well.

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We are right in the whirl of it all. The roar and rush of the festive season. The hurried pace and harried gaze as parents prepare their children for the start of a new school year. The hustle and bustle of preparations for Chinese New Year celebrations.

Read this charming piece by Patsy Clairmont and be inspired to take a break ... and be refreshed by a cup of tea.

Tea Time



What is there about a cup of tea that charms a woman's heart much more than an amber liquid to be sipped? It also speaks of a different pace, a genteel space, a still moment, a quiet thought and a worthy conversation. Tea is another mindset, one very different from the intensely driven whirl we live in. Tea time invites us to relax and to reflect; it helps us not to lose touch with ourselves and with others. And it permits us to unplug from our harriedness to nurture our souls. Tea also whispers a language of romance, the romance of embracing loveliness. A graceful cup, a crocheted napkin, a sterling spoon, a lace doily and a tea service help to establish a gentle ambience. Our senses are soothed by a gracefully prepared tea environment.

Tea is a sip of yesterday when times

were less frantic and more family, when Polly put her kettle on and we all had tea. Listen ... can you hear the sounds of loved ones as they congregate around the comforting cups? The steaming kettle

sings for attention as friends lean in to reach one another's lives.

My yesterdays are filled with the delicate sound of clinking ice cubes in tall glasses of sweet tea on hot summer days. The heat in the South was made more tolerable and more sociable by partaking of this delightful refreshment. In the noonday sun, we sought refuge on the shady porch and there drank our tea and enjoyed each other's company. These moments are even sweeter than was the tea.

Most importantly for me, tea time is when I collect myself before re-entering my passionate pursuits. This personal interlude becomes as sacred as a *tete-a-tete* with the One who understands my franticness, my longings, and my leanings. He reminds me that 'in quietness and trust is your strength' (Isaiah 30:15b).

Partake with me some amber warmth, a cup of cheer, a sip of encouragement ... and moments worth remembering.

From her delightful book Tea with Patsy Clairmont



WOMEN TO WOMEN NETWORKING TEA

Saturday, October 19, 2002

By Goh Poh Gaik

‘S’o many good things packed into one short afternoon’ – that probably sums up the response to our first networking tea. Fifty women came from different churches in the Klang Valley to listen and to learn from women’s groups in different churches, “What are women doing to reach women?” The question was adequately and competently answered by the different presentations.

Sow Ying inspired us with the creative topics that LIT (Ladies in Touch) in Jalan Gasing Gospel Hall, Petaling Jaya, has for their monthly Sunday afternoon ladies’ programmes. Keeping to Bible-based topics, the ladies plan fun and creative activities to reinforce the teaching of the Word. A couple of years ago, the women had courageously changed the day, the time and the whole approach to women’s meetings when they sensed a need for change. Bravo! The women present were given an invitation to attend the LIT meetings. That’s what networking is all about! Thanks, Sow Ying and Mrs Boler.

The delights and potential of the Sunshine Playgroup, presented by Nyuk Lim (Subang Jaya Gospel Hall) impacted us forcefully. This programme reaches parents and their young children. The team of mothers and volunteers diligently plans delightful and wonderfully fun and creative activities and learning sessions for the Playgroup. While the children learn and play,

the mothers have opportunities to take a break and to interact with mothers from the church.

Shireen from Calvary Church, Kuala Lumpur, gave us an insight into what a well-developed women’s ministry looks like. The ministry is equipped with a pastor and women’s cells meet regularly, catering to the needs of women working in the home or office. We were challenged by what the united efforts of women can accomplish – making mission trips to teach and encourage, raising funds to adopt needy children and to build dormitories for the homeless, visiting shut-ins and sharing the love of Christ. Opportunities to love and serve abound and where the women are willing and available, God has opened doors.

The Alpha Course, originating from Holy Trinity Brompton in London, has recently been introduced to churches in Malaysia. The programme is a systematic, excellently prepared introduction to what it means to believe in the Lord Jesus. We were pleased to have Vonnie Schouneveld from St Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Kuala Lumpur, share with us how the women in the church are effectively using Alpha to reach other women. Jenny Sim shared and warmed our hearts with testimonies of how God is using Alpha to touch the lives of expatriate women.

Sally Sinniah of St Paul’s Church, Petaling Jaya, took time off from her tight

schedule to encourage us and to give us further insight into the different ways women are effectively serving the Lord in their communities. Visiting homes battered by racial conflicts to speak compassion and healing; praying, cooking. Sally shared about the adoption of a home for needy children at Christmas and then inviting the members to buy gifts for the children. Several women responded well to this and felt this would be a meaningful way to share the love of Jesus.

We are grateful for the contribution of each of our sisters. Over tea, the general feedback was that it had been a very fruitful afternoon. The only ‘complaint’ that reached my ears was, “There are just too many good things and ideas shared!” There was a request for a session for mothers and daughters-in-law.

Will there be another Networking Tea? Well, we’ve received requests for more. We’ll be back. Look out for the announcement in our forthcoming issues.



Photos show an LIT meeting in progress.



WOMEN to WOMEN

Advisor/Co-ordinator: Goh Poh Gaik

Women to women, a project of the NECF Commission on Women’s Concerns, is a bimonthly supplement to Berita NECF.

It has the broad objectives of:

- educating and raising awareness of the social and theological issues affecting women
- stimulating efforts towards networking and dialogue amongst women
- encouraging one another in the use of our gifts and talents for the Lord’s Kingdom

Your letters and contributions (feedback, suggestions, ideas, articles, poems, cartoons, etc.) are most welcome.

Send to:

The Co-ordinator, **WOMEN TO WOMEN**

NECF, 32, Jalan SS2/103, 47300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

The views expressed in this supplement do not necessarily reflect those of the Commission or the NECF.

NECF Conferences To Note

Patrick Johnstone, author of the necessary missions guide Operation World, will speak at our missions conference in Ipoh in June.

The Promise Keepers will be back here again this year in July to conduct our national men's conference. The exact date will be announced later.

In August, internationally renown speaker on intercession Cindy Jacobs will speak at our prayer conference, which will culminate at the yearly Merdeka prayer rally on Aug 30 night. Below are the rest of our year's activities.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Programme</i>	<i>Location</i>
Jan 25	NECF seminar on trends and challenges and the Church's response	Johor Baru
April 26	NECF seminar on trends and challenges and the Church's response	Penang
May 24	*Consultation on educational trends and challenges and the mission of the Church	KL
June 5-7	National Missions conference with Patrick Johnstone	Ipoh
July 13	NECF seminar on current trends and challenges and the Church's response	Kuantan
July	*National Men's Conference with the Promise Keepers	
July 21 - Aug 29	40-Day Prayer & Fast / Nationwide Charity Campaign	Nationwide
Aug 27-28	National Prayer Conference with Cindy Jacobs and Barry Boucher	KL
Aug 29	Merdeka Prayer Rally with Cindy Jacobs	KL
Aug 31	Community events throughout the nation	Nationwide
November	Praying for the persecuted church	Nationwide
Nov 8	NECF seminar on current trends and challenges and the Church's response	Ipoh
Dec 6	NECF Prayer Commission Thanksgiving Tea	KL

**To be confirmed*

New Staffmember to Strengthen Chinese Ministry

NECF Malaysia's ministry among the Chinese-speaking churches will be strengthened with Ms Ngeh Hoong Eng in the staff. Hoong Eng, who joined us on Jan 1, has a Bachelors degree majoring in Chinese Studies and a Masters degree in Modern Language from Universiti Malaya.

She taught Chinese as a second language in Universiti Pertanian Malaysia before going full-time on board Hannah International Mission, a South Korean mission ship. After a year of sailing, she returned to Petaling Jaya and was involved in the orang asli (OA) work.

During this time, Hoong Eng supported herself by giving tuition and doing



translation work. Last year, her church decided to adopt her ministry with the OA, and with that, Hoong Eng was able to take on the Chinese ministry, a burden that has been increasingly growing in her heart.



New OA Chairman

Pr Bakar Mogot has been appointed the chairman of the NECF Malaysia Orang Asli Ministry Commission. He replaces Rev. Lieow Meng Kuang, who has been the chairman since the commission started three years ago.

Pr Bakar comes from the Mah Meri tribe and has been serving full-time among his people since 1993. He will serve a two-year term.



New Members

We welcome the following into our fellowship as Ordinary Members:

- **Grace Church**, Puchong Jaya, pastored by Joe Marcose
- **Victory Life Church**, Kota Kinabalu, pastored by Edwin Richard
- **Oikos Family Centre**, Petaling Jaya, represented by Peter Ting

We also welcome five individuals as Associate Members. They are Pr Stephen Tang Bong How, Pr Karuppiah a/l Muthiah, Ms Tan Ai Ming, Mrs Lim Hoy Kiang and Mr C. Jeya Balan.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The Church in the Last Days

By Rev. Loh Soon Choy

Do We Need Another 'Church Eschatology'?

Can one write anything new and profound on the 'Church in the End Times' that is not already in the Scriptures, in general and symbolic terms? Is there a church eschatology separate from a world eschatology?

Arguably, there could be one. Just as the world has spiritual impact upon the church, the church has historical and sociological dimensions in its relations with the world. We could talk for example of how new technologies and new configurations power will affect the institutional church.

Old and New Testament histories also show that 'the world' – through the successive ancient civilisations of Egypt, Canaan, Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece and Rome – had its special traumatic impacts on the called-out communities of God's people.

The chariot and building technologies of Egypt were disastrous for Israel who was thoroughly enslaved. Assyrian, Babylonian and each subsequent civilisation developed harder metals, more formidable weapons



and conquest strategies and power structures to 'unite' and subdue yet larger and larger lands.

Where was 'God's church' or the OT Covenant community then in the scheme of world affairs? What a God who even prohibited them from simple modernisation processes, such as building chariots (Jos. 11:6, Deut. 20:1–9) and improving their governance and administration through the institution of a kingship except only with great reluctance (1 Sam. 8)!

The purpose? That they may trust Him and not in the icons of power, property and wealth. God had His own sovereign and decisive but very different ways of dealing with those challenges and crises represented in the most fearsome manner by monstrous beasts and other apocalyptic imagery (see Daniel and Revelation). Israel was crushed as a nation not because of these beasts but because of their sins. Yet, Israel – and later, the crucified Jesus – was raised up again.

Lest we become triumphalistic and escapist, the Bible has given us a cultural or creation mandate to be involved with and

be "in the world but not of the world". The Bible has also given us a sort of outline of world eschatology. Hence the flood of literature on what may happen to the world (including the church) before Jesus comes again.

Our NECF Malaysia Eschatology Commission – later re-named Research Commission – and the Watchmen's Forum, are premised on these biblical 'givens'. Even if our works are imperfect but biblically and theologically responsible reflections, they can be, in God's mercy, become wake-up calls and exercises in pastoral reflection and watchfulness. They also help check irresponsible, alarmist or over-dogmatic tendencies in some of the literature produced by some prophecy groups, publishers and authors that hurt the church and its testimony.

In its eschatology, mainstream Protestantism has suppressed the blood, the chaos, and the terror of the Apocalypse; and these have leapt out like the bogeyman from under the bed. If mainstream churches

see page 13

The Church in the Last Days: from page 12



cannot give a satisfactory account of the End, is it surprising that many people will choose to go elsewhere where their questions can be addressed?

Therefore, let us teach the Scriptures, which already gives us a world eschatology with enough blood, chaos and terror. However, the need for a further and separate 'church eschatology' is controversial. For, the church is already an eschatological event instituted by God according to His salvation plan for the world. This is also repeatedly commemorated at the Lord's Supper, which is "until He comes."

Identity of the Subject: The Church Itself is an End-Time Thing

Another issue is: What exactly is meant by 'Church'? The term comes from the Greek *kuriakon* (that which belongs to the Lord). Many wonderful people, groups and para-churches belong to God, but they are not 'churches'. We shall not enter into this here except to remind ourselves of Paul's best-known images of the church as the Body and Bride of Christ.

Historically, Bishop Ignatius of Antioch in about AD107 left us a memorable one-line definition: Where Jesus Christ is, there is the church. Irenaeus, a generation later, said, "Where the Spirit of God is, there is the church and every grace."

The great reformers Calvin and Luther were wise to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials (a procedure we need to learn afresh) in describing the church. These essentials in their writings were (a) a

worshipping fellowship of believers; (b) the preaching and discipline of the Word; (c) the presence of the Holy Spirit; (d) the observance of the Sacraments; and (e) the practice of Service. Yet, if we would, we could expand their descriptions to include dimensions and scenarios about modern churches they did not foresee.

Perhaps we can here appreciate Wayne Grudem's simple definition of the church as "an assembly of all true believers for all time". The "for all time" defines the church as a 'supra-temporal, eternal entity'. The "all true believers" defines its supra-racial identity. Being supra temporal, the Church is eternal and has no end. It is God's most important 'last thing' before Jesus comes.

Conclusion

Since Process (Methodology) is as important as the substance of the content in any Christian work, we conclude with the following reminders:

1. With regard to our intellectual and theological Methodology, we are often caught between several extremes. As John Stott says in regard to current affairs and the future, "we need... an unusual combination of the conservative and the radical, the dogmatic and the agnostic, the fixed and the free. Our starting point is Scripture, which we accept as God's unique and trustworthy revelation. Yet in seeking with loyalty to conserve this truth for God, we attribute no infallibility to our own Evangelical traditions. If we seem

to the reader to be always sure about the truthfulness of Scripture but sometimes less than sure in our understanding of how to apply it to complex contemporary questions, then we have accurately grasped our mood." This is the basic humility and reverence required of us as we approach and apply the Scriptures especially to end times.

2. With regard to our Spiritual Mood and Attitude, we can be caught with one of three wrong ones:

i) Because it is God's church, the 'gates' or powers of hell cannot prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). It will, by divine grace, finish triumphantly in this world but that does not mean we can be triumphalistic and complacent. Our Basic here is to live theologically as a latter-day end-time disciple and to engage with the world.

ii) Because of the reality and power of sin, Satan and his evil principalities and powers, the church will also go through great suffering and persecution – as had happened in history as well as today. Our Basic here is not to be fearful and despair (Ezek. 37 and 38, Rev. 17 and 18).

iii) Because of so much disunity, worldliness and sin even in the church, we can become cynical and indifferent towards, not only its future but also Truth itself and the call to radical discipleship. This is further worsened for the intellectual by the 21st century 'post-modern' mood that is sceptical of the earlier 18th and 20th century presuppositions and ideologies, whether these are based on reason or on faith or supposedly on facts. Our Basic here is a renewed way of returning to the Scriptures, the fountain of Truth, and not be seduced by the hype and trendy, supposed insights and challenges from modernity (post-modernity).

If Adam had not been put to deep sleep, he would have tried to control God's hand in creating Eve. Such is our Philistine tendency to want to know and control everything, but our own insatiable curiosity. Such curiosity is a form of control in itself, a control over the future. It fosters anxiety, restlessness and loss of priorities and our very spirituality.

It can lead us to use Scripture to demonise opponents or glorify violence. Scripture itself warns us against our tendency to deny the limits and boundaries set by God beginning from the Garden of Eden.

(This article is contributed by the NECF Malaysia Research Commission.)

FOREIGN NEWS



Bloody Christmas for Christians

From Belgrade to Bethlehem and the borders of Bangladesh, Christians experienced bloodshed last Christmas amid growing sentiment against the Christian faith. Analysts have linked the attacks to the U.S. war against terrorism.

A grenade attack killed three girls worshipping at a Presbyterian church in Daska, Pakistan, about 100 miles south of Islamabad. Earlier bombs exploded at a church in eastern India, where a priest was injured and scores of others wounded as assailants threw bombs at a midnight Christmas service in a Catholic church.

The attack in the town Malipota near the India-Bangladesh border, 20 miles northeast of Calcutta, forced the priest and some of the 1200 worshippers inside to hand over their valuables, including money from the church safe and wrist watches. Elsewhere in Asia, Christians gathered despite warnings of possible Islamic attacks.

In Indonesia, police seized 550 pounds of a fertiliser usable in explosives that they say was to be delivered to a fugitive bomber, *Associated Press* (AP) reported. And there were even troubles in former Communist countries, such as Yugoslavia. AP said about 30 hard-line Serb nationalists prevented dozens of worshippers from attending an Anglican Christmas eve church service that was to be held in a Serbian Orthodox chapel in Belgrade, the Yugoslav capital.

Even in Bethlehem, the place Christians regard as Jesus birthplace, Christmas was a sad affair. There were no signs of Christmas

decorations, in what officials said was protest against the occupation of the West Bank town by Israeli troops. —*Assist News Service*

SENEGAL: New Testament Recorded in Chants, Koranic Style

One of the powerful communication vehicles in the Islamic world is the use of chants that emulate the style of the chanted Koran.

While controversial among orthodox clerics, among common people who grew up hearing the sounds of their scriptures chanted, a deep emotional connection exists when the chants are heard.

After three years of hard work the New Testament was released by cassette in the Wolof language of Senegal. In addition the team now has the Gospel of John recorded in a chanted Koranic style. This is proving to be a powerful way of presenting God's Word. —*Global Worship Report*

Afghanistan's Poppy Problem

Opium production was projected to be 10 times higher last year. In 2001, the Taliban boasted a 94 percent reduction of poppy cultivation. Afghan poppies account



for around 80 percent of Europe's heroin supply.

Development agencies face the daunting task of helping create alternative income sources for poppy farmers. A farmer today can expect to bring in US\$6,250 per acre of poppy, but only US\$25 per acre of wheat. —*World Pulse*



Vietnam Closes Over 350 Churches

Information has been coming out of Vietnam about a recent wave of government repression against Montagnard (a collective name for Vietnam's many minority tribal groups inhabiting the Central Highlands) evangelicals in Vietnam's Central Highlands.

Documents acquired last October by religious and human rights workers in this country confirm that by last September, 354 of 412 churches had been forcibly disbanded in Dak Lak province alone. By mid-October, about 50 Christian pastors and elders in this province had been arrested or had "disappeared."

It is expected that the remaining 58 churches in the province will soon be closed. Also, Vietnam's normally cautious Roman Catholic Conference of Bishops has recently released a letter decrying the persecution of Catholic Montagnards.

Montagnard churches are historically part of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South). Last year, 26 years after the country was reunified under communism, the ECVN(S) was granted legal recognition. However, only a handful of the many hundreds of Montagnard churches were allowed to identify with the ECVN(S).

This latest move against churches in Dak Lak is the most severe persecution since

1975, when churches were closed and church leaders put in re-education camps for years. – *Maranatha Christian News Service*

Muslims Find Christ in Saudi Arabia

But not in the hundreds, as claimed. Although Saudi Arabia works hard to keep the Bible from crossing its physical and electronic borders, some in the staunchly Muslim kingdom are coming to know Christ.

A report in the January issue of *Charisma* magazine details how foreign believers working in the country have encountered some Muslims who want to know more about Jesus after having dreams about Him.

However, resident expatriates say such conversions do not number in the “hundreds” often claimed.

Saudi Arabia leads the world roster for unbending regulations designed to keep its Muslim population untainted by Christian influences. Although almost a million of the country’s seven million foreign workers are Christians, the laws forbid them to gather for public worship. Private worship is supposed to be permitted, but it is widely known that the religious police offer a standing bounty of 50,000 riyals (five years’ salary) to anyone who exposes a house church.

Famine in Africa

An increasingly severe famine in Ethiopia and southern Africa has prompted an urgent call for help from relief organisations, reports *Associated Baptist Press*. Recent reports from the United Nations World Food Programme indicate there are food shortages in Ethiopia and six countries in southern Africa. Complicating the food crisis are the ongoing HIV/AIDS pandemic and a recent outbreak of cholera.

The Atlanta-based Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which has a relief partnership with World Vision, is calling on individuals and churches to respond with money and volunteer assistance.

With a serious drought worsening in many regions of Ethiopia, the number of

people needing food aid is expected to rise sharply from six million to between 10 and 14 million people this year.

One Billion Gideons Bibles Distributed

Sept 11, 2001, will stick in our minds as long as we live, but by comparison only a relative handful of hardworking, faithful Christians will remember Sept 10. That was the day The Gideons International reached the one billion mark in Bible and New Testament distribution.

Those ubiquitous hotel and motel room Bibles were first placed in 1908. Today, Gideons in 175 countries put them also in prisons, schools, military bases, college and university campuses, hospitals, nursing homes and rehab centres – places the Gideons call “the human traffic lanes and streams of everyday life”.

Around the world, some 235,000 volunteers and auxiliary (wives of Gideons) place nine Scriptures every five seconds. Bibles and New Testaments are distributed in 80 languages.

Having reached the one billion-milestone, the Gideons have a new slogan: “Why one billion Scriptures is not enough.” Their goal for the June 1, 2002 – May 31, 2003 fiscal year is to place 60.5 million Scriptures worldwide. Their annual budget is US\$90 million, which comes from donations.

Amazing stories surface showing how God continues to use the Bible to touch the lives of people, many of them in tough circumstances. – *World Pulse*



Church trends in U.K.

Over 20 percent of all British churches grew at least 10 percent in the ‘90s, according to *Religious Trends*. Growing churches tend to be small, friendly (especially to ethnic minorities), offer Alpha courses and have a sizeable youth population.

More people go to church in Scotland than in England. Charismatic churches are often larger than other churches – more than double the average churches. – *World Pulse*

Call for Equal Rights for Christians in Turkey

The International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) in Frankfurt has called for equal rights for the Christian minority in Turkey. It also criticises the detainment of journalists and the closing of human rights offices.

Nearly all 64 million inhabitants of Turkey are Muslims. The number of Christians is estimated to be around 110,000 or 0.2 percent of the population.

According to ISHR, church life continues to be restricted. Theological seminaries of the Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches remain closed so that the training of priests is impossible.

Some evangelical churches are threatened with closure, as happened to a 40-year-old congregation in Iskenderun last June. There is no legal framework for the Roman Catholic Church and its social ministries. – *idea*

FOR Your Prayers



A Z E R B A I J A N

Azerbaijan is a Central Asian nation on the west coast of the Caspian Sea. Though the constitution offers full religious freedom, a culture of control still exists at all levels in this former Soviet state. Thus the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations (SCWRA) has considerable, unchecked power. All religious groups had to re-register with SCWRA in August 2001 and less than half the groups previously registered have successfully re-registered under more restrictive new conditions. Unregistered groups may still operate legally, but find it very difficult to function properly. Non-traditional churches frequently report that they are harassed by local authorities. Pray for a change of attitude among authority figures and a commitment to uphold religious freedom; for grace and wisdom for pastors who are being harassed; for the release of the Christian literature being held in customs; and for God to protect believers and their places of worship.

K A Z A K H S T A N

There are some 6,000 ethnic Christians here. In 1990, there were none, says *Operation World*. Most are from Muslim backgrounds. Altogether it is estimated that the Church in this land is 50,000 strong. Pray for the ongoing work of the gospel here. Freedom of religion was recently guaranteed – for the time being. A law that would have banned all religious unregistered groups and required missionaries to register with the state was thrown out by the constitutional court. But it is believed that the authorities will continue their attempts to clamp down on religion, especially Christianity. Pray for the faith of Christians to be built up during this time of freedom and that they will be willing to seize every opportunity to share the gospel while they can.

T I B E T

Tibet is a mysterious, isolated land nestled between China and Nepal. It is a resolute Buddhist country, struggling against Chinese annexation, which has resulted in a million Tibetan deaths. Pray

for the gospel to reach the people's hearts. *Feba*, a Christian radio broadcasting station, has been broadcasting to Tibetans at home and in exile for the last 11 years. The radio programmes not only proclaim the gospel but also demonstrate it in practical ways such as broadcasting healthcare information. Evidence that the broadcasts are making an impact came from 20,000 listeners' letters last year. In a land fighting for its identity, pray that Tibetans will find their true identity in Christ.

S R I L A N K A

Attacks on evangelical churches in Sri Lanka have escalated. Local people have been incited to carry out the attacks out of fears that the small fellowships will undermine the cultural and religious unity of this predominantly Buddhist nation. The Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka says the Society for the Preservation of Buddhism is aggressively trying to establish chapters in every district of the country to monitor growth of Christianity and prevent conversions. Radical Buddhists also aim to close down churches in traditional Buddhist villages. Pray, however for the Church to grow.

P A K I S T A N

An alliance of Islamic parties was very successful in the national and provincial elections held last October. The

parties now dominate the provincial assembly in the North West Frontier Province. This surprise result has increased the fears and uncertainties of Christians in Pakistan. Pray for them that they will not be dismayed at the circumstances but will turn to God for courage to face whatever is ahead.

B U L G A R I A

The missionaries were thrilled the day the Bulgarian Turk mother came with her baby daughter and told them she had renounced old religious traditions and burned their charms and beads. Yet she still poured melted lead into water for those who asked. This was supposed to scare away evil spirits. The missionaries exhorted her to tell the people that since she had put her trust in Christ, she would no longer do this because He is far stronger than any evil spirit. Pray for people like her in Bulgaria to be set free.

A F R I C A

Africa Inland Mission is seeking to bring the gospel to Africa's unreached peoples and, through its programmes, link churches and Christian groups in Europe to this work. One such people group are the eight million Somalis in Somalia and around the world. Almost all are Muslims. Pray for the work.

