

## EDITORIAL

**N**ot enough is being said and done to honour spiritual fathers in our nation.

Last month, NECF Malaysia had the opportunity to honour our immediate past chairman, Rev. Datuk Prince Guneratnam, for his memorable contributions to NECF over the past 12 years. It was a rare opportunity to see all three NECF chairmen – two past and the present one – fellowshiping together.

Rev. Prince commented that it was such a blessing to see “no strife” in NECF’s leadership succession, and indeed it was a blessing to see the “precious oil upon the head, running down...” (Psa. 133).

Many, if not all, went away from the dinner thinking what a privilege it was to honour the spiritual fathers of our nation.

The Bible exhorts us to honour those who deserve honour. We are urged to *overwhelm* our leaders *with appreciation and love!* “And now friends, we ask you to honour those leaders who work so hard for you, who have been given the responsibility of urging and guiding you along in your obedience. Overwhelm them with appreciation and love!” [(1 Thess. 5:12–13a (MSG))]

What happens when spiritual fathers take their place in our nation? I believe:

- Prodigal sons will return;
- His Church will enjoy stability and security. No pastor or church need feel alone in his ministry. Many do not have the benefit of the fathers’ wisdom and encouragement;
- Pastors and workers will enjoy

‘added safeguard’ against moral failure. Fathers are there to provide checks and balances, and wise counsel when one is drawn away;

- Spiritual fathers are the ones God will use to sustain revival. We have been praying for years for a sovereign move of God in our nation, but what happens after He has poured out His Spirit on our nation? Our churches, in their present state, will be hard pressed to sustain any move of God; and

# NOT ENOUGH

- “City fathers” will emerge to lead His Church to focus on nationhood. The walls between churches will fall; churches will be more united, and can be challenged to co-operatively work on larger issues such as nation building.

But why is it that leaders and pastors today do not adequately recognise and honour spiritual fathers?

Sadly, what Apostle Paul lamented in 1 Cor. 4:15 appears to be still true – there are many instructors, but few fathers.

Perhaps we are part of the problem? So many of us are just too busy with our own churches and church activities that we don’t see taking time and initiative to honour fathers as important for our spirituality.

It could also be that we have not been able to see past the quirks and ‘splinters’ in our spiritual fathers’ eyes. We are ignorant of what God has been doing

in the lives of these honourable men – we have forgotten they are human too and have their own personal struggles.

And we are not as forgiving as we like to think. Also, if we are honest, there may be jealousy – let us not be quick to dismiss this. Possibly too, many have not benefited from spiritual fathers within their own churches and consequentially, we don’t see the need to be spiritual fathers.

Doubly tragic is that we ourselves, whilst not recognising spiritual fathers in our lives and in our nation, are reluctant to rise up and be one. It has been observed that workers with spiritual fathers in their lives tend to finish well (in their spiritual walk).

Where the hearts of the fathers have turned to the children, let there also be a corresponding turning of the hearts of the children to their fathers (Malachi 4:6).

Let us honour those who deserve the honour. ■

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# Report: Religious freedom in Malaysia tightened

NECF MALAYSIA now has a commission to monitor events and developments pertaining to religious liberty in the country. The Religious Liberty Commission exists to:

- defend the freedom of religion as defined by Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments;
- help Christians to exercise their faith without oppression or discrimination; and
- systematically address the subjects of religious liberty.

The seven-member team is entrusted with the responsibility of:

- Monitoring judicial, social, economic and political development that impacts religious liberty in Malaysia and regions beyond;

• Promoting consciousness and awareness of religious liberty

among Malaysian churches (including dissemination of relevant information and literatures);

• Training and building up a core team of advocates and lawyers to address religious liberty in its various aspects;

• Advocating religious liberty in the Malaysian society with reference to government, NGOs, churches, other religious communities, et cetera;

• Providing legal assistance to victims of religious liberty violations, especially churches and Christians;

• Networking with other religious liberty groups; and

• Providing an annual audit on religious liberty in Malaysia.

The members comprise Lee Min Choon (Chairman), Lim Heng Seng, Dr

David Fung, Henry Jalin Wat, Rev. Johnson Chua, Cyrstal Kuek and NECF Executive Secretary (Research) Lim Siew Foong.

The commission recently released its maiden audit report for 2005, which is available on the NECF website under the Research section.

The report details development of various events relating to religious liberty, such as: controversial court cases (for example, the Moorthy and Lina Joy cases), restrictions on *Al-Kitab*, MyKad error, headscarf ruling on non-Muslim students, destruction of places of worship, government action against non-Orthodox Muslims (for example Ayah Pin) and the dual legal system in the country.

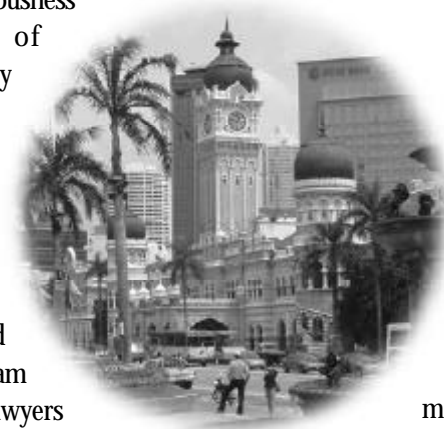
The report concluded thus:

“Religious liberty in Malaysia further constricted in the period under review (2005). While it is regularly argued that non-Muslims in this country enjoy significant freedoms to worship, these are no more than have been

granted by the Federal Constitution since Independence.

It is indisputable, however, that the tangible expression and practice of these rights is being curtailed by the formulation and interpretation of laws, policies and administrative procedures. At the present rate of erosion, it may not be too long before a great deal of the substance of this right is only good on paper.

To be sure, there have recently been a few positive developments on the horizon but the landscape remains less



# NECF Supports PM's Sensible Statements, Rejects Leaders' Racial Remarks

**N**ECF MALAYSIA lauds Umno President Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for his firm and assuring statements made while delivering his presidential address at the opening of the 57<sup>th</sup> Umno General Assembly on Nov. 14.

His statements reflected his sincerity and commitment to his responsibility as the Prime Minister of all Malaysians.

NECF particularly notes and welcomes his specific commitment to:

- Firmly act against any group, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, who incites the public with “bogus allegations and fictitious threats”;
- Reject any demonstration of the “new intolerance”;
- Strengthen national unity to promote cooperation and dialogue;
- Uphold meritocracy and promote excellence as the way forward for Malaysia, and assurance that “no race should be left behind in terms of educational attainment”;
- Eradicate poverty regardless of racial background;
- Enforce the rule of law in battling against corruption;
- Advocate good governance: political leadership should provide “best possible example by displaying

honesty, diligence, dedication and commitment”; and

• Affirm freedom of expression in rational manner: “a nation should provide channels that enable its people to voice their concerns.”

Although his speech was read in his position as the Umno president, NECF deems his message beneficial to all Malaysians as it aims at raising a generation of united and progressive Malaysians who are able to tackle the challenges of a globalising world.

However, NECF regrets the statements made by several Umno leaders, which appear to go against Datuk Seri's commitment towards national integration and unity. Their statements further demonstrate an unhealthy superior attitude by blaming on and unnecessarily issuing warning statements against the people of other races.

NECF notes with deep disappointment their statements that the rights of Malays were being threatened by the other races. Such statements made so publicly are likely to breed resentment in the hearts of our Malay brethren, and is definitely injurious to peaceful race relations in the country.

NECF is also disappointed by some Umno leaders for rejecting the setting up of the Interfaith Commission and discouraging discussion on constitutional provisions. ■

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than encouraging. (These and other matters will be covered in the next report.)

Of even more concern is the fact that certain socio-religious groups, in the name of ‘defending’ the country’s official religion, appear to be more willing to use

Of even more concern is the fact that certain socio-religious groups, in the name of ‘defending’ the country’s official religion, appear to be more willing to use the threat of force – if not force itself – to suppress the protests against restrictions of religious freedom and, more generally, the Federal Constitution.

the threat of force – if not force itself – to suppress the protests against restrictions of religious freedom and, more generally, the Federal Constitution.

Malaysia has had a very good, if not unblemished, record of keeping religious-inspired violence to a minimum and this tendency therefore ought not to be condoned by the authorities.

With a landmark Federal Court ruling in the offing, an increasing number of conflicts involving religious re-conversions, conflicts between civil and religious family and inheritance laws, and with temperatures

rising among certain ethnic groups at what is seen as systematic destruction of their places of worship, religious freedom is expected to remain high on the agenda in the near future.

Christians and the Church will need to continue to be watchful, prayerful and truthful in detecting and engaging infringements in religious liberties.

They should, as our Lord God commanded, do so out of the spirit of love and concern for the country and not driven by hate and selfishness, as is the case of some.”

The full report is available on the NECF website ([www.necf.org.my](http://www.necf.org.my)). ■



# Second prayer network formed



Open air discussion for delegates.

DELEGATES from the three southern peninsular states who attended the recent NECF Malaysia Southern Prayer Consultation have agreed to form a network to enhance ties and increase the prayer momentum in the region.

The three states are Johor, Negri Sembilan and Melaka.

The delegates also appointed coordinators for the various towns, a coordinator for each state, and finally a chief coordinator for the region – Pr Joshua K from Melaka.

The state coordinators are Pr Ruth Tan for Johor, Pr Joshua K for Melaka,

and Pr David Rajjah for Negri Sembilan. They will meet every four months to share current issues and prayer needs.

The Southern Prayer Network is the second regional network formed under the NECF Prayer Commission, the first being the Northern Prayer Network. The commission aims to set up prayer networks for all regions to mobilise Christians throughout the nation to pray, especially in times of crisis.

Held in early November, the three-day consultation in Melaka was attended by over 40 prayer leaders.

During the consultation, delegates representing their towns shared the spiritual landscape and needs of their areas. The towns covered were Johor Baru, Kluang, Batu Pahat, Muar, Pontian, Seremban, Port Dickson, Nilai, Mantin, Pajam and Melaka.

The sharing helped the delegates to “feel” for the towns, and gave them new insight to ministry and intercession. ■

## Deceased son left insurance gift for parents



Vincent's parents, Mr and Mrs Lee Weng Loke, are thankful for the cheque.

VINCENT LEE from Ipoh was born with five heart defects and a host of other problems. Doctors did not think he would live past his first birthday.

Vincent went home to the Lord on Sept 12. He was 21 years old.

On Oct 23, his parents were at the NECF Malaysia office to receive a cheque from Great Eastern (GE) for a policy he had bought last year under the NECF-Great Eastern *Group Multiple Insurance Scheme Investment Linked with Critical Illness*. The cheque amounted to over RM27,000.

According to Lawrence Liew of GE, GE accepted Vincent's application even though they knew of his congenital heart problem.

“This is a very special insurance scheme specially designed for NECF's members. Under this scheme, we will accept all applications except for terminal and bedridden cases,” he said.

GE will continue to offer this group scheme without underwriting to NECF members, provided 30% of their congregation join the scheme.

NECF associate members may also sign up directly through NECF.

In return, GE will contribute two percent of the premiums collected to the NECF Foundation. The foundation will in turn use the money to help pastors who cannot afford to pay the full premium. Churches which are interested in the scheme may contact Rev. Lai Moo Him at the NECF office. ■

## Hope ALIVE

THE local church is the biblical channel to reach out to the nation. Hence, it is imperative that Christians are aware of and concerned about current national issues, so that they can make effective long-term plans that will contribute to nation building. Additionally, the church must maintain a high standard of management and discipline.

NECF Malaysia Chairman Rev. Eu Hong Seng made the remarks in his message to over 500 participants attending the 2<sup>nd</sup> NECF Tamil conference at Full Gospel Tabernacle, Subang Jaya, in August.

The former NECF Tamil Commission chairman lamented that churches are normally tied down to the “ABC agenda” – attendance, building

and cash – and urged the participants to break out of this mentality if they want their churches to be effective channels to bless the nation.

The two-day conference, themed “Building Strong Churches”, had a three-fold aim of motivating pastors and leaders of the Tamil churches to build healthy and strong churches that last; challenging them to identify weaknesses that restrict proper and dynamic growth; and learning the dynamic key church growth principles that enhance the building process. The underlying premise of the entire conference was that strong churches are a real possibility in our nation.

At another session, Rev. Eu helped the participants explore the factors needed in “Building the Tabernacle”.

He stressed seven factors in building

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# Takut Tuhan, Stem Corruption

By Ong Juat Heng

The Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) celebrates its 39<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and as part of its celebration, the agency's officers are going to religious institutions – mosques, churches, temples and others – to promote its work.

On Oct 12, a group of ACA officers were at the NECF Malaysia office to meet Klang Valley pastors and leaders. Led by its Federal Territory director, Chuah Chang Man, they shared about their work with the 100-strong audience.

The meeting was hosted by NECF but it was organised and sponsored by the agency, with 'brunch' thrown in.

In his talk, Chuah covered the definition and laws on bribery and corruption, and even quoted Bible verses relating to the two evils. What he shared was probably nothing new to the audience.

The interesting thing to note is that the ACA bothered to send its officers to NECF and other religious institutions to promote its work. That spoke something about what the agency is driving at, that is – the relation between God and corruption.

Perhaps if everyone knows and fears God, won't we be more hesitant about giving and accepting bribes? Maybe, maybe not, but our relationship with God will surely have a great influence on our daily encounters with the authorities.

Likewise, if we have God-fearing leaders, they will, at least, think twice about using their positions to line their pockets.

I once encountered a "think-twice" policeman who stopped me for driving through the amber light. He cited my offence, asked for my driving licence and as he jotted my details on his notebook, he ranted at how "*leceh* (troublesome)" it was to pay

the fine.

I begged for mercy, pointing to my two boys at the backseat who were going to be late for school. His reply to my "*Tolonglah Encik*" was that over-familiar phrase, "*Tolong? Macam mana nak tolong?*" (How can I help?)

Then, he said *it*: "*Ha, kalau nak tolong cepat* (If you want help, quick)". And he thumped his notebook impatiently.

Ha, I knew what that meant – put some red notes on the opened pages of the notebook, and I'd be off the hook. Instead,

I said softly and humbly, "*Tak bolehlah Encik. Takut Tuhan* (Cannotlah Sir. Afraid of God.)"

"*Takut! Takut apa?* (Afraid! Afraid of what?)" he barked. I looked up to his face and pleaded, "*Takut*

*Tuhan. Encik tak takut Tuhan?* (Afraid of God. Sir, you're not afraid of God?)"

I will never forget the look on his face when he heard these words. He was stunned; his face turned a shade paler and I thought I saw fear flashing in his eyes. Then, he snapped shut his notebook and told me to go. As he marched back to his motorcycle, I thanked him profusely and zoomed off.

When the policeman stopped me, I was already prepared to pay the fine for my wrongdoing (though I'm still unsure if going through an amber light is wrong). But God was merciful to me in this case. And, I guess, He was also merciful to the policeman. Thankfully in this instance, he did not succumb to the lure of easy money because he *takut Tuhan*.

The temptation to give, accept and ask for bribes is a reality we battle daily, more so for those in authority. And so, as the ACA officers continue to discharge their duties, let us be prayerful for them, for ourselves and for our leaders. ■

Tolonglah, Encik.

Tolong?  
Macam mana  
nak tolong?

## Free Shofar, anyone?

WOULD your church like a shofar? Shofar maker Paul W. Howe is eager to give your church one. For free. Not only that, he is offering lessons on how to blow the shofar using the "pert-sound" technique, which he has developed. With this technique, anyone can easily sound the shofar, he said.

Paul, who juggles his shofar ministry and his work as a sound editor in his church (Miracle, Signs & Wonder Fellowship), picked up the shofar interest in October 2005 when he was "awakened" by the sound of the shofar during one Sunday worship service in church.



A ready-treated horn.

"Something in me jumped when I heard the sound," he recalled. He then began to search the Internet for the instrument that gave the "sound", and finally managed to get hold of a ram's horn shofar from abroad. "But wow, was it smelly! The horn had to be treated before it could be blown or everyone would have run away."

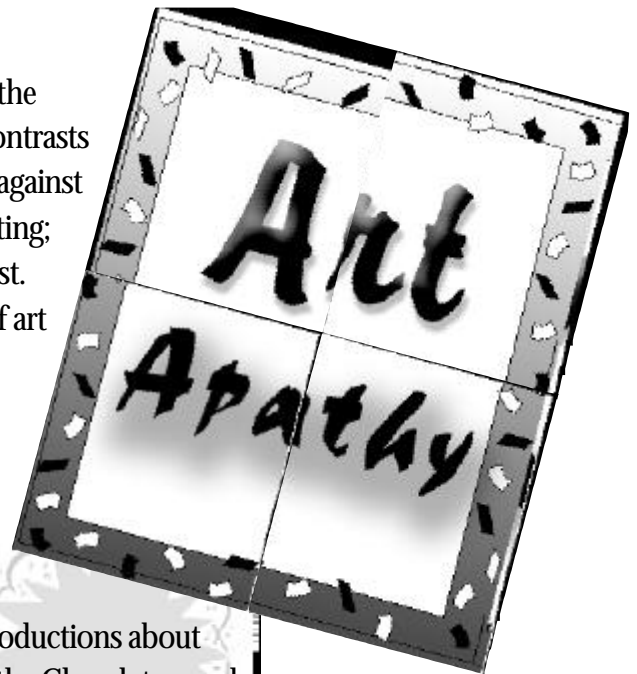
Paul found that a ready-to-blow shofar is rather pricey for the average Malaysian and this would be an obstacle to popularising it as a regular instrument for worship. He then decided to import raw ram's horns from abroad and treat them locally, and sell them at affordable prices. Those interested to know more may contact Paul at 016-2656605 or email [wilwin@tm.net.my](mailto:wilwin@tm.net.my) ■

ACCORDING to Christian art history, art is one of the finest expressions of mankind's spiritual aspiration. This contrasts sharply with the arrogance of modern art, which sets itself against God. Indeed, art is more than just word or dance or painting; it is also the voice of one's soul in his or her spiritual quest.

Sadly, the Malaysian Church has yet to recognise the role of art in Kingdom building. At best, art is merely seen as an evangelistic tool.

NECF Malaysia Executive Secretary (Research) LIM SIEW FOONG finds out from COLIN KIRTON how art can help us discover and articulate our faith. Colin is a freelance performing artist and the Artistic Director of Footstool Players, a theatrical company that

provides entertaining and thought-provoking dramatic productions about the Christian faith. It also seeks to encourage and equip the Church to use drama as a medium of communication in Christian ministry.



### As a Christian, how do you view art?

Firstly, as a person enjoying the artistic work of someone else, art is *a gift from God*, created for our blessing. My response to that is naturally grateful worship. I am of course excluding art that dishonours or blasphemes God in some way.

Secondly, as a person exercising my artistic abilities, art is *an expression of my worship of God*. The creative spark within me is part of my being created in the image of God. This is one of the most beautiful aspects of being created in God's image, probably only second to the ability to love. When I exercise my creativity as unto Him – as I believe I am expected to do by my Creator – I worship Him and reflect His image in a fallen world.

### How do you combine art and faith? Do artist-Christians have an obligation?

Our primary 'obligation' is worship. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Footstool Players derives its name from Psalm 99:5, which calls us to "exalt the LORD our God and worship at His footstool". We see all our theatrical endeavours as ultimately submitted humble worship at the feet of our great God, so that He may be exalted through all that we do.

I believe that God has given us unlimited scope in terms of the artwork. It does not necessarily have to be about God or religious themes. However the total body of our work as an artist should reflect and be consistent with a Word-centred worldview.

Our secondary obligations, which really flow naturally from our primary obligation to worship God, are no different from those of any other Christian: Love our neighbour; the celebration of what is good, just, and righteous; speaking on

behalf of the downtrodden and needy; encouraging one another, and so on. The only difference is that as artists, we may use our art as the medium of expressing what is on our hearts or communicating our message.

### In this increasingly visual-oriented culture, the Bible seems to have lost its appeal in its written form; young people today don't read. How can art provoke them to read the Bible and help them understand God's work through Scripture?

Art makes the familiar unfamiliar so that the audience is forced to see something with new eyes. Footstool Players do this through theatre. Theatre is actually storytelling, and that is pretty close to the way the Bible goes about communicating God's heart to us! Much of Scripture is narrative, metaphor and poetry. It makes great subject matter for theatre!

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, audio-visual has become dominant, not just with young people, but with the older folks too! We need to rise to the occasion and find ways to communicate Scriptural truth in the media of the day. This is certainly not to diminish the need to read our Bible! But there is a need to creatively explore other options to capture the minds and hearts of people. I am always amazed at how, years later, some of the audience can articulate details and the point of the theatrical pieces we have performed, when they are often unable to even remember what their pastors preached about two Sundays ago!

**Artists see with different eyes. Paul Tillich said, "Artists do not merely express a moment of the social situation of their time. They express the dynamics in the depths of society, which come from the past and run toward the future. Therefore, they have a prophetic character."**

**It is not that artists have a vision of a future which is not yet real. They are not romantics, but in their creative depths they are aware of those elements in the present, which will determine the future of society.**

**A most telling example of the prophetic function of the artist was the way in which the expressionist painters before the First World War foresaw the catastrophes of the 20th century” (1987). How can artists play a prophetic role in Malaysia?**

Yes, all artists see with different eyes, but not all are necessarily gifted with the so-called ‘prophetic discernment’ which Tillich describes. Yet, there is probably a greater streak of that discernment among artists than there might be in the general populace. Perhaps because the artistic temperament tends to be more reflective and introspective, artists tend to have a greater sensitivity to what is happening around them, which is in turn expressed in the artwork.

Again, I don’t want to narrow artistic expression among Christians to merely a prophetic role. There is snootiness among some secular artists that if an artwork does not make some social statement, or promote some agenda (usually left-wing!), it is despised as being ‘low art’, or ‘commercial’! We can easily breed that same kind of ‘more-prophetic-than-thou’ attitude in Christian-themed art!

But, yes, I would agree that some of the most powerful prophetic statements can be manifested through artists who are sensitive to the heartbeat of God in this day and age and circumstance. In fact, artistic Christians need to continually seek the heartbeat of God so that their artwork may reflect that heartbeat, instead of “trying to be prophetic” for prophecy’s sake or feeling pressured that their artwork must be “prophetic” in some way. When God becomes the focus and pursuit, He will by default use art in prophetic ways that the artists themselves may not have realised when creating the art!

I look upon prophecy as ‘declaring the Word of the Lord’ or ‘calling the people back to God’, so in that sense, we all have a prophetic role to play through our art forms.

In the play entitled “Runaway Bride,” the Footstool Players’ 2005 production, we tackled, in seven short sketches, many of the maladies affecting today’s Church such as apathy, consumerism, legalism, compromise, idolatry, and lack of love towards the needy. Since it was an exposé of the sinful condition of God’s people and a calling to return to their mandate and position as the Bride of Christ, it was prophetic.

An earlier production, “Let Go, Let God” dealt with the very struggle we face in releasing ourselves to God who asks us to trust Him with total abandon even when His ways do



not seem consistent with His character, or our circumstances seem too overwhelming. Was it ‘prophetic’? Certainly! Try Habakkuk for a similar message!

**Historically, Christianity has played a significant role in social influence and community transformation. How can art play a role in “transforming the nation through the local church” (NECF’s theme)? Christians are called to be salt and light. How can Christians engage their culture through arts?**

Let us first remind ourselves that it is not the art *per se* that transforms people or nations, but the Spirit of God. But the art may be the medium that He chooses to use to facilitate that transformation.

I feel very strongly that if we Christians are going to engage our culture through art, we need to take a good hard look first at how we view art.

Too often art is viewed merely as a propagandist tool of the Church, seeking to bash everyone on the head with the Four Spiritual Laws! We are also, in the words of Franky Schaeffer, “addicted to mediocrity”.

If we are going to impose such so-called ‘art’ on a secular world that has such high standards, we are lacking the credibility entirely! The sad thing is, so much of what the Church attempts to do is in this vein! How can we then be taken seriously? How can we gain an audience for what we have to say?

Art can act as a bridge between believers and the communities. Art provides an avenue for our stories to be told, our feelings to be voiced and empathy to be shared. We as Christians should be telling our stories – our testimonies in effect – and, above all, God’s stories, through art!

We must also seek to be listeners, empowering the communities to share their stories with us through artistic expression. Empowering communities artistically allows them to process what is happening in their lives, and around them. Perhaps in doing so, we can point to the God who desires to walk with them through all that they experience. ■

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Colin trained and performed in professional theatre in Canada before returning to Malaysia in 1998. He now freelances in the arts and entertainment scene as an actor, director, writer, trainer, musician, singer, host/emcee and voiceover talent.

He also regularly teaches on issues pertaining to the arts and faith, directs creative projects and conducts practical theatre skills workshops towards equipping and encouraging the Malaysian Church in using the creative arts in worship, teaching and outreach. Colin worships at Subang Jaya Gospel Centre, where he also serves as a deacon. In our next issue, he will share how the Church can embrace art and nurture Kingdom-minded artists.

# Current Concerns for your prayers

## Urgent Prayer for Malaysia

MALAYSIA, who has prided herself as a socially harmonious and politically stabile nation, is now on a new threshold. Ethnic bigotry with religious complexities is on the rise. For example, an individual's religious status is now invariably the concern of the whole community.

As a result, many civil society organisations have turned towards issues on religion. Meanwhile, new religious groupings are springing up rapidly, particularly the Muslim NGOs.

In the recent months, religious extremists have gone beyond vocalising their thoughts to actively mobilising group protests and spreading vicious rumours to provoke the sentiment of the people.

Politically-motivated racial slurs, the fractions within the ruling party and the conflicts between the PM and his predecessor have not been helpful. They have instead produced political loopholes for the extremists to whip up religious fervour for the purpose of creating instability and chaos in the country.

The SMS rumour on a church baptising a group of Malays is evidently consequential to the intense ethnic/religious consciousness in the society.

While such malicious act of some ill-willed persons is revolting, many are shocked and alarmed by the irrational reaction of many based on an unfounded rumour. One wonders if our racial relation could worsen to a situation that will see a replay of the May 13 racial clashes.

Abhorrent events hover around us. Yet the Christian community must not lose heart but to "wait for the Lord and keep His way" (Ps 37:34a), for "the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord, He is their strength in time of trouble" (37:39). Therefore we pray unceasingly with the Word of God, out of love and concern for the nation.

Pray for:

1. The Government: loves justice and righteousness (Prov 25:5); walk in integrity; and has the political will to stamp out corruption and extremism.
2. The extremists: against the spirit of extremism (Eph 6:12); those who seek to sow discord and hatred to turn from their evil ways (Ps 83:13-18).
3. The neighbours: renewed mindset and spiritual enlightenment (2 Cor 4:4-6; Rom 10:10).
4. The Church: loves God and loves neighbours (Matt 33:36-38); continues to makes disciples, and be salt of the earth and light of the world (Eph 6:19; Col 4:3-6; 2 Thess 3:1-2). ■

## Affirmative action for all poor

FOR the past two months, Malaysians have been engulfed by the NEP equity ownership debate. According to the Ninth Malaysia Plan, Bumiputra equity ownership in 2004 measured by the Economic Planning Unit is 18.9%, but this was refuted by the Asian Strategy Institute (Asli), which said it was 45%.

Then came a university research paper that reported Bumiputra equity ownership had already hit 33.7% in 1997. The research was done by Universiti Malaya academician Dr M Fazilah Abdul Samad.

The latest revelation came from the Finance Ministry itself, which reported that Bumiputras own some 36% of shareholding value in companies listed on the main board and second board of Bursa Malaysia as at last Dec. 31.

The original objectives of the NEP are two-fold: poverty eradication regardless of race, and eliminating the identification of race with economic function – for example, Malays are farmers and Indians estate workers - by restructuring society.

And because bumiputras were deemed to have been left out of the development process during the long colonial period, the policy imposed

ethnic-based quotas for university admission, licences and scholarships.

The government is continuing the affirmative action under a new name – the National Development Policy – because it felt the bumiputras had not been able to increase their ownership of the nation's wealth from 2.4% in 1970 to 30% in 1990 despite the billions spent to help them.

But some experts feel equity ownership should not be the focal point. What is more important is equitable distribution of wealth among the people, irrespective of race, so that no one is marginalised.

In every race, there are the wealthy and the poor, and the Government ought to ensure that the gap between the two is narrowed, said Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER) executive director Dr Mohd Ariff Abdul Kareem.

"There is nothing wrong if the Government wants to take affirmative action to help a particular segment of the community. However, the real issue is that the particular community as a whole has access to the wealth and that it is not confined to a privileged few," he said.

Pray that this equity ownership will not be used by self-centred politicians to further their personal agenda. Pray that the Government will heed the MIER executive director's wise counsel for equitable distribution among people within all races. Pray that the Government's "affirmative action" will help the poor segment of *all* Malaysians, regardless of the race. ■

## Police and IGP

THE manner with which a Mongolian model was recently murdered is shocking, but what was more deplorable was the news that three police personnel were suspected of shooting her first and then exploding her body with government-issued explosives.

As Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang





# Current Concerns for your prayers

↑ told AFP, the case raised concerns about the “easy availability” of explosives. How did the culprit(s) manage to get hold of the explosives? Isn’t there a system to check the flow of armaments?

The gruesome murder has tainted police reputation, not just locally but abroad. But the redeeming point for our law enforcers is their quick action in reining in the suspects and its attempt to swiftly solve the case.

Pray for the police – for courage and competency as they investigate this case. As this a high-profile case involving a high-profile well-connected political analyst, pray against any attempt by anyone to obstruct the truth, and justice for the deceased’s family.

News of this scandalous murder broke out just days after the shameful SMS incident in Ipoh, which might have ended horribly had not the police kept a tight grip on the crowd.

Again, the police must be commended for their firm rein over the situation that saw hundreds of Muslim Malays gathered outside an Ipoh church after hearing rumours spread via SMS alleging that hundreds of Malays were going to be baptised there.

As it turned out, the service was for a “first holy communion” ceremony for 110 Indian children.

Please continue to cover our police in prayer. They require divine courage, wisdom, tact and fairness to carry out their duties among the many races and religions. Pray particularly for our Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan, who shoulder the burden of the entire police force and the peace of our streets.

Recently, he proposed several measures to check the increasing crime rate and improve police service to the country.

He has requested the Government for an additional 30,000 personnel to boost the existing 90,000-strong force, and it is understood the Cabinet is

studying his proposal. With more men, he will be able to deploy policemen on the ground to curb crime.

Recent statistics showed that the national crime index from January till last month has gone up by more than 12 per cent compared with the same period last year. There was an 18% increase in the number of violent crimes committed. Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili who released the figures, urged the public to help create an “anti-crime culture”.

Pray for the Government to release funds for the necessary programmes that will boost the morale and presence of the police force as proposed by the IGP.

## Corrupt leaders

THE media is an indispensable mean in exposing misdeeds and corruptions, especially by government leaders, and influencing the authorities to act against the transgressors.

This is starkly evident in the case of the Klang municipal councilor Datuk Zakaria Md Deros who has been dominating daily conversations since *The Sun* boldly uncovered his misdeeds in October.

Among his offences were: building his palatial bungalow without a planning approval; establishing a satay restaurant illegally on state land without approved building plan; and failing to pay assessment for house for the last 12 years.

Following incessant and intense media reports, the Selangor Sultan heard and felt his rakyat’s disgust and summoned him to his palace to explain. At a meeting with Datuk Zakaria in late October, the Sultan reprimanded him and directed him to quit his council post, and pay up the assessment he owed.

It disgusts the public no end when their leaders flout the law for their personal gain but are able to escape action because they have ties with those in government position. Malaysians are questioning whether there are two sets

of laws – one for ordinary folks and one for well-connected politicians.

One Klang municipal councillor has decried MPK’s double standard for merely sealing Datuk Zakaria’s illegal satay restaurant, but demolishing another man’s satay stall because of an extension constructed without a building plan. The councillor, Datuk Teh Kim Poo, is currently raising funds to help the owner of the demolished stall, Abdul Salim Mohamed.

Pray for the media that it will continue to be a voice for the public and they will diligently play the role of watchdog. Pray for the removal of corrupt and oppressive leaders, and that God will bless the righteous.

‘O let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish thou the righteous: For the righteous God trieth the minds and hearts.’ (Psa 7:9) ■

## The Church, Christmas and a new year

BY now, churches throughout Malaysia will be busy preparing for their Christmas programmes. Christmas presents a great opportunity to share the good news and demonstrate God’s love, especially to the poor and needy. ■

Pray for the spirit of love, unity and humility as we share Christ’s love with our neighbours.

As the year draws to an end, this is also a good time for us to take stock of our lives. Speaking of “stock”, the stock market sentiment seems to be riding high. Analysts are predicting a bull run next year, and we can guess that many will again be caught up in the money-making frenzy.

Pray that as God’s children, we will have our priorities right, that we will not lose sight of our eternal destiny.

Pray that the Malaysian Church will remain pure and passionate in its mission and vision of the Great Commission.

A blessed Christmas to all. ■

# Should Christians Emigrate?

By Bishop Rev. Dr Hwa Yung



According to the 2001 census, at least 35 percent of Malaysian immigrants to Australia were Christians. This is a highly disproportionate figure in view of the fact that Christians form only 9 percent of the Malaysian population.

This is, of course, part of the wider problem of the emigration of many skilled professionals from the Third World to the West. The resulting brain drain of some of the best and brightest, and the consequent damage to the economy and society, is a well-established fact.

The damage is also felt at the church level. Most of us can easily draw up a long list of people who were or could have been playing key roles in the Church in Malaysia, who have left the country over the last 30 years. For those who are seriously contemplating emigration, the issue is often a sensitive one.

At the same time, the issue is not a neutral issue but one that is at its very heart, moral. Therefore, despite its sensitivity, it needs to be discussed openly, objectively and frankly. What are the reasons why some Malaysians would consider emigrating?

## THE ATTRACTION OF THE WEST

The first reason is the general attraction of living in the more prosperous Western world, as all who have experienced living in the West would know. Higher standards of living, greater efficiency of the system, amenities of a wealthier society such as social security and better healthcare, and greater opportunities for jobs and children's education, are all part of the package that exerts an irresistible pull to the West.

## LACK OF PROFESSIONAL FULFILMENT

Some who are highly intelligent and motivated find that there is no way to achieve professional fulfilment in Malaysia. Where can a theoretical chemist, a nuclear physicist, a brilliant pianist and the like, find a happy niche to pursue his or her career here?

## RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS FACTORS

The National Economic Policy (NEP) has left many non-Bumiputras feeling that they do not belong in this country. The resurgence of Islam in the 1970s, and its continuation into the present, has aggravated this sense of alienation for those who are neither Bumiputras nor Muslims. "Why stay when we will always be treated as *pendatang* and will never be allowed to fully claim our rights as citizens of the land?" so the argument goes.

## EROSION OF CONFIDENCE

There has also been a growing loss of confidence in the ability

and integrity of the government. The many financial scandals, rampant corruption at all levels of society and the government's seeming failure to deal with it, increase in money politics and the struggle for power that led to this, plus rising crime rate, cause many to fear for the future.

## HOW SOME CHRISTIANS JUSTIFY EMIGRATION

While the above factors may be good reasons that have led many to consider emigration, they may not be sufficient reasons in themselves. Many recognise that these reasons arise out of putting as our top priorities our own comfort, security, careers and families, something which, in the final analysis, is rather centred on oneself. Not all would agree with this but most Christians would. The result is that amongst those who have emigrated or who are considering emigration, there is often a feeling of guilt which they rationalise away with the following arguments:

### "We can serve God anywhere!"

This is the most common argument put forward by those emigrating. On the surface, it seems a strong argument but problems appear upon closer examination. It depends on what we mean by "serve." In the general sense of "service," it is true that we can serve God anywhere. But in Scripture, "service" is linked to need and calling.

Consider the example of Paul. He was happily settled in Tarsus when Barnabas pulled him away to help meet the evangelistic and teaching needs of the church in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). Later, when it became evident that there was a desperate need for workers to evangelise the wider Gentile Graeco-Roman world, Paul and Barnabas responded to that need (Acts 13:2-3).

However, the question of "need" in itself does not constitute the command to go. There has to be a "call" from God as both passages indicate. The truth is that there are always needs everywhere, but we cannot humanly respond to every need.

The Christian thereby functions on the basis of two principles: "Where or which are the greater needs?" and "Is God calling me to meet that particular need?"

Applying the first principle to the question of emigration, we immediately recognise that both spiritually and socio-economically, the needs are far greater in the Third World than in the West. As regards the second principle of "calling," I must confess that I know of very few people who justify their

• SEE NEXT PAGE

emigration in terms of God calling them to specific work abroad.

On the other hand, God in his sovereign wisdom caused us to be born in Malaysia, and surely it is because this is where God has called us to serve him. Recognition of this simple truth would mean that we stay unless he calls us out to another place, like Abraham, or to another area of service, like Paul.

The fact that emigration invariably means moving to greener pastures of the West and never to poorer and spiritually needier countries belies the argument that “we can serve God anywhere.”

### **The Bible allows emigration**

It is not certain what people mean when they claim that the Bible allows for emigration. While it is true that Abraham emigrated from Ur, it was in response to God’s call (Genesis 11:2–12:1). It was not a case of moving from insecurity to greater security; rather it was exactly the opposite.

There is in fact a passage in Scriptures which specifically discourages ‘emigration’, if it may be put that way: Jeremiah 29:5–7. It was at a time after the Babylonians had deported a large number of Israelites as punishment for rebellion.

Many of the Israelite exiles in Babylon were unhappy in a foreign land where they had little citizenship rights, and would have emigrated back to Judah given the first chance.

But God asked them to “build houses...plant gardens...marry and have sons and daughters...seek the welfare of the city to which I carried you...pray to the Lord for it...”

Properly understood, this passage enshrines the fundamental principle, that we must learn to trust God’s sovereignty in history, and where he has placed us, there we are to remain to pray for and seek the welfare of the land. If this were the case, then it would be most unwise to claim that “the Bible allows for emigration.”

### **What about the prospects of persecution?**

In the history of the church, emigration as a result of persecution has often appeared to be the proper course of action to take. But do these historical facts necessarily justify the emigration movement involving Malaysian Christians today?

One can hardly describe the present situation in terms of persecution. Despite certain restrictions by the government, freedom of religion is still enshrined in our nation’s Constitution.

And we should certainly pray and work through all lawful means to help create a social climate in this nation so that the forces of extremism seeking to remove such constitutional safeguards would be held in check or removed altogether.

It has to be admitted that the pressure towards increased Islamisation will continue. Many are fearful and for some, the fear is too overwhelming for them to consider staying on.

## **FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED**

### **A question of need**

All of the above reasons are valid. But the question is whether they constitute a sufficient cause for leaving. I have suggested that they do not because from the Christian point of view, leaving for these reasons only solves the problems for myself, and perhaps, my family. It does not solve the problem for the nation, the Malaysian Church, and in particular, for those who are too poor and unqualified to have the means to leave.

It will mean that in the face of genuine spiritual and socio-economic needs, which are far greater than those in the West, we turn our backs and walk away like the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan.

By leaving, we leave the country and the Malaysian church in a state of even greater need than before because often, it is precisely those who leave who have the training, resources and ability to alleviate the needs of the country and the Church. If

this is so, then emigration cannot be a viable option for the Christian.

As for the question, “What about my children’s future?” the answer is two-fold. First, those who can afford to emigrate usually are rich enough to give their children an overseas education anyway if necessary, and thereby to give them a sufficient start in adult life.

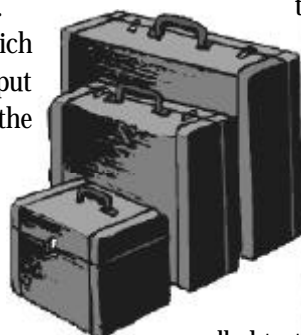
Secondly, and more pertinently, surely just as we are called to trust God for our own security, we are called to do the same for our children. We must dare to trust him and take seriously His Word, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things (all that we truly need) will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

### **God’s sovereign wisdom and his calling for us**

Christians must learn to believe that God is all-wise and that He has a definite purpose for us in placing us in Malaysia in this day and age. It is our responsibility to seek His will concerning this purpose and ask Him for grace and strength to fulfil it. Thus, ultimately, the question is not whether to emigrate or not to emigrate. Rather, it is: What is God’s will or calling for us, and what is our commitment to Him and His will?

The Christian life is built upon an eternal covenant between God and us, which involves God committing Himself to us, and we, in response to His initiative, grace and love, committing ourselves in return to Him. Many of us, however, seem not to have grasped this point, that the Christian life does involve a definite commitment to God and to His will for our lives.

We still think of Christianity in the way many non-Christians think of their religions. God is like Santa Claus, and if we are good, we can expect God to bless us with comfort, health and wealth. And we often forget what our commitment to Christ requires of us in terms of obedience, self-denial and sacrifice.



The outcome is that we often end up walking the path of least resistance in life, spiritually and emotionally, and many justify emigrating after praying, "If you give me the visa, I will take it that it is your will for me to go."

We forget that such oversimplistic approach to guidance will justify the emigration of almost all our Christian professionals. But is that God's call? I am not saying that God does not call some of us to emigrate. But such calling appears to be the exception rather than the rule.

### Settling in the West is no final solution

Settling in the West does not necessarily provide an escape from all the problems we hope to leave behind. Which country is safe these days? Is racism in the United Kingdom or Australia less ugly than its counterpart here? How would you like your children ogling at nude bodies making love on the TV screen and growing up desensitised to sexual immorality?

In the light of these questions, we must ask: "Is the West safer and more secure than here?" Western civilisation is on the decline, and the influence of the Church in the West has also been marginalised in an increasingly pluralistic post-Christian society. The 'war on terror' has also made Western countries vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

As such, despite its superficial attractions, all is not well with the West. Those seriously contemplating emigration should first take a good look at where they are thinking of going. Otherwise, they may find themselves jumping out of the frying pan into the fire! The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith (Romans 1:16)

Most of the time, we allow the negative circumstances around us to determine the course of action we take in life. Often, we fail to begin with God, with who He is – the Lord of history – and of what He can do through His people who trust Him.

The gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation to those who believe, as Paul wrote. And this is not just in the

narrow sense; God's salvation will necessarily have socio-economic and political implications for the nation as well.

We need to take our eyes off the negative circumstances around us and recognise that if this is where God has called us to be, then He will also make available to us His power, to proclaim His gospel of salvation, to build His church and to transform the society in which we live into something better. We need grace sufficient to grasp afresh such a vision of God.

If this is the vision that we need, what concrete shape will it take? Dr. Isabelo Magalit, a respected Christian leader in the Philippines once wrote an article entitled, "I have a dream."

In it, he spoke of seeing, coming out from the Christian student world of this present generation in East Asia, men and women who truly know God and His Word and whose lives are fully yielded to Him.

From amongst such men and women, he sees many going into full-time ministry as pastors, evangelists and theologians, labouring to build God's church in East Asia. Others amongst them would enter the professional fields such as law, business, engineering, politics and government, and journalism, and from within these professions exert a positive and powerful Christian influence in our society in Asia, and turn it towards a more righteous and just and godly direction.

Then he sees Christian homes springing up all over the region shining with the glory and beauty of the gospel in the dark world around them. Finally, he spoke of the pouring forth of the next wave of overseas missionaries from Asia into all the world. Towards the end of Dr. Magalit's paper, he said, "Share my dream. Take your place in it. Stand up and be counted for Jesus."

This is the sort of vision we all need to recapture today. ■

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HWA YUNG is Bishop of the Methodist Church in Malaysia. This article in its current form first appeared in the Kairos publication, "Emerging Church Issues" (October 2006). It is excerpted and updated by Kairos Research Centre from the original publication, "Christian Thinking on Emigration" published by Graduate Christian Fellowship in 1987.

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## Targeting five-fold increase

THE SPM Bible Knowledge (BK) subject has been given a boost by the formation of a committee to promote its growth. The committee, comprising the Malayan Christian School Council, Teachers' Christian Fellowship, Scripture Union and several Christian leaders, has set a target of 3,000 BK candidates for the SPM examination by 2010.

This is an uphill task, considering that last year, only about 600 SPM candidates sat for the BK paper.

More BK teachers are needed to

achieve the target; hence, the committee recently organised the SPM BK Teachers Training Seminar to recruit more teachers. At the same time, the committee is championing the subject among students, parents and churches.

Thus far, the committee has released new BK resource materials, and organised the BK Postal Quiz and the BK Oral Quiz to attract students.

The SPM BK syllabus requires a minimum of two hours of instruction per week over a period of two years.

The RSV version of the Bible will be used up to 2006. From 2007, the Good News Version will be used as standard text. BK resources include the new SPM BK textbooks, compilation of past year questions, database on BK teachers and classes, information on the BK Postal Quiz and BK Oral Quiz, as well as training VCDs for BK teachers.

The resources are available from **MCSC** (03-79565310; email: edumeth@streamyx.com); **TCF** (03-56375623; e-mail: tcfmy@pd.jaring.my) and **SU** (77829592; e-mail: info@su.org.my). ■

# Stay safe – stick to small group

THE Rev. Ted Haggard's sex scandal underscores the grave importance of peer accountability as a way for Christian leaders to counter temptations, which they are very vulnerable to.

"Leaders, especially those who travel a lot, need a small group of spiritual peers, God-fearing people who dare ask each other honest questions like 'What did you do in Bangkok? Who did you go out with? Who did you see?', advised NECF Malaysia Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong.

"Like I've always said, if leaders are not accountable, are inaccessible and think they are infallible, they will eventually become immutable."

Rev. Haggard was a leader to many millions but he forgot to lead himself, Rev. Wong lamented. "He allowed himself to go astray by his lack of self-discipline. Let us all learn from this incident and extend our prayers to him, his suffering family and church members," he added

Rev. Haggard has since resigned as President of the US National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and senior pastor of the 14,000-member New Life

Community Church, Colorado, which he founded.

NAE and NECF are both members of the World Evangelical Association (WEA). Rev. Haggard, who is therefore Rev. Wong's counterpart, was head of the 33 million-member NAE and was one of the most powerful religious leaders in the US before the scandal erupted. *Time* magazine voted him one of the top 25 most influential evangelicals in America in 2005, and he was often credited with rallying votes for President George W. Bush during the 2004 election campaign.

Rev. Wong called on the Christian community to avoid merciless judgement against Haggard; instead, we are to graciously and compassionately pray for him and his family members as his counsellors work with him towards discipline and restoration.

Immediately after news of the scandal broke out, WEA released a statement acknowledging the instrumental role Rev. Haggard had played in helping to revitalise the work of NAE in America.

"It is during these difficult moments



**"Haggard was a leader to many millions but he forgot to lead himself."**

**– Rev. Wong**

that the core principles of our faith become crystal clear: we all fall short of God's goodness and are need in of forgiveness and redemption that comes through Jesus Christ.

"The global Evangelical community is made up of 420 million people who are unified in seeking holiness, justice and renewal at every level of society – individual, family, community and culture," WEA said.

On his end, Rev. Haggard released a letter to his church, apologising for the "disappointment, the betrayal, and the hurt".

He also graciously asked his congregation to forgive his accuser, Mike Jones, who had claimed Haggard had regularly paid for sex with him over a three-year period. ■

• FROM PAGE 4: HOPE ALIVE

a strong church – jealously (not by begging, badgering and bluffing), willingly, spiritually, skillfully, obediently, daily and generously. Throughout his message, he emphasised the need for pastors and leaders to raise the standard of ministry so that God's work can be done more scripturally, skillfully and intelligently.

The second speaker was Rev. David Mohan, pastor of India's largest 300,000-member church. He shared practical ways to build a strong church by creating a strong leadership, providing motivational preaching, developing a healthy self-image for the

church and equipping church members with skills.

Another speaker, Rev. P. S. Rajamani, shared the need to recapture the vision of three Old Testament builders whom God used to restore three phases of revival – Zerubbabel in restoring the temple, Ezra in restoring the people and Nehemiah in restoring the walls.

Every church must revive and restore her worship, her people and her spiritual covering, said the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God churches in South India.

Rev. Rajamani also cautioned the participants on the danger of the church sidetracking from her original purpose and vision, and the necessity for the church

to boldly take a non-compromising stand.

The day sessions were followed by a time of prayer and rededication where God moved powerfully as participants prayerfully responded to Him.

The night rallies reminded the congregation about the crucial issues that were involved in proper church building – keeping the right vision, obedience, cleansing and sanctification.

Each night drew many to a deeper commitment in the Lord, with, many weeping and rededicating their lives. While the day sessions were full of exhortation and vision enhancement, the two nights were nights of cleansing, healing and restoration. ■

Negeri Sembilan is greatly influenced by the Minangkabau culture, evident in the buffalo-horn shaped roofs of the many buildings and the practice of fascinating 'Adat Perpatih', a matrilineal system of inheritance and administration. But for political purposes, the Minangkabau people are considered Malays, although they have little in common in sociocultural aspect with the Malays of other States. Still, religious piety is on the rise among the Muslims.



## STATISTICS (MALAYSIA STATISTICS DEPARTMENT, 2005)

**Population:** 946,300 (est.)

**Ethnic groups:** Malay 54.86%, Other Bumiputera (Temuan & Semelai) 1.42%, Chinese 23.91%, Indian 15.24%, Others 0.43%, Non-citizen 4.14%

**Religious Breakdown (2000):**

Islam 58.6%, Buddhism 20.3%, Hinduism 13.9%, Christianity 2.7%, Taoism/Confucianism 3.0%, Tribal 0.6%, Other 0.3%, No Religion 0.5%, Unknown 0.1%

**Incidence of poverty (2004):** 1.4%, Hardcore 0.2%

THE State's Control and Restriction (the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions Amongst Muslims) Enactment 1991 makes it an offence for non-Muslims to propagate non-Muslim doctrines or religions to Muslims.

Additionally, Section 48 of the Syariah Criminal Enactment 1992 states that declaring oneself to be a non-Muslim to avoid action taken is a punishable offence. He or she will be fined not more than RM5000 or imprisonment not more than three years or both.

Nyonya Tahir, a Malay woman who converted to Buddhism, died early this year. The Negeri Sembilan Religious Affairs Department (JHEAINS) obtained a Syariah Court order to postpone her burial until the Syariah High Court decided on her religious status. The court ruled she was not a Muslim.

This case was eventually cited as evidence of the Syariah Court's ability to declare a person's religious status and also to safeguard the rights of non-Muslim.

However, many think otherwise as the judge, in his judgment, quoted a Muslim scholar that "a person who had

left the Muslim faith should be asked to repent three times and if he did not, he should be killed, his body cannot be bathed according to Muslim rites, prayers cannot be performed for him and he cannot be buried in a Muslim cemetery" (*The Star*, Jan. 24).

In June, Datuk Dr Abdullah bin Md Zin, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of religious affairs, implied that a Muslim could leave Islam as long as the prescribed procedure was followed.

According to him, the Syariah Court could hear the application to leave Islam and make a declaration that the person has renounced the religion. This is evident in the Negeri Sembilan Islamic Religious Administration Enactment 2003.

The above Nyonya Tahir case was used as an example. The enactment also carries provision on the procedure to convert out of Islam (S119).

While this was gleefully accepted by some, many actually opined that the situation has deteriorated as compared to the past when one only needed to send notification to the Registrar of Mualafs to register his or her renunciation. They claimed that the existing provision is ultra vires.

Requiring an apostate to go to the Syariah Court is going beyond the Ninth Schedule of the Federal Constitution. In short, "it may seem more liberal but legislatively, they have encroached into a domain that they don't have any business in," commented Zaid Kamaruddin, President of Jamaah Islah Malaysia (*malaysiakini*, 29 June).

Meanwhile, there are groups who are ferociously opposing apostasy, strongly advocating the principle of 'no exit' in Islam. For example, a group named Gabung Anak Muda Negeri Sembilan expressed its opposition in a statement in August, calling for the largest Muslim gathering in Port Dickson.

Negeri Sembilan also reportedly houses a faith (Aqidah) rehabilitation centre. In 2002, it was revealed that hundreds of followers from "deviationist" groups were "rehabilitated" after undergoing "counselling" at the centre.

In August 2005, the Chief Minister told the State Assembly that action had been taken against followers of at least nine "deviant" sects to ensure that they return to the "right path" (SUARAM Human Rights Report 2005).

In 1996, three Muslim brothers were expelled from Sekolah Kebangsaan Felda Seriting in Negeri Sembilan for refusing to take off their *serban* during classes. Their father filed a suit against the school and Education Ministry. The case finally reached the Federal Court and in July 2006, the court ruled that the expulsion did not affect the students' religious freedom because *serban* was not an integral part of Islam.

The decision was applauded by those who advocated moderation, but some perceived the ruling as watering down

• SEE NEXT PAGE

freedom of religion in the country – the right to practise and profess one's religion as well as the child's rights.

PAS accused the judge of insulting Islam for saying that a Muslim boy need not wear a serban to prove his faith.

The freedom of worship by adherents of other faiths is respected by the State Government. However, there have been reports on the infringement of the rights to places of worship.

Many may not realise that the most severe racial clashes occurred in Negri Sembilan and Kedah in 1967 leading to the unforgettable May 1969 racial riot.

But generally, at the civil level, the relationship among the different ethnic and religious groups has been harmonious.

### Corruption and social ills

As stated in the Auditor-General's Report 2005, a sum of RM9.94 million meant for the poor was misused by the State Government, which took out RM5.44 million from the special fund to purchase furniture for the administration offices of Seremban and Port Dickson district councils. Another RM4.50 million was used to convert the State's official guest house into the Chief Minister's residence (*malaysiakini*, Sept. 6).

There may be social problem created by illegal foreign workers. It was recently reported that 380 foreign students enrolled in a college in Seremban are actually working illegally instead of attending classes (*NST*, Nov. 3).

Drug addiction continues to be a pressing issue, especially among the youth in Seremban, Tampin and Jempol

### The Church

There are supposedly 40 churches in Seremban and 12 in Port

#### PRAY FOR:

- State Government: wisdom, integrity and corrupt-free, prioritise public interests, good stewardship of state funds, uphold religious freedom.
- Against the spirit of those who incite hatred, bigotry and intolerance.
- Economic sufficiency, especially for those involve in agriculture, e.g. farming and fishing. Economic development and employment opportunities
- Healing for the ageing survivors of the World War II atrocities.
- Effective rehabilitation programmes to combat drug abuse.
- Youth: moral purity, respectful, sense of responsibility and sense of purpose.
- **Church:** Unity, vision, passion for the lost; more dedicated leaders and committed full-time workers; leaders and pastors to receive strong support from families and members; fruitful campus outreaches, especially the foreign students; and return of young Christian graduates to the state to contribute to their local churches and the state.

Dickson. The relationship among the church leaders has been strengthened through pastors' fellowships. They meet on a consistent basis for accountability and prayer as well as sharing of needs.

Some challenges faced by the local churches are weak attendance, complacency and ageing church leaders. The rapid migration of young Christians to major cities such as Kuala Lumpur, has drained some churches of their manpower. ■

## New Members

NECF MALAYSIA welcome another 11 churches as **Ordinary Members:**

- **Living Streams Centre, Kota Kinabalu**, pastored by *Pr Chok Tsun Vun*
- **Persatuan Persaudaraan Kristian Visi Johor Bahru**, pastored by *Rev. Wong Wai Leong*
- **Good Tidings Assembly, Shah Alam**, pastored by *Sean Prasad*
- **World Outreach (Malaysia) Bhd, Kuala Lumpur**, represented by *Au Yong Mun Heng*
- **Fellowship of the Cross Bhd, Johor Baru**, pastored by *Tan Chee Seng*
- **Praise Sanctuary, Kuala Lumpur**, pastored by *Richard Wong Poh Kong*

- **GraceHaven Church International Christian Ministries, Johor Baru**, pastored by *Kenson Cheah Kean Sun*
- **Grace EFC, Subang Jaya**, pastored by *Benjamin Skadiang*
- **611 Bread of Life Christian Church, Kuching**, prresided by *Rev. Ling Soon Huat*
- **Pertubuhan Magimayin Kudaram, Ipoh**, pastored by *Samuel a/I Sinnappan*
- **Persatuan Penganut Agama Kristian World of Life, Sabah, Kota Marudu**, pastored by *Belunduk Lingungud*

NECF also welcome four people as **Associate Members:** Pr J. Devenesan Joseph, Pr Sean Sivindran Prasad, Gau Aran and Pr Greman @ Ujang Ak. Slat.

Correction: In the last issue, a new Ordinary Member was incorrectly listed as Miracle, Sings & Wonder. The church's name should have read Miracle, Signs & Wonder. Apologies for the spelling error.

# FOR YOUR PRAYERS



EVERY November, we focus our thoughts and prayers on our persecuted brethren worldwide. According to German evangelical newspaper *idea*, approximately 80 percent of all victims of religious persecution are Christians in 50 countries.

As we intercede for them, let us consider taking an offering for their practical needs. Oftentimes, they face difficulty securing jobs simply because they are Christians. They are vulnerable, marginalised and at risk. Barnabas Fund, a ministry that aids suffering Christians by providing material and spiritual support, has themed this year's Suffering Church Sunday, "He will bring justice". Its director, Patrick Sookhedo, says, "From beginning to the end of His Word, God tells us that He loves justice and cares for the oppressed".

**NORTH KOREA** The very notion of openness and liberty have been beaten and brainwashed out of existence. But after more than half a century of isolation there are cracks appearing in the fortifications through which the outside world can be glimpsed.

The greatest difficulty is the tough human skin created by 50 years of lies and propaganda. But God created man for relationship with him and with a longing for spiritual truth. A struggle for openness and liberty is inevitable. Pray for the nation: for the Spirit of Christ to infiltrate the nation with His gospel and loving presence through cracks that God will make and doors that God will open, or through supernatural means like dreams and visions. May Christ bring justice, righteousness, healing, comfort, abundant life and salvation to the people, freedom to the prisoners, and healing to the land. (Luke 4:18,19). Pray for the Church which exists primarily in horrendous prison labour camps, and also in underground, secret house-churches, that these most cruelly-abused believers will be preserved and strengthened in their faith and hope by the ever-present Holy Spirit. ■

**AFGHANISTAN** When international pressure earlier in the year forced Afghan president Hamid Karzai to find a pretext to release Abdul Rahman, a convert from Islam to Christianity who would have faced execution, there were many other consequences. One is that Karzai's own

position was considerably weakened because of the shame and humiliation involved in capitulating to the West. If he falls, it is likely that his replacement would be considerably more hardline.

Please commit this situation to God, asking that His will be done. Pray for the protection of Afghan Christians, most of them, if not all of them, who are converts from Islam. ■

**MIDDLE EAST** This year has seen increased chaos and destruction in the Middle East. Among the many refugees who have fled the violence in Iraq, Lebanon and Israel are hundreds of thousands of our Christian brothers and sisters, perhaps as many as 750,000.

There are around 200,000 Iraqi Christian refugees in Syria, and a similar number in Jordan. They have escaped the chaos and growing anti-Christian threats and violence of their homeland, but live in poverty, unable to settle legally or support themselves effectively.

Within Iraq, many Christians have left their homes and moved to the north, desperately hoping to find a measure of security there. Those who have not left are living in desperation and hopelessness, compounded by the dangers which confront all Iraqis.

Over 100,000 Lebanese Christians have moved from areas affected by this year's war to the relative safety of the mountains or over the border to Syria and Jordan. At the same time hundreds of Christian Arab Israelis have left the war-affected areas of northern Israel for

the West Bank, while many other are making their way to Syria.

The most vulnerable of all are the Filipino, Sri Lankan and other Christians from "third countries" who were working in Lebanon when the war broke out; neither their governments nor their employers seem to care what becomes of them. There could be as many as 100,000 of these forgotten ones, few of whom can hope to make it home to their own country.

Pray that these suffering brethren will find hope in their desperation; God will strengthen them to face discrimination and violence, refresh the spirits of those who are weary and renew their confidence in the Lord of history. ■

**INDIA** According to World Evangelical Alliance, the persecution of Christians in India is now at its worst ever. Anti-Christian persecution began to escalate when the Hindu nationalist BJP party won the 1999 elections for the federal government. They lost the 2004 elections and some respite came to Christians. However several state governments are controlled by the BJP. Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) forces are working hard to incite religious hatred against Christians and Muslims, to persecute Christians, and to forcibly convert many to Hinduism. Their aim is to ensure a BJP victory in the 2009 elections. Pray for grace for Indian Christians to "rejoice and be glad" remembering that their reward in heaven will be great (Matt. 5:12). ■