

Berita NECF

Editorial

OUR TAKE ON 1 Malaysia

Ever since his appointment as Malaysia's sixth prime minister, Datuk Seri Najib Razak has been actively promoting and speaking about his 1Malaysia concept. On June 27, the Prime Minister officially launched the logo for 1Malaysia at Dataran Merdeka.

1Malaysia is now the buzzword for most Malaysians. What is 1Malaysia and how does it impact society and the various communities in Malaysia?

A look at what the Prime Minister has been saying reveals that "1Malaysia" is a catchphrase meant to promote unity, mutual respect and trust among the different ethnic communities in Malaysia.

The concept has two key elements: (1) mutual respect; and (2) trust. Says Datuk Seri Najib,

"Mutual respect is not just tolerance. That is just the bare minimum. Mutual respect means you have embraced unity in diversity. And secondly, we must trust one another. But trust is not something gained overnight. But if done consciously over time, it will eventually happen. Once trust is developed, Malaysia will

be the sum total of all races. We will not be moving as separate communities but as one Malaysia and we will be stronger. It will be a new Malaysia because we'll change our mindset because we trust and respect each other." (*The Malaysian Insider*, 1 April at <http://www.themalaysiainsider.com/index.php/malaysia/21999-najib-wants-one-malaysia>)

The ultimate objective of 1Malaysia is national unity and this is achieved by fostering unity among the multi-ethnic *rakyat* of Malaysia and ethnic identities of each community in Malaysia by upholding the value of "acceptance" where one race embraces the uniqueness of the other races.

The resulting consequence is that all will live with mutual respect for one another as a nation.

Aspirations of Malaysians – 1Malaysia for All

While all that has been spoken and written seems inspiring enough, in order for the concept to move from mere rhetoric to actual national aspiration, the expression and

implementation of 1Malaysia must be consonant and consistent with the intent and thrust of the Rukun Negara.

OUR COUNTRY MALAYSIA nurtures the ambitions of:

- achieving unity among the whole of her society;
- preserving a democratic way of life;
- creating a just society where the prosperity of the country can be enjoyed together in a fair and equitable manner;
- guaranteeing a liberal approach towards her rich and varied cultural traditions; and

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Chairman's Message



By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

A tale of 3 Kings

(LESSONS ON TRANSITION WOES)

The stories of the three Kings of the “united kingdom” (Saul, David and Solomon) provide rich lessons about successions and transitions – for both the corporate man as well as the ‘man of the cloth’.

We have always assumed that if we do all the right things, transition will be smooth. But there are no magic formulas for trouble-free transitions. Indeed, with changes come woes. Surely we can learn from Israel, Iran and even Ipoh because there are always “the other opposing party” and the devil.

Saul, the first king of the 12 tribes, could not accept that there was a price for his mistakes (disobedience by assuming the priestly role of offering sacrifice), and that there could be another successor.

As long as he was king, it didn't matter who anointed whom (in this case David) at whose behest. People at the apex of power often forget there are boundaries and there is the all-powerful Almighty who promotes and demotes.

No doubt drunk with power, Saul was no history student and had not learned that kings do fall. David did indeed succeed Saul, but not before Saul saw the wickedness of his own heart when he attempted to spear the anointed.

Then in 1 Kings, the book begins with David, advanced in age, circa 1015 BC, just before his turn to transit.

Though he knew he had to transit, his problem was that he had to be prompted to appoint Solomon over

Adonijah by the prophet Nathan together with Bathsheba.

While Saul was unwilling and ended his term with a spear in his hand, David, though willing, almost fumbled and was slow. And though he didn't have a spear in his hand, he did have a young virgin (not his wife) in bed, assigned to keep him warm (1Kings 1:2–4)

It was time to transit but before he could hand over the kingship to Solomon (1Kings1:13, 17), his other son Adonijah, exalted himself (1 Kings1:5ff) to take the throne. Priests, prophets, commanders and mighty men were involved. Grand ceremonies were planned. Where there is no legitimacy, grandeur and popular endorsements are crucial to authenticate the coup.

At times like these we need to be reminded of Bathsheba's words of wisdom –

²⁰...the eyes of all Israel are on you, that you should tell them who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. ²¹ Otherwise it will happen, when my lord the king rests with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be counted as offenders.”
1 Kings 1:20–21 (NKJV)

We must provide leadership in seasons of transition; otherwise, innocent people will become “offenders” if we fail to act. In the words of Eugene Peterson, Bathsheba said “my son Solomon and I are as good as dead.”

To his credit, David did make

...continued next page

Continued from front cover

- building a progressive society that will make use of science and modern technology.

NOW THEREFORE WE, the people of Malaysia, pledge to focus all our energy and efforts into achieving these ambitions based on the following principles:

- ▶ BELIEF IN GOD
- ▶ LOYALTY TO KING AND COUNTRY
- ▶ THE SUPREMACY OF THE CONSTITUTION
- ▶ THE RULE OF LAW
- ▶ COURTESY AND MORALITY

In accordance to the intent and thrust of the Rukun Negara, the evangelical community of Christians in Malaysia calls upon the Government to:

- **Affirm and put in place** affirmative and action-oriented

programmes and policies that actually promote mutual respect and trust within and among all races and religious community in Malaysia;

- **Affirm and maintain** all such practices, action-oriented programmes and policies that preserve and expand upon the civil and fundamental liberties that all human beings are called to enjoy;
- **Recognise** that at present, there exist barriers, obstacles and hindrances – whether social, cultural or religious – in the attainment of mutual respect and trust among the different races in Malaysia and that the Government should make wholehearted and every attempt to remove such barriers, obstacles and hindrances;
- **Instill** in all races and communities and imbibe the spirit and value

of interdependence among all races, recognising that any actions arising from one particular race and community will affect and consequently have a bearing on the welfare and well-being of the other communities in Malaysia.

A spirit of interdependence is therefore essential and foundational towards the bonding and formation of mutual respect and trust for all in order for this nation to move forward and face the challenges of the future; and

- **Reclaim and recover** the loss of public morality in all aspects of public life in Malaysia. The basic quality, and the manifestation of an upright, moral life is an essential and indispensable value and characteristic to espouse if ever mutual respect and trust for all are to foster and exist.

1Malaysia for ALL Malaysians!

Continued from pg 2: Tales of the 3 Kings

Solomon king that day itself (1 Kings 1:30, 33–35). Adonijah's reign lasted less than 24 hours. The story almost became a tale of 3



plus 1 kings, but it was not to be so. When news spread that Solomon was made king, the loyalists of Adonijah left the celebration party. People are basically opportunists – unwilling to follow God's choice initially but most happy to stand by the winning side.

Lines were drawn that day and two lessons can be learned – we sometimes have to leave the baggage of “old relationships” (those who stood with Adonijah) and move forward. Some priests, prophets and mighty men lost their jobs that day.

Secondly, David was wise – he did not declare Adonijah “not king” but took steps to appoint the rightful king. Do the right thing, not so much as undo the wrong thing. It's not what we should do with the wicked but rather how we should work with the righteous.

Sometimes too much time and energy is spent putting out fires, which if left alone, would die out by themselves.

Lastly, Solomon's transition to his son was similarly marked by the unfortunate intervening hand of God (as in Saul's case) because of his idolatrous inclinations and adulterous addictions. “The Lord became angry with

Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God” (1 Kings 11:9a), hence the 12 tribes were divided between Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

Saul had a spear in his hand, David was slow, preoccupied with a virgin in bed, while Solomon had to contend with the sin of idolatry.

Tainted legacies, bumpy transitions, attempted coup.

Troubles and hiccups – at times violent and bloody – plague almost every transition, not only because the stakes are high but because there are power struggles in the heavenlies, be it in business, nation or church.

David was no transition guru, but he did leave behind many invaluable lessons – he was proactive in ensuring a smooth transition (oh yes, he mustered enough strength to get out of bed though it was warm); he was teachable and did listen to advice; he did have loyal, godly men in the corridors of power; he changed the team and he did follow through on the promise made earlier (that Solomon would sit on the throne) and on God's plan for the nation.

It has been said that we are in dire need of statesmen, but the country is crawling with politicians (and political analysts – every subscriber to the alternative media is an ‘expert ‘today.) Let this be not said of the Church and the people of the Book. With Christian Statesmen, there should be less transition woes.

Golden opportunity to be compassionate and caring employers

By Bob Teoh

THE Government is proposing a compulsory weekly off-day for foreign domestic workers soon. The provision comes with a penalty of up to RM10,000 for non-compliance. This move is not only welcomed but I wonder why it has taken so long.

Fundamentally, this is not a question of labour law and practice but one of compassion and ethics.

Must we wait until the Government passes a new law to make it compulsory to give our domestic workers a weekly day of rest before we are willing to do so? Why can't we just do unto as we would like others to do unto us?

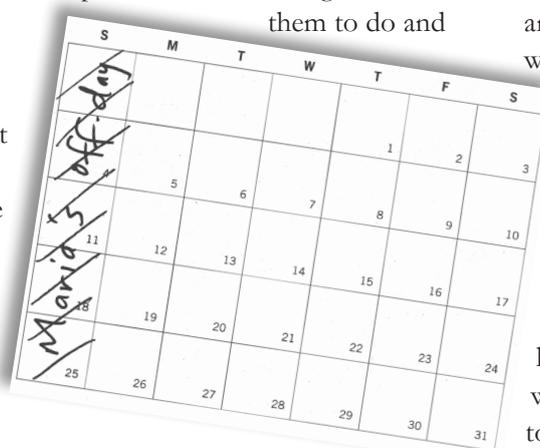
How would we feel if we have to work seven days a week? if our daughters, sisters and even mothers are forced to work overseas by circumstances and they have no rest day? There are many Malaysians working overseas in Europe, the US, Japan, Taiwan and elsewhere. It is not uncommon to find families where wives, daughters, sisters and mothers have gone overseas to work as domestic helpers.

My wife and I don't have a foreign helper, but we are part of an NGO reaching out to such as these. We have first-hand knowledge of the conditions these domestic helpers worked under. Apart from the difficult working conditions, they also suffer psychologically from homesickness, loneliness, cultural shock and the like. Many of them come from rural and farming environments and have never been to a city before, even back at home.

Some who are Muslims have the horrible option of either eating pork or just plain rice and sardines. On top of this, some are unfortunate enough to be abused, physically or sexually

or both. Given a choice, many would want to go home tomorrow if not for the money they need to send back to feed hungry stomachs.

Needless to say, employers also have their fair share of painful experiences. Take my mother-in-law for instance. She has by now employed six or seven Indonesian helpers. There is nothing much for them to do and



there are no children to look after. Basically all the helper has to do is to be a companion and carer to her and keep her house tidy and neat. She's really generous to a fault and spoils her helper thoroughly.

And what did she get in return? Without exception, they all stole her money and eventually ran away. One even regularly sneaked her lover into the house in the wee hours of the morning. It was only after she ran away that we found this out from neighbours and evidence of the safe-sex practices that she had left behind.

But does this mean that just because there are a few rotten helpers, the whole lot is spoiled and should be denied the basic right of a rest day? It really depends on how we look at it. Are we Christian employers part of the problem or part of the solution? We all know the problem quite well. We don't have to wait for the Government to pass a new law to

force us to give our domestic helpers a weekly off-day before we can be part of the solution.

On our own, we can easily give our helpers a day off a week for her to do what she would really like: seeing friends, shopping, or just doing nothing and sleeping in.

But some may argue: What if the helpers are given the weekly off-day and they 'turn bad' after hanging out with their fellow countrywomen?

'Turning bad' happens, just like all Christians 'turn bad' one time or another. It's a matter of magnitude. Even by not giving them an off-day, domestic helpers have still run away or 'turned bad'.

When we employ a domestic helper, we take the risk, just like when God gave us His only Son, he took the risk with us. And we may fail Him, just as our domestic helpers may.

For Christian employers, the weekly rest day is a divinely-mandatory obligation. It is the fourth of the Ten Commandments to honour the Sabbath Day where the whole household is to cease from work and consecrate it as a holy day.

That's where the word 'holiday' comes from. And the Indonesian worker is also part of such a household. She too must cease from her labour on her rest day. If we look at her closely enough, we will soon discover that she is also a human being just like us, made in the image of God and needing a rest day.

Giving our domestic helpers a day off is really a golden opportunity to be compassionate and caring employers. Let's not wait until the Government forces it on us.

Note: Bob is the managing editor of the Sin Chew (English) online portal. The view expressed in the article is his.

Christians Impacting the World

- Planet Shaking

By Steven Wong

Christians can impact the world around them with their very existence. But we can only impact the world most effectively if we are unlike the world. Otherwise, we merely reinforce its tendencies and trends. Like many organisations, the Church has, in the past, quite often placed its interests ahead of even its *raison d'être*. It has either actively contributed to or passively sanctioned some of the most non-positive transforming events in history, including bloodshed, torture and persecution over doctrinal and denominational disputes, political power and control, and even suppressed scientific discoveries.

There have also been long periods of indifference and complacency where the needs of “the neighbour” in the Second Commandment were all but forgotten. Out of the Reformation, however, came a recovery of the gospel and with it, the desire to change the world from within and without. Not only was there newfound passion to reach the lost in distant lands but also to reform the societies and communities in which one lived.

This is precisely why it is so important to spread the ‘counter-cultural’ message within churches but in a wider, rather than narrower, sense than it usually is. We are all familiar with the passage that says, “*Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. ... Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*” (1 John 2:6, 15–17)

To do the will of God is not confined to attending church, evangelism and mission but acting in a way where choices about work, lifestyle, parenting, politics and social relationships all conform to the integral mission. The greater the degree to which we have been transformed from within, the greater we can influence the world around us in a total lifestyle sense rather than the sum total of individual activities.

In many senses, getting the “living right” is the real key to larger social and political transformation. What

do Christians who are engineered with Biblical values think about such issues as good governance, corruption, social justice, human rights, treatment of migrants and refugees, and so forth? How do they perceive international problems of armed confrontation, terrorism, inhumane regimes, nuclear proliferation and global warming? How do they express and more importantly, engage in addressing these issues so that society is bettered not just for themselves but especially for those without a voice and ability?

All too often, the Christian community reacts to defend its own interests but is slow to act for others, let alone those across borders. It is imperative this should be recognised to be an Achilles heel of many Christians. Perhaps not wishing to be mistaken as social gospel proponents or deviate from the central task of soul saving, Christians have, by default, vacated the task of social development and nation building to those of other persuasions.

Transformation via counter-cultural Christians

The idea that to be a global transforming Christian, one must be called out among God’s chosen elite, perhaps in reluctant Gideon-like fashion, may have more to do with our psychological need for heroes and heroines rather than the need and reality of the situation.

The reality is that while larger-than-life figures are needed to lead, inspire and labour, global transformations are accomplished by the masses, that is, counter-cultural Christians living out an existence that reflects and upholds God’s purposes in all the spheres, whether political, social, economic or spiritual.

It is only when these spaces are occupied and transactions worked at and carried out by the carriers of Christ’s teachings that the process of transformation can and will be accomplished.

This is an extract from the article “Transforming Christianity: What Does It Mean To Be A Global Transformer?” which is published in full in the upcoming book “Forum VI – Transform Nation Agenda” produced by the NECF Malaysia Research Commission.



Global Prayer Power

Malaysian Christians joined millions in the family of God around the globe on May 31 to pray for their countries and the world. The annual Global Day of Prayer (GDOP), held on Pentecost Sunday and billed as the biggest prayer meeting on earth, saw a participation of 220 countries, the biggest number since it started in 2005.

Throughout Malaysia, churches in 43 towns and cities gathered for their local GDOP meetings. In the Klang Valley, some 2,000 Christians from various churches and denominations gathered at SIB Kuala Lumpur to lift up the nation and the world to God. Prior to this meeting, over 50 churches had taken part in the 10-day, 24-hour prayer drive organised by NECF Malaysia.

The GDOP 2009 night was packed with praise, worship, repentance and intercession for the king and country, good governance, migrant workers, social justice, freedom of religion for all races, church unity, cooperation and alliances among churches, missions, and para-church groups, and to top them all, the furtherance of the gospel.

To reflect an all-age prayer movement, there was a special children's session where several children prayed in different languages and dialects, and another session led by youths under the banner of RunNat (Run for the Nation – see pg 14 for more information.)

Declarations were led by the adults – Dr Tan Nget Hong (GDOP Malaysia coordinator), Rev. Eu Hong Seng (NECF Malaysia Chairman), Rev. Looi Kok Kim (GDOP Malaysia co-coordinator), Bishop Hwa Yung (Bishop of Methodist Church Malaysia), Rev. Lawrence Yap (Senior Pastor, Charis Christian Centre), Elder Kong Yeng Phooi (Elder, PJ Gospel Hall), Venerable Eddie Ong (St Paul's Church,



(Bottom) FLYING FLAGS: Youths, a symbol of our future, flying the different flags of Malaysia. (Top) Men united in prayer.

PJ), Rev. Elisha Satvinder (Senior Pastor, New Covenant Community), Rev. Daniel Raut (President, SIB Semenanjung), Pr Andy Yeoh (ACTS Church) and Pr Dr Chew Weng Chee (Senior Pastor, SIB KL).

Back to Simplicity, Back to the Cross

In his opening message, Rev. Eu observed that the Malaysian Church had become complicated and called for a return to the simplicity of the cross.

He said: “We believe in God but not in praying to the God we believe in. We won't compromise on the use of the Bible but (we) obey it selectively, especially the part where we are exhorted to always pray.

“We believe God can answer by fire, but we don't have the fire in our prayers to implore Him to answer by fire. We believe in intercession as long as it's relegated to some small group doing it and we don't have to pay the price for it.”

He said that NECF has two main goals – to get the churches involved in nation building, and to get the Church to return to the house of prayer.

The drought over the nation is not only financial but political, moral and spiritual as well. Christians must therefore learn to put their heads in between the knees like Elijah did.

“Otherwise, the rain will not come at the end of the three and a half years and there will be no distinctiveness between the people of the Book and the people of other faiths, he added.

“The crisis in our nation seems never ending – the economic leakages, billions squandered. The wrong people seem to be getting arrested while the drama in our courts could keep Hollywood going for a long time to come, BUT our prayer meetings remain insipid and listless,” he lamented.

“Tonight, we call upon all to go back to your churches to pray!”

“YES, it's time we stop barking up the wrong tree, stop faltering, and return to simplicity, return to the foot of the cross, and return to good old fashion praying.”

At the gathering, the GDOP committee also announced that next year's GDOP would be held on a far larger scale at Stadium Melawati in Shah Alam. Glory to God!



Report Card Out

Not-So-Rosy Picture on State of Religious Freedom

Political suppression and heavy-handedness are well and alive in Malaysia while ethno-religious polarisation is growing, according to the just-released NECF Malaysia 2008 Religious Liberty Annual Report compiled by the NECF Malaysia Religious Liberty Commission.

The report traces the trends in inter-faith relationships, documents cases of abuses relating to religious freedom, recommends ways to resolve the tension and urges churches to be more involved in matters relating to religious liberty so as to preserve their public space.

The report observes that “while more optimistic Malaysian voters would have expected positive

developments due to the outcome of the 12th General Elections, an air of despondency and malaise continues to hang over the country.”

But what’s worse is that “the unwillingness of the ruling Government to be guided and held in check by law, even of accepted interpretations of the Federal Constitution by the highest court in the land, is threatening to cast the entire country into a ‘social-political jungle’ where the strong take what they can and the weak give what they must,” laments the report.

The following is extracted from the conclusion of the report. For the full report, go to the NECF Malaysia website at www.necf.org.my

Over the past few years, the Christian community in Malaysia has been concerned that the religious space to affirm and practise one’s religion according to one’s own persuasion and ways has been severely affected and reduced. Consequently, religious liberty for all religion, and in particular Christianity, is at stake.

Some have linked this cause to the ruling Government’s Islamisation agenda and the power elite within political circles. In this respect, the observation by Salbiah Ahmad is pertinent when she says, “if privileging Islam (and Sunni-Islam) in Article 11 of the chapter on fundamental liberties is part and parcel of ‘Islam as the religion of the Federation’ in Article 3 to the Constitution, it makes the freedom of religion illusory”.¹

The continuing incidents of denial of religious rights, the Islamisation efforts by Islamic authorities and the positions taken by Islamic state proponents highlighted above (in the report) seem to justify the fears and misgivings that religious freedom is merely illusory in Malaysia.

In PR (Pakatan Rakyat)-controlled states, there appears to be an attempt

to defend and promote religious freedom and rights. However, doubts remain and indeed questions have been asked whether religious space has actually been liberalised, thus allowing for greater acceptance or is it really constricting.

Several reasons suggest why such doubts exist. Firstly, opposition political parties still do not have full control over state public administration machineries. Executive decisions made may not be carried out or what is carried out may be contrary to the actual executive decisions.

Secondly, the efforts to ensure Constitutionally-guaranteed religious freedoms are often branded as a betrayal of Islam and those attempting to do so are regarded as “un-Islamic” and risk losing political support among Muslims.

Thirdly, opposition parties themselves are divided over what may or may not be done in the name of religious liberty, given the very strong religious proclivities among them. Indeed, on some key issues, there

are closer positions between some members of the opposition with the ruling party than among opposition parties.

In short, while the political climate has changed considerably post 8 March 2008, there is no real evidence that religious (and racial) tensions have simmered down. If anything, there seems to be an overarching strategy of solidifying majority support by adopting a hardline, non-accommodative approach towards those of other religions and races.

One reason for this may be that the minorities’ support has shifted to the opposition and since any effort to appease them will be perceived as a compromise that will likely incur the wrath of the dominant community, it would be more effective to employ a strategy of vigorous religious-racial contestation to counter the opposition.

This would make sense as the opposition, reliant on the minorities’

“...religious freedom is merely illusory in Malaysia.”

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Insurance Payout For Kidney Patient

LEE MING WAI (right) receiving a cheque of RM30,874 for the insurance payout on behalf of his father, Lee Voon Weng, from Patrick Cheng, NECF Malaysia Senior Executive Secretary.

Voon Weng, who is suffering from kidney failure, signed up for the NECF-Great Eastern Group Insurance Scheme when it was first launched in 2005. He took up the RM30,000 policy, paying a monthly premium of RM30 for the critical illness scheme specially designed for full-time workers, their families and church members of NECF member churches or organisations.

(However, participants must be below 55 years old.)

Since the scheme was launched, Great Eastern has paid out close to RM550,000 to 14 persons – three for deaths and the rest for critical illness.

For a premium of RM30 per month, participants enjoy the following benefits:

- Critical illness coverage of RM30,000;
- Death coverage of RM30,000;
- Accidental death coverage of RM60,000;
- Total permanent disability (due to



illness) coverage of RM30,000;

- Total permanent disability (due to accident) coverage of RM60,000; and
- Maturity benefits at age 65.

For more information, contact Lawrence at 019-338 2687 or 03-4294 7673.

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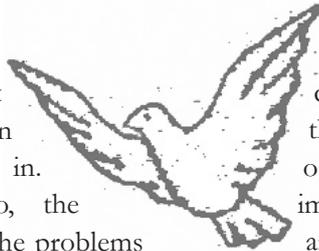
support, would be put into a difficult position and forced to give in.

Given this scenario, the indications are that the problems of religious liberty have not and will not abate despite the political change. This point has to be made emphatically to the various religious communities so that they are not lulled into a false sense of bliss and security.

In the circumstances, it is of utmost urgency to ensure that no one religion is permitted to dominate another.

To allow this will only bring into reality the view that what is being enforced is the view of an elite of the ruling majority. Abdullah An-Naim warns that this is a “paramount danger” because “they will force others, Muslim as well as non-Muslims, to live by the narrow ideological vision of the elite”.²

With these observations, this Commission therefore calls upon the national Church in Malaysia as the “Body of Christ” to consider and undertake the following actions:



1. The Church needs to be informed. Christians cannot be effective until they understand the issues of religious liberty and its implications to the wider society and the nation.

For this purpose, Christians should attend briefings on social-political and human rights issues. Church leaders should also organise talks by believers who understand these important issues so that their congregation may be enlightened.

2. The Church must be initiated. More Christians should join political and non-governmental organisations or form voluntary associations of their personal conviction and choice towards public engagements. Numbers do not indicate quality but they should not be underestimated in efforts for concerted actions.

In this respect, the Church should initiate steps to re-visit the idea on the formation and setting up of an Inter-Faith Commission.

Although this idea was mooted before and faced opposition, the

benefits for coming together and for concerted actions are obvious.

3. The Church must be involved. Christians should be engaged in efforts to address and counter the undermining and erosion of our political and legal order as well as state institutions.

In this respect, Christians should participate in prayer meetings and prayer networks to pray for matters of religious liberty and not just limiting themselves to congregational concerns as part of our intercession before God and be moved to action as the Lord leads and direct.

Not all of us have the same abilities or similar opportunities but each should find his/her calling and in small ways attempt to make a difference in the preservation of our religious space and freedom.

¹ Salbiah Ahmad, *Malaya: Critical Thoughts on Islam, Rights and Freedom in Malaysia*. (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2007), 213.

² Abdullah A. An-Naim, “The Islamic Law on Apostasy and its Modern Applicability: A Case from Sudan”. *Religion* Vol. 16: 197-223 cited in Salbiah Ahmad, *Malaya*, 206.

Are You Recession Ready?

It has been officially announced that the Malaysian economy is contracting and we are running into technical recession. Even though globally there has been an upward surge in petroleum and palm oil prices, Malaysia is only expected to recover in mid-2010.

Our manufacturing industries have been badly affected with this financial meltdown, and have reported a negative growth. April factory output fell by 13 percent, according to a *Reuters* poll. Other economists believed that industrial output was likely to fall further due to weakening exports.

Is the spiritual barometer of the Malaysian Church dictated by the economic state of the country? In times of uncertainty, how can the unchurched find hope through us? Is God saying something in all this international mess that we might not have been able to hear in other ways?

In his message at the recent Global Day of Prayer event at SIB KL, NECF Malaysia Chairman Rev. Eu Hong Seng quoted Harvard professor Rosabeth Moss Canter's call to "return to simplicity" when she was asked to comment on the "global crisis".

Scriptures calls followers of Jesus during times of crisis not to abandon our role to the community but to find more creative approaches in sharing our resources.

We have to dig deep into our inventory of available resources to convene classes on financial stewardship focusing on the biblical principles of reducing debt, budgeting, giving and saving. In short, the church should take the lead in financial mentorship.

"In short, the Church should take the lead in financial mentorship."

We are to promote lifestyle changes that can save money and free up funds to help those in serious need. We are to demonstrate to our youths new perspectives by encouraging them to learn about sustainable lifestyles from older people in their communities.

In a public prayer, Jehoshaphat speaks frankly about the effects of the siege, "If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague, or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us."

Later in the same prayer, he says, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you" (2 Chron. 20:9, 12). Jehoshaphat prays like a broken man who knows that Jerusalem's salvation can come only through direct deliverance from the God of Israel.

So too the Church of Malaysia must come to God with a contrite heart and pray with conviction that God will hear and act, always remembering that "to obey is better than sacrifice."

The Good, Bad and Ugly of Megachurches

A US survey reveals the mentality of churchgoers there. Could it be a reflection of the Malaysian Church scene?

Wondering where all the young single adults in your church have gone? If you're the pastor of a small- or medium-size congregation, you may want to check the nearest megachurch*, reports *Ministry Today*, June 12.

That's because singles are three times as likely to attend a megachurch and make up one-third of those churches congregations, according to

a study by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research that surveyed nearly 25,000 people at 12 megachurches throughout the country (USA). The report also discovered that two-thirds of megachurch regulars are under the age of 45, with the average person being 40 years old. When compared to the typical Protestant church, at which the average age is 53, it's clear that megachurches continue to attract

a younger crowd.

What they're also drawing, however, is an "entertain me" mindset. The Hartford study found that nearly 45 percent of those who attend a megachurch never volunteer at the church, while 32 percent give little or no money.

"The ethos of the megachurch is to

...continued on pg 13

Time and again, NECF Malaysia has been asked to recommend people to fill up pastoral vacancies in churches. It seems there is an acute shortage of pastors, especially youth and children's pastors, in the Malaysian Church,

Twelve years ago, NECF brought together the heads of three local bible seminaries – Seminary Theology Malaysia, Malaysia Bible Seminary (MBS) and Bible College Malaysia (BCM) – to discuss why Christians are shunning

the pastoral ministry and seek possible solutions to meet the demand for pastoral workers.

Since then, REV. BISHOP DR HWA YUNG has gone on to become the bishop of the Methodist Church while REV. DR TAN KIM SAI AND REV. NG KOK KEE are still heading MBS and BCM respectively.

Though the interview took place long ago, the interviewees' response reflects today's scenario. We reprint below extracts from the interview for your reflection and invite you to give your comments on www.necflc.blogspot.com



The sheep are plentiful, but the shepherds are few



IN YOUR OPINION, WHY ARE SO FEW CHRISTIANS ENTERING FULL-TIME MINISTRY NOWADAYS (12 years ago!)?

Hwa Yung:

I would like to say that it is not only nowadays. Over the last 2,000 years, there have not been many Christians entering full-time ministry. It is only in special times of revival and in special situations when many people have moved into full-time ministry – for example, in the Korean Church over the last generation and also today, a lot of highly-qualified people have entered the full-time ministry. That is an exception rather than the norm. Throughout history, it has always been difficult to get the right people to go into the ministry. In the Malaysian context there are three main reasons.

The first reason is that going into the ministry always involves an element of sacrifice. That's always the tough part. If you look at the Malaysian Church, you will find that before 1970, there were very few university graduates moving into the ministry. Thankfully, the picture has changed over the 70s and 80s and people are coming to terms with (this) matter of sacrifice. But there remains a big issue. Why go into the ministry and have unreasonable elders/board members working over you when you yourself can become a millionaire at 30 years old? Why go into ministry when you are not sure whether you can send your children for university education? "Why go into the ministry when you may not even have a house to stay in? These are real questions involving sacrifice that people going into the

ministry have to grapple with.

The second reason is the wrong notion that the full-time ministry is only for the drop-outs and non-performers. I still remember one incident when a particular bishop was sitting with a group of friends and one of them complained about this son who was academically quite weak, as compared to the first daughter and second son who were doing well in their respective careers. He just didn't know what to do with him. "Perhaps I will send him to Trinity Theological College", he said. Of course he apologised profusely when he realised that the bishop was there. That unfortunately has been the image a lot of people have about the full-time ministry:

The third reason is the negative image of the ministry created by those of us who are in the ministry. Ministers have failed to uphold the dignity and image of the ministry and allowed themselves to be corrupted by money, sex and power. This problem can only be resolved by those of us in full-time work. We have to show to our church members that the calling to full-time ministry is something that we thank God for and something we deeply value. When people are touched by our life's example and also by our ministry, they too will want to enter the ministry.

Kok Kee:

In my denomination some 20 years ago (1970s), there was a high percentage of people



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who were willing to go into full-time ministry. But I think materialism has affected the church somewhat over the last 10 or 15 years and people are finding it harder to make that kind of sacrifice. A lot of my friends have become executives, driving imported cars and making their first million ringgit before they are 30. Going into the full-time ministry means that they have to sacrifice all these and people are finding it very hard to do so even though they say that they love God.

The more affluent you are, the harder it is for you to give up. An example that always intrigue me is that when you earn \$100, it is easy to give \$10. If you earn \$1000, to give \$100 away is not so bad; but if you earn \$100,000 to give \$10,000 can be real struggle. I think the affluence over the last few years has badly affected the church and many of our people are not willing to make the sacrifice.

Kim Sai:

All the factors and elements that have been mentioned are very real that made many that have been called not willing to give up. But I like to affirm what Hwa Yung has said earlier that one of the reasons why not many are willing to take up the challenge is the many problems, squabbles and fights that exist among the church leadership. If you were to ask around, many of those who are now serving in the ministry most probably come from non-Christian backgrounds, not knowing the many problems that they have in church!

They were challenged by the gospel and God's call and most innocently and zealously took up the challenge. But if we were to do a survey among the second or third generation Christians in the church, the number of them going into full-time ministry would most probably be very small – unless it is the very special work of the Lord.

In the face of so much church politics, problems and the lack of integrity and dignity on the part of pastors and church leaders, it is not surprising why second and third generation Christians are refraining from going full-time.

To reverse this trend, we as pastors and church leaders must sincerely serve the Lord in all that we do and be helpful to people in general. We need such godly role models in our church today to be the motivational force for more people to enter the full-time ministry.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ARREST THE DECLINE OF CHRISTIANS GOING INTO FULL-TIME MINISTRY?

Hwa Yung:

From the mainline church's point of view, I won't say that there is a decline in Christians going into the full-time ministry because the number has never been very high in the

first place. From our observation, the quality of people who have come to our seminary has gradually risen. Generally speaking, more mature people and some with university or other professional backgrounds have entered full-time ministry. I would also like to point out something that Kok Kee has brought out earlier, that is rightly or wrongly, some churches perceive that seminary training is not very useful.

They think that studying theology is a waste of time. But the quality of preaching and messages in our churches today is generally very poor because full-time workers and even pastors don't have a solid understanding of the Bible, church history and theology.

On the other hand, the seminaries have themselves to blame because we have locked ourselves too much into the Western model of training which is basically very academic. We are still wrestling with this problem and slowly getting ourselves out of it because it is not an easy task.

For example, there is not a single textbook on Systematic Theology which relates to Asian society, culture and the needs of our society. Most books are neither written in the Asian context nor pastorally-orientated. Hence, we hear complaints from church leaders who say that there are workers who have been to seminary for four years who cannot even conduct a proper Bible study. I am not saying that seminaries have not done their jobs but that they are doing their best within their limited resources because most of the text-books are from the West.

Kim Sai:

So in this regard, there is a need not only for godly role models, that is, pastors and preachers who have immediate influence over the potential people who may be called to serve the Lord full-time, but also the need for role models of theological educators and scholars to improve the situation.

Kok Kee:

I like to emphasise that role models are very important. The role model may not necessarily be a dynamic preacher, great administrator or the person who is always up front, but one who makes an impact on the church members' lives – the godly pastor. He is the one whose life the church members want to emulate.

Hwa Yung:

In this regard, I think of Rev. Peter Hsieh. Everywhere that he has gone and pastored, many people have gone into full-time ministry. The Air Itam Methodist Church in Penang alone has produced quite a number of pastors because of



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Let BK replace Moral

Will arrest moral decline among youths, say Mission Schools

Allow Bible Knowledge to replace Pendidikan Moral (Moral Education) in mission schools to help arrest the deterioration of moral standard among our youths. This is among the resolutions passed at the Conference of Christian Mission Schools on June 26 and 27 in Kuala Lumpur.

The conference acknowledged that, while the teaching of Moral Education in schools for non-Muslim students has the virtuous aim of inculcating good moral values to improve their character and conduct, it does not place emphasis on God. And, when God is absent, youths are not guided by their conscience, the fear of God and the after life.

Forty-one representatives from 425 mission schools from both East and West Malaysia attended this conference, made historic because it was the first time the East Malaysia side participated.

Mission schools have always had the reputation of being the best schools in terms of character building, high academic standards as well as extra-curricular activities. The conference was therefore a timely opportunity to encourage, affirm and unite the schools' common concern in improving their current high standards and providing

the best opportunities for their students.

In view of the sizeable number of mission schools in the country, the conference also passed a resolution asking the Government to establish a special unit within the Education Ministry to deal with matters which are unique to mission schools. This unit would enhance communication and effective implementation of policies between the schools and the Ministry as it will reduce the current lack of understanding among ministry officials.

In addition, the unit should be staffed with officers who understand and appreciate the history, culture and ethos of mission schools, and are sensitive to the distinctive operational character and needs of mission schools.

As for the issue of limiting SPM candidates to 10 subjects, the conference was of the opinion that this would restrict the scope of more talented students and prevent the schools from offering a more holistic range of subjects. Furthermore, a wider range of subjects will give students the opportunity to choose their careers.

The Pupils Own Language (POL), English Literature and Bible Knowledge (BK) are subjects not normally taught in school. They are, however, what provide for a well-rounded education and prepare the student for adult life.

Hence, limiting the students to 10 subjects will curtail the more capable science students to be well rounded in both the Arts and Sciences.

Another deep concern is that the 10-subject limit will lead to the 'death' of many minor subjects, including BK, and limit the creativity, innovativeness and knowledge of future Malaysians.

The conference then proposed that the limit be raised to 12 subjects.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak (seated middle) and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Bernard Dompok (on the PM's right) were the special guests. The PM, who attended a mission school in his youth, acknowledged the invaluable contributions of mission schools during his speech.



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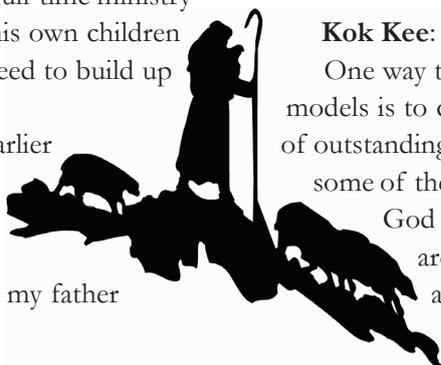
his influence. In the West, we can think of the Guinness' and Hudson Taylor's families where successive generations of them have gone into mission fields. I think one test as to whether the person has a real calling to full-time ministry is whether he really desires and prays for his own children to go into the full-time ministry too. We need to build up such traditions in our country.

Some of the reasons we discussed earlier on why people are not going into full-time ministry are the same reasons why we don't have such traditions in Malaysia. I have people who say to me, "I saw what my father

went through as a pastor and I told myself that I will never become a pastor." I think it is partly the church's fault for we have not really taken care of those who are in the ministry. It is also partly our fault – we have not shown ourselves to be godly role models.

Kok Kee:

One way to compensate for this lack of godly role models is to challenge our people to read biographies of outstanding men and women of God and understand some of the sacrifices that they have made in serving God as missionaries and so on. Our people are reading too much 'junk' in the form of all these 'bless me' stuff.



40-DAY FAST AND PRAYER

JOIN CHRISTIANS THROUGHOUT the country in this yearly journey of contemplation and intercession for the nation.

The theme this year is "Love Our Neighbour – A Shining Light to the Nations". This is a call to churches and Christians to love our neighbours in practical ways.

Organised by NECF Malaysia, this prayer journey culminates at the Merdeka Prayer Rally (more info on the right).

Merdeka Prayer Rally

Combined English- and Chinese-speaking churches

30 August
7.00p.m.
FGA KL

This year's Merdeka Prayer Rally will be a combined affair between the English- and Chinese-speaking congregations. The organisers – NECF Malaysia and participating churches – are expecting a huge turnout of Christians at the venue, FGA KL, on Aug 30 at 7.00p.m.

The speaker is Philip Mantofa from Surabaya, Indonesia. As Senior Pastor of Rose of Sharon Church, his ministry covers 51 churches with over 30,000 disciples.

Philip is married with three children. He is fluent in English and Bahasa Indonesia.



Northern Region Tamil Pastors' Gathering (Perak, Penang, Kedah & Perlis)

IN response to numerous requests by pastors from the region, the NECF Malaysia Tamil Commission is organising this one-day gathering for networking and spiritual inspiration.

Date : 29th Oct 2009 (Thursday)

Time : 10.00am – 4.00pm

Place : Emmanuel Christian Assembly, Taiping

Look out for more details in the next issue.

NECF Foundation Study Loan Frozen

The NECF Foundation has approved 19 study loans totalling RM 299,787 since its inception in 2004.

Unfortunately, repayments for the loans have been discouraging.

The Foundation Board has therefore decided to freeze all study loan applications until the borrowers replenish the revolving fund.

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say 'You can't just sit there and spectate, that's not enough, you've got to do this or do that,' " said study co-director Scott Thumma. "But a lot of people said 'I'm perfectly happy coming here and doing that.'"

Don't assume that's because megachurches attract more new Christians or those who haven't been to church for a while – both of which could possibly add to the spectator mindset.

According to the study, only a quarter of those attending a megachurch had stopped going to church for a long

time prior to coming. And in terms of drawing new believers, the survey found hardly any difference among megachurches and non-megachurches.

The biggest difference between the two, however, is attracting new people. Two-thirds of those attending a megachurch have been there five years or less – compared to 40 percent in churches of all sizes. (Interestingly enough, this ratio remains the same even when you don't consider newer churches that began within the past decade.)

When analysing what attracts people to megachurches, the report found the top three factors (in order)

to be worship style, senior pastor and the church's reputation.

Leaders will also find it interesting that the top reason first-time visitors of a megachurch return is the senior pastor.

This is the turn of events in the US. Does it reflect the state of the Malaysian Protestant Church? Let us know your thoughts. Write to editor@necf.org.my

*The term "megachurch" generally refers to any Protestant congregation with a sustained average weekly attendance of 2,000 persons or more in its worship services.

National Church Conference

Aug. 25–27 at FGA, Kuala Lumpur

THEME: Transformation – Leading with Creativity and Conviction in Crisis

SPEAKERS: Rev. Barry Boucher and Paul De Jong

REGISTRATION FEE: RM100

THE presence of a church is felt in its community when it goes out to serve the neighbourhood in areas where help is sorely needed. Many churches have successfully started and run community programmes that have impacted their neighbourhood.

In line with this, NECF Malaysia is organising this conference to spur churches to move out of their doors into their communities. The conference will feature some successful community programmes, such as dialysis centres, children’s homes, disaster relief work, drug rehabilitation centres and two grocery-related ministries that sell essential goods at either subsidised prices or free-of-charge to the needy. Churches and para-church organisations running these programmes will share their stories.

Pastors, leaders and all Christians who desire to make a difference in their communities are strongly encouraged to attend the conference to be inspired and also to network.

Rev. Barry Boucher is one of the three founders of The Life Centre, Ottawa (Canada). He has been deeply committed to citywide ministry and has been actively involved in the



Ottawa Pastor’s Prayer Fellowship. With his wealth of experience, Barry will be sharing on the importance of “Spiritual Fathers” and “fatherhood” to nurture and equip the younger generation.

Barry will also share ways how we can rediscover our calling, not so much as a vocation, but to lead the church to impact the community, that will transform the nation through the local church.

Two particular themes he will be addressing are 1) Transformational Prayer 2) Authentic Relationships.

Paul De Jong – New Zealand has a Christian heritage;



however, it is besieged by a host of social ills and ranks among the countries with the highest teenage pregnancy, alcohol abuse and suicide rate. This diversified ethnic and cultural backdrop with a myriad of social problems is similar to Malaysia. Paul, senior pastor of LIFE,

one of the fastest growing churches in Auckland, will share his church and leadership models which have played an influential role in *TRANSFORMING* the multi-ethnic city of Auckland and culture for Jesus!

RunNat 09

October 10, 5.00a.m. to 12p.m.

CHRISTIANS, especially Christian youths, throughout Malaysia who wish to experience the thrill of running and praying at the same time for their cities are urged to sign up for RunNat (Run for the Nation).

It may not come close to extreme sports, but RunNat is nevertheless a challenging event as the runners will



RunNat – a fusion of physical and spiritual exercise.

have to focus on their five km-run while taking turns to pray aloud.

The vision of the national run is simply to inspire our youths to have a prayerful heart for the nation; the spillover effect is that Christians across denominations will be united in prayer for the nation.

And so on October 10, runners in all the state capitals of Malaysia will hit the trail at 5.00a.m. for their run past homes, schools, offices, government buildings and religious sites.

In teams of three to five, they will pray for the people in the buildings as they pound the streets. And instead of carrying torches, they will carry prayer cards which they will pass to the next team at the end of their five kilometre-route.

The run is organised by Sports

Partnership Malaysia, supported by NECF Malaysia and covered by the GDOP (Global Day of Prayer) Kuala Lumpur committee.

On May 23, 2010, RunNat will partner GDOP Malaysia for a 10-day “Olympic-type” prayer run where the last team of runners will enter the Melawati Stadium in Shah Alam and run around the track to kick off the GDOP Concert.

This prayer run was first held on Oct. 5, 2007 where 105 Christians in various teams ran a total of 160 km within the Klang Valley.

For further details and to register as a runner, visit www.runforthenation.com or email enquiry@runforthenation.com or organising chairman Victor Chua at 019-2246886 or victor@runforthenation.com

Students' Ministry Forum Sept. 7 at Canning Garden Methodist Church, Ipoh

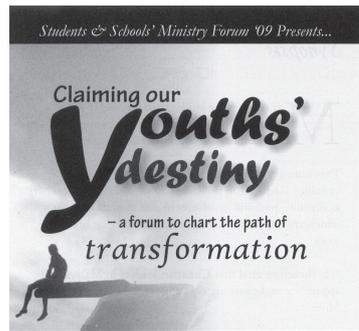
THEME: "Students & Schools Ministry
– A Partnership between Parents,
Teachers and Churches"

THE future of our nation rests on our youths. The Church therefore needs to proactively and passionately pursue ministries that reach out to them, especially the teens in schools.

This pursuit is all the more urgent considering the constantly-changing education policies, and the fact that the policies and school authorities dictate how schools are run and how our children's mindset is shaped.

However, reaching out to youths in our schools cannot be done in isolation by the concerned parties (teachers, parents or churches). To achieve far-reaching impact for our nation and churches, effective Students and Schools' Ministry (SSM) requires the synergic partnership of all – teachers, parents, churches, and concerned para-church ministries.

In light of this, NECF Malaysia, through the NECF YouthNet, and



several organisations will be jointly holding a special forum to brainstorm ways to effectively impact students. The organisations include the Malayan Christian Schools Council (MCSC), Teachers' Christian Fellowship (TCF) and Scripture Union (SU).

The forum aims to:

- Re-look at schools as an important mission-field and chart long-term strategy towards developing our youths as nation-builders of tomorrow;

- Bring together parents, teachers and churches to synergise their roles as agents of transformation, for example through parent-teacher association and schools' Christian Fellowships; and

- Brainstorm how to make SSM effective and impactful.

Parents, teachers, youth workers (including uniformed bodies), senior pastors, church leaders and youths are strongly urged to attend.

Malaysian Youth Missions Conference 2009 Sept. 20 - 23. at D'Village Resort, Melaka

THE conference kicks off the vision to start a Malaysian youth missions movement to stir Malaysian youths to take up the call of the Great Commission. It is initiated by the Youth Track of Malaysian Centre for Global Missions in partnership with others including NECF YouthNet.

There will be over 20 workshops highlighting the various aspects of missions involvement, Missions Fair, testimonies from young Malaysian missionaries and tentmakers serving in various nations and Cultural Tent experiences.

Registration fee is RM270 by 1st August and RM290 thereafter.

Contact theplan09@gmail.com or visit www.theplan09.weebly.com for more information.

Retreat for Full-time Single Women's Workers Sept. 10 – 12 at Port Dickson

SINGLE women who are serving full-time in Christian ministries are invited to a retreat for a time of rest, recreation and networking.

Organised by the NECF Malaysia Women's organisation, the retreat is fully sponsored by appreciative Christians who wish to honour these single ladies who have devoted their lives to the service of God.

Two speakers – single ladies themselves who have been in ministry for a long time – will be sharing their experiences.

They are Dr Teresa Chai, currently the President of Alpha Omega International College and also Mission Pastor of Grace Assembly, Petaling Jaya; and Nesam Ebenezer who had served in Malaysian Care in various caring ministries for 20 years. Presently, she is a lay pastor at St Paul's Church, Petaling Jaya.

Although single women, like the Apostle Paul, have many advantages over their married colleagues, they face unique challenges in their work.

Hence, the retreat provides a good opportunity for them to invigorate their spirits in a time of ministering and bonding with other like-minded servants.

NECF MALAYSIA WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

ORDINARY MEMBERS

Jubilee Sdn Bhd, Bentong, Pahang, *represented by Ann Wan Kuan*; Bethany Chapel, Klang, *rep. by Gan Tian Eng*; KK Harvest Church, Kota Kinabalu, *pastored by Chong Su Kong*; Rhema Blessed Church Kajang, *pastored by Paulus Joseph*; Life Empowerment Bhd, Kota Kinabalu, *pastored by Ng Weng Kong*; and Grace Community Johor Bahru, *pastored by Dr Charmiane Choong Poh Lee*

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Elder Goh Kim Moi; Ms Chen Mee Foong; Pr Petrik Andrews; Madam Wong Ming Yook; and Pr Charmiane Choong Poh Lee

Iran On June 12 after an unusually bitter campaign, voters went to the polls to choose a new president. Less than two hours after the last of some 40 million paper ballots were cast, the authorities announced that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had been re-elected with more than 60 percent of the vote. This prompted mass protests by demonstrators who claimed that he had stolen the election.

Ahmadinejad's main challenger, Mir Hussein Moussavi, a former prime minister with a reputation for honesty and competence, called on supporters and fellow clerics to fight the election results.

Protesters poured into the streets for the largest demonstration since the fall of the Shah. But after a few gestures toward compromise, the country's supreme ruler, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, harshly denounced the demonstrations and turned loose the police.

Days of street battles followed, in which at least 17 people were killed, including a young woman, Neda Agha-Soltan, whose death was captured on video and became a worldwide rallying point. Hundreds of opponents were jailed, and the protests dwindled. The election was certified by the country's Guardian Council and praised by Mr Ahmadinejad as the "freest" in the world. (Extracted from *The New York Times*, 13 June, accessed on 14 July at <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iran/index.html>)

Pray for wisdom and prudence for the protestors and their leaders who

must decide their course of action, for the Church and its leadership which must endure this time of turmoil.

Pray for the Lord to reveal Himself to the spiritually hungry Iranians as the only true source of hope, for a spiritual awakening among them. Pray for Christian leaders, evangelists and broadcasters for wisdom on how best to reach the various regions and communities, and for their continued courage and perseverance. Pray the Iranian people will again have a ruler like Cyrus of the Old Testament who acknowledged the God of Israel as the only true King.

Pray especially for the Iranian women, that they will experience true liberty that only Christ can bring. Pray for those suffering domestic violence and abuse, and pray for female Christian workers for wisdom on how to introduce the Gospel to these women.

May the Gospel continue to spread through the country through family network.

North Sudan Enabling Christians to support themselves in contexts where they face discrimination or hostility is an important part of the work of Barnabas, a ministry to the Persecuted Church. One way to do this is to equip them with skills they can use for income-generation. A grant of 5,000 pounds to a Christian ministry in North Sudan contributed to the costs of a five-month training programme for 100 women to teach them tailoring. Each woman was also

given her own sewing machine. This is the seventh such course, and those who have already been trained testify to how their new skills have changed their lives. Many are pastors' wives, and the increase in the family income from the sewing frees their husbands to give more time to serving the Lord.

The skills learned and the sewing machines given are especially vital for widows who have no one else to provide for them or their children. Many have also been greatly blessed by the Bible studies held before each sewing class and have had their faith renewed and strengthened, giving them peace in the midst of all the difficulties they face. (From *barnabas aid*, July/August 2009.)

Praise be to God for this ministry of Barnabas to empower the needy for self-reliance. Pray that the funds needed to run the ministry will always overflow from the generosity of His financially-able children.

Continue to pray for our sisters in North Sudan that God will grant them special strength as they juggle their many challenges. May they reflect the beauty of God's grace and holiness.

H1N1 On July 13, the World Health Organisation said the new flu virus was "unstoppable" and promptly gave drug makers a full go-ahead to manufacture vaccines against the pandemic influenza strain. Countries everywhere are now scrambling to get hold of the vaccines. As the pandemic continues to spread, pray that this will provide an occasion for the Gospel to also go forth through all the corners of the earth.