

EDITORIAL

Nobody's Watching Is there?

Sexual immorality is fast becoming a rampant social ill, affecting both young and old alike. Immorality refers to any act, thought or communiqué that is licentious and disregards morality. It is an “evil, wretched and wicked” social ill that is capable of generating other social diseases and “impairs good public (societal) interest and welfare (Webster’s Encyclopedia of Dictionaries). Addressing and combating these ills have become a global preoccupation of the Church and some governments as never before. We have already been pre-warned by Jesus in Lk. 17:26, “As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man” (Lk. 17:26).

Destroying Moral Fabric

The Government’s ongoing war against piracy of counterfeit CDs and VCDs, including porn-related ones shows clearly how society’s moral standard is being shamelessly and pathetically corrupted and debased by immoral influences. Added to this is the easy availability of pornographic materials through the Internet in the comfort of the home. With computers becoming the in-thing, even children now have immediate and direct access to pornography.

The irony is that some parents themselves are said to be bringing such porn-related materials into their homes to conduct ‘family viewing’. Such ongoing defilement of mind, body and soul provokes people into promiscuous indulgences of various sorts. ‘Escapism’ encouraged by the porn media has additionally led many to indulge in drug and alcohol abuse, transexuality, homosexuality, and sex orgies. Parental neglect in guiding and disciplining their children has also contributed to the gravity of sexual immorality and domestic violence, exposing children to traumatic events, child abuse, divorces and the like.

These, in turn, have caused resentment in children against parents and society and are worsening the generation gap. The end result on children is filial impiety, disrespect for elders

and rebellion, increase in school dropout rate and indulgence in *bohsia* (promiscuous affiliation) and *lepak* (loitering), teenage pregnancies, abortions and child prostitution. The AIDS epidemic has even begun to threaten the extinction of whole families.

The moral integrity of local manufacturers and consumers of such counterfeit materials has certainly gone down the drain. In contrast, piracy is still frowned upon by the masses in the West.

Apart from the ill effects threatening the nation’s economy, the more serious concern is the moral degradation of our society and the disastrous chain effect in the form of sexually- and crime-related social ills. In this affluent age, people have become as in 2 Tim. 3:1-4 “*lovers of their own selves...lovers of pleasures*”.

With a reported average of four women being raped daily and two persons being murdered every three days (The NST, July 2) where is our society heading? With the inclusion of unreported cases, the problem could be even more alarming. Porn and violence-related media have also contributed to death by shooting as the number one cause of death in the USA. The Church in Malaysia, according to a recent survey, is not encapsulated from the damaging cyber-porn media and pirated CDs and VCDs. In fact, the Internet is said to be the biggest threat to good Christian conduct.

The demonic influences of the questionable entertainment offered on the Internet and video games are not unknown to God’s children. One Christian leader aptly said, “This is a reprobate society exploring every realm of absurdity and madness in a non-rational fantasy world...”

Efforts by the authorities to combat pirated materials through raids and confiscation, imposition of stiffer penalties (including whipping) have not had the desired impact. Moral



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Morally Bankrupt

BY REV. DATUK DR PRINCE GUNERATNAM

On a recent website, writer Omar Bradley remarked: “*Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants.*” This thought-provoking statement candidly portrays how man has used his God-given intelligence to do great things but many times forgets or neglects the moral dimension of his actions.

Morality – relating to events such as the September 11 attack, scandals within the church fraternity, sanctioning of gay marriages in the West and corporate corruption – is increasingly and intensely debated.

An innovation such as the harnessing of nuclear energy, initially meant to bring positive benefits to mankind, has become instead the basis for the development of weapons of mass destruction. To justify issues such as these, what were once moral concerns have been denigrated to become amoral.

Traditionally-held moral values of developing societies have been subjected to brutal change. As historian Samuel Huntington predicted in his book “Clash of Civilisations”, values-based conflicts have become a reality today as seen in the ongoing conflict between western nations and those holding to other cultural or religious ideologies.

The word “moral” denotes qualities such as being chaste, virtuous, ethical and pious, while “values” refers to consideration of worth – that which is esteemed, appreciated, highly rated or treasured. In the secular world, what is considered moral is that which is grounded in laws, religion and family, peer or societal norms.

But, as God’s children born of the Spirit (Jn 3: 5), we evaluate what is good or bad only on the basis of God and His character. The only foundation for moral values is God in our lives, the God of the Bible where Christian morality grows out of a relationship with Jesus.

As moral values shape the character of the individual, the community and the nation, they are indispensable ingredients in the nation-building agenda. Differently perceived definitions, views and standards amongst people, however, makes acceptance of what constitutes “universal values of moral integrity” a utopia (as seen in suicide bombings and human rights issues).

The Church’s Moral Integrity Challenged

Audrey Brownie in a Haggai Institute Lecture, 2000 sums up: “Sex, money and power (pride) as being three areas that challenge the moral integrity of people, Christians included.”

The alarming incidence of sex-related scandals – pornography, prostitution, perversion and corruption of private thought life (Matt. 5: 28) – involving even some prominent men of God, not only poses a serious hindrance to the Church’s efforts to fulfill the Great Commission but also stumbles the life of the Christian.

“But, as God’s children born of the Spirit (Jn 3: 5), we evaluate what is good or bad only on the basis of God and His character.”

As the root of temptations lies in the heart, adherence to sound doctrine is crucial for victorious living. As W.C. Faber says, “*Every moment of resistance to temptation is a victory.*” Ministries have been destroyed, believers have been scattered and worldly lifestyles have infected the Church due to the absence of moral integrity. Spirituality, moral integrity and credibility wane if increasing love of money and materialism is unchecked.

The common saying, “power corrupts” has become a vivid reality in some seeking position, recognition or status. Because of a lust for power, even leaders who hold strong moral values concerning financial integrity and accountability have fallen.

Building A Community With Moral Integrity

The Bible says, “Train up a child in the way he should go. And when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). Values, both moral and non-moral, are acquired from infancy along with language, culture and socialized behaviour.

The influence of religious beliefs, customs, traditions, cultural practices and rules of social conduct shape our values and behaviour. The parental role in imparting bible-based moral values and discipline cannot be delegated. At the same time, the

• GO TO PG 4

Piracy Quandary



LIKE most consumers, Christians generally are indifferent to the issue of piracy. A minority may struggle with the ethics of buying counterfeit CDs or photocopying books, but for most of us, owning and using imitations are a way of life, with nary a thought to the question of legality. Has the recent government crackdown on pirated software and VCDs prompted Christians to re-think their attitude towards the issue of intellectual property? It appears not, judging from the replies offered by some Christians when asked for their views on piracy. All names have been changed.

Aileen, Part-time Seminary Student

It's not a big deal. I don't consider it a big sin to buy and own pirated materials. I think the bottomline for most people here is affordability. The originals are so expensive. Think about the poor seminary students who really need the books but cannot afford the originals. Or someone who needs a particular computer programme that costs a few thousand dollars as compared with a pirated version that costs a few dollars. I think it's okay if he gets the pirated copy. But those who can afford the originals should buy the originals.

Susan, Research Writer

Personally, I won't get involved in any grey areas, so I don't buy pasar malam VCDs or computer programmes, or photocopy books or burn CDs for personal use. If I really need something, I will buy or borrow it. I make sure I can afford it; if not I just do without it. But I won't judge those who do this. They are accountable to God.

Patrick, Civil Servant

Of course I buy pirated stuffs, especially software. How can a normal person afford all the originals for personal use at home. For example, an original Microsoft Office 2000 costs about RM2,500. You can get a copy at the pasar malam for RM10.

If I get caught, sure, I'll plead guilty. But the prices of the originals are ridiculously high. In America, you don't have a problem with piracy because the prices of the originals are affordable to the masses. Bill Gates (of Microsoft) should lower the prices of his programmes for the Third World countries.

Hui Ngoh, Executive Secretary

I feel uncomfortable buying a pirated VCD, so I don't do it. But if somebody's watching a show on a pirated VCD, I'm okay watching it. As to photocopying books, I'll only do it if it's stated in the book that we may photocopy it.

Keith, Researcher

Praise the Lord for alternatives.

Kwan, Seminary Student

It's all a question of stewardship. If a man can spend a few thousand dollars to take

his family for a holiday, what is a few dollars to take them to watch a movie?

Jim, management consultant

I agree with the reader who said in a newspaper that we've been taught from young to be frugal, to save in whatever ways that we can. Before buying something, most of us will shop around for the best price. If the price difference of an original VCD and a pirated version is not much, maybe I will consider buying the original. I suspect some people purposely buy the pirated ones as a protest to the exorbitantly-priced originals.

Moral Claim to 'Illegal' Practice

DR NG KAM WENG has "sorted out" the piracy predicament, he says. The research director at Kairos Research Centre shares his perspective.

"BEFORE patent laws existed, inventors were reluctant to share their secrets. Thus their inventions, which would have made life easier for the masses, were restricted to themselves.

The original aim in the patent mechanism was established to encourage mass production of inventors' creations to bring benefits to the wider population. Patent alone is not an act of selfishness, but rather a genuine claim to one's years of efforts and ingenuity. But what began as an ideal – that is for the benefit of the masses – can be exploited (and has shown to be) by the stronger parties who wield great influence over lawmakers.

The issue of piracy is not whether it

is legal, but whether it follows the 'fair pricing' rule for both the masses and the innovators. It is impossible to have one price for the whole world because not everyone is endowed with equal resources. Thus, a Christian in North America has a wider range of options compared with a Christian in Malaysia.

Take India, for example. Manufacturers in general recognise the low-income level of the masses and their ability (or rather, inability) to afford their wares, so the prices are adjusted to match the consumers' affordability to own the goods. By factoring 'affordability' to their pricing, they have

• GO TO PG 5

National Service



In response to the government's National Service programme beginning next year, NECF Malaysia recently presented a blueprint to Cabinet Committee on National Services (CCNS). The blueprint contains NECF'S recommendations – summarised from comments and suggestions by Christian leaders of evangelical churches – for drafting the National Services (NS) policies and guidelines. Following is the blueprint.

Overview and Background

ON October 30, 2002, the government announced that it would be compulsory for all youths to join a "modified" form of NS. An estimated 480,000 SPM school leavers in 2003 will be required to enlist for the six-month NS. Some flexibility will be employed on those studying overseas, but they are not totally exempt from it.

After careful consideration, especially on the high cost that may be incurred, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak on March 26 disclosed the proposal for a transparent and fair selection of 100,000 youths for a three-month participation instead.

The CCNS has identified 12 public (eg. Universiti Teknologi Mara) and three private universities, and 27 teacher training colleges as possible NS training centres. The National Service Training Bill was passed in June.

The proposed training syllabus will cover basic military training – for example, military drills and basic arms training including weapons firing – currently used by the Defence Ministry on reserve soldiers. NS youths will also be taught to march, raise the Jalur Gemilang (national flag) and some basic shooting, all aimed at instilling discipline, patriotism, civic consciousness, team spirit and other positive values.

We recognise the importance of racial integration as one of the crucial elements for political, economical and social stability in an advancing society. We commend the government for taking progressive steps to overcome the revealed deficiencies and weaknesses by introducing the NS with the objectives of inspiring patriotism, and building character and racial harmony among young Malaysians.

Perceived advantages and concerns

We recognise the advantages and agree that the programme will:

- enhance racial ties and promote ethnic integration;
- promote character building among the young people, motivate and help them to make wiser decisions, as well as building manhood and confidence in each individual;
- complement the armed forces in time of national crises; it will establish a shared responsibility and a common commitment to the defence of the nation; and
- cultivate a sense of duty and loyalty to the nation.

We also perceive the potential limitations and therefore share our concerns as follows:

i) Ideally, NS is an effective tool to promote racial integration because every citizen, regardless of race, is given equal opportunity to serve in any area of service, namely, Airforce, Navy and Army.

However, a three-month time frame may be too short to inspire patriotism and unity among the youths because the 10 years of public school education have apparently failed to achieve these objectives.

Given such a short time, NS may not be able to provide the antidote for racial disintegration if the deep-seated issues are not first dealt with in schools and at home. Fostering a sense of patriotism takes time, given the understanding that NS alone cannot promote patriotism without the government addressing broader issues relating to equality among Malaysians.

ii) Since the basis of the training programme is to strengthen the nation's multi-religious and multicultural principles, will the youths be exposed to different faiths and cultures in the country? Will there be observance of all the provisions in the Federal Constitution, especially in relation to the freedom of religion?

iii) The potential misuse of firearms training, for example using such knowledge to vandalise, rob, or just create chaos in the country.

iv) NS may also generate unintended opportunities for corruption, for example bribing officials to avoid enlistment (since only 100,000 of the 480,000 youths will be enlisted).

Recommendations

Having carefully considered all the arguments for and against NS, and in view of the potential limitations and concerns for our Christian youths, NECF Malaysia, on behalf of the evangelical Christians, has made the following recommendations:

i.) We urge the full observation of all Federal Constitution provisions relating to religious freedom, for example the freedom to worship, to profess one's own religious beliefs, to possess and read the Bible. In this regard, we also request that a suitable time and place be allocated for worship.

ii) We appeal for the setting up of a chaplaincy to cater to the

• GO TO NEXT PAGE

• FROM PG 2: MORALLY BANKRUPT

Church must guard against the deceptive 'self-esteem' teachings, which are solely based on humanistic psychology or "doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. 4: 1).

Moral integrity in the home, church and marketplace will enhance healthy individual and church growth towards spiritual maturity. It will also build a loving, caring and responsible Christian community and citizens who will engage positively in Kingdom and nation building respectively.

The Church's task is to disciple Christians in developing moral values "after the image of Him that created him" (Col.3: 10) and replacing "old things" with the "new" (Eph. 4:17-24). Truth and morality are inseparable. Without Him in our lives, where is morality? Our destiny is determined by our moral worth. Living uncompromisingly in accordance with His standards of moral integrity is the best gift we can leave for our next generation and contemporary world.

Our witness as 'salt and light' can impact and convincingly transplant God-centered moral values to our "neighbours".

spiritual needs of Christians in the NS. The evangelical Christian community is committed to providing the necessary manpower in this area.

iii) We recommend the introduction of a pre-NS programme to ensure a smooth transition into NS for students after their SPM examinations. We will commission the programme for Christian youths that includes basic physical training and counselling.

iv) We also implore CCNS to ensure that the aims and objectives of NS take into account the National Philosophy of Education and the principles of the Rukun Negara.

v) We beseech CCNS to ensure that the NS syllabus covers teachings that will instil the sense of purpose and discipline in the individual, structure and cohesion in the family; and independence, competitiveness, self-reliance and innovation in the society. We also request transparency in the enlisting procedures.

vi) We propose that representatives from each religious group be included in the CCNS. Their role is to provide religious advice and input in the planning process.

We commend this blueprint for recommendations to the Board of CCNS and also recommend that the Board appoint a team to work through the details of implementation together with NECF Malaysia.

Hurrahs to Schoolteachers

CHURCHES should consider honouring in a special way their members who are schoolteachers to thank them for choosing a laborious but influential vocation. The move may also help to boost the image of the lacklustre career, one that has been slowly losing its shine among Christians over the last few decades.

NECF Malaysia Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong made the proposal at a recent seminar on local current issues and how they affect the local Church. Held at the NECF office in June, it was attended by over 60 pastors and leaders from Petaling Jayachurches.

Rev Wong expressed optimism that the switch to teaching Maths and Science in English in national schools would attract more Christians to the teaching career. He was also hopeful that the switch would also help to reverse the decline in the enrolment of Chinese students in national schools.

Quoting an article from the *Far Eastern Economics Review* which said that, on a national average, 98 per cent of Chinese students went to national schools in 1964 but the figure is down to a mere five per cent today, he said: "We have a tendency to isolate ourselves from the issues surrounding us. This is evident in, for example the low

number of Christian teachers, and our general apathetic attitude towards the teaching career. He added: "For instance, I nearly said 'wasted' when a girl in my church, a top student, opted to enrol in a teachers' training college instead of Form 6 or other courses after completing her SPM."

Besides his observations on education, Rev Wong also covered trends and issues in religion and society. He shared about the revival in other faiths, notably Buddhism and Hinduism; the rising militant extremism in Islam; demographic changes and how they affect the local church.

Rev Wong urged Christians not to be dismayed or alarmed by the events or isolate themselves from the issues, but to face the challenges and persevere in prayer for the nation. On this note, he called on the participants to involve their churches in the NECF 40-day Prayer and Fast from July 21 to Aug 30 in conjunction with the Merdeka Prayer Rally.

A similar seminar was held for Subang Jaya churches in early July and two separate ones will be held for Kuala Lumpur churches and NECF Associate Members.

Note: Churches which are interested in organising such seminars in their towns or regions may contact Patrick Cheng at the NECF office.

• FROM PG 3: MORAL CLAIM TO 'ILLEGAL' PRACTICE

followed the 'fair pricing' principle, and shown regard for the people. That means the prices are fair to both the consumers and manufacturers and inventors, and this gives the consumers little reason to indulge in piracy or veer into extra-legal territories. Why not extend this practice to all other countries?

By and large, this 'fair pricing' rule has generally been ignored, largely because of self-interest. For example, in England, the book industry has a quite a stake in exports, so the people there are edgy about photocopying books. They know it works against the interest of their economy. But they are unperturbed by software piracy because they don't control that sector, whereas in America, which controls the world software market, piracy is strictly frowned upon by the

masses. I note the difference in attitude to highlight the fair pricing mechanism.

Secondly, distinction should be made between copying products for the purpose of education (information and technology) and for entertainment.

For example, photocopying books is not an issue if they're for personal academic use, especially if the 'offender' is genuinely financially wanting. But companies and institutions should not indulge in extra-legal means of procuring their materials unless they are out of print.

For software, consumers have a moral claim if it is copied for education purpose. The line is blurred when we come to copying software for entertainment (songs, movies and games) because it is not essential. Here, it is difficult to claim the high moral ground but because of the lack of moral integrity of manufacturers, and the consumers' lack of confidence in them, what was a legitimate demand to access to

knowledge has now spread to entertainment. Copying software and purchasing pirated VCDs has become rampant, even for the local Christian community.

This is a symptom of the breakdown of integrity for both consumers and manufacturers. It falls short of the moral ideal, but I can empathise with the necessity of life that have caused us to fall prey to this.

Finally, a word of caution: Those who claim to be poor have to guard against the moral presumption that they are exempt from licensing laws. They have to beware of the moral hazard of compromising, which may lead to a hardening of the heart. Never abandon the moral struggle when trying to make moral decisions. On the other hand, just because innovators and manufacturers can influence lawmakers, they cannot claim the high moral ground."

Perturbed by PAS Islamic State Blueprint

NECF Malaysia is perturbed by the recently-concluded PAS blueprint of the Islamic state, and has asked MCCBCHS to quickly respond to it as the matter affects all non-Muslims in the country.

NECF has chosen to voice its concern through MCCBHS (Malaysia Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism) as the council represents the common interests of non-Muslims.

In a letter to the council's president, the Most Rev Anthony Soter Fernandez, NECF expressed alarm over the blueprint, particularly one feature that said "The Syariah is the supreme law, superseding the Federal Constitution". Currently, the

Federal Constitution supersedes all other laws in the country.

Although the blueprint has yet to be officially announced, NECF stated in the letter that "we should, without further delay, put forth a presentation before our Prime Minister or Deputy Prime Minister, conveying our concern and also the need of the government to act appropriately..."

Other features of the blueprint are: Non-Muslims caught for criminal offences will still come under the country's present criminal penal code; the Prime Minister has to be a Muslim; other cabinet posts are open to non-Muslims, including women; and Non-Muslims will not be classified as *dhimmi* but will be expected to pay income tax but not any special tithe.

(*Dhimmi* is the term used to describe non-Muslims who live in societies governed by Muslim rulers and law. They have limited autonomy and are subject to a specific tax higher than the tax on Muslims.)

The news of PAS' blueprint was first reported in mid-June by the *Singapore Straits Times*, which said that the copy of the final draft had been approved by the party's Council of Ulamaks.

A fortnight later, the *Sunday Star* ran an analysis which raised several questions on the pragmatic application of the blueprint in a pluralistic society.

Among the questions asked were: How can there be democracy when the ulama have the final say on any law? If a non-Muslim man rapes a Muslim woman, which law will he be tried under?

• **See this issue's NECF Prayer Digest for help in interceding on this matter.**

• FROM PG 1

religious education methods need to be reviewed. The issue "creative licence" for import of films, videotapes, cassettes and other medium is meant to help enhance knowledge in creative arts (including music). On the contrary it facilitates infusion of corrupt values in our society as manifested in the increase of sexual crimes.

Where is the Church?

Our current situation calls for God's divine intervention. God does His work through those who "stand in the gap" to intercede against these evil influences. The situation is made more acute with the work of 'imposters' and 'false prophets' emerging "...worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13). The Church, therefore, has also to develop strategies to combat sexually related social ills infiltrating the Church.

Apart from input to the Government by Christian organisations and leaders, the Church is encouraged to develop a relevant and holistic approach that could include the following: -

- Developing bible-based guidelines on moral standards and parental vigilance and guidance that could help lay a strong moral foundation in our children;

- Encouraging family and personal devotions and healthy family development;

- Reviewing and redeveloping Sunday School curriculum and teaching methods to include teaching on combating social ills;

- Developing healthy, wholesome youth fellowships;

- Training volunteers in counselling on sex-related issues;

- Initiating awareness prog-

rammes on threats posed by "porn and violence-related media" and ways to combat them; and

- Working alongside government agencies to fight piracy of porn-related materials.

The gospel has the ultimate answers to the suppression of all social ills that plague society today. As God's children, we need to be ambassadors of societal transformation, battling against powers of darkness (Eph. 6:12) and ushering lost souls into His Kingdom.



CONDOLENCES

THE Council and Staff of NECF Malaysia grieve with the family and loved ones of the late Rev Kalip Basar, who returned to the Lord in a helicopter crash on July 17. He was on his way from Lawas, Sarawak, to Mount Murud to open the House of Prayer for All Nations Revival Meeting, and was scheduled to speak on the

last evening of the three-day conference.

Rev Basar, 49, was a member of the NECF Council from June 2002 and is fondly remembered for his love for all those he served.

NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong said his departure was a great loss to the Christian community in Sarawak, where he served as President of SIB Sarawak from 2002. "He was a man of vision and passion for the expansion of the Kingdom and because of that, he had the humility to learn, especially in the area of leadership for the indigenous people."

Rev. Basar left behind his wife, Mura Balang, and four children: Cherly, 26, Joslyn, 24, Debbie, 19, and Jonathan, 16.



Innocent and carefree... Our children need our intercession and guidance to be protected from the damaging effect of pornography.



INTEGRITY and FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

By Mrs Chan Tean Yin

The word 'integrity' has, in recent months, become a very important byword in political, social and professional circles. The world has been awakened to the implications of this word by the series of shockwaves that have rippled far and wide from high politics in America (the classic case being the Clinton-Lewinsky liaison), from corporate America – monumentalised by the Enron-Arthur Anderson fraud case and most recently, the WorldCom. Scandal.

Corruption and disintegration (the opposite of integrity) have infected the very fabric of socio-political life. What we have today is a broken, disoriented world.

James Patterson and Peter Kim did an interesting study on 'What Americans really Believe and Do'. They made the following findings:

1. There's no moral authority in America

'Americans are making up their own moral codes. Only 13% of us believe in all the Ten Commandments. 40% of us believe in five of the Ten Commandments. We choose which laws of God we believe in. There is absolutely no moral consensus in this country as there was in the 1950s, when all our institutions commanded respect.'

2. Americans are not honest

'Lying has become an integral part of American culture, a trait of the American character.' The authors estimate that 91% of Americans lie regularly.

3. Marriage and family are no longer sacred institutions

'While we still marry, we have lost faith in the institution of marriage. A third of married men and women confessed to us that they've had at least one affair. Thirty per cent aren't really sure that they still love their spouse.'

4. The Protestant work ethic is long gone from today's America workplace

Workers around America frankly admit that they spend more than 20% (seven days a week) of their time totally goofing off. That amounts to a four-day week across the nation.

The authors conclude that there is a new set of commandments for America.

- I don't see the point in observing the Sabbath (70%)
- I will steal from those who won't really miss it (74%)
- I will lie when it suits me, so long as it doesn't cause any real damage (64%)
- I will cheat on my spouse; after all, given the chance, he/she will do the same (53%)
- I will procrastinate at work and do absolutely nothing about one full day in every five (50%)
- We say that we are a nation that wants integrity, but apparently a majority of us lack it in our personal lives.

RELEVANCE TO THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

I suspect that these findings are becoming more and more applicable to the Malaysian and Asian contexts as globalisation

becomes a reality and Asian countries succumb to Western lifestyles and influences. The difference is only in the degree of seriousness, as the process of modernization erodes traditional cultural values and ethical practices in family, business and politics.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRITY IN THE FAMILY

Marriage and family are accorded great importance in the Scriptures as the family is the most basic of all sacred systems.

When Christian marriages and families lose their sense of belonging and purpose within the community of faith, the Church is weakened and its ability to witness to Christ and His kingdom is reduced. This is a great loss to a world in need of redemption.¹

The family is in a sense a mini church. If the family unit is weak, the church is weak as it is the family of families. Some experts suggest we learn our ethics in the same way we learn our language – by absorbing the inflections and nuances that have surrounded us since we were born.

We learned ethical value, such as fairness and honesty and what's decent, through the significant adults we lived with and the culture that surrounded us.

Thus values are inculcated, learnt and caught in the family. If good ethical values are modeled by parents in the home, they rub on to the children. Hopefully, they carry over these values learnt into the larger society they interact with.

Unfortunately, the tide of secularism and liberal morality has swept into the Christian family and weakened the moral foundation of the home.

Therefore, it is of fundamental importance that integrity be brought back



A covenant-keeper is loyal, trustworthy, committed and dependable.

• GO TO NEXT PAGE

into our family relationships so as to stem the tide of secularism

CHARACTERISTICS OF INTEGRITY THAT ARE VITAL IN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

1. Vow-keeping

Respect for the covenant (the seventh commandment), “Thou shall not commit adultery.”

Lewis Smedes in an article, ‘Respect for Covenant’² suggests that the question of adultery is a question of what sort of people we want to be. He postulates there are two kinds of characters – and both of them live within each of us. The two characters are covenant-keepers and self-maximisers. Culture tells us to be maximisers; the commandment tells us to be covenant-keepers.

A covenant-keeper is loyal, trustworthy, committed, and dependable. He/she is a person who keeps faith with people who trust him/her, a person who holds relationships together.

A self-maximiser is self-asserting and self-gratifying. A self-maximiser evaluates relationships with others in terms of how much he/she can benefit from it. The self-maximiser’s life is an exciting quest for maximal happiness. Extramarital affairs can offer maximal happiness to a person whose spouse has lost the flame of love and whose marriage has gone flat’.³

Yet, the commandment asks us to become covenant-keepers, people who subordinate the right to maximise their potential for sexual happiness to their responsibility for a covenanted partnership with another human being. The commandment calls us to make a deep decision, not simply about sex, but about the meaning and purpose of human life.⁴

The commandment calls us to be vow-keepers in defiance of our culture. Our **culture** urges us not to define our life in terms of past commitments but in terms of present needs and future possibilities. The **command** calls us to subordinate our needs and accommodate our possibilities to the vow we made as partners in marriage.⁵

2. Honesty

Honesty is another trait of integrity that is important in family relationships. Truth telling is apparently no longer a virtue people try to adopt for their lives. We may say we want people to tell the truth, but we don’t do it ourselves. This is particularly true in the family context. We punish our children for lying but we ourselves are guilty of the same sin.

We cheat with income tax returns, falsely declare or fail to declare items at immigration check points, break traffic rules and when caught, we lie our way through or worse, we bribe to avoid paying the summons.

We believe we can be dishonest just a little bit. We say we want people to be honest, but then we cheat on our taxes. We say we want to obey the laws, but then we go ‘just a little bit’ over the speed limit. We want to be honest enough to ease our conscience.

(The article will be continued in the next issue. THEAN YIN is a member of the NECF Malaysia Women’s Commission.)

(Footnotes)

¹ Wayne G Boulton, Thomas D Kennedy, and Allen Verhey, *From Christ to the World Introductory readings in Christian Ethics*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 323

² Ibid, 348

³ Ibid, 347–348

⁴ Ibid, 348

⁵ Ibid, 349



Presented by
Focus on the Family Malaysia

What is ‘No Apologies – the Truth about Life, Love + Sex’

‘NO APOLOGIES’ (‘NA’) is a unique **Character-Building Curriculum on Abstinence**. This ‘NA’ curriculum is currently being conducted in many parts of the world and it has been well received and has produced very encouraging results in countries such as Thailand, Philippines, southern Africa and Singapore, where young people are pledging to remain abstinent until marriage.

The purpose of this curriculum is to help youth to commit to delay sexual involvement and it is an achievable standard for them. It is aimed at helping our adolescents to:

- i) Identify clearly the consequences associated with premarital sexual activity
- ii) Understand the value of healthy behaviours
- iii) Practise the skills necessary to achieve the goal of abstinence from premarital involvements

With abortions and babies born out of wedlock growing in numbers, teens should be taught the truth, that the consequences of premarital sexual activities are detrimental to their physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being. The ‘NA’ is a non-threatening, fun-filled, interactive, well-planned, structures and systematic curriculum which is effective with the young people of this generation.

‘NA’ has achieved tremendous results with young people taking the pledge to ‘Abstain’ from premarital sexual relationships and to save the best for marriage. By this one step the teenagers are taking on the true character of purity and to committing to a

the truth
about
life,
love
+sex

lifelong relationship to a life partner.

Women to Women asked **Aaron Tham**, *Focus on the Family No Apologies* Curriculum Coordinator, the following questions about the curriculum.

Is the curriculum suitable for both male and female adolescents?

‘No Apologies – the truth about life, love and sex’ is a character-building curriculum on abstinence. The purpose of this curriculum is to help youth – both male and female – to commit to delay sexual involvement

and to see it as an achievable standard. It identifies clearly the consequences associated with premarital sexual activity. The target group for the curriculum is youth from 13 to 18 years, and now we have extended the age group to include college students as well. The main purpose is to bring the message: ‘*Abstinence – It Works Every Time*’ to the youth.

Since its release in 1998, the No Apologies Curriculum has been well received by young people all over the world with almost a million youth taking the **Pledge** to remain abstinent from premarital sex and to remain faithful in their monogamous marriage.

The Curriculum addresses the youth as a whole person and takes into account their intellectual, ethical, physical, social and emotional being. We want to resist the ‘safe sex’ promotion message and to make a stand against legalised abortion and the homosexual agenda. The number one goal is to challenge our youth to take this ‘abstinence message’ and for them to make the choice to become men and women of good moral character.

Is there any follow-up after the presentation of the Curriculum?

Each participant who takes the step of commitment by taking the Pledge of abstinence will be asked to sign a Pledge Card which says: ‘*Believing in saving myself for marriage, I make a commitment to myself, my family, my friends, my future spouse and my future children to be sexually abstinent from this day onward until the day I enter a lifelong, committed, monogamous marriage.*’

The participant who signs a pledge card will be required to select an adult of his/her own choice to be the witness and accountable partner to his/her pledge. Participants are advised to select someone who is a responsible adult whom they can trust and who will not misuse the confidence placed in him/her.

We will keep participants who have attended our No Apologies workshops (whether they took the pledge or not) informed

about the progress and development of this abstinence message in our country and the rest of the world. We will provide reports and news to participants through emails.

The purpose is to reinforce the message of abstinence to the youth and to (remind them) that this is the only 100% protection against STDs (sexually transmitted diseases).

There is no guarantee that the youth will keep to their pledge. However studies have shown that taking the pledge will help to delay their initiation into sexual activity by between one and three years. By then, we hope they will be more mature to make a sound decision on their own with regards to premarital sexual activity.

The No Apologies curriculum is from the States. Has any adaptation been made to suit the local participants?

The contents of the Curriculum are applicable to youth from any ethnic or religious background. The responses from young people in countries where No Apologies has been conducted shows that the message of abstinence cuts across culture and religion. The Curriculum is presently conducted in: Costa Rica, east Africa, Japan, Mexico, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, Latin America – Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Columbia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and Venezuela.

In our workshops, we present local life examples to enhance our messages and to make them applicable. The future of this generation of youth in Malaysia should be built upon the good foundation of moral values. This will bring about strong family structures that are to be passed on to the generations to come.

It also teaches about abstaining from other negative activities such as gambling, drugs, alcohol and pornography. ‘No Apologies – the truth about life, love + sex’ should be shared, taught and instilled in the lives of young people today and the generations to come. There is no problem reaching the young people with this curriculum and its message of abstinence.

What are the challenges you face in following through with the abstinence programme?

Recently *Focus on the Family Malaysia* signed a Memorandum of Understanding with *Systematic Education Group International Berhad* (SEGi) to conduct the curriculum for 17,000 students in their colleges in West and East Malaysia.

We are in need of more facilitators to ensure that we can meet the demand for this curriculum at SEGi and other youth groups, clubs and organisations. Other educational institutions and school have also expressed keen interest in the curriculum.

In view of the demand, Ms Leslie Yeaton, the Manager of International Abstinence and Youth Outreach from *Focus on the Family US* will be conducting a training session for facilitators in Malaysia this September. We are targeting to train 150 facilitators.

We are honoured to have Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara (LPPKN) support this curriculum. It is our vision that the No Apologies curriculum will be made available to all secondary schools and colleges in both East and West Malaysia, with the aim of bringing good moral values back into the lives of our young people in the nation.

(For more information, call FOFM 03-58823343/335.)



Faith Enough To Finish

Speaker: Jill Briscoe

Date : 3 September 2003

Time : 9.30am – 1.00pm

Cost : RM10.00

(Please note change of topic)

To register call: NECF 03-77278227

Shereene 016-3387171

Poh Gaik 012- 3263100

*Please register EARLY (before August 15) to enable us to make tea arrangements.
Thank you.*

Thank you for being a Friend

by Jill Briscoe

A little before my father died our third child had been born, and my hours were filled with the demands of that new life, and the refereeing of David and Judy's time together. My day started so terribly early! Before I had the three children, I had given an excellent talk to a ladies group on daily devotions, but it now lay buried at the bottom of a drawer and I had to admit that *daily commotions* had taken their place!

I just couldn't wake up before the first baby's cry, and once the bedlam started – just where in our small lodge could I ever find a quiet place to meet with God. Three pairs of small hands clutched at me all day long, and if they weren't clutching at me, they were clutching at each other and I'd have to de-clutch them and watch

and see that the baby didn't get trodden underfoot in the confined space. One morning I ignored Peter's screams and went ahead and read my Bible anyway. I could hear David and Judy happily playing some game, and therefore reckoned Peter's cries were an 'I want to play too' tantrum.

After the wailing music had continued for some time, I thought I'd better investigate and went through to their bedroom. The bunk beds stood against the walls and there was a bar across the top to prevent anyone from falling out. From it dangled Peter, who had been hooked up there to keep him out of the way! When I lifted him down, his little arms remained stretched straight above his head and I had to massage them back to life again!

Well, now, I reasoned, if I couldn't meet the Eternal before the day began, then I'd better meet Him when it was over! But when it was over so was I, and I decided it wasn't very polite to give God the most worn-out part of me.

What was I to do? Looking around the living room the next day my eye fell on the play pen that just about filled the room.

That would do it! I clambered in and put the children *out* and found a place where at last I was all alone, but still had a vantage point from which I could keep an eye on the infants.

The little imps rattled the bars in fury trying to get at me – in fact – that was the only time I could remember them wanting to get *in* instead of *out* and I told them they would just have to wait as it was Mummy's turn in the play pen!

What a difference those brief moments with God's law began to make. I couldn't imagine how young mothers like me with a crop of young children could ever cope without the wise words and encouragement of that Book. – Taken from *Thank You for being a Friend* by Jill Briscoe, who is in great demand as a woman's speaker.

WOMEN to WOMEN

Advisor/Co-ordinator: Goh Poh Gaik

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

It has the broad objectives of:

- educating and raising awareness of the social and theological issues affecting women
 - stimulating efforts towards networking and dialogue amongst women
 - encouraging one another in the use of our gifts and talents for the Lord's Kingdom
- Your letters and contributions (feedback, suggestions, ideas, articles, poems, cartoons, etc.) are most welcome.

Send to: The Co-ordinator, **WOMEN TO WOMEN**
NECF, 32, Jalan SS2/103, 47300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

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

Ministering to the 'Persecuted' Pastors

"YOUR idea of *Appreciation Day* came too late. I have just left pastoral ministry and I WILL NEVER be a pastor again! If pastors are indeed an endangered species then I think it is not correctly phrased. Pastors are a very persecuted species. Thanks and no thanks to NECF."

The e-mail was sent to the NECF Malaysia office by an embittered former pastor who did not disclose his/her identity, in response to its *Appreciation Day* campaign, a follow-up initiative to the NECF Pastors' Prayer Shield campaign

launched in 2001.

While there are instances of "persecuted" pastors, thankfully there are also cases of fulfilled ministers who have found satisfaction in their ministry. A significant contributing factor to this fulfilment is the visible affirmation given by the congregations to their ministers' contributions.

Which is why the *Appreciation Day* initiative is catching on with more and more churches contacting NECF to ask for assistance in planning this event.

Recently, the Worldwide Church of God Malaysia, Klang, used one of its Sunday worship service to honour and acknowledge its pastors for their labour of love.

One member commented that the appreciation service was long overdue. Pr Yong Chin Gee and Pr Wong Mein Kong, who have served the church for 26 years and eight years respectively, were each given a monetary gift – enough for them to have a hearty meal or a local holiday.



Another church – His Sanctuary of Glory, Kuala Lumpur – also used a Sunday worship service to honour its pastor, Rev Daniel Cheah and wife Deborah. They have served the church for 15 years, and this was the first time they were honoured by the church.

Perhaps the most encouraging response to the *Appreciation Day* initiative comes from Sarawak where some 500 SIB congregations will hold *Appreciation Day* celebrations statewide come Aug 31.

Initiated by SIB Sarawak, the celebrations to honour their pastors and church workers are not just one-off events for the SIB churches in the state, but will remain a permanent event on the calendar. SIB has set aside the last Sunday of August for this yearly celebration.



The sweetness of the cake symbolises the sweet fellowship of a church united in love. Pix shows pastors and family members of Worldwide Church of God Malaysia cutting the cake presented by their congregation after the "Appreciation Day" service.

New BM Fellowship targets evangelism and discipleship

THE BM Pastors Fellowship in Melaka has been dissolved and replaced by a new fellowship that comprises pastors and also church leaders. The new fellowship is called *Persekutuan Pelayanan BM Melaka* or Melaka BM Ministers Fellowship, and aims to strengthen and expand the BM ministry in the state, particularly in evangelism and discipleship.

The fellowship represents BM churches from the Methodist, SIB, AOG and Salvation Army denominations and also includes some independent churches.

The move was initiated by the NECF Malaysia BM Commission whose Executive Secretary Alfred Tais is the advisor to the committee, chaired by Calvary Life Assembly Melaka pastor Edward Avit. All the committee members of the previous fellowship have graciously stepped down to make way for new faces to serve.



Standing fr left: Pr Edward Avit (Chairman); Pr John; Pr Peter Ukong; and Captain Jihper (Secretary). Seated fr left: Yong Pit Loon; Pr Goh Lyn Ngio (Treasurer); and Sharily Ong.

One of the fellowship's immediate tasks is to mobilise BM churches in Melaka to participate in the NECF Malaysia 40-day Prayer and Fast. This also includes organising a Merdeka Prayer Rally for the BM churches (separate from the rally for English-speaking congregations) in Melaka.



What is entertainment? There is no clear-cut answer because entertainment means different things to different people. Perhaps it may be more instructive to consider why people seek out entertainment, writes DR MINNI K. ANG.



Putting our youth's creative energy to good use

Entertainment and Youths

Sociologists studying the phenomenon of movie going among the poor in India generally conclude that the fantasy world of the movies provides temporary relief from the harshness of real life.

Author David Farland suggests that we crave immersive imaginary experiences to which our subconscious minds may respond to in some degree as though they were real, because our subconscious minds are unable to differentiate reality from imagination.

A captivating and entertaining story is one that resolves a meaningful conflict. As the conflict in the imaginary world (that is, the story) builds up, some threshold point is reached where the human biofeedback mechanism is triggered and the body, in its effort to handle this imaginary stress, creates some endorphin-like substance to counteract it. As the story draws to its conclusion and the imaginary conflict is resolved, the feel-good substances are released and the viewer feels relieved. This emotional exercise helps the body manage the day-to-day stresses, as minor problems seem to diminish in intensity and even major ones appear less daunting.

This principle applies not only to reading for entertainment, but also to other forms of entertainment such as spectator

sports, participative sport, board games and even gambling.

Thus far, we have attempted to define entertainment and why human beings seek it. This context is important to provide a Christian understanding of and response to entertainment, and the role it plays among our youths. Whether the entertainment we seek provides an escape from the hard realities of life or whether it actually is a reflection of our own individual realities, I would like to suggest that entertainment not only provides personal relaxation and leisure, but also plays a significant role in human and community development.

Creativity's Slow Death

The development of human civilisation through the ages has been dependent on creativity – the ability to think out of the box, to come up with fresh, new, extraordinary, and yet workable ideas and inventions that are the hallmark of quantum-leap advances. The fact that creativity has been at the heart of every single significant step forward in human development should not come as a surprise – after all, the very first sentence in the Bible talks about God as Creator of the Universe. Creativity is clearly a pre-requisite to creating something truly new.

In discussing creativity, we are excluding the warped use of creativity for bizarre and destructive purposes.

But why is it that many have failed to develop this aspect of their potential, that the majority lack that spark of creativity, satisfied merely “to go where others have gone before”, instead of “to go where no one has gone before”?

I believe the answer lies in the general trends in modern entertainment. To draw an analogy from the world of sport, there is a ‘spectator mentality’ present in most entertainment today, as opposed to the ‘participant mentality’ prominent in entertainment of yesteryear. Take children’s play for example. Parents used to be able to tell their children to “go outside and play” – with little else other than their imaginations and their friends. So trees became hideouts, broom handles became horses, badminton rackets became guitars. Children were able to improvise, to make do with whatever they had and to invent whatever else they required. Today’s parents, in contrast, feed their children with more toys.

Storytelling is another favourite all-time entertainment; what has changed is

• GO TO NEXT PAGE

the form it takes. The oldest form of storytelling was just that – telling stories. As the storyteller unfolded the plot, each listener would play out the scenes in his mind. Often, the listeners' interjections would fuel the storyteller's imagination, causing the story to evolve into a sort of living organism.

With the invention of writing stories and the printing press came books, and a new form of storytelling entertainment: fiction novels and short stories. While these more explicitly described characters, places and events in the author's imagination, they nevertheless still engaged the reader's own imagination.

The invention of the moving picture added yet another external shell to the world of storytelling. With television and movies, viewers are now fed an exact replica of the producer's imagination, resulting in everyone receiving an identical mental image of the story. My vision of the Mines of Moria may have been different from yours before *The Lord of the Rings* came to our screen, but now everyone's vision is exactly the same as Peter Jackson's. The proposed next step in the world of film technology is to introduce smells. What else is there left to imagine?

From Active Participation to Headphones

Music is one of the oldest forms of entertainment, and along with dance, is one of those mentioned in Scriptures in the context of entertaining guests and strangers at feasts and banquets.

It is interesting to note the difference between more 'primitive' musical forms in contrast with newer more 'advanced' forms of music. Folk music is by its very nature meant to be for the people, by the people. It does not require high levels of musical skill, but instead corporate participation. People play, sing and dance, rather than watch and listen. This active participation not only builds community spirit, it also develops individual character and participants learn to express themselves through their instruments, voices and bodies.

The trend of concert going, which first came into style in the 18th century, bred a generation of passive music listeners who merely sat back and enjoyed the effort of others. The musicians and singers themselves became more and more skilled, until the average person felt content to leave the music making to the professionals.

The invention of recording technology and mass distribution avenues such as radio and music CDs meant that even the limited

'community experience' of physically going to a concert hall is now replaced by an even more passive form of individual listening, at its most extreme form in total isolation through a pair of headphones.

These examples serve to effectively illustrate the trend in modern entertainment towards mass forms that require minimal creative input from its participants. The fact that entertainment today is geared towards the masses has resulted in a general mindlessness in modern society. In fact, we live in a society that has been prepared to receive mass direction – a potentially dangerous situation open for exploitation by manipulative marketers.

Back to Creative Entertainment

Young people are impressionable, and are at that stage in life where they are searching. They are also one of the main consumers of modern mass entertainment.

Today's youths, unless properly nurtured by their parents in their childhood, are being fed a diet of passive forms of entertainment not requiring much imagination or creativity: television, pop music, computer games, and the movies. It is easy for the scrupulous and unscrupulous alike to promote their own hidden agendas through these entertainment forms.

“Our youths should be taught how to evaluate the entertainment they seek, and how to weed out the good from the bad.”

The Church needs to be aware of these trends and to address these issues, for this modern passive entertainment mentality has not only invaded our personal and family lives, but also crept into the Church. It is present when we see

“An increasing fixation on worship experiences (in the form of praise concerts) instead of a fixation on fruitful godliness”. (Quotation by Joe E. Furr, “The Singing School”, Abilene University.)

I am not saying here that church has to be boring and that Christians should utterly shun all forms of modern entertainment. To be able to respond to the challenges facing our youths, we need to understand trends in modern entertainment, especially the trend towards decreasing imagination, creativity and an ability to think for oneself.

The Church should not be influenced by such trends. Christians were never meant to be pew warmers, but participants. If Sunday Service means going to church Sunday after Sunday only to listen to great

sermons and enjoy great music, then we have to examine why we go to church in the first place. Joe E. Furr sums it well when he said:

People should enjoy going to church. Praise, joy, and thanksgiving should be a delight. Sermons should be motivational and life changing. We should enjoy God's Word. We should be uplifted. We should be inspired to grow, develop, and become more productive in God's kingdom. We should be moved to put away our carnal nature. If all of this is “entertainment”, then church should be entertaining.

The assembly should not substitute audio-visual stimulation and sensational excitement for genuine worship. Bright lights and hyper emotions should not replace the delight we have in the Word of the Lord. If we need fast, loud music, stimulating videos and liturgical dancing to get people to church, then we are abusing the assembly. If this is “entertainment”, then the church should not be entertaining.

How do we, as a Church, respond to the present situation? Firstly, we need to return to the realisation that we are all born creative beings with active imaginations. Instead of allowing modern lifestyle to dull our minds, the Church should take the

leadership in nurturing and developing this God-given ability to imagine and create something new, all the time subjecting this to the Word of God.

The Church has the responsibility also to redeem all forms of entertainment for the glory of God and for use in the proclamation of His Good News. Within the moral framework of His Word, creative entertainment should be encouraged and developed.

Our youths should be taught how to evaluate the entertainment they seek, and how to weed out the good from the bad. Development of the imagination needs to be encouraged, again all the time subjecting it to the moral framework of God's Word.

There is still so much to do, but it does need to be done.

(Dr Ang holds degrees in physics, percussion performance and computer music applications. She is currently a consultant to several projects including NAFA Singapore, Unesco and London College of Music. This article is a contribution of the NECF Malaysia Research Commission, of which Dr Ang is a member of.)

Christmas without Christmas trees?



The world may reel in shock at the thought, while the anti-Christmas tree Christians may exult. But for most people, Christmas isn't Christmas till the tree's up. For centuries, it has become an obligatory part of the festivity, adorning homes, brightening dreary winters and delighting children and adults alike. Without going into a theological debate on Christmas trees, PATRICK CHENG suggests some ideas to make our celebration of the Lord's birth more meaningful.

A few Christmases ago while I was window-shopping in Singapore, I came across a department store selling various sizes of manger scenes. What a rare sight! Most department stores sell Christmas trees, tinsels, etc. which are very western. The manger scenes reminded me of our Prime Minister's advice to "Look East". That would mean contextualising some of the usual practices, such as singing "I'm dreaming of a White Christmas", feasting on turkey and roast lamb, and draping mistletoes around our house. Aren't there any non-western festive items that will draw people back to the centrality of Christ?

Here are some suggestions to celebrate Christmas more meaningfully.

Decorations

While the Christmas tree has been widely used by both Christians and non-Christians as the main decorative item, it does not accurately reflect the purpose of Christmas. On the other hand, the manger/nativity scene – Joseph, Mary, baby Jesus in a manger, shepherds, stable animals etc. – may evoke queries from non-Christians, thus providing an opportunity to share the Christmas story.

Perhaps our local Christian bookstores can bulk-order the manger sets (thus lowering the price) or even get them produced locally. We can also hang or put up suitable Bible verses strategically around the house to give visitors first-hand contact with the message of Christmas.

Carolling

During one Christmas season, I managed to

coerced my church's youths to don costumes similar to those worn at the time of Jesus' birth. So, dressed like shepherds and ordinary Jews, the high-spirited youths went around members' homes proclaiming the Christmas message through carols. The invited guests from the neighbourhood were treated to a nice *makan*, and the hosts seized the opportunity to share their faith. And for the youths, that Christmas brought fresh insight into their understanding of the celebration.

Christ-centred Cards and Karaoke VCD

Sending meaningful Christmas cards is a good way to spread the gospel. But how about giving to your non-Christian friends Christmas karaoke VCDs that contain Christ-centred Christmas songs? Unfortunately, there is none in the market, to my knowledge. Those we have are filled with secular Christmas songs that have nothing to do with the birth of Christ or the gospel. (Non-Christian businessmen do know how to capitalise on the Christmas season.)

A 2-in-1 gospel-centred Christmas card cum karaoke VCD will make an excellent gift. The idea is here. So is the market. Now, we just need some enterprising Christian businessmen to pick this up.

Reflecting on a Swiss Christian activist group's action to ban Santa Claus from Christmas, I feel that though their intention is noble, it will take major effort because Santa Claus has been widely accepted as the icon of Christmas. Another icon is the Christmas tree, which Christians and non-Christians alike like to put up.

From the sociological perspective, it will take one or two generations before any changes can be effected. Let this Christmas be the start of the change. Then, if the Lord should tarry for another two generations, our children and grandchildren will see manger scenes instead of Christmas trees.



Putting up a manger scene may pique the curiosity of your visitors.

WRITE TO US. We welcome your contribution for this column. Articles should focus on observations of current issues facing churches in Malaysia, and should not exceed 800 words. E-mail to editor@necf.org.my

New Members

We welcome the following into our Fellowship as **Ordinary Members**:

- **New Horizons Society** represented by *Michelle Cheng*
- **FGA Church Prai** pastored by *Saw Thean Oon*
- **Grace Community JB** pastored by *Raymond Chong*
- **Megah Ria Kailer Christian Church** pastored by *Lydia Wong*
- **Living Streams Community** pastored by *Magdalene Loo Jee Nam*
- **Calvary International Ministries (CIM)** represented by *Rev. Datuk Dr Prince Guneratham*
- **Harvest Community Centre Penang** pastored by *Patrick Chong*

We also welcome seven individuals as **Associate Members**.

Lift Up Our Nation in Prayer

Join our 40-Day Prayer and Fast and
Merdeka Prayer Rally



JULY 21 marks the beginning of our annual 40-day Prayer and Fast for the nation, culminating at the Merdeka Prayer Rally that will be held throughout the nation, including Sabah and Sarawak.

Organised by NECF Malaysia and held in conjunction with Merdeka Day (independence day), the event is gathering

momentum with more churches and individual Christians signing up to participate.

NECF staffmembers who have been travelling all over the country to launch the event have reported that Malaysian Christians are increasingly concerned for the welfare of the nation.

The prayer and fast will end on Aug 29, followed by combined-churches prayer gatherings on the same night and Aug 30 night in various towns and cities all over the country. Pastors are urged to mobilise their congregations to participate in the prayer and fast and the rallies as a corporate witness of Christian concern for the nation.

First Central Prayer Rally for Chinese Churches

FOR the first time, Chinese churches throughout the Klang Valley will gather at a central location to pray for the nation in conjunction with the annual NECF Malaysia Merdeka Prayer Rally. Previously, the churches met separately in their regions (for example, Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur) on the last week of August.

NECF has appointed a committee, comprising pastors and church leaders from the Chinese churches, to organise the rally to be held at FGA Kuala Lumpur on Aug 29 night. Some 1,000 Chinese-speaking Christians are expected to attend.

The rally will be conducted in Mandarin and to make it a memorable first event, NECF has invited a special speaker - U.S. seminary principal Rev Dr Ernest Chan. The committee has also planned a one-day prayer conference - from 9.30am to 10pm - for Chinese-speaking Christians to be held at FGA KL on Sept 1. The

following day, a special meeting will be held from 9.30am to 12.30pm for pastors and full-time workers. Dr Chan will speak at both gatherings. For more information, contact Ngeh Hoong Eng at the NECF office or 012-3202324.

Unravelling the SuperPastor Myth

CHRISTIANS tend to place their pastors on a spiritual pedestal. In response, pastors have to put up a front to meet their congregations' expectations. Are these observations true? What about the perception that pastors unintentionally build walls around themselves to project an invincible image?

A nationwide survey will soon shed light on these questions and furthermore, give a deeper understanding into the dynamics of the pastor-congregation

emotional relationship. Starting August, NECF Malaysia will mail out questionnaires to pastors in a two-part survey.

The *2003 Emotional Connection between Pastors and Congregations* survey is initiated and facilitated by the NECF Research Commission in conjunction with the ongoing NECF Malaysia Pastors Prayer Shield campaign.

The first part of the survey targets pastors who will answer a list of 50 questions on how they feel about themselves and their ministry, and how they think their congregations perceive them and their contribution. The second part of the survey, to be conducted separately and at a latter date, will have the congregation's response to a separate questionnaire.

From the response, NECF hopes to pinpoint the sources of wall-building between pastors and congregations. The information will help NECF to plan programmes to help pastors.

FOR YOUR Prayers

UGANDA

THE terrorist cult-militia, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), is still causing intolerable suffering in northern Uganda. With a 16-year history of rebellion, the LRA has kidnapped more than 10,000 children to drug and forcibly conscript as child soldiers. Uganda is a predominantly Christian country with an active, strong and growing Church, and Christians are regularly victims of the LRA's cruelty and evil.

On May 11, the LRA raided a Catholic seminary, killing one and kidnapping 44 young seminarians, three later escaping. Noah's Ark Children's Ministry Uganda has set up a night-time safe haven for hundreds of children seeking protection from LRA raids. LRA's leader, Joseph Kony, is a spirit medium.

Remember Eph. 6:12 as you pray for God to bind all demonic forces at work amongst the LRA; and for God in His great mercy to grant safety, release and healing to the kidnapped children.

LATIN AMERICA

DESPITE the tremendous growth of the Church in Latin America over the past few decades, there is still a low percentage of evangelicals in many parts. For example, Mexico City, the world's largest metropolis, is still around 99 per cent unevangelised, according to Action International Ministries.

Pray for this mission field. Poverty in Latin America makes it difficult for indigenous churches to pay Christians workers and national missionaries, and to finance church-planting ventures. Foreign missionaries supply resources, but can find it difficult to meet the needs beyond the areas they are operating in. Pray that God will remove the financial barriers to mission initiatives.

However, expatriate missionaries are still much needed. One reason is the rigid class system, similar to India's caste system but not as extreme, means that the large evangelical population among the lower class finds it difficult, if not impossible, to evangelise the middle and upper classes, whereas missionaries can enter any social class.

LIBYA

LIBYA remains tightly closed to the gospel. Christian radio and satellite television are among the very few ways of telling Libyans about Christ, but personal follow-up is well nigh impossible. Very few Libyans are Christians. Christians face huge obstacles to fellowship, not least from the elaborate secret police networks. Expatriate Christians groups are largely nominal. Pray for a breakthrough and for protection of believers and a revival among foreign church-goers. Meanwhile, there is a growing hunger to know God among Libyans abroad - businessmen, students, diplomats and refugees. Pray for Christians to witness to these people, even though they are kept under surveillance by Libyan government agents.

CONGO

THE Church in Congo has a long history of suffering and martyrdom. History has been repeating itself recently with many atrocities. One story to emerge in 2002 was of Christian Congolese and expatriate medical missionaries leading some 900 patients on foot to safety through 105 miles of dense jungle for a week after their hospital at Nyandkunde, a major evangelical centre, had been attacked. Some 1,000 were massacred there by armed groups who use cannibalism, butchery, executions, systematic rape, torture and kidnapping of some civilian Congolese as weapons of war. Pray for the spiritual, emotional and physical healing of those who have suffered and are suffering terror.

IJIM

LIKE many girls kidnapped and trapped in the ever-widening web of sex trafficking, Joyti, 14, was a slave in a brothel in Bombay, India. Her captors kept her from running when she was forced to abuse drugs and alcohol. They held her captive as she was made to have sex with men. Joyti endured this living hell for three years, with no hope and no future, until she was rescued by IJIM personnel.

Just as relief and development organisations seek to feed the hungry and meet physical needs in the name of Christ, IJIM (International Justice Mission) seeks

to show Christ's love through advocating for and freeing the oppressed. "We (at IJIM) are a group of law enforcement personnel and lawyers who bring our skills to apply to people around the world who have no other recourse," says IJIM chief operating officer Bob Lonac.

As mission organisations and overseas workers report cases of injustice, IJIM sends attorneys and law enforcement personnel to expose injustices to local officials, providing evidence via recordings, witnesses and more. Last year, IJIM handled cases in 16 countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Pray for IJIM's mission, for courage, wisdom, compassion and protection of the staff as they seek to free the oppressed.

In Bombay, India, girls were brought out of a dungeon-like hole in the ground during a brothel raid led by IJIM operatives and local police. The girls were locked in a soundproof room so that no one would hear them during the raid. (Pix from *World Pulse*.)



NORTH KOREA

CHINESE authorities have been cracking down on those who help North Koreans flee across the borders to escape the terrible conditions in their homeland. Many have responded to the love and practical help of Chinese Christians but the authorities offer money to betray neighbours who hide refugees and even torture North Koreans to get the names of their helpers.

Pray for God's hand on the Chinese Christians helping the fleeing North Koreans and that they will continue their good works for the Lord despite the threats to their lives as a witness of Christ's sacrificial love. Meanwhile, more and more children of high-ranking North Korean officials are studying in the US. Pray that they will hear and respond to the gospel, and be able to exert much influence for reform, especially religious freedom, when they return home.