

E D I T O R I A L

# Minding Our Shepherds

**A**re your pastor and full-time workers adequately paid? Those people who have heeded God's call to serve you, who have set aside the luxuries of life had they remained in their 'secular' jobs, and now giving the best of their lives to help you grow – are they sufficiently provided for? Or do they have to resort to part-time work to make ends meet?

A well-cared servant of God is the strongest asset to building a united and healthy community of believers in a growing church. We therefore have to ensure their well-being so that they can fully concentrate on their ministry. This ultimately yields a win-win situation - the sheep benefit from the shepherds' commitment, while the shepherds gain fulfillment in their calling.

The *NECF Malaysia Survey of Churches, Pastors and Christians* conducted three years ago showed that 19.4% of pastors interviewed received an average monthly salary of RM1,000, while about 50% earn between RM1,000 and RM2,000. About 80% said the income was inadequate or just enough to meet present needs. Over eight percent cited insufficient income as the greatest discouragement to them.

The reality is that pastors' present salary is not commensurate with the current cost of living index. Does this not contradict God's desire that shepherds should be given double honour and rewarded worthily? That the ox that treads out the grain should not be muzzled? (1 Tim. 5: 17-18)?

This inadequate-income predicament has put pastors and full-time workers, particularly in rural areas, in financial difficulties. Consequently, some had to quit the ministry and take on 'secular' work to adequately provide for their families' needs, which include higher education expenses for their children.

Others press on in their ministry, while juggling another job to supplement their meagre income. In addition their financial difficulty, some full-time workers also suffer emotional pressure from the high expectations of their congregations.

Some established denominational churches have built-in structure and

goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?" And in vs 11, "If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?" Like Paul, who appealed to the Corinthian Christians to

## THE SUPERPASTOR MYTH

"There goes our SuperPastor. He can do anything."



system to cater sufficiently for basic needs such as Employees Provident Fund benefits, insurance coverage, and medical benefits. In contrast, most of the local independent and evangelical churches do not provide such security, let alone gratuity or sabbatical. Little thought is given to their workers' emergency and future needs. Early burnout becomes a dangling threat that could seriously affect the workers' morale, and inevitably productivity and efficiency.

Some Christians feel that full-time ministry entails sacrifice, self-denial and suffering, and are expected to forsake their beloved ones as well as all that they possessed (Luke 14:26,33). Over time, this view has resulted in the neglect of the workers' welfare.

Paul argued in 1 Cor. 9: 7, "Who ever

consider the welfare of their "full-time ministers", we also appeal to the Church to care for their workers.

Two major challenges facing the pastoral and full-time ministry need to be addressed and overcome. First: How can we – the congregation – encourage capable, qualified and dedicated Christian to enter the ministry by assuring them of sufficient finances and material support? Second: How can we ensure that they remain in the ministry?

Two years ago, the NECF Malaysia Pastors Prayer Shield Campaign was initiated nationwide. The campaign helped stir awareness of pastors' plight and their need for financial, emotional and prayer support, especially those serving in rural areas.

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# God's Household of Faith

NECF  
Foundation

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:10)

BY REV DATUK DR PRINCE GUNERATNAM

### The Shepherds

God's concern for the Church is the "perfecting of the saints" (Eph. 4:12). To accomplish this vital work, God has given gifts to the Church – apostles, prophets, evangelists (missionaries), pastors (elders) and teachers. They are also peacemakers in the midst of

"quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder" (2 Cor. 12:20). Their willingness to do right comes from their steadfast faith in God's power and sufficiency of His grace (2 Cor. 12:10). But, though privileged to be in the Lord's work, they face persecutions, criticisms, diverse

trials and spiritual attacks. They certainly need our prayers and support.

### The Sheep

Paul exhorts us to "do good", especially to those in the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). The context of this exhortation is in Paul's encouragement to "let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches" (Gal. 6:6).

What does it mean to "do good"? Doing "good" is an act of sowing (Gal. 6:9). While sowing is often in the form of financial support for God's work and workers, it is not the only way we can sow. We can sow seeds of love, kindness, goodness and concern as we relate with them in the ministry. We can also sow sacrificially and stand by them and affirm them.

The Bible exhorts us in many ways to give them the needed support.

• Pray for them. We are called a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). Let us stand in the gap (Ezekiel 2:20), and

intercede for them, that God will protect them from evil, harm and danger and for His rich anointing and blessings upon them.

• "Elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17). You can honour them by your faithful attendance in church and by putting into practice the Word they have taught you.



Praying for those who serve you is one way of showing your support to them.

• Seize every opportunity to provide hospitality to those who serve (Rom. 12:13).

• Use your talents and spiritual gifts by being personally involved in God's work. (Rom. 12:6–8). "Every believer without exception, every member of Christ's body, is called to take part in the work of ministering" (Andrew Murray in *How to work for God*). Let us, under the guidance of those in the household of faith, serve the Lord with "fervency in spirit and gladness" (Rom. 12:11, Ps. 100:2).

• Be loyal to those in leadership by helping them build and maintain unity in the Church. Protect, exhort, and encourage them as they work to sustain such unity (Eph. 4:13).

Paul says God cannot be mocked (Gal. 6:9). As you obey the Word faithfully taught to you, you will reap spiritual life and fruit (Gal. 6:8,22). As you care and provide for them, God is faithful and will reward you for your kindness (Heb. 6:10).

Let us continue to work together to see the Church strengthened and the Great Commission fulfilled.

# Welfare Foundation For Full-time Workers

## NECF to help churches and Christian organisations care for their staff

THANKS to the thoughtfulness of several Christian laymen, there is now a welfare foundation to help Christians serving in full-time capacity in churches and Christian organisations.

Come next February, NECF Malaysia will launch the *NECF Malaysia Foundation* which will provide financial assistance to pastors, full-time workers and their families who are burdened with expenses due to unforeseen circumstances, such as accidents and sudden deaths.

"The foundation is a complementary ministry to what churches are currently doing to care for their pastors and full-time workers," said Davy Woo, the foundation chairman.

"Some churches, especially the bigger ones, have well-structured programmes that look after the welfare of their full-time workers and their families. But we believe there are many smaller churches which do not have welfare programmes or whose programmes are not adequate. This is where the foundation steps in to help," Davy explained.

The foundation is in line with NECF's ethos to provide a platform for Christians to wholeheartedly serve in full-time capacity. It also enhances the *NECF Malaysia Pastors Prayer Shield Campaign* initiated two years ago to encourage prayer and assistance for pastors, leaders and full-time workers.

NECF has appointed a committee to manage the foundation. The committee, comprising 13 members, reports to the NECF Council. A welfare sub-committee is responsible to identify the people who merit financial assistance. Examples of typical needs which warrant the foundation's consideration are education loans for full-time workers' children, medical expenses for surgeries or treatment for various ailments at government hospitals, and unexpected death and/or permanent disability.

Assistance from the foundation is not restricted to NECF members only. Applicants, however, must be attached to local churches and para-church organisations.

## One Question

"Do I love God?" The question kept tossing tenaciously in Davy Woo's mind. As he mulled over it, his thoughts strayed to the Biblical account of Jesus questioning Peter's love for him. After three times of gentle probing, Jesus then asked Peter to feed and tend His sheep.

Davy figured Jesus was asking Peter to demonstrate his love for Him by caring for His sheep. Back to the question. "Now, if I love God, how then can I show my love to Him? And who are His sheep that I can specifically care for? In what ways can I care for them?" By now, the businessman's mind was perking up with more questions.

He quieted his thoughts and waited. Somehow, the word "sheep" inspired a vision of pastors caring for their congregation members, being called up at all times of the day and night to tend to their problems. "This is the pastors' love to their sheep. But I wondered about the pastors themselves – who cares for them when they have problems, when their wives are crying. How many Christians will visit their pastors, pray for them, find out whether they have material needs and meet the needs?" Davy pondered.

Restless with these questions, Davy set out to ask pastors what they need and how their lives and ministries may be improved. Whomever he asked, wherever he went, he heard a similar cry – more adequate physical care please.

"I met this pastor who married late and who was twice the age of his wife. Now, if something happened to him that caused him to be incapacitated, will his church be able to support him, his young wife and their children long term? Will the church finance his children's education?" Davy wondered.

The idea of a foundation to help pastors was thus sown. But before he ventured further, more questions crossed his thoughts. "Why limit the assistance to pastors? Why not extend to full-time workers and missionaries? And why limit to churches? What about para-church organisations?" After much consideration, he approached NECF and tossed the idea of the foundation to them.

"I went to NECF because it has a good inter-denominational network and I felt it was able to materialise the idea," he said.

Today, two years after his first meeting with NECF officials, Davy is getting some assurance that pastors and



"...faith without action is dead." – Davy

full-time workers have an avenue to turn to if and when they require financial aid with the launch of the NECF Foundation.

"Some Christians feel that pastors and full-time workers should trust God to provide for their needs. They forget that faith without action is dead. We are taking action to help God's servants who also are our servants because they serve us," Davy pointed out.

"We can show our support to these servants of God by signing up as sponsors. Imagine how much we can raise for the foundation if every Christian gives just RM10 a year," he said.

The Foundation will be officially launched next February 29 at a fund-raising dinner.

# Foundation a Symbol



# of Love

Since news of the NECF Foundation broke out, many Christians have expressed appreciation for its formation. For the foundation is a symbol of family love and concern for members serving full-time. Here is a sampling of the responses received.



**Anna Tan (Church worker)**

"A lot of pastors and full-time workers do not earn high salaries. Most of us have enough just to survive monthly. We have no savings for emergency use. Some Christian organisations can't even afford to pay their staff full salary. Others even ask their workers

to raise their own salary or part of it. By looking into our needs, the foundation will help full-time workers to serve without anxiety."



**Daniel Cheah (Pastor)**

"When a pastor faces an emergency that requires hospitalisation, he and his family should have the assurance that they do not have to go around borrowing. The world views health care as a legitimate provision for every employee. Every company has a health care programme for its workers. Even the government looks after its

workers. What about the church? Pastors and full-time workers contribute to the growth of their churches, and if the churches have benefited from the energy of their workers, it is only right and proper that their workers be given proper care. The foundation is a tremendous thought that will go a long way to give pastors and full-time workers fulfilment, so that at the end of their service, they don't feel they have been used and after they have given their best and the last drop has been squeezed out of them, they are dumped."

**Peter Jebasekaran (Pastor, Tamil congregation)**

Most of the families in the Tamil congregations are poor. They cannot afford to pay their pastors well. Sometimes, they can't even pay the rental of their church premises. If something unexpected happens to a pastor that requires substantial money, the pastor usually turns to other pastors for help. I personally don't agree with borrowing money, because it affects our integrity when we can't pay back, but this is unavoidable sometimes. So I really appreciate the NECF Foundation. However, the people administering it must ensure that the money goes to genuine cases."



**Wong Siew Li (Church deaconess)**

"Finally, something is being done for full-time workers. For so long, many of our churches have not been paying their staff well and their monetary needs have not been adequately met especially in the area of their children's education. Some

children of full-time workers may not be able to further their education because of insufficient finance, and this may cause them to be resentful. You know, God is not stingy but people are stingy. But thank God for the foundation."

**Lee Chee Loi (Executive Director, Christian social organisation)**

"Lack of financial support and a secure retirement plan have contributed to the resignation of many full-time workers. The foundation is an encouragement and an assurance to smaller Christian para-church organisations and churches where funding is a major concern. It also encourages full-time workers to be honest about their real needs. Many of them, especially pastors, find it hard to go around and ask for help."

**Stemmah Sariau (Wife of BM pastor)**

"Many churches, especially the indigenous and smaller churches, can barely afford to pay the basic salary for their pastors and staffworkers, what more fringe benefits such as children's education, health and medical insurance, accident and death insurance, EPF contributions, or pension schemes. One Christian organisation that I know has a scheme for the staff's children's education where the staff and the 'employer' contribute towards it. The foundation will be very helpful during emergency situation."



**Lai Suk Yin (Pastor's kid)**

I believe the first thing I did when my father became a full-time pastor in my early teens was to ask if I needed to take a part-time job to help out. Even at the vague age of 13, I was



dimly aware that something called *money* factored rather large in daily affairs. The money worries didn't stop there of course. When less-than-stellar SPM results left me choices of repeating Form 5, working, or going to a private college in Kuala Lumpur, and my parents opted for the latter, I screeched, "But we can't afford it on Dad's salary!" I felt guilty for

being such a tremendous expense on our limited budget. I'm sure that somewhere out there, some other pastor's child can identify with this!

I still remember how mortified I was when I found out that, to send me to college in America for the last year of my undergraduate degree, they had, after much prayer, sought out an old friend and raised the funds. I recall saying to them, very vehemently and loudly, "If I'd known you had to do that, I wouldn't have gone."

Silly of course. Rather faithless in retrospect, even if well intentioned. God provided miraculously for all of that and saw to us. I don't know if I would have felt differently (maybe less

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Several churches, and even denominations, responded to our call to appreciate their pastors and leaders by organising special gatherings to honour them, and support them in prayer.

Spurred by such enthusiastic responses, we considered more ways to help pastors and full-time workers, particularly those serving smaller churches in rural areas. Hence, the creation of the NECF Foundation – a welfare fund that provides financial assistance to needy pastors, full-time workers and missionaries.

As Christians we need to use whatever resources we have to ensure that the servants of God are loved, encouraged and cared for. It is our responsibility to also serve them by freeing them from financial and other material burdens so that they can be more effective and fruitful in their ministry.

At the time of the first church, there was none who lacked, "for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet, and they distributed to each as anyone had need." (Acts 4: 34–35) Our first-church brethren set an example that demonstrated our Father's heart for the needy.

Let us give to the deprived, yes, even our full-time workers.

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guilty) then if the NECF Foundation had already been established. But I do know that I wished my parents had more job security, a retirement pension, *something* to fall back on if they were no longer in the ministry.

The foundation would definitely have helped with that. As a daughter living overseas worrying frantically about their welfare, it would have been a tremendous relief – an assurance that they would be looked after financially, especially when circumstances prevented me from being able to do so.

This foundation is practical and very necessary. Like the Levites in Israel, full-time workers and pastors dedicate their lives to taking care of God's people.

Like the Levites, it is only fitting that the people of God help to take care of these precious, often-overlooked servants of God when they are unable to do so for themselves.

## Introducing Members of the NECF Foundation

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(NECF Malaysia Chairman)

**Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng** (NECF Malaysia Vice-Chairman)

**Elder Kong Yeng Phooi** (NECF Malaysia Honorary Secretary)

### Chairman

**Davy Woo**

Trained in automobile retailing and marketing, he is now a semi-retired businessman. He worships at Sunway Cornerstone Baptist Church, Petaling Jaya.

### Treasurer

**Samuel Ang** (NECF MALAYSIA Honorary Treasurer)

### Financial Consultant

**Qua Poh Keat**

A senior partner in an accounting firm, he is an elder at Cornerstone Doulos, Petaling Jaya

### Legal Consultant

**Dato' Daniel Tay**

A senior partner in a legal firm, he worships at Grace Methodist Church, Bercham, Ipoh.

### Executive Director

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### Board Members



**Chai Cheng Sheng**

An elder at Bandar Sunway Gospel Centre, he is the Country Manager Strategic Outsourcing at IBM Malaysia.



**Daniel Ebinesan**

Worships at Kajang Assembly of God and is the Chairman of the Board of Malaysian Care. Works as the Finance Director of

the Boustead Group. Married with three sons.



**Pr Dr Lew Lee Choo (SIB Petaling Jaya)**

A pediatrician by profession, she now serves as pastor alongside her husband, Pr Dr Chew Weng Chee, at SIB Kuala Lumpur, which they started in 1993. They have two adult sons. "While at Bible school in Vancouver (Regent College), I met many pastors who were burnt out, discouraged and in financial need. Providing financial assistance to them and their families in times of emergencies are indeed some of the ways we can support them.



**Dr Oliver Ho**

A college principal and corporate trainer, he worships at City Discipleship Presbyterian Church, Subang Jaya.



**Stephen Wong**

A businessman who worships at First Baptist Church, Petaling Jaya. Married with a teen son and a teen daughter.



**Elder Timothy Phua (The Word Centre)**

A retired public accountant serving as an elder in The Word Centre churches with emphasis on networking with pastors of needy churches in the rural areas. Hopes to encourage Christians to contribute to the foundation in fulfilment of Matt. 25:31-45; 1 John 3:17; and Gal. 6:10.



**Ee Chong Kang**

An elder of First Assembly of God Church, Kuala Lumpur, and a businessman in the Information Technology sector.

Married with a daughter.

# OA Church Illegally Torn Down By Local Authority

ORANG Asli Christians in Kampung Pasu have taken the Pahang State Government to court over the illegal demolition of their church building in September. (Kampung Pasu is a village located in the district of Temerloh, Pahang.)

Akuang Wet and his son, Yaman, on behalf of the village's Christian community, filed the civil suit – which also named the Temerloh Land Office as defendant – in early November.

They are seeking, among others: the right to practise their faith as granted to all citizens under the Federal Constitution and with this, the right to construct and own a place of worship; and compensation from the state government for demolishing their church building.

The church was planted by SIB Semenanjung and pastored by Ajos Larau. According to Pr Ajos, about 30 people tore down the RM25,000 newly-constructed building on Sept 30, five days before it was to open for its inaugural worship service. The assailants came in seven vehicles, one of which

bore the name "Jabatan Tanah dan Galian", said Pr Ajos who witnessed the incident. He added that government officials including the Temerloh state assemblyman, a policeman and a reporter stood by and watched while the building was torn down.

Pr Ajos photographed the assailants in action but one of them seized his camera, confiscated the film and returned the camera.

Soon after the incident, Yaman Wet lodged a police report. While making the report, Yaman – whose father owned the land where the church sat on – said a policeman told him the reason for the demolition was that the church was built on government land.

The church was to cater to about 40 Christians residing in Kampung Pasu and surrounding villages. Work on the building started in July soon after SIB raised the funds, secured the piece of land donated by Akuang Wet, and obtained a written approval from the village headman to build the church. The matter has been referred to NECF Malaysia who then referred it to the relevant authorities.



Above picture was taken shortly before the attack. Below – flattened within a few minutes, five days before their first worship service in the church. The scheduled inaugural service was instead held under the trees nearby.



## VOTING – A Privilege and a Responsibility For Christians

MALAYSIAN voters are expected to go to the polls next year to choose the government that will lead them for the next five years. Every general election is important; however the upcoming election is crucial as it coincides with a transition in the top leadership of the country.

As Christians, we know that "there is no authority except that which God has established" (Rom. 13:1). The opportunity for us to be involved in the process by which God institutes authority – voting – must therefore be regarded not only as a privilege but also a great responsibility.

We can take **four steps** to ensure that we properly appropriate this honour and fulfil our duties as Christians and citizens of this country.

• **First, ensure that you have registered to vote.** You are eligible to vote if you are (1) a Malaysian citizen,

(2) at least 21 years of age, and (3) a resident of an electoral district. You will need an identity card, which furnishes proof of these three things. (Note that you can only vote in the constituency that corresponds to the address in your identity card.) If you have never registered to vote, you can now do so throughout the year at the State Election Office or any designated post offices. When filling in the *Borang A*, ensure that you clearly state your religion as 'Christianity'. (For the location of the nearest registration centres or to check your eligibility to vote, refer to the Election Commission's website at [www.spr.gov.my](http://www.spr.gov.my))

• **Second, either in your church or community, organise meetings with the potential candidates** for federal and state seats to discuss issues of deep concern to the constituency and the country. This is vital if you are to make informed choices about the suitability of

the various candidates. It allows the values, views and interests of the Christian community to be made known. Face-to-face meetings also help ensure greater accountability on the part of the elected representatives.

• **Third, pray for the smooth running of the elections.** We are instructed to individually and collectively pray for "kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." (1 Tim. 2:1–2) We should never take our freedoms in this country for granted. In addition to the holding of peaceful and civilised elections, Malaysian Christians ought also to pray for an abiding fear of God, national righteousness, good governance, political and religious pluralism and the upholding of the Federal Constitution. Pray against all those who would incite unrest and

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# Women to Women



Wanting to sort out clutter at year end? Seeking to set goals in place?  
Here's timely advice as we learn that it all begins with...

## SAYING

By Miriam Adeney



(Part 2)

### Kingdom Priorities

Try this: Lay out a large sheet of butcher paper or construction paper, take up a few coloured pens, and draw a picture of your life (as you'd like it to be) five years from now. Stick figures are fine: this is for your eyes only. Cover as many aspects of your life as you can: friends and family, career, intellectual growth, finances, service activities, hobbies and skills, fun flings. Include your wildest dreams. This exercise will help you make contact with some of your unconscious hopes.

From this picture select a list of goals to work toward this year. You might break some of these down into steps, with deadlines. For example, 'I will greet one stranger and try to start a conversation every week, starting this week.'

Before you get too committed though, you need to step back and ask yourself: Are these worthy goals? I use two tools here, one for critiquing my goals, and one for arranging them in a hierarchy according to importance.

To critique my intended activities I ask these questions:

How important is it? How much power does it have to affect the world?

How needy is it?

Can or will anyone else do it, or am I uniquely fitted to do it by gifts or by being on the spot?

Is it new? Does it break ground? Or is it something I have done before? Will I grow?

Is this an obligation because of loyalty to an institution? (Like wiping the kitchen table?!)

What is the financial compensation?

Are my time and energy already committed?

Next I arrange my goals in order of importance. A year ago, using the criteria above, I divided my current projects into three lists:

1. Top priority
2. Fairly important
3. Interesting but not crucial

To my surprise, most of my planned activities fell into lists 2 and 3. In list 1 were specific needs in my relationship with God, specific and relational needs of my children and my husband, needy friends outside my comfortable network, and creative writing that nobody was urging me to do. These lists helped me discover where I had priorities without plans. Now, one year later, I can thank these lists for pushing me to take specific steps in priority areas that I would have let slip by otherwise.

For you, kingdom priorities might mean saying no to talking on the telephone so much. Or saying no to well-established committees in order to serve on other more needy committees. Saying no to certain kinds of reading to do other, more crucial reading.

Saying no to thinking so much about how you feel or the way you look – saying no to your 'pity parties.' Kingdom priorities might mean monitoring your imagination – "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself...and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5 KJV).

It might mean limiting the time you spend thinking about fashion, shopping, romance, eating out, backpacking, gardening, skiing, soap operas, novels, gossip, or whatever catches your imagination, in order consciously to focus a certain amount of your thoughts on people's need for Jesus, on world hunger, on nuclear weapon dangers, on teenage mothers.

Kingdom priorities might mean saying no to spending so much time with certain friends in order to spend time with other friends who need you more.

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Or limiting your mindless conversations, in order consciously to make your conversations channels of grace.

There's a time for frivolous activities. They shouldn't be scratched out of your agenda because they're 'not important.' We need to dare to act out some of our silly dreams. On the other hand, our dreams deserve some scrutiny. Some will prove to be hollow. Others will be seen to be redundant. When I first drew a picture of Miriam-five-years-from-now, I included a sketch of myself travelling in Africa.

Later, when I looked at my goals in light of God's kingdom, realising that he has given me a good deal of ministry in Asia and Latin America, I saw that it's probably not necessary for me to go to Africa too.

Struggling toward that is probably just greed. When I realised that, I was able to loosen my grasp on that goal. If God sends me to Africa, well and good. If not, that's one thing I probably don't need. Nor does God's world.

So make time to dream without inhibitions. Then, later, critique these dreams.

Here are a few questions:

What will I do this week that I haven't done before?

Who do I want to relate to this week?

What am I struggling with?

What am I hoping for?

What am I learning?

On weeks when I need a pep talk, I use these. Scanning the week ahead, I ask myself these questions before I plan my schedule. Then at the end of the week I review what happened in relation to these guidelines. This pushes me to take initiative in areas that I would let slide otherwise. For example, I may call a rarely-seen friend and say, "Can we get together? While setting up my priorities for this week I discovered that you are a luxury I'd like to treat myself to."

Beyond this, if you're committing yourself to a lonely, unusual, or difficult activity, a list of specific motivators may help. Writing is one of my priorities. But when I get writer's block I lose my nerve and want to withdraw into my shell. To attack that block, I remind myself of these motivations:

*Personal call:* A conviction that God wants me to write

*Past use:* People have been helped by my writing.

*Present use:* When I get discouraged about what I'm working on now, I remember that when I speak on this material people are helped. So it must be written.

*World need:* Beyond individuals, the hurting world needs my vision and my creativity

expressed.

*Models:* Isaiah, Catherine Booth, and certain contemporary friends have spent long, lonely, late nights struggling to find the right words. I'm not alone. In their company – even across thousands of miles, or across centuries – I can do it too.

*Daily goals:* "How do you manage to keep going when writer's block hits?" Contemporary Christian writer Philip Yancey was asked that question recently. He answered, "Rigid discipline. And then after a few days I get so exasperated with myself that the block disappears."

*Public accountability:* I seek assignments. I also commit myself to show a friend a certain amount of work by a certain date.

Try undergirding yourself with a similar list of motivators as 'expect great things from God, and attempt great things for God.'

In the area of housework and general life maintenance, we can always find simpler strategies. Most of these are small no's that can free us up to say yes to bigger challenges.

### 'NO' Is a Knife

Over my desk hangs a motto: "Writing is planned neglect." Recently I read a related statement: "Only the unemployed can run for President." Only those who turn down standard activities will have the time and energy to pour into priority affairs.

### Saying No

In the final analysis, all significant living is planned neglect. Ultimately, only a few things can be priorities.

It is good to put on leotards, to stretch and to kick, for example.

Bodily exercise profits a little.

But it is not only good, it is essential to follow Isaiah's advice regarding inner as well as outer discipline.

'Awake, awake! Put on your strength...put on your beautiful garments...' (Isaiah 52:1 NKJV).

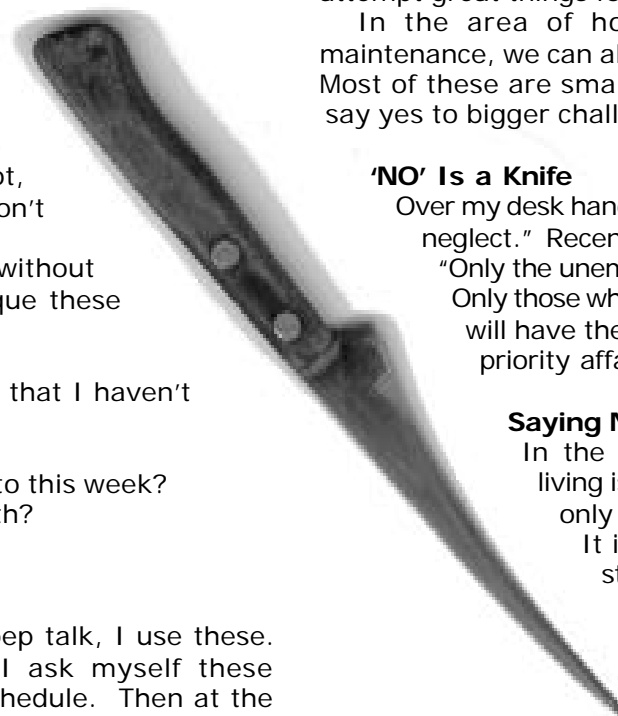
A woman's normal life is flooded with distractions, as Anne Morrow Lindbergh observed. What a very hard struggle it is to be a responsible person, as Catherine Booth noted.

Although, or rather, because both of these women knew well how to say no, both are remembered for their positive gifts to the world.

No is a knife word. We cringe from its sharpness. We fear cutting away alternate possibilities. We fear letting go. Yet we need it. Let's remember, there is no fear in God's love (1 John 4:18). And God's love is the context within which we make choices. Why do we say no? In order to say yes to what really matters.

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Taken from *A Time for Risking, Priorities for Women* by Miriam Adeney Regent College Publishing, Canada, 2001. Used with permission.





# Sketches of Simplicity

By Lydia K Kristanio

Some time ago *Star In-Tech* carried an article entitled, 'Just say no to gadgets and gizmos.' The article mentioned Nicols Fox, author of 'Against the Machine: the Hidden Luddite Tradition.' Nicols discovered pleasure in simple things. She enjoyed a curious satisfaction out of grinding coffee beans by hand. When she dried her clothes on a line, she became conscious of the sun and the wind, and she heard the birds sing. It was therapeutic.



The mega sales lure us to buy more 'at cheaper prices'. We are cajoled relentlessly to add new commitments to our already strained timetables. Richard Foster defines simplicity as 'an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle'. As I reflect on this I am prompted to sketch portraits of men and women who, in different ways, modeled simplicity. They have left imprints in my life.

## Simplicity in a High Calling

My father was killed in an accident. The legacy he left us was his choice of simplicity that enabled him to live a focused life as a 'single parent'. Father was widowed at 35 and was left with two children aged six and two. He never remarried although he was encouraged to do so. He put in all his energies to earn a living and see us grow up. Our love for books and the theatre came from him. He was not very well educated but he decided to let me attend college and was willing to meet the protests from his relatives.

Once I asked him why he never remarried. He replied, 'I promised your mother to love and care for you both. I do not want to add complications to my life. A new wife will constantly put me in a dilemma.' The way I see it, Father deliberately eliminated distractions and probable complications – to fulfil his commitment to care for my brother and me. I must have hurt him deeply with my decision to join the Discipleship Training Centre in Singapore for my theological training. His dream to see me take over his business, get married and give him grandchildren

vanished.

But God used that pain and hurt to bring about his conversion. When the church had its building project, my father served in the area he knew best. He not only provided the window panes and all the glass panels, he also lovingly fitted them one by one with his own hands. Every time I am back home sitting with the congregation, I feel my father's presence.

I shall always remember Father as a man for whom simplicity and commitment intertwined to bring forth a focused life.

## Simplicity and Commitment

I have yet another sketch in this category. During my time at the Discipleship training Centre, Singapore, we had a visiting lady writer from Hongkong. She took the room next to mine. There was a door separating our rooms. Night after night I noticed that her light was still on, even into the early morning hours.

What was she doing? The purpose for her visit was supposed to be for rest and recuperation after treatment for cancer. A heart to heart talk revealed her philosophy of life: focus and commitment born out of a simplicity of life's goals.

She felt her life was like a half-burnt candle. Two options confronted her. She could be thrifty with her candle and maybe she could let it last a little longer. But it would still burn out in the end. Or she could set that candle to deliberate, purposeful use in the time that was left. Her dedication produced the New Testament in *Han Yu Pin Yin*. When she passed away she left behind few possessions, but plenty of hearts committed to the cause of the Kingdom. Her example got me through the difficult times spent in the revision of the Alkitab with the Malaysian Bible Society.

Like Father, this dear woman taught me the wisdom of deliberate choices that will bring forth simplicity and clarity in the setting of life goals.

## Simplicity and Faith

My maternal grandmother became a widow before she was 30. Single handedly she raised her three children. Her son died as a teenager. Her two daughters (my mother and my aunt) died within three months of each other. That was how she came to stay with us and helped Father care for us.

As children, we enjoyed her many tales that



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*NO is a knife word. We cringe from its sharpness.  
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• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

included an incident when a thief thrust his hand through a bamboo wall and she wounded it with a chopper! In the kitchen she was a wizard at whipping up dishes. Every Chinese New Year I am nostalgic just thinking of the 12 types of dishes she could cook with bamboo shoots!

When Grandmother advanced in years, she began to muse about death. What would happen to her in the afterlife? Could she depend on us, her grandchildren, to send her food, paper money and other necessities? Strangely, by the marvelous grace of God, she also had the insight that she would not need all these things in the afterlife if she were a Christian. She sought the help of a bachelor who lived in the neighbourhood. She knew he went to church every Sunday. The young man brought her to see his pastor and thus my grandmother became the first Christian in our household.

I marvel at her simple, uncomplicated, childlike decision to believe in Jesus. In Jesus' words she was like one of the little children who belong belongs to the Kingdom of God. It took me years of struggle before I finally made the plunge into the life of faith.

### **Simplicity and Possessions**

The other day a friend invited me to a demonstration of a machine that could juice fruit with its pulp, seeds

and all into a smoothie. The price was within the four-figure bracket, but most importantly I asked myself the questions, 'Do I really need it? How often would I use it?' I was glad I turned down the invitation because I would like to learn to be mindful of Richard Foster's suggestion that we learn 'de-cumulation.' There is a need to learn the art of 'being detached' which will enable us to exercise compassionate living.

At the Discipleship Training Centre I had a roommate who came from Hongkong. This was her first time living in Singapore. The tropical weather fascinated her. She concluded that living in the this part of the world one could do with only three sets of clothing: one to wear, one to be in the wash and one just in case.

She became a missionary in Indonesia. True to her conviction to travel light and live simply, she brought only two sets of plates and cutlery. But the flow of people coming in and out of her house soon necessitated modification. Nevertheless she aspired to live a simple life.

In his mid twenties the great painter, Vincent van Gogh, experienced an awakening of a religious zeal. He gave away all his worldly goods and ministered as a lay preacher among the poor miners in a district in Belgium. Some time later he went through a spiritual crisis. He realized that art was his vocation and that through it he could glorify God by bringing comfort to fellow men.

Not all of us are called to 'voluntary poverty' but we ought to nurture its spirit so that there will always be resources for God's Kingdom. For where our heart is, there is our treasure.

The above mosaic gives us some insight into the hearts of those who yearned to please their Creator. They rejoiced in the richness of His gifts and gave their best to live responsibly and simply in His presence. Living simply is not observing a set of rules. It is a gift from God to those whose hearts have been renovated.

The writer is a homemaker. She lives in Kuala Lumpur with her husband and two daughters.

## **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.*

# Settle Disputes Within the Church

IN recent memory, we have seen the proliferation of church groups as a result of disputes. We also hear of disputes so severe as to cripple the unity and witness of a particular church.

What kind of legal rights the members of a church have in the event of a dispute depends on how the church is constituted. For example, if a dispute arises in a church that is a registered society, then the Societies Act will apply.

Every church is exposed to litigation or legal processes that may force a legal resolution upon a church in dispute. The obvious danger of this prospect is that disputes are then resolved by legal principles without any recourse to Scriptures.

The authority of the leadership of a church is undermined as leaders will have to be subject to Court orders or directives of authorities.

To protect the independence and integrity of churches and their system of church government, it is essential that churches should not be subject to the jurisdiction of the courts.

In the context of Malaysia, if there is

litigation involving a church it would mean in practical terms that the fate of the church would be decided by non-Christians (in most cases, Muslims). To minimise this danger, certain measures should be considered:

- Dispute Resolution Procedures should be drafted and incorporated into the constitutional documents of churches. This should state clearly that in the event of a dispute, certain internal mechanisms should be invoked or resorted to. Courts will honour such provisions and require a litigant to "exhaust all internal remedies" before coming to Court.

- Alternatively, Arbitration Clauses could also be inserted into constitutional documents of churches to require that disputes must be referred to arbitration. The identity of the arbitrator could even be described, for example a specific committee or tribunal. Some churches may like the idea of an outside arbitrator. Thus, arbitrators could be denominational committees serving churches of that denomination. Or, an inter-denominational committee set up

by NECF Malaysia could offer its services to arbitrate in cases of specific church disputes.

- Leadership and succession issues should also be clearly described in constitutional documents of churches. This will prevent a challenge to a properly constituted leadership of a church. It will also prevent, in the case of litigation the Court forcing its own nominated leadership upon a church.

- Property issues also must be clearly defined in the constitutional document of a church. A suggested approach is to treat all gifts as irrevocable and vesting in the corporate body (or what's left of it). The identity of the church has then to be clearly defined as the group that subscribes to the articles of faith and accepts the duly constituted leadership of the church.

*(Extracted from Lee Min Choon's paper, "Legal Aspects of Disputes", which was presented at a recent NECF Malaysia consultation on conflict resolution. The paper may be viewed in full on NECF's website under the section "Signs of the Times".)*

## Focus on Unity, Integrity and Activity

TAMIL churches should play a more active role in social ministry in order to be more visible and effective in reaching out to their communities. At a recent conference for Tamil pastors and church leaders, Dr Daniel Jayasoria urged the participants to learn from the English churches, which have been actively serving their communities.

The Executive Director of Yayasan Strategik Sosial suggested some ways Tamil churches can help, such as organising tuition classes for needy Tamil students, holding festive parties for children within the church's community, and arranging caring programmes for Tamil students in the universities.

Dr Jayasoria was one of the speakers at the October conference – attended by 82 participants from all over Malaysia – organised by the NECF Malaysia Tamil Commission.

Earlier, NECF Vice-Chairman Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng spoke on the necessity of integrity in daily living based on the life of the biblical Daniel, who though a captive in his captor's country, rose to great heights because he lived by his strong principles. Dr Eu urged participants to be "loyal to God and loyal to their sheep", and to conscientiously care for their members.

When opening the conference, themed "Unity Through Fellowship", Commission Chairman John Nagamuthu told the participants to set aside their differences and work together to usher in revival.

The conference ended with a dinner fellowship, a 'bonding activity' that contributed to the conference's unity objective.

## One Thing I Do

MALAYSIA Campus Crusade for Christ (MCCC) recently celebrated its 35th anniversary with a dinner attended by some 840 people including leaders from the Christian community such as MBS principal Rev Dr Tan Kim Sai, STM principal Rev Dr Ezra Kok and Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Malaysia and Singapore Rev Bishop Gideon Chang.

During the dinner, MCCC National Representative Ling Yok Wong shared the organisation's vision of building a generation of influencers for Christ in every segment of society through the strategy of spiritual multiplication - win, build and send. The win-build-send strategy is a two-prong tactic focusing on evangelism and disciple-making. In evangelism, more emphasis will be placed on "cultivating soil and planting seeds" to connect with society, while life multiplication through a wholistic mentoring system will be focus on disciple-making.

The goal is to give every Malaysian the opportunity to, not only hear the gospel but also, 'see' the gospel in the lives of these influences.

NECF Malaysia Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong also attended the celebration as the guest speaker. Speaking on the theme "One Thing I Do," he stressed the importance of staying focused on the one thing that God has entrusted to each believer. He encouraged MCCC staffworkers to remain faithful and to follow the example of Paul "in forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead".

# Commending our Faith In Multi-Religious Malaysia

BY REV TAN JIN HUAT

LIFE is crowded, complicated and competitive. People strain their brains to figure out the meaning of life and in their pursuit of God. These result in constant change of views and diverse faith movements.

In Romans 1: 19–20, Paul says that everyone knows about God's existence and power. No one has any excuse for not believing in God because God has revealed what He is like to all the people, not only through the testimony of the Holy Spirit, but also through the external witness of the created universe (Psalm 19:1-6). Every person, therefore, either accepts or rejects God. Not everyone, however, worships the same god(s) and even those who believe in the same god(s) may worship in different ways.

Indeed, every single human being worships something. Even those who profess to be irreligious – atheists or agnostics – find it necessary to 'fill' their inner vacuum. Failing to find the true God, many pledge their allegiance to lesser gods and causes – fame, work, success, money, sex, universe and others.

The renown objectivist-atheist, Ayn Rand, said, "I raise this god over the earth, this god whom men have sought since men came into being, this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride. This god, this word 'I'." From the biblical point of view, that is idolatry. Instead of looking to God as the Creator and Sustainer of Life, people see themselves as the centre of the universe and invent 'gods' that will fit neatly into their plans.

## Are we ready?

In a multi-cultural and religious society like Malaysia, most people still believe in the existence of God. The problem is: Which God? Non-Christian religions are, or can be, the means for a natural knowledge of God. But, Christianity alone asserts the claim that only a personal relationship with the Creator can fill that vacuum in the heart. Spirituality and religiosity are not enough.

Christians are often challenged on their beliefs and doctrines on the person, authority and mission of Jesus Christ.

Yet, how ready are we to "give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you?" (1 Peter 3:15) Simply put, are we able to explain what we believe and the doctrines we know? And how do we explain passionately without aggravating the existing tension among the different religions?

The best Christian apologetic (defending, commending and explaining our faith) in the Malaysian context lies perhaps in the personal and corporate witness of the Church, that is Christian living and Christian thinking that make a difference in the community. It would be willful disobedience if we were to excuse ourselves from such responsibility.

Before examining the task of apologetics within the Malaysian context, let us look at how the early Christian Church effectively explained their faith.

## How the early Church commended their faith

At the day of Pentecost, outsiders charged the early disciples with drunkenness because of the commotion. In

Acts 2:14–15, Peter not only defended their conduct but also commended the Christian faith as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and asserted his view that Jesus is truly the Messiah and Lord, in whom there is forgiveness of sins and salvation (Acts 2:22–36).

Peter's defence before the Sanhedrin was both a defence of his innocence in the healing of the lame man at Solomon's portico and a commendation of the Christian faith using arguments acceptable to the Jewish mind (Acts 4:8–12).

Similarly, Paul argued his case for the Christian faith before the Greeks in Athens. Using the doctrine of creation as his starting point, he moved on to the central tenet of the Christian faith – the resurrection of Christ (Acts 17). But, before the Jews, Paul employed a different approach – he appealed to Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament Messiah, hoping that this will find a sympathetic hearing among the Jews.

From both Acts 14 and 17, Pauline

apologetic in relation to pagans appealed to a number of themes. Firstly, there was the appeal to a true and living God who is the creator and sustainer of mankind; then the unity of the human race from a single parentage with a desire to seek God; and the need for repentance in view of the impending judgment by a man, Jesus whom God raised from the dead, and the reality of the resurrection.

In the first century, the Church was a beleaguered minority and was eyed with great suspicion by the larger society.

First as a sect within Judaism, it set out its own distinctive identity, beliefs and

MEANING IN GOD  
Jesus Christ

mission in contradistinction to Judaism, proclaiming itself to be *true* Israel, the Israel of fulfillment in and through Jesus the Messiah. Then, within the larger Graeco-Roman world, it competed with the other religions.

The Christians were said to adhere to a "pernicious superstition," were "hated for their abominations" and were regarded as "haters of the human race." To these accusations, they gave spirited defence of their faith, a way of legitimising their existence as a body of people within the larger society.

In the second century, when the Roman Empire was at its height in terms of peace, stability and security, there was a rise in the movement of Christian apologists. They wrote defences of the Christian faith addressed to the State.

The assessment of the British historian Gibbon writing of this era in 1776 was that these rulers prided themselves "in the image of liberty and

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were pleased with considering themselves as the accountable ministers of the laws. Such princes deserved the honour of restoring the republic, had the Romans of their days been capable of enjoying a rational freedom."

Despite the totalitarian nature of their government there was "the image of liberty". With the enjoyment of this rational freedom, the Christian apologists took to writing first to the State to plead their case. In the later part of the second century, this method did not produce the desired results so that after the bloody martyrdom in Gaul, Tatian wrote not to the emperor but to Greeks in general.

During this time, petitions to the emperors had ceased and the apologists wrote to non-Christian individuals or groups to tell them about Christian truth. In doing so, they used the philosophical categories and reasons of that time to communicate their faith, thereby forging Christian theology from within their context.

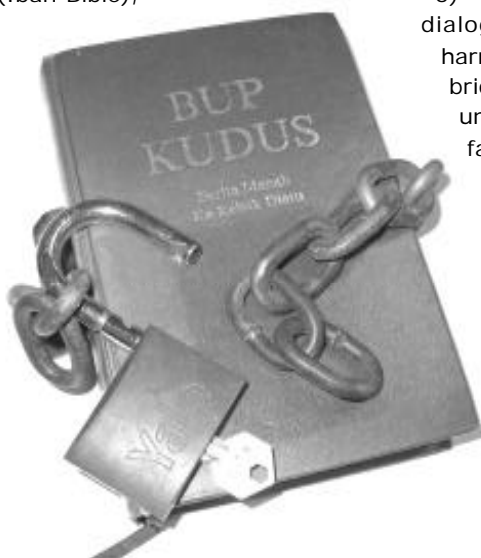
**Commending our faith to Malaysians**

Besides being able to defend our faith – intelligibly, scientifically or philosophically with accuracy in Biblical knowledge and understanding – the above examples of apologetics of the early Christian Church during the first two centuries serve as instructive lessons for us to plead our cause with the ruling authorities and local populace.

Here are some approaches that Malaysian Christians may consider (or even may have already been engaged by some):

1) Dealing with specific issues that affect the Christian community, such the banning of the Alkitab (Malay Bible) and Bup Kudus (Iban Bible),

**One way to defend our faith – by pleading, on behalf of the Iban Christians, with the authorities to lift the Iban Bible ban.**



**"Ultimately, the most powerful apologetic weapon is prayer, with a heart that is filled with love for God and for the people."**

and issues relating to places of worship through our city councilors, MPs, Cabinet Ministers and specific authorities. Where necessary, networking with MCCBCHS (Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism) over issues of mutual concern.

2) Speaking out against anti-Christian polemics or apologetics, for example articles that present an unfair view of Christianity; dealing with the in-built traditional Islamic apologetics against Christianity; and promoting good Christian responses to issues raised by Muslims against Christians.

3) Advocating a more democratic state with the freedom of religion for everyone. This includes defending the right of anyone to choose his or her own religion without fear and hindrance. Dealing with world issues that affect global security and peace, for example the Israel-Palestine issue.

4) Speaking out on ultimate matters of meaning such as life and death, personal significance and destiny, and transcendence.

5) Engaging in inter-religious dialogue that will promote a harmonious society by building bridges and creating mutual understanding of each other's faith.

6) Commending a Christian perspective on social issues such as education, morality, politics and government, always dealing first with the issue of the day including the current issue of good corporate governance.

7) Involvement in acts of charity and mercy as an apologetic tool for

the Christian way of life of holiness and doing good acts. Highlighting Christian social causes, for example monetary collection for Afghan, Iraqi and Palestinian refugees, Christian work among HIV/AIDS patients, abused children and women, and drug rehabilitation work.

8) Networking with other Christian groups to lobby for Christian causes where necessary.

Ultimately, the most powerful apologetic weapon is prayer, with a heart that is filled with love for God and for the people. It is the commandment of the Lord to love God first and foremost with all our heart, mind and soul, and to love others as ourselves.

We are without excuse not to live a life of obedience, defending the person, authority and mission of Christ, for what and who we are today birthed from the ransom that he paid on the cross two thousand years ago. – *This is a contribution from the NECF Malaysia Research Commission. Research Executive Lim Siew Foong contributed to the article.*

undermine the country by restricting rights and introducing political and religious extremism.

• **Fourth, vote on polling day** and encourage all Christians to do so.

The outcome of elections may sometimes hinge on voter turnout. *Not* casting your vote could have as much impact as your casting it. It is imperative that voting be undertaken regardless of the inconvenience. It is an act of stewardship and integral to fulfilling our obligations to God and the country.

# Christian and Muslim Women Call for World Peace

FOUR hundred Christian and Muslim women from 23 countries worldwide recently participated in The International Conference for World Peace in Tehran, Iran. Themed "The Christian Women for World Peace together with the Women of Islam", the conference was sponsored by the International Association of Woman Ministers, P&S Foundation and Mehr White Home and Iran Tour and Tourism Organisation. Following is an extract of their joint statement released at the end of the conference:

"We believe that we are one big family of humanity, brothers and sisters, by creation of God, and are to live with one another peacefully together alongside with others in this small world in spite of some differences between us, and that the differences should not hinder the relationship with our neighbours. Diversity is the marvellous gift of the infinite God...

It is our duty and privilege to love and care for one another without causing unnecessary conflict. We should pay attention to the oppressed and the downtrodden and take a stand against oppressors and exploiters and resist them decisively.

We believe that the leaders of all countries, organisations, or political movements should never religionise their petty causes in order to promote their own interests... Religious faith is for the

good of the people, not against them... Anything which oppresses and destroys life and the dignity of human beings should be rejected by all honourable people.

We recognise the immeasurable value of human lives and nothing should degrade the dignity of women by injustice, dishonour or violence, which is prevalent in the present world, and we must uphold all women with love, care and respect. There is no man or woman before. They are all one in Him. Women are the givers of life, the keepers of family, the sustainers of humanity, the makers of future leaders, just as capable workers in various professions as men, with all the basic human rights.

We the participants of the inter-religious peace conference resolve that we are prepared to live in peace with all people regardless of race, colour, religion, sex, country.

We believe that human life itself has the highest value. We also believe in full acceptance of one another and the resolution of all conflicts must be achieved for the good of all by the peaceful means through dialogue, understanding, love and forgiveness.

We resolve that we shall think peace, speak peace, act peace, promote peace wherever we go and whatever we do. We will go forth from this place to be blessed peacemakers.

## Muslim headscarf upsets secular European nations

THE traditional Muslim woman's headscarf, or tudung, has sparked controversy in several European countries, with prime ministers and supreme courts being asked to decide when it can be worn.

Germany's highest court ruled in October that a Muslim woman teacher had the right to wear a traditional headscarf in the classroom. The Federal Constitutional Court ruled that Stuttgart authorities were wrong to bar Afghan-born Fereshta Ludin from a teaching job in 1998 as there were no existing laws on the wearing of the tudung.

But the issue is far from settled. The court said Baden-Wuerttemberg state could still ban headscarves in schools – but must first pass a new law saying so. The state had argued that a teacher with a headscarf violated "the strict neutrality

of public schools in religious issues" and could have undue influence on impressionable young children.

The tudung issue is also stirring debate in France, where five million of the 58 million inhabitants are Muslim. A state commission will make recommendations to the government by year's end on how best to preserve secularism in French society, including whether new laws are needed on Muslims wearing the tudung in classrooms.

Even in traditionally tolerant Sweden, an ethnic Palestinian, Ms Nadja Jebril, had to fight for the right to have her own cooking programme on TV after an initial rejection because of her headscarf. – Extracted from an article in *Charisma News Service* with additional information from *Reuters*, *AFP*, and *AP*.

## Nigerian State Bans Christian Worship

AUTHORITIES of Kumbotso local government council in the state of Kano, Nigeria, have banned Christian worship, a decision that has heightened tensions between Muslims and Christians in the area.

"This directive for Christians not to conduct Sunday worship services has raised a lot of concern," said Rev A.U. Uba, secretary of the state chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria.

According to Uba, the Kano state government has seized lands belonging to Christian schools and used the sites to construct business shops.

Kano governor Malam Ibrahim Shekarau said he was prepared to step on toes in his bid to implement Islamic law, and revealed plans to ban women from commuting in the same vehicles with men.

Shekarau stressed that *sharia* law would apply to all citizens of the state, irrespective of their religious affiliation. If necessary, his administration would strengthen vigilante groups to support the implementation of Islamic law, he told reporters. – *Compass*

## Attacks on Sri Lankan Christians Intensify

ATTACKS on Christians in Sri Lanka intensified during the month of October, prompting the National Peace Council to call for a government investigation.

On Oct 19, members of the New Covenant Life Center of Athurugiriya were meeting in a reception hall when a Buddhist monk accompanied by about 50 young men arrived and demanded that the believers vacate the building within 10 minutes.

According to the Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (EASL), a leading Buddhist monk in the area had warned the Christians they would no longer be permitted to meet in the village.

One week earlier, Sunday worship at an Assemblies of God church in Embilipitiya was interrupted by seven Buddhist monks and a small crowd of local villagers. They forced the Christians to stop the service and said they should leave the area and practice their faith elsewhere.

The EASL issued guidelines encouraging pastors and Christian workers to maintain a low profile in their villages and avoid unwanted attention. – *Compass*

## Thanksgiving Tea



THE NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission will hold its annual *Thanksgiving Tea* on Dec 6 at New Life Restoration Centre, Petaling Jaya.

To attend, please register by contacting NECF at 03-77278227 (tel.) or e-mail [prayer@necf.org.my](mailto:prayer@necf.org.my) or fax 03-77291139. The organising committee appreciates a love gift of RM5 per person for refreshment and other expenses.

Registration deadline is Nov 28. For more information, call Ann Low at the NECF office or 013-3649239.



## NECF MALAYSIA 2004 CALENDAR

<b>Feb 29</b>	NECF Foundation Official Launch cum Fund-raising Dinner (Contact Rev Lai Moo Him)
<b>March 4 – 7</b>	NECF Church Visits cum Current Events seminars in JOHORE* (Contact Patrick Cheng)
<b>15 – 22</b>	NECF Church Visits cum Current Events seminars in PERAK* (Dates to be confirmed. Contact Rev Lai Moo Him)
<b>April 1 – 3</b>	BM Pastors Conference with Dr Bambang Widjaya, Chairman of the Evangelical Fellowship of Indonesia (Contact Alfred Tais)
<b>16 – 25</b>	NECF Church Visits cum Current Events seminars in EAST MALAYSIA* (Contact Patrick Cheng)
<b>May 1 – 3</b>	1st National Prayer Consultation with Rev Bradley Stuart (Contact Ann Low)
<b>May 19 – 26</b>	NECF Church Visits cum Current Events seminars in PENANG* (Contact Rev Lai Moo Him)
<b>June 10 – 12</b>	NECF Malaysia Biennial General Meeting cum Pastors' Conference (Contact Patrick Cheng)
<b>16 – 22</b>	NECF Church Visits cum Current Events seminars in EAST COAST* (Contact Patrick Cheng/Rev Lai Moo Him)
<b>July 22</b>	Start of Merdeka 40-Day Prayer and Fast (Contact Ann Low)
<b>Aug 25 - 27</b>	Chinese National Prayer Conference (Contact Ngeh Hoong Eng)
<b>26 – 28</b>	English National Prayer Conference (Contact Ann Low)
<b>29</b>	Klang Valley Merdeka Prayer Rally
<b>30</b>	End of Merdeka 40-Day Prayer and Fast

\* Churches interested in holding the Current Events seminars are to contact the said persons at the NECF office. For example, churches in JOHORE are to contact Patrick Cheng.

## Help for Hymns from the Internet

Go to [www.cyberhymnal.org](http://www.cyberhymnal.org)

THIS is an indispensable site for anything relating to hymns, with over 4,400 hymns and gospel songs from many denominations and various periods in history. The site is also linked to other worship sites.

When you click on a song, the tune is played and the lyrics displayed. This is helpful if you wish to learn a new hymn. The song will link you to the page which gives a brief description of the songwriter and the circumstances which inspired the writing of the song. The write-up also includes the other songs he/she wrote. For example, did you know that Fanny Crosby wrote over 8,000 hymns besides her all-time classic "All the way my Saviour leads me"?

Most of the time, portraits of the lyrics writer and music composer are displayed to allow viewers to connect the song to a face. You can also download scores and lyrics.

For preachers, you can pick a hymn to accompany your message by clicking on the section "Scripture Allusions". This



**Fanny Crosby was blind from six weeks old. She returned to the Lord at the age of 95.**

section is arranged according to the books of the Bible.

For example, if you are preaching on Hebrews 11 about faith, you can find a list of songs on faith; or if you are sharing on Exodus 32 about Moses' anger with the Israelites' for worshipping their golden calf, there are several songs to choose from, depending on the subject of your message.

One particular song that stood out is "Who is on the Lord's side?" based on Moses' challenge to the people in Exo. 32:26, "...Whoever is on the Lord's side..."

The section "Topics" has scores of hymns on specific occasions in alphabetical order, from Advent to baptism to Palm Sunday to weddings and the Holy Communion, this section offers many hymns never heard before.

Great for preachers too as there are hymns for various subjects such as death, heaven, healing, marriage, family, the Sabbath, the Cross, Bible and many others.

## SHARING RESOURCES



# FOR YOUR PRAYERS



## MIDDLE EAST

MIDDLE East Concern (MEC) is a coalition of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa – both local and expatriate – and Christian organisations and individuals in the West that are helping Christians who face discrimination or persecution. MEC assists victims through prayer, publicity, advocacy, and where appropriate, relocation to a place of refuge. It helps Middle Eastern Christians practise their faith freely in their respective countries through projects that address structural discrimination and persecution. MEC has helped suffering Christians in Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Through seminars, MEC has trained and equipped Christian leaders from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and several countries on the Arabian Peninsula. Pray for the people involved in this ministry that they will find great joy and peace in the midst of helping the suffering.

## COMMUNIST REGIMES

THE Chinese government is moving towards political and economic reform, and increased openness. Yet in true Communist fashion, they seek to maintain ultimate control over “the masses”. In order to maintain the balance, the government will offer openness from one hand while tightening the oppressive grip of the other.

China is a most strategic nation in terms of both religious liberty in the region of Communist Asia and global missions. As such, China merits our most vigilant attention and prayers. Hundreds of pastors and evangelists and thousands of Christian believers are imprisoned as political prisoners charged with subversion, or as criminals charged with illegal worship or “evil cult” activity. Some die from the mistreatment they receive in custody.

This situation is also found in Vietnam, Laos, and most severely in North Korea where an estimated 100,000 Christians struggle to survive as political prisoners in labour camps where the degree of suffering is beyond imagination. Pray also for other Communist East Asian countries, such as Cuba and

Turkmenistan, and other totalitarian states where Christians are persecuted and imprisoned for giving allegiance to Christ ahead of the government.

## RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

IN Hindu and Buddhist nations, as well as some totalitarian, dictatorial or simply politically troubled states, religious nationalism is so popular that it has become a political tool for political gain. The majority religion (be it Hindu, Buddhist, or Russian Orthodox) is propped up and advanced in exchange for political support. The majority religion then has the leverage to enlist State power to close down and persecute ‘competitors’ (evangelical churches). This symbolic relationship between the state and leaders of the majority religion has been going on since the days of the first Christians. Pray for: India (Hindutva – Hindu nationalism); Sri Lanka (Buddhist nationalism); and Cambodia (early signs of Buddhist nationalism). Some totalitarian regimes promote the Orthodox Church – severe in Eritrea and Belarus, early signs in some former Soviet states and Central Europe. Early signs in Haiti with voodoo.

## CENTRAL SULAWESI

JIHAD violence has returned to Central Sulawesi. On Oct 10, masked militant Islamists attacked the predominantly Christian village of Beteleme, killing two and wounding many more. They also torched a church and 38 homes, leaving some 200 homeless. Two days later, militant groups targeted four predominantly Christian villages around Poso simultaneously. Many were seriously injured. Police reinforcements have restored calm. However, thousands of frightened Christians are once again seeking refuge in the hill town of Tentena. It is presumed that politically motivated provocateurs are behind the carnage.

Please pray for a just and lasting peace for Central Sulawesi; for security to be completely restored and for humanitarian aid to be delivered to the victims; for the Indonesian authorities, in the light of this violence, to heed and act now on the testimony of the imprisoned Rev. Renaldy Damanik

regarding the corruption and flouting of disarmament rules in Central Sulawesi; and that President Megawati Soekarnoputri's political resolve to stamp out terrorism will extend to domestic terrorism against Indonesian Christians.

## WOMEN AND CHILDREN

WOMEN and children around the world continue to suffer for their faith. For example in remote parts of China and some countries in Central Asia, kidnapping and stealing of brides is still part of the local custom. Christian women thus end up being married to Muslim men against their will. Pray for their husbands to find Jesus.

In Egypt, Pakistan, Colombia, Sudan and Nigeria, Muslim families, guerrilla fighters or Muslim bandits hold Christian girls and women against their will. In North Korea, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Eritrea and Mexico, Christian men and women suffer in jail, while their families miss their presence at home. Inside the prison, they are tortured, assaulted and sexually abused. Please pray for the many suffering in prisons for Christ's sake.

## SRI LANKA

SEVERAL churches have been burnt in Sri Lanka and numerous others violently attacked over the past month, mostly during Sunday worship. In one attack in September, four women working at the AOG church in Kotadeniyawa were violently assaulted. Unable to rape them, their frustrated attackers took the women to the police who then charged them with prostitution. Medical tests were used to clear the women of the charge. One of them had to be hospitalised due to her injuries.

Dearth of justice is a serious issue. The perpetrators of violence act with impunity. Thus there is little inducement to cease lawless acts of religious hatred against Christians, and the violence is escalating. Please pray that the believers will persevere, and bear a gracious testimony; and for the government to be deeply convicted that, for the sake of civil society, the rule of law must prevail, police reports acted on, justice dispensed and minorities protected.