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EDITORIAL

RISING RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM Ready to respond

PAS' public declaration of its intent to set up an Islamic state should it come into power has once again sent jitters through the non-Muslim community. Some Muslims have also expressed reservation over the issue. The fears did not subside even after the party said it would delay the plan to focus on the issues which were raised in their 1999 election manifesto. The issues include corruption, justice, violation of human rights and abuse of power and the economy.

Alongside the rise of religious activism, religion-based political party leaders are increasing their influence over the political rulership in Malaysia and also Indonesia. We are hearing of more attempts to make *syariah* laws the basic tenets of their political dominance.

The resurgence, consolidation and expansion of Islam is expected to continue irrespective of whichever party is in control, an alarming trend to communities of other religious faiths.

Generally, the Government is of the view that religious freedom—as enshrined in our federal constitution—is a pre-requisite for national harmony and integration. In reality, however, the practice is not consistent with the view, as we can see from several recent official proclamations that restrict and curtail our freedom to exercise our religious convictions. Perhaps the decisions were made by the lower-rank policy makers without the knowledge and consent of the higher authority?

Certain religious proponents within the ruling and opposition parties have also demonstrated greater religious zeal in pushing for a political system governed by religious tenets, thereby causing even more religious confusion and tension internally.

Though dialogues at local and national levels have been convened, much remains to be done to create a more permanent and stable climate that is conducive to religious harmony.

How then should the Church respond to these changes and challenges? Firstly, it must have an unswerving conviction towards Christian mission and evangelism and recognise that it is fighting an ongoing spiritual battle. The struggle is a long one and without rock-solid commitment to Christ's call, the Church will soon



Be Bold. Emmanuel!

quit the battleground.

The Church must also continually equip itself with the “spiritual professionalism and knowledge” to grapple with multiple religious forms and meanings and deeply embedded beliefs and cultures. In equipping itself, it has to be mindful of contextualising the Gospel and theology to suit its varied cultures. At the same time, the Church must strive for a deeper understanding and clarification of the Gospel and theology to defend its faith in the midst of the aggressive encroachment forces.

And the Church must be ready to give an answer at all times as directed in 1 Peter 3:15: “...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

Finally, the Church cannot afford to be intimidated into withdrawal by whatever alarming circumstances it is in. Be convinced (of our faith), be ready (to respond and defend), be bold—because God is with us. Emmanuel! ■

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The "FAST" way to bless the nation

By Rev. Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam
NECF Malaysia Chairman

The recent NECF Malaysia 40-Day Fast and Prayer commencing July 21 and culminating in the August 30 Merdeka Eve Prayer Rally, I believe, is a God-inspired call to Malaysian Christians.

This scriptural fast has a two-pronged purpose. The first is for us to search our hearts and to sanctify ourselves. The imperative is for Christians to draw delightfully closer to our awesome God, to know His ways "as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God..." (Isaiah 58:2).

Secondly, it is to stir God's people to become wise witnesses in words and deeds to "Light Up the Nation"—the theme for the Fast and Prayer.

In Isaiah 58:6-7, fasting was to encourage a person to respond positively to God by living a life pleasing to Him. By abstaining from food and denying our wants during the fasting period, we are preparing our hearts to yield to Him. We, therefore, become "living sacrifices" for the sake of being an example for others to see, know and believe that Jesus Christ is the answer to all our personal and nation's needs.

Within the Church, our repentance and confession with a broken and contrite heart, should precede our laying down, not only the "Isaacs" of our lives but, the sins that so easily beset us. If we are willing to be like Abraham, who laid down Isaac—his most treasured possession on the altar in obedience to God's will, God will not only give us back our "Isaacs" but also bless our "Isaacs" abundantly. Are we also willing to confess and forsake our sins? God has promised to forgive us and we can live the abundant life.

In the context of the changing scenario conditioned by political, social, economic and religious influences as well as the deteriorating moral standards of life, the Church of Jesus Christ in Malaysia is compelled to make praying and fasting a "high priority". Prayer is a powerful weapon that brings answers to our needs. Jeremiah the Prophet said, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." (Jer. 33:3)

Meanwhile, principles such as belief in God, peaceful co-existence, loyalty to legitimate authorities and mutual respect and courtesy as entrenched in the Rukun Negara, and above all exalting Jesus, need to be manifested in our daily lives. By so doing, the Church can positively impact the nation, thus becoming the "salt and light". This is the calling of every Christian.

The 40-day Fast and Prayer project has been well received by the local churches and for this, we are most grateful to God. NECF Malaysia's fervent hope is that prayer and fasting for church revival, national unity and transformation of the nation through the local church will continue to be a perpetual feature and, hopefully, an increasing engagement by the churches.

We, the Christians, need to remind ourselves that we have been called out as a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9).

Above all, it is the ongoing sanctification through prayer and fasting that will play the pivotal role of preparing us to be presented as a "chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). ■



DEFEND CONSTITUTION TO PROTECT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

All Malaysians must uphold and defend the Constitution to ensure the continuance of religious freedom, a right which has been continually threatened by calls for an Islamic state.

Speakers at a forum on nation-building organised by NECF Malaysia reminded that every Malaysian citizen has the inherent right to practice his religion as enshrined in the Constitution.

During his paper on *The Law Relating to Religious Liberty*, lawyer Lee Min Choon made an impassioned plea for the Constitution to be upheld "at all cost", adding that though it may not be the perfect model, it was the best that our founding fathers could frame to ensure harmony in the nation.

Another speaker, Lim Heng Seng, urged all Malaysians to "understand and defend the foundational bases of the establishment of the Malaysian nation enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution" in the light of heightened demands for the establishment of an Islamic state.

Explained the Chairman of the Industrial Court: "The Constitution lays down the basic structures and foundational principles for the governance of the Malaysian nation consisting of a federation of the eleven states of the then Federation of Malaya and the new states of Sabah and Sarawak which merged with the Federation to form the enlarged Federation of Malaysia."

In his paper *The Federal Constitution, Religion, and the Secular State*, he related the few attempts that had been made in the past to islamise the Malaysian polity. Each time though, the Constitution was referred to and the attempts were quashed.

"From the foregoing it is unequivocal that the constitutional history of the Federation of Malaysia records for all posterity that Malaysia is a secular state. Although the Constitution provides that Islam is the religion of the Federation, the provision only means that for the official purpose of rituals and ceremonies the government may use the Islamic form.

"The Constitution establishes a parliamentary democracy based on the supremacy of a secular constitution. The three branches of government are subject to the Constitution and not to any other legal code or institution, religious or otherwise. The government of this nation is to be guided by the Constitution in the execution of their duties of good governance.

"It is the Constitution which the citizens of this nation will invoke in its interaction with the state, its organs and its officials. It is

the Constitution which all members of the Malaysian Parliament, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet and the Chief Justice and all other judges are obliged to pledge to 'preserve, protect and defend' before exercising the functions of their office," he stressed.

Dr Ng Kam Weng, another speaker, added that an Islamic state is an unacceptable option for Malaysian citizens as it would "overthrow the present Constitutional guarantees".

The Kairos Research Director in his paper *Christian Witness in Time of Political Transition* also called for the Constitution to be defended in the midst of political transition, adding that the Government must meanwhile find ways to institutionalise dissent against itself and ensure that the transition of political power is free from violence.

The July forum, entitled "Christians and Nation-Building" drew more than 50 Christians comprising politicians, lawyers, leading corporate figures, academicians, theologians and journalists.

The speakers and panelists came from both the ruling and opposition parties and though different in political ideologies, they all shared the same concern for the continuous freedom to exercise their Christian faith in the nation. Issues that were deliberated included Islamisation, religious freedom and political engagement.

The forum also heard how the *Shariah* law came about and its limitations and weaknesses.

In his paper *Islamic Law and Constitutionalism*, Universiti Malaya law

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DATO' LEW SIP HON shares why Malaysian Christians should participate in politics. The former politician also gives his views on the current political situation in Malaysia.

As disciples of and ambassadors for Jesus Christ, we should be good citizens and set an example for others to follow. We also need to remember the biblical principle that all governments are established by God and we should be subject to authority, no matter who we are (1 Peter 2:13–17). Paul refers four times in Romans 13:1–2 to follow God's ordinances in civil government.

As good citizens, Christians must concern themselves with politics for it affects our daily lives. By the passing of a law and the stroke of a pen, our lives can be changed.

Realities of Malaysian Politics

Before I discuss how Christians can actively participate in politics, we need to know the realities of Malaysian politics. What are the facts?

Malaysia is a multi-racial, cultural and religious country, comprising about 65% Malays and the indigenous people in East Malaysia (now all termed as Bumiputras), about 25% Chinese ethnic origin, and the remaining 10% people originating from what is today India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The political and military power is in the hands of the Malays due to historical and other reasons. Prior to May 13, 1969, it was perceived that the economy was largely in the hands of the foreigners and the non-Malays. The scene has changed somewhat over the last three decades.

The National Economic Policy (NEP),

CHRISTIANS AND POLITICAL REALITIES

implemented over a period of 20 years (1971–1990), had a two-pronged goal. Firstly, it aimed to restructure society to eliminate compartmentalisation of economic function with race. Hence today, we have Malay billionaires and a strong Malay middle class, and recently we hear of the emergence of the “Melayu Baru”.

Secondly, the NEP's aim of eradicating poverty irrespective race has been achieved to a certain extent so much so that the general standard of living in Malaysia is far above that of other developing countries. Malaysia has been so prosperous that in recent years, there has been a large influx of illegal immigrants from neighbouring Indonesia, Philippines, Bangladesh, Myanmar and others.

Since Merdeka, the political leaders in the government—from our first Prime Minister, the late Tunku Abdul Rahman, to our present Prime Minister Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad—have realised that Malaysia must first have political stability before it can pursue economic development and prosperity. And to achieve political stability there must be national unity. That is why the first Government elected into power in 1957 was the Alliance Party, comprising UMNO, MCA and MIC (parties representing the three main racial groups).

Even then, the political leaders realised that any elected government—if it was to rule wisely—must be moderate, accommodating and be able to resolve sensitive issues in a give-and-take spirit, and not through open confrontation.

As a matter of practical politics, the government (though it appears to be Malay-based) must be multi-racial, as reflected since Merdeka in the composition of the parliament and cabinet. The presence of multi-racial leaders is conducive to moderation and acts as a brake on excesses intended by any one community. This is also why the government cannot condone racialism and extremism in any form.

Because of the multi-racial make-up of the tripartite Alliance party, and after 1973 (when it became the National Front or Barisan Nasional, which was enlarged from a party representing the three major communities to one embodying the parties representing the native tribes in Sabah and Sarawak), it has won every election since Merdeka.

Malaysia is one of the very few countries in the world which has had the same political party in power since its independence. This is the reason behind the political stability in Malaysia and with it came rapid economic development and a

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Defend Constitution to protect religious freedom: from page 3

lecturer Dr Khoo Boo Teong said: “Unless orthodox *Shariah* can be reformed, the treatment of non-Muslims will always be a major stumbling block in enabling the *Shariah* to be consonant with the definitions of Rule of Law today and into the 21st century.”

His research on orthodox *Shariah*, the dominant approach in the Muslim world, indicated discrimination based on gender and religion that would lead to the clash of two great civilisations—the West with its Judeo-Christianity legacy and Islam itself.

However, the Second Message of Islam, which Dr Khoo said was the “original revelation of Islam”, does not discriminate on the basis of either gender or religion and is a complete message of egalitarianism and equality.

He believed that it was imperative for Muslims in South-East Asia to break away from orthodoxy and returned to the Second Message of Islam where human rights and equality can be realised.

The forum also held a panel session with panelists YB Tan Cheng Leang, MCA Jawi state assemblyman; YB Dr Max Ongkili, PBS Tandek state assemblyman and Bandau MP; YB Dr Ron Tan, Gerakan Segambut state assemblyman; Goh Keat Peng, Keadilan committee member; and former DAP committee member George John

During the session, the panelists expressed the same concern as the speakers about the Islamisation issue and urged the Christian community to be more actively engaged in politics and the nation's affairs.

The panelists also shared their testimonies on how they got involved in politics and how they relate their religious convictions to their vocation.

Also present at the forum were YB Theresa Kok, DAP Seputih MP and YB Dato' Lee Hwa Beng, MCA Subang Jaya state assemblyman. ■



consistently high level of GNP growth (eight percent per annum for 14 years since the end of the recession in 1985).

The Changing Political Equilibrium After 1999

Since 1997, particularly before the last general election in 1999, there has been a major split in Malay unity, not only within UMNO but amongst all Malays arising from the PAS and UMNO political and religious differences, which was brought into sharper focus by the so-called "Anwar factor".

Many staunch supporters of Anwar Ibrahim led by his wife Datin Dr Wan Azizah founded the Social Justice Party (Parti Keadilan). Together with PAS, DAP, and Party Rakyat, they formed the Alternative Front as a counter bloc to Barisan Nasional (BN).

Although the 1999 General Elections results showed that BN won the parliamentary seats with their usual two-thirds majority, a major dent in their armour was the loss of the Terengganu state government to PAS and their retention of the Kelantan state government.

In fact, DAP, because of their alliance with PAS, were the biggest loser as the three party stalwarts—Dr Chen Man Hin, Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh—lost their parliamentary seats. PAS emerged as the main benefactor of this alliance, and since then, they have been capitalising on their newly-gained confidence to show the non-Malay voters that they can be as accommodating and even more liberal than UMNO.

This is a new scenario never seen before in Malaysian politics. Malay unity, particularly spearheaded by UMNO in the past, has always been trumpeted as the backbone of national unity, bringing political stability, racial harmony and economic development for the last 32 years (since the racial riots in May 13, 1969).

Today, UMNO are still recovering from the dismemberment of the mainstay of their erstwhile political strength, viz: the Malay intelligentsia—teachers, university students and lecturers, even professionals. The 1999 Elections has been touted as the wake-up call for new vigour and vitality to be injected into UMNO's political sinews so that Malay unity can be restored and strengthened.

With this proper understanding of the political realities in Malaysia, a Christian must decide how he wants to participate in politics or in the political decision-making process.

In the early days of Merdeka and the early years of the nation-building process, people like the late Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Tan Cheng Lock and Tun Sambanthan went into politics with commitment and dedication to an ideology—the ideology of winning independence for Malaya (now Malaysia), and the building of a united, harmonious, progressive and prosperous Malaysian nation—a country where every Malaysian of whatever race, colour, or creed can have his rightful place under the Malaysian sun.

The Malaysian polity cannot run away from a bias so long as the Malays regard themselves as Malays and look at national problems from the Malay perspective. The same is true of Chinese and Indians. Malay, Chinese and Indian problems are equally national problems.

In any conflict involving the people, there is always a racial undertone. This racial undertone has been suppressed so long as the leaders in the government and Opposition realise that they cannot afford to have racial confrontation and worse, if to it is added a religious flavour.

Malaysians can be proud of the fact that nowhere else in the world can people of so many different racial backgrounds, cultural and religious differences live together in peace and harmony and attain political stability and economic prosperity which even the developed nations envy.

Participation in Politics Today

The politics of today is, of course, different from what it was in the early '70s and '80s. I find that while the commitment may still be

there, the motivation is somewhat adulterated. I find that people nowadays go into politics for what they can get out of it. That is why there is so much allegation about "money politics" in almost all political parties, more so in the parties in power.

A Christian can participate in politics in one of the following ways:

1. Be a strong pressure group but stay on the sidelines. That does not mean demonstrating in front of Parliament or marching through the streets like what we see in Indonesia and Philippines and even in Malaysia. Voice your concern through the media, participate in political meetings, go to your elected representatives, (MPs or state assemblymen) and bring your national or local problems to their attention and make them act. (If they don't act, do not vote for them in future.)
2. Be involved in partisan politics. Join a political party, either the Opposition such as DAP or a government party such as MCA, Gerakan, SUPP, etc. By being a party member, you can influence

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Dato' Lew Sip Hon

Black Metal vs Gospel of Luke

The public should not capitalise on current social issues to create inter-religious tension, NECF Malaysia advised in a statement to the local press in response to a local newspaper report alleging that members of a Black Metal cult group were forced to read the gospel of Luke.

The report quoted an unnamed source as saying that after reading the gospel, the teenage members stopped praying and practicing religious teachings; instead, they indulged in "free sex", claiming it was neither wrong nor sinful.

NECF's statement called for respect and a deeper understanding of each other's faith to avoid any misunderstanding and suspicion.

For example, it said, the four gospels together with the teachings of Christ do not endorse free sex. Instead, the whole Bible has consistently taught against immorality and fornication and stressed the importance of prayer.

Black metal and Christianity are in direct opposition, the statement concluded

after explaining briefly the development of black metal music, its ideology and connection with Satanism.

"...what concerns us most is some people are making use of such opportune time of the 'black metal turmoil' to create misunderstanding about the gospel of Luke," it said.

The statement also urged the authorities, parents, teachers and all concerned parties to join efforts in battling the negative subcultures assaulting our youth, who are very vulnerable to such influence.

"The period of youth is a time for growth and development by discovering and acquiring values and receiving nurture within the culture. Unfortunately, this generation of youth live in an era where abortion and divorce are rampant, and where the invasion of popular culture is raging.



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"Instead of making remarks to provoke others and to create discord within the community, let us put aside our selfish agenda, be realistic and truly re-examine our social and cultural values, and care for our children." ■

Pastors and Christians Gain from Church Survey

The NECF Malaysia Survey of Churches, Pastors and Christians 2001 is yielding benefits even before the data collected are analysed.

In the course of filling in the survey questionnaire, pastors and Christians have been edified. Several pastors commented that they were glad they had taken the time and effort to fill in the questionnaire as now, they have a more comprehensive record of their own churches.

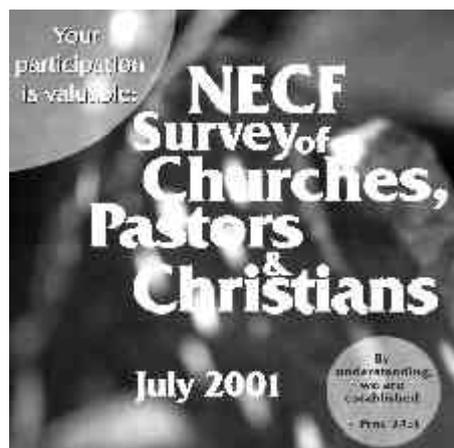
Many Christians, who participated in the survey, said the questions have given them a broader perspective of the Christian faith, particularly in relation to their work, family and society.

Furthermore, many pastors and Christians said the survey questions had "forced" them to assess their relationship with God as they reflected on several issues raised in the questionnaire.

Meanwhile, we are still waiting for the remaining churches to return their completed forms. A number of churches have informed us that they received the survey packages almost a month after they were posted while several packages were returned to our office undelivered.

Therefore, churches that have not received the survey packages are advised to call the NECF Malaysia office immediately. For churches that do not operate an office during the weekdays, kindly give us an alternative address where there is someone to receive the package.

The first batch of the completed questionnaires has been sent for data analysis via computer scanning. We hope to complete the analysis by end-September so that the first survey report can be sent to the participating churches before year-end. ■



I S S U E 5 8

Women to Women



THE "4-14 WINDOW"

Child Ministries and Church Strategies

By Dr Dan Brewster

As the delegates from Evangelical Fellowships from all over the world gather around the theme "Serving Churches Worldwide" in Kuala Lumpur, it is important to look to the future of those churches in each of the countries we serve. Cutting edge mission groups and motivated churches today are making some of the most significant advances in the history of Christianity by looking closely at the "10-40 Window," where most of the remaining people groups are who have never had an opportunity to hear the Gospel. The concept of the "10-40 Window," and of "people groups," are among the most significant innovations in missions thinking in generations. These two principles have enabled mission leaders to focus evangelism efforts in ways never before possible.

There is another "window within the window" however, which may even be more significant for the National Evangelical Fellowships making up the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF). This new window lets in the light not just on the churches and missions, but on the very foundations for the future of the church. Indeed, it may suggest an opportunity and a focus for the churches for the next decade. That window is what I call the "4-14 Window."

The "4-14 Window"

Some years ago, Dr Bryant Myers, now Vice President for International Programme Strategy for World Vision made an excellent presentation which suggested that in the USA, nearly 85% of people who made a decision for Christ, do so between the ages of 4 and 14!

Each time I have spoken on the subject, I have conducted my own survey, and it has largely confirmed this important missiological fact. My informal results have

yielded a somewhat lower figure than Bryant presented. Generally about 60% of the people I ask say that they became Christians between the ages of 4 and 14. Perhaps only 60% of Christians made their decision for Christ during these pliable years. Or only 50%. But even so! What should this say to church leaders today? What should this say to the Evangelical Fellowships around the world?

Children as a "People Group"

We wouldn't normally think of children as a people group. People groups are typically defined along ethnic, geographic, habitat or social affinity lines. But if we think for a moment about them in this way, we find a sobering reality.

CHILDREN: AN ENORMOUS PEOPLE GROUP

Over one-third of the world's population, nearly 2 billion people, are under the age of 15. Of all the children born today 80% live in developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America and some parts of Europe where extreme poverty is prevalent.

Surely this fact alone is enough to cause church leaders to re-examine their priorities and strategies for the coming decade.

CHILDREN: A RECEPTIVE PEOPLE GROUP

Missiologists are also documenting the reasons for apparent changes in receptivity to the Gospel. The School of World Mission shelves at the Fuller Seminary are brimming with theses and dissertations exploring the reasons for resistance and receptivity. One clear and consistent factor is that people tend

to be more receptive when their lives are disrupted. The poor and exploited tend to be much more receptive to the Gospel. There is no people group today whose lives are more disrupted than those of children and youth.

Bryant reminded us that children are...



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...Suffering

For years we were told that some 40,000 children die around the world every day, very many of them die due to malnutrition and preventable diseases. Thankfully, however, the annual childhood death figure has come down to only (!) 24,000 per day. Nevertheless, many challenges remain and children in many countries still face enormous risks. Those in the "4-14 window" remain the most affected and vulnerable group for every kind of disease and suffering.

...Unwanted

We know that very many of these children are still unwanted. One evidence of this is the appallingly high rates of abortion,

especially in the so-called developed nations. An equally shocking and growing problem is that of street children around the world. Statistics indicate that between 100 and 200 million children around the world call the streets their home.

...Victimized

Between 100 and 300 million children are currently involved in abusive child labour around the world. In India alone, it is estimated that nearly 100 million children work without proper rest, safety or care. Child labour is not necessarily unjust and in many cultures the family relationships are strengthened when children work alongside their parents. However, far too many children are working under exploitative conditions. And when children are working, they are not in school.. Child labourers are often treated as expendable parts, easily replaced by the next young child with good eyesight and nimble fingers.

Children are also the victims of the many wars around the world. In the last decade, over 15 million children were killed in armed conflicts, more than 4 million were disabled, and more than 12 million lost their homes.

Equally disturbing are the tragedies of the buying and selling of children for sexual abuse. Global figures are difficult to assess, but some estimate that as many as 10 million children are caught up in sex industry: child prostitution, sex tourism and pornography.

The needs and injustices behind such shocking statistics cry out for attention. But the net result globally is a suffering, disrupted people group which is often hungry for the touch of the Gospel in their lives. Attention to this "4-14 window" is then imperative for any church which is serious about reaching truly receptive peoples in any other "window" of the world. Lamentations 2:19 urges us to "Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to Him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street."

CHILDREN: A FORGOTTEN PEOPLE GROUP?

In light of all these factors, it is curious then the relative lack of attention that churches sometimes give to children's ministries. What do we have to say, from an ecclesiastic standpoint, to the most numerous, poorest, disrupted, hurting, and quite possibly the most receptive of the world's population groups?

Sadly, apparently not much.

Child Ministries and Church Growth

Another reason for the Evangelical Fellowships around the world to consider seriously the needs of children is that an emphasis on children is often the fastest way to plant and to grow churches. Compassion's experience is that one of the most significant interventions for church growth is to assist the church develop a child health, education, and spiritual nurture programme. If the programme is done right, and new Christians enrolled and parents included, those churches will grow. And in the process, many of those families - both the children and the adults - will come to Christ.

We know that children are the church of the future. But we must understand that children and their parents are also the church of today.

Mending BROKEN HEARTS

By Catherine Clark Kroeger
& Nancy Nason Clark

The most basic form of Christian service is love in action - mending broken hearts. Christians will be identified by their love (Jn 13:35). The task of mending suggests repair, fixing things that are broken. Isaiah 61 speaks of binding up the brokenhearted, comforting those who mourn, replacing mourning with gladness, offering a garment of praise in place of a spirit of despair. And how will this be accomplished? When God's people go up to Gilead and apply its healing balm to the wounds of those who suffer (cf Jer 8:20-22; 46:11).

God has a passion for mending brokenness. Scripture is filled with passages in which the God of the universe shows compassion for the weak of this earth, like a hen that gathers her chicks under her wings (Mt 23:37). This is the picture of the Christian God: a deity who has the hairs of our head numbered, who cares about the feeding patterns of sparrows and the enduring beauty of lilies in a grassy meadow (Lk 7:24; 12:7; 27-28). How much more valuable, sister in Christ, brother in Christ, are you? How much more valuable indeed!

Jars of Clay

While there can be little doubt of God's interest in the heart-mending business, individuals must recognize their need of repair and congregations must be prepared to assist in the tasks of mending. God's mending does not occur in a factory, where hundreds of machines and machine operators sew clothing in a standard fashion. God's mending occurs one heart at a time - sometimes at the altar, sometimes at the kitchen table, sometimes during a walk in the woods, sometimes prompted by the words of another woman of faith, always prompted by the still small voice (1 Kings 19:11).

As people of faith we need to recognize brokenness in ourselves and in those around us. We have to acknowledge our need to have the healing balm of Gilead applied to our afflictions, physical or emotional or spiritual. The God we serve, who loved us before we could love in return, is in the business of mending hearts, shattered dreams and broken bodies. To put it in the language of the day: the market niche of God's Spirit is heart repair. But how is the healing balm of Gilead applied? That's where you and I come in. That is the role of congregational life.

Sisters of Mercy

God chooses earthly vessels, jars of clay, ordinary people to assist in responding to the brokenness around us. There are many models of menders offered in Scripture: think of Dorcas, Phoebe, Priscilla, or the unnamed stretcher bearers, each a conduit to the healing touch of Jesus.

The story of Dorcas is recorded in Acts 9. A woman named Tabitha, translated as Dorcas, lived in Joppa. She was constantly doing good and helping the poor and needy, especially widows. She would use a needle and thread in her upstairs room to sew garments for poor women who had nothing to wear. Clothing needy women was her market niche. But she fell ill and died, and the church in



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Joppa begged Peter to redirect his travels in order that he could visit their town and touch her body. Somehow the Christian community in Joppa was convinced that its ministry opportunities would be thwarted without the talents and gifts of this old woman. Peter came. The church widows showed him the hand-made garments Dorcas had crafted. Peter prayed. Dorcas arose.

In the tradition of Dorcas, some today

use domestic talents in service of Christ. This woman used some rather uncomplicated tools - a needle, some thread, a pair of scissors - to offer hope to needy women. Her ministry of clothing worked to mend some of the rips and tears that years of living had created. She was a sister of mercy before the name was adopted by Catholic nuns. And congregations can become sisters of mercy to families in crisis..

Washed and Clean

Phoebe’s service to God and the growing Christian community is recorded in Romans 16. Paul commends to his readers this woman whom he calls a servant (or a deacon) of the church in Cenchreaa, asking that they receive her in a manner worthy of the saints, offering her help and remembering her labour. How exactly did Phoebe serve the church? Among other tasks, female deacons in the early church prepared women candidates for baptism and visited women and girls in their homes—which was not always appropriate for men to do. While Dorcas was stitching broken hearts, Phoebe was washing them.

When the Christian church sets about

bathing our lives, we do not feel dirty or shameful any longer. The old nature, replete with heartache and pain, is replaced with a new nature fashioned in likeness to Christ. The past is washed away. God’s Spirit beckons us to start over - to mourn no longer, to rise and go forth, to put our hand to the plough and not look back.

While Dorcas stitches and Phoebe cleanses, Priscilla offers wise counsel. A tentmaker by trade, Priscilla and her husband Aquila began a house ministry in Ephesus, after being commissioned by Paul to leave their homestead in Corinth for the sake of ministry. Their family story, recorded in Acts 18, suggests that Priscilla used her talents both inside and outside the home to share the gospel and to reason in the synagogues - and often as she and Aquila sold their goods in the marketplace. She used her intellectual prowess to convince others of the efficacy of the gospel of Christ. She offered hope to the hopeless by words of wisdom, reason and truth.

Taken from Chapter 3 Growing in Compassion, No Place for Abuse by Catherine Clark-Kroeger & Nancy Nason-Clark, IVP

Heart to heart



A pastor’s wife, who wishes to remain anonymous, responds to the Pastors’ Prayer Shield campaign.

I wish to thank all the Christians who have treated pastors and their families with much love and consideration. It is only God who can repay all that you have done. I would like to think that we represent pastors and their families who have received free medical care, dental care, luncheons and dinners, free stay in holiday bungalows, free or paid-for music lessons for our children; even free membership to a swimming club. These are but a few of the untold blessings that have come as a result of being in full-time service.

I was most overwhelmed by a family who used old cups and saucers for themselves but gave us their wedding dinner set to start us off in our new parish. We were conscious of the love of the brethren who wanted us to make it in the ministry. For example, the young people took our children out when we were too exhausted to do so ourselves. The young adults babysat for us when we had

to minister to those in need. Many members prayed for us. They ministered to us when we were weak.

To all who have loved us and loved their full-time workers, I would like to bless them all in return with God’s riches and spiritual blessings in the heavenlies (Eph 1:3).

Learning to Cope

One of my greatest struggles was coping with my husband’s absence in my times of need. His work seemed more important to him than the family. It turned out that the quality time he had with the family was during the times when I fell ill. I was initially resentful and discontented.

It took the Heavenly Father’s gentle rebuke to bring me to my senses. As my husband needed to sacrifice his family time for the Master’s use, I had to sacrifice him. Was I willing to trust God to provide for me when my husband was not available? Was I willing to let him go when God needed him in another place?

Jesus seemed to be saying to me, “Am I not better than ten

husbands?" (1 Sam 1:8). God proved Himself faithful over and over again. When I needed a dental operation in another district in my husband's absence, God provided a companion to stay with me throughout the whole procedure. He provided a friendly mechanic when the car broke down. There was always a doctor standing by when the children fell sick. A faithful neighbour loved our children and provided unpaid babysitting services. A friend shopped for provisions for me even without my asking. How could I complain?

Bitter-sweet Experiences

One of our precious experiences was during a period of uncertainty about God's direction for our ministry. How could we lead when we were not sure about our own future? We put this honestly before the church leadership and requested that they pray for us. They immediately did so.

They then advised us to stay on for as long as there was no leading to go anywhere. They would release us as soon as we were sure where God was leading us. In our time of confusion,

our church leaders stood by us. When we asked for an early release, they honoured their word and let us go. It is humbling to know that even pastors can lose their way!

Another bitter-sweet experience was during a busy season for the church when my husband was working hard to cover for different members of the church committee.

He could not cope and did not have time to carry out duties assigned to him. He did not even have time to think about what he was so busy about! The subsequent grilling he received from the church committee for the things he had left undone left him devastated. It took me some time to forgive the people involved.

Yet all the experiences were part of God's purifying process. Those responsible did not mean to break us and they did not even know the effect their actions had on us. But we learnt an important lesson: every difficult experience can be turned around for our good. The bitter-sweet experiences



were the instruments the Master used to shape us into the image of Christ-likeness. To stay bitter and to hanker after only pleasant experiences will deprive us of the deep spiritual growth that can only come as the Master Surgeon's knife cuts deep to remove unwanted growth. The cuts are painful but the wounds will heal.

Dealing with Conflicts

My husband has the 'misfortune' of having a wife trained in a Bible College different from the one he attended. I must have crushed him many times with my criticisms and comments. But I suspect God was on his side. One time, after a particularly 'mediocre' message, someone accepted the Lord. Even he was surprised! I have seen this happening over and over again. If God can use a donkey to speak for Him, how much more will He be able to use 'mediocre' pastors.

I have stopped commenting on his sermons and instead, I pray that God will touch someone in the congregation whenever he preaches. I encourage all preachers' wives to do the same.

In times of conflict with church members or leaders, I found it hard to distance myself and to remain neutral. When I take sides with my husband, I end up with a grudge long after my husband had forgiven the other person. He is able to take what I am unable to. So we have agreed that in future sharing, he should not reveal names so that I will be able to pray and minister to him.

The problem gets complicated when I secretly agree with the opposition. Wisdom dictates that I remain silent and stick to praying.

Down and Out

I have seen my husband demoralised many times during his ministry. Often, he has thought of quitting. In fact, in the early days, I had encouraged him to take up another profession if there was any that suited him. I seriously thought there was nothing wrong in changing professions if he discovered he was not cut out to be a pastor.

Again, God had other plans. He used opposition from senior pastors to teach him patience and endurance. He used the recognition of his own abilities to teach him humility. He used fickle congregations to remove his faith in men. God reached deep down to heal him of his childhood traumas and restored to him what the locusts had devoured. What he is today is not the work of man but the craftsmanship of God.

The writer and her pastor-husband have been in the ministry for 25 years. They are now involved in an itinerant ministry.

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.

Gifts from God

Pastors are God's gift to His people. The pastoral ministry is God's gift to His ministers.

"I myself have selected your fellow Levites from among the Israelites as a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD to do the work at the Tent of Meeting... I am giving you the service of the priesthood as a gift." (Num. 18: 6-7)

If congregations love their pastors, they are actually treasuring the GIFTS God has given them as their dedication to God. Pastors need a cheering team to 'Go for it' and press on to victory over the enemy. Even when they fail, it is for repair and expansion.

If pastors treasure their ministry as God's GIFT to them (v 7), they will not take the ministry lightly and leave when they think they have enough of the struggles. It will be like 'exchanging your heritage for a bowl of pottage' (Gen 25:30-33).

To all fellow pastors—may we all press on without wavering until we have finished the task, as the Master had done, and hear the "Well done" at the end of our days.—*From the NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission*

Thank your pastor today

Appreciation to a person is like water to a plant. Constant showering will induce a beautiful bloom. Pastors, like any normal human being, will also be encouraged to labour harder for their flocks if constantly shown affirmation and appreciation.

So, if have you never thank your pastor or have not done so for a long time now, don't wait. Send him/her a thank-you card today. (We are suggesting this knowing how reserved we Asians are at vocalising our appreciation.)

To help you, NECF Malaysia has produced an appreciation pack containing a VCD and a thank-you card. The VCD, which contains segments of the Pastors' Prayer Shield launch meeting for the Klang Valley region, gives reasons for praying for pastors and practical steps to love and affirm them. The VCD is to be retained by the purchaser as a reminder to pray for his/her pastor while the accompanying card is to be sent to his/her pastor.

The attractive pack costs RM5 each and is available from NECF Malaysia office.



S H A R I N G R E S O U R C E S

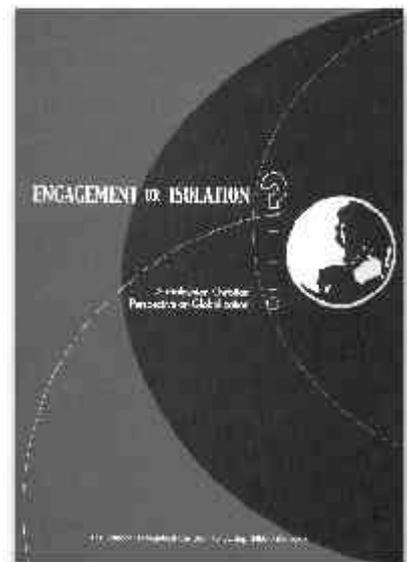
Globalisation Booklet

NECF Malaysia has published a booklet on globalisation entitled *Engagement or Isolation: A Malaysian Christian Perspective on Globalisation* as a follow-up to the World Evangelical Fellowship International Consultation on Globalisation held here in February.

The booklet contains the Malaysian paper that was presented at the consultation, and the speeches of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, which were respectively given at the consultation's opening and closing ceremonies.

The Malaysian paper was written on the basis of a personal encounter with the impact of globalisation and presents a helpful Christian perspective on the subject matter. Churches are challenged to go beyond their own agenda and private plans; to encourage one another to think and act globally because Christians are called to be salt and light to the world (Matt. 5:1314).

Available from NECF Malaysia office at RM10 each.



Inspirational articles from Focus on the Family

Focus on the Family Malaysia has short articles suitable for church bulletins. These articles are related to the importance of building strong family relationships including parenting, marriage enrichment and interpersonal relationships.

Anyone who would like to obtain these articles on a regular basis can contact Focus on the Family Malaysia, 39 Jalan Bandar Enambelas, Pusat Bandar Puchong, 47100 Puchong, Selangor. Tel: 03-58823343; Fax: 03-58823533; E-mail: fofm@pc.jaring.my from 9am to 5.30pm Mondays to Fridays.

Worker Shortage No Hindrance to Sending

Sarawak indigenous churches are crying out for more workers to cope with the large numbers of new converts. Yet, they are sending away their own workers to other parts of the world.

The situation is akin to that of a starving man giving away portions of his food to others. But, Pr Gerawat Maran, Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB) Sarawak president, views it

This selfless act in caring more for others is a reflection of our Sarawakian brethren's love and passion for God who, Pr Gerawat said, has moved mightily among his people since the formation of SIB Sarawak in the late 1950s.

Since then, it has reached out to 26 ethnic groups in the state, establishing along the way some 600 churches (with established leadership, pastors and staff) and 500 small groups who meet at longhouses and homes. Pr Gerawat estimates their membership at between 90,000 and 100,000 people.

Sarawak is home to 38 main ethnic groups and within the ethnic groups are many splinter groups. Language-wise and culturally, they are different but they all understand the BM language.

Although SIB Sarawak was originally started to reach out to the indigenous people, the work soon spread to the Chinese in the major towns. Today, SIB Sarawak runs 23 Chinese congregations in Mandarin, Foochow and Hakka. It also has some English congregations but BM remains the most widely-used language in their churches.

Pr Gerawat attributes this rapid growth to God's grace on his people. He believes the Holy Spirit has been moving among the tribal people and preparing their hearts for the Gospel.

"You can go to any longhouse and share the Gospel and they will listen without resistance. Many of them come to Christ this way," Pr Gerawat says. "The field is truly ripe for harvest and we need more people to go out."

Not only is there an urgent need for workers to harvest the crops, there is an equally urgent need for follow-up workers to disciple the many new converts. To help resolve this problem, SIB Sarawak is challenging its churches to release their pastors (while maintaining their financial support) and members for short-term ministry (usually three months) to the newborns.

Pr Gerawat has also taken this need for workers to West Malaysia and wherever he goes and thus far, his campaign has bore fruits. There has been a consistent stream of "short-term missionaries" from West Malaysia and elsewhere tripping into the Sarawakian jungles. "Maybe it's because they've heard there are now better roads to the interiors, thanks to the logging companies," he quips.

"Whatever it is, we truly appreciate the partnership and fellowship of our brethren who have helped us so much," he says gratefully.

Long-term solution

However, short-term missionaries are, as its name suggests, short-term measures; they fill the gap temporarily. The long-term solution is to be found on home ground, in its people, Pr Gerawat feels. "We just need to train our people to do the work," he asserts.

And for that, there is an urgent need to maintain its bible schools and if possible, expand to accommodate the increasing number of people seeking training. "Right now, this is our greatest need," Pr Gerawat reveals.

SIB Sarawak currently runs five bible schools—three for foundation studies and two at advance diploma level in Miri (English medium) and Lawas (BM). The total student intake is 150 with 50 to 60 graduating every year.

Among the 600 churches in its roll, 80 percent are from rural areas. Besides supporting their local pastors and workers and maintaining the church buildings, they also contribute about 60 percent to the sum

see page 13



An evangelistic meeting in progress at an Iban longhouse in Sarikei, Sarawak.

differently—it's a hungry man giving away portions of his food to even hungrier people.

"We will always be short of workers because our churches will continue to grow rapidly. We accept that, but at the same time, we cannot ignore the needs of people elsewhere especially if we are in the position to meet those specific needs," he says.

He explains: "We have some 30 pastors in West Malaysia ministering in the Bahasa (Malaysia) churches. They were sent there to either plant and pastor the SIB churches or help other denominations in their Bahasa ministry. Also, we have missionaries in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea and South Philippines. These workers are involved in helping the indigenous churches reach out to the tribal people. We have the experience in this kind of ministry, that's why we were asked to go and help them."



*SIB Sarawak workers outside one of their outreach points—
an Iban longhouse in Bakong, Miri.*

“Partnership and networking will yield far greater results than if each church or organisation works alone. To effectively witness for Christ, there is no other option but to work together as a community of believers.”

That was the firm message given by NECF Malaysia Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong to the first national assembly of the Mongolia Evangelical Fellowship (MEF) held at Ulaanbaatar in June. The four-day assembly drew more than 80 pastors and leaders from 40 evangelical churches of different denominations and over 10 representatives from local and international Christian organisations.

Rev. Wong was the guest speaker at the assembly in his capacity as a member of the World Evangelical Fellowship International Council, and NECF Malaysia which had “adopted” the two-year-old MEF. MEF intends to hold a general assembly once every four years to mobilise Mongolian churches for nationwide evangelism, church planting and discipleship.

At the first assembly, the concept and vision of “Kingdom ministry” was introduced. Many participants heard for the first time how a shared common vision of the Kingdom could more effectively reach the unreached people. The Bible teaching

Think “Kingdom”, Mongolian Evangelical Leaders Urged

sessions led by Rev. Wong further helped participants to view church ministry through the Kingdom perspective and seek the direction for the Church of Mongolia to follow.

The assembly was a groundbreaking event in that it was the first time pastors and leaders collectively discuss the future of the Mongolian Church.

To address the needs of the churches and mobilise united church missions, MEF proposed the setting up of four commissions—Missions, Social Concerns, Religious Liberty and Nationwide Programme and Activities.

The assembly closed with Rev. Wong’s sharing on Christian Leadership,

followed by Holy Communion and a time of testimonies. ■

Rev. Wong (centre) surrounded by several Mongolian participants dressed in resplendent traditional costumes at the opening ceremony of the first MEF general assembly.



Worker shortage: No hindrance to sending: from page 12

required to run the schools. SIB Sarawak has to rely on outside supporters to fund the rest.

Pr Gerawat says the need for finance to maintain the bible schools has reached critical level and appeals for help.

While having to raise support for the bible schools, Pr Gerawat has also to consider the needs of the brethren in the interiors. Often, the requests are for finances to build churches when the believers’ home cannot contain the congregation anymore.

“Right now, I have three requests to build church buildings,” he reveals.

Nevertheless, the lack of finances and shortage of workers has not hampered SIB Sarawak’s march towards breaking new grounds in Sarawak and blurred its vision of planting churches in every state in West Malaysia.

To date, it has started two churches in Johore, one each in Malacca and Seremban and several in the Klang Valley. “But we encourage our congregations to work closely with the local churches,” Pr Gerawat quickly points out.

In its ministry in West Malaysia, SIB Sarawak works closely with other SIB components and the local churches, whatever

denominations they may be.

“There are many Sarawakians and Sabahans living in West Malaysia. Most of them are students or factory workers. We focus on reaching out to them and establishing small congregations among them. Here, we work with the local churches who provide their premises for meetings and sometimes, help out financially,” Pr Gerawat explains.

Pr Gerawat Maran, who has been the SIB Sarawak president for the last 15 years, oversees a staff force of 640 pastors and workers.

SIB Sarawak also runs a recording studio in Lawas which records two radio programmes—one for Christians and the other for non-Christians. The programmes are broadcast by a Christian radio station in Manila.

It also runs Christian bookrooms in all major towns and has a bible translation ministry which has to date, translated the whole Bible into four main ethnic languages and the New Testament in several others. ■



Pr Gerawat “...need for finance to maintain the bible schools has reached critical level.”

Editor’s note: Those who wish to make a contribution to SIB Sarawak may send their donations to: Sidang Injil Borneo Sarawak. Lot 67 Jalan Cosmos, Krokop, 98000 Miri, Sarawak.

COMING UP ...

2nd National Orang Asli Ministry Conference

Date : November 12–14, 2001

Theme : GO! PREACH!

Venue : Nan Hwa High School,
Ayer Tawar, Manjung
(Sitiawan), Perak

Cost : RM45 (food, accommodation
and materials)

Speakers: Pr Donald Anamalai, Pr Timothy
Cheah, Pr Danny Lainsin
Limpakan and Pr Lam Kee Hing

This conference aims to raise awareness among our *Orang Asli* brethren of their role and responsibility in reaching their own people as well as other races, and to challenge them to act. Through the workshop sessions, they will be equipped for the task.

In addition, it is a not-to-be missed opportunity for OA Christians from different tribes, scattered and isolated by distance and unawareness of each other's existence, to gather for fellowship, prayer and mutual encouragement. For many of the OA

Christians, attending a conference like this requires sheer determination on the part of their leaders to overcome the logistics and financial hurdles of getting their members out of the *kampungs* and taking them all the way to the venue and back.

Let us then pray for our OA brethren and perhaps go one step further by offering practical help. For more information and/or brochure, contact OA@necf.org.my or call the NECF Malaysia office.

International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church – Nov. 4, 2001

This is a yearly global day of intercession for Christians being persecuted for their faith. It is officially observed on the first Sunday of November and this year, more than 300,000 churches worldwide are expected to participate.

In Malaysia, Open Doors Malaysia

Services jointly with NECF Malaysia have planned a one-month prayer emphasis for the Persecuted Church beginning October 4 and climaxing Nov. 4. Let us join hearts with Christians around the world to stand in the gap for our brothers and sisters who are suffering.

For more information, contact ODMAL Services Bhd at 03-3341 8905 (tel.); 03-3341 8010 (fax); odmal@po.jaring.my (e-mail).

Steve Hill “Here’s Life! Evangelistic and Revival Meeting”

The evangelist of the Brownsville Revival fame will be preaching nightly at Putra Stadium, Bukit Jalil, from October 3 to 5. In addition, he will be ministering to pastors and leaders in the mornings of the same dates at Glad Tidings Petaling Jaya. The meetings are hosted by the Assemblies of God of Malaysia with participating churches. For further enquiries, call 03-79565195.

Christians and political realities: from page 5

the party leadership to take up your problems in the parliament or state assemblies. In other words, be in the corridors but not in the front-line.

3. Be actively involved in front-line politics. Participate in the election and be elected to parliament or state assembly.
4. But if you comprehend the political realities, and if you want to be a front-line politician “who can deliver the goods”, then you have to join a party which is in the government. This is the fourth option, and this is the way I chose to participate in politics. A Christian can be an active politician, serving as MP or Minister and yet be the light and salt of the earth.

However for one to do well and be at the top in the political party, he must have strong grassroot support. Party politics is sometimes called the politics of survival and has its ups and downs. There are no rigid rules in politics—your friend today can be your enemy tomorrow, but if you stand firm on your principles, people will respect you. I have always believed that one goes into politics because of his ideology, and so long as he can play an effective role in the party to fulfill that ideology, he should strive to be at

the top. The moment he feels and finds that he cannot perform that role effectively, it is time to step down and leave to others to carry on. It has been said that leaders in any political party come and go, but the party and the ideology which it stands for, remains forever.

One last option is for Christians to form a political party of their own and field candidates in the state and parliamentary constituencies in the next general election. If elected, the party can be the mouthpiece and platform for upholding Christian principles and ideals. Or it can openly declare its support for certain candidates who subscribe to the Christian party's manifesto. ■

During his 12 years as a Member of Parliament, Dato' Lew served as Deputy Minister of Primary Industries and Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry. Following a three-year term as Malaysian Ambassador to the USA and concurrently to Mexico, Dato' Lew left politics in 1986, turning his activities to the Malaysian private sector.

(This article is a contribution of the NECF Malaysia Research Commission.)

F O R E I G N N E W S

Living in sin is OK, say young believers

A third of Christian young adults questioned in a major new Evangelical Alliance survey say they would be happy to “live in sin” prior to getting married.

The findings in *Generation X: attitudes and lifestyles* show that Christians in the age range 18 to 35 are more likely to see cohabitation as an acceptable first step towards marriage, directly contradicting biblical teaching and contradicting one of Christianity’s core lifestyle messages.

This statistic compares with a similar result from research carried out in 1995, which show that 28 percent regarded cohabitation as acceptable.

This recent survey highlights the need for clear and firm teaching on sexuality and marriage—an area some churches avoid for fear of alienating young people.—*Evangelicals Now*



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New Study Reveals Which Churches Grow Churches

that have “explicit, specific definitions and goals for their members and high standards for personal morality and communal justice” report greater vitality as well as growth in participation and financial giving, says Carl Dudley, co-director of a Faith Communities Today survey by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research which is part of Hartford Seminary in Connecticut.

Most congregations—51 percent—report growth. The survey defines growth as an increase of at least 5 percent in Sunday morning attendance for the five-year period starting in 1995.



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The survey is a cooperative project of 41 denominations, which represent about 80 percent of the 300,000-plus congregations in the United States. Survey participants included leaders from 14,301 congregations of Protestants, Roman Catholics, Mormons, Jews, Muslims and others. Congregations were selected to match the regional distribution of the U.S. population.

Mormons and Muslims have started more congregations than liberal and moderate Protestants and Roman Catholics combined—about 20 percent of the congregations founded in the last decade. But liberal and moderate Protestant churches are emphasising higher commitment from their members and are adapting contemporary worship styles.—*Christianity Today*

Islam Spreads in Austria While

Austria’s public school classrooms still must have a crucifix hanging on a wall, many children in the nation’s schools are Muslim, reports the New York Times. Austrians see their own culture threatened by this wave of immigrants who aren’t Catholic. Anti-immigrant political parties are gaining popularity among native Austrians.

“Pressed as to what their culture is, many conservative European politicians invoke Christianity but Muslims are an ever-larger presence,” the Times reports. “The question then is: can Europe’s self-image



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evident in that class crucifix accommodate Islam? With the economic approaches of left and right converging at the centre, such debate about national culture has increasingly come to define the divide between conservative and liberal thinking in Europe.” —*Pulse*

Evangelical Erotica?

A German Protestant church in the Rhineland presents a monthly series of “erotic sermons” followed by X-rated movies and discussion afterward, claiming it’s a way of getting people to come to church, reports *Idea Evangelical News Agency*. When a Christian complained, a church official said the series had succeeded in attracting the unchurched. One French film the church screened had been banned in France. The discussions give visitors a chance “to voice and question their erotic desires without the fear of being moralised,” the official tells *Idea*, adding that the erotic sermons have an “evangelistic quality”.—*Pulse*

Belarus’ Christian Fear Cult Label

Because falling down while being prayed for in a church service is viewed as cultic, Pentecostals there huddle during ministry times to keep everyone on their feet, *Charisma News Service* reports.

A pastor in Minsk told the news service that churches that weren’t careful lost the places they rented for worship. “Observers attribute the crackdown to pressure from the Russian Orthodox church, which has been critical of the growth of non-traditional faiths,” says *Charisma*.—*Pulse*

Gay Marriage — no joke

On April 1, Holland became the world’s first nation to recognise same-sex marriage. The issue is expected to affect other countries when gay couples that wed in the Netherlands demand their unions recognised outside that country’s borders. Under the law the Dutch senate passed in December, at least one partner must be a Dutch citizen or resident. Earlier this year, Holland legalised euthanasia.—*Pulse*

For Your Intercession



G R E E C E

Evangelicals in Greece continue to face discrimination and harassment as a court case in Larissa a few months ago showed. Although the case was quickly thrown out and the threat of jail sentences against the three believers removed, it underlined the fact that the Greek Orthodox Church (the official state church) remains firm in its belief that the evangelical church is heretical.

A L B A N I A

Adriatik Toska became a Christian at 14. At 15, he was leading a church, displaying maturity beyond his years. That's not unusual in Albania where many young people have joyously accepted Christ and gone on to become mature disciples since the doors opened to missionary work in the early 1990s. For example, 50 of the 65 people at a church meeting are under 25 years old—a typical situation. Finding new leaders for congregations is not easy especially as, with an estimated 60 to 70 percent of people without work and those with jobs on desperately poor wages, many of the gifted Christians are joining the economic exodus to Italy. Pray for God to raise leaders that the Church in Albania needs.

E C U A D O R

With many people in Ecuador practicing a form of ritualistic folk religion, Christians are seen as enemies of a traditional form of life, resulting in many being expelled from their villages. Juan is one of the many Christians who have been forced to stay away from home for months on end. His wife was beaten up. Yet one desire remains: to make Christ known among his people. Ecuadorian Christians are also persecuted by rebel groups. One group has told all Christian organisations to close or believers will be killed. In recent years, many indigenous Ecuadorians have become Christians. Their biggest need is the Scriptures. The Bible is

available in two indigenous languages but many believers are so poor that they cannot afford to buy a copy. Pray for the means to get the Scriptures in their own languages and for the persecuted Christians to remain steadfast.

I R A Q

Official permission was recently given for the erection of the very first evangelical church building in northern Iraq and for the first evangelical radio station to be set up in the area. Pray for many to find Christ as Lord and Saviour through these initiatives.

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B A N G L A D E S H

The Church in Bangladesh is tiny—around 0.4% of 128 million people. Although the constitution states there is freedom of religion, direct sharing of the Gospel can be dangerous in a land of floods and poverty. Islam is the official religion and the common culture is built on Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic rule of past centuries. Consequently, Christian agencies are spreading the love of Christ through their holistic ministries in partnership with local churches and para-

church organisations.

Christians continue to be persecuted for their faith. One such person is Shofu, an Operation Mobilisation associate worker, who was forced to leave his home by family members. Shofu, his wife and children continue to suffer persecution. Pray for them and other Bangladeshi Christians.

L O N D O N

London City Mission is reaching the capital's children for Christ through many activities, including mothers' and toddlers' groups, nursery schools, school assemblies, kids' clubs and other children's groups.

Hospital visitation is also an important part of LCM's ministry to children. It also seeks to help the young homeless on West End streets. Pray for this ministry and for the many children it will be reaching.

P O R T U G A L

The long-awaited contemporary Portuguese Bible, *Nova Versao Internacional*, published by International Bible Society, is now available. Pray especially that it will communicate the truth of the Gospel to young people since half the 172 million population are under 20.

P E R U

Hundreds of innocent people, including a number of Christians, are seeking to be released from Peru prisons. Pray for these victims of former President Fujimori's anti-terrorist drive and for Christian Solidarity International and other Christian organisations working for their release. Many children who have lived in a climate of violence and fear in Peru are finding hope and meaning to life through the Peruvian Bible Society's Bread of Life programme. The programme helps 1,000 poverty-stricken youngsters in overcrowded areas by providing a daily breakfast and Bible materials. Pray for this ministry.