

## EDITORIAL

# Good to be Nice

In January, Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi launched the nationwide Courtesy and Noble Values Campaign (*Kempen Budi Bahasa dan Nilai-nilai Murni*) aimed at taking the nation to greater heights, not only in terms of economic development but moral and spiritual character as well.

This new emphasis is a wake-up call for Christians. For too long, we have neglected these universal values in favour of more exclusive Christian values. "It's not enough just being nice," we say. "It can't save you." But being nice and courteous has an important place in life.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines "courteous" as "polite, respectful and considerate"; and "noble" as "having fine personal qualities or high moral principles". Other definitions exist but they converge on the same set of qualities.

A little booklet published by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage lists 47 courteous qualities and noble values that should be practised by all Malaysians (see inset on page 4). The weighty list may leave us in despair but the following tips may help us make a start.

### THINK IN TERMS OF RELATIONSHIPS

The same booklet lists four major arenas

in which courtesy and noble values are to be practised.

### 1 At Home

Pertinent relationships here are those between parents and children (parents are duty bound to bring up their children well while children are to love, respect and be obedient to their parents); between siblings (younger ones are to address

waiting to be served, etc.).

### 3 In School

Key relationships are those between teachers and students (teachers are to be role models for their students in every way while students are to show respect and appreciation for their teachers); and between students (who are to be tolerant of differences between them in terms of race, religion and other matters, etc.).

### 4 At Work

Key relationships are found between superiors and subordinates (superiors must treat their subordinates with kindness and act fairly towards all of them while subordinates are to be diligent, punctual, etc.); between colleagues (who are to help instead of compete – in an unhealthy manner – with one another, etc.); and between employees and customers (employees are to be responsive to customers, pleasant when rendering service, etc. while customers are to be polite when making requests, etc.).

This is not the only source we can learn from. Many of us are familiar with Confucius' five great relationships – between father and son, ruler and subject, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and between friends. Specific duties are prescribed for each



older ones according to convention, etc.); and between relatives (relatives are to visit one another when the opportunity arises, etc.).

### 2 In Society

Pertinent relationships are those between the older and younger generations (juniors are to give way to seniors while seniors are to value the opinions of juniors, etc.); between leaders and the public (members of the public are to give full support to their elected leaders, etc.); and between members of the public (who must learn to queue while

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# The Upright Man

**I**ntegrity is derived from the root word *integer*, which means “a whole number or a thing complete in itself”. Integrity is the condition of being unified or sound in construction, of internal consistency without corruption. Integrity means being integrated.

Applied to a person, integrity is often associated with the quality of being consistent in word and action, in public presentation and reality. Honesty, incorruptibility, uprightness are close synonyms.

The Bible tells us that God “test(s) the heart and (is) pleased with integrity” (1 Chron. 29:17a). People of integrity go beyond talk in their lifestyles. Their actions reflect their character. Integrity is a choice that brings lasting success in

of actions that require mountains of explanations. This approach also protects “weak” Christians (1 Cor. 8, Rom. 14) or the less knowledgeable ones from being stumbled by our actions that they cannot understand.

**Search our hearts**

The Bible reminds us that “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9) We are full of misperceptions and self-deceptions.

Be careful never to attempt to justify wrong actions through rationalization. Beware too, of actions that once seemed unacceptable but have become acceptable over time, whether through our own participation in them or our observation

**Fear of man is a primary factor undermining the integrity of many Christians.**

ministry. It gives lasting power. A leader cannot rise beyond the limitation of his character.

How can a believer demonstrate integrity in our conduct at home, at work, in church, in ministry, etc.? Below are some steps we can take.

**Keep it simple**

Being “simple” is different from being “simplistic”. We cannot afford to be simplistic. Life is very complex. Everything we do has consequences.

We must weigh the pros and the cons in every decision. Sometimes decisions are difficult when considering “grey areas” but we must never take advantage of such situations to do wrong.

Jesus taught his disciples: “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” (Matt. 5:37). All things equal, the less we have to explain ourselves in an action, the better it is. Conversely, beware

of others’ participation.

Like David, we pray, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Ps. 139:23–24). We must spend quality time with God allowing Him to search our hearts and cleanse us.

**Fear God only**

The Pharisees attempted to trap Jesus in His words, but they nevertheless gave an accurate description of integrity. “Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.” (Matt. 22:16)

Fear of man is a primary factor undermining the integrity of many

# Moving towards a Courteous and Noble Nation

**THE** Culture, Arts and Heritage Ministry will endorse and support NECF Malaysia's nationwide campaign to help reverse the moral decline in the nation. Its minister, Dato' Seri Dr Rais Yatim, will personally launch NECF's campaign scheduled for September.

Dato' Yatim also agreed, at a recent meeting with NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong, that the ministry will provide joint partnership by placing the government logo besides NECF's in the campaign materials, and assist NECF to gain approval and licence from municipal councils to put up the campaign banners and posters in public places.

NECF is undertaking this major nationwide campaign because it concurred with the government's view that Malaysia should not just become a prosperous and politically stable nation, but also a God-fearing civic-conscious nation – rich in character and assimilated with good values.

The campaign is NECF's contribution to society in response to the ministry's *Courtesy and Noble Values* campaign launched early this year. "We recognise the deterioration of moral values in our society with the marked increase in criminal activities, such as murders, robberies and corporate frauds, corruption and immoral activities. We believe that instilling good values is the most effective preventive measure against crime and wrongdoing," Rev. Wong said.

He added that NECF's campaign aimed to raise awareness of the citizen's role in helping to arrest the moral decline and promote good values, as well as 'conscientise' citizens to be actively

involved in preventing immoral and criminal activities.

Themed "A Nation with Courtesy and Noble Values Retains Honour/The Way of the Wicked is sin against God", the campaign is targeted at all Malaysians and not just Christians only, Rev. Wong stressed.

NECF will produce and distribute posters, car stickers, cards, banners and bookmarks cards in all the four major languages.



The ministry's logo and NECF's campaign logo.



## Protection for you, Help for full-time workers

**MEMBERS** of NECF Malaysia can now sign up for an insurance plan jointly offered by NECF and Great Eastern (GE). Initiated by the NECF Foundation, the *Group Multiple Insurance Scheme Investment Linked with Critical Illness* is only available to congregants and staff of NECF Ordinary Members (comprising churches and Christian organisations) and NECF Associate Members (individuals).

By signing up, insurers will also be helping full-time workers. Here's how – GE will give to NECF two percent of the insurers' premiums, and NECF will in turn plough the money into a fund that will be used



to help full-time workers who wish to buy the insurance but cannot afford to pay the premium.

Churches or organisations that are interested in the plan can contact the insurance agents directly and make arrangement for the agents to be in their churches to handle enquiries and applications from the members and staff.

To date, several churches and organisations have already responded to the scheme, which offers insurance coverage on injuries or death due to accidents and medical ailments at only RM30 or RM50 per month.

Application forms are available from the NECF office. For more information, please contact the office at 03-7727 8227.

### TESTIMONY

*"A few years ago, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, but miraculously, doctors told me it was just at a preliminary stage and it was treatable. Ever since then, I have been going for treatment. The treatment is very costly and has many times left me in financial difficulty. I really want to thank God that He has provided for my needs through NECF Foundation's financial aid. Now I feel less burdened and can fully concentrate on my ministry."*

**– Pastor from the south (of peninsular Malaysia)**

participant in these sets of relationships. In Confucius' *Hsiao Ching* (The Classic of Filial Piety), the five duties of a filial son include venerating his parents in daily life, making them happy in every possible way especially when the meal is served, taking extra care of them when they are sick, and so on. It helps to be specific.

The best source of relationship guidance is the Bible. Ephesians 5:22–6:9 and Colossians 3:18–4:1 instruct us on right attitudes and conduct between husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves (employers and employees). 1 Peter 2:13–3:7 requires that Christians submit to rulers, and slaves to masters, and has instructions for husbands and wives. Titus 2 teaches what is right for different categories of people in their respective roles – older men, older women, young men, young women, and slaves.

**“By promoting good qualities in society, we act as salt and light of the world in preventing moral decay. We also point people to the salvation that is available in Jesus Christ.”**

There are many other exhortations to correct behaviour between believers, between believers and non-believers, between rulers and subjects, and others.

**THINK OF THE MOST BASIC AND MOST NEGLECTED**

There is popular saying: “It’s the little things that mean the most in my life.” In the context of courtesy and noble values, the little things include greeting another (“Good morning”), enquiring after another’s welfare (“How are you?”), smiling, saying “thank you” and “sorry”, and giving little encouragements and appropriate praise.

These civilities have been so neglected that a person who practises them is considered odd! It is unfair to say these practices are superficial and merely habitual. In fact, to consistently practise the “little things” require much discipline and determination. Therefore, good habits need to be cultivated.

**THINK OF THE BENEFITS OF PRACTISING COURTESY AND NOBLE VALUES**

Courtesy and noble values are part of what we call universal moral law. Every society upholds these values regardless of religion or no religion.

It is interesting that some time ago, communist China sought to promote “courtesy and noble values” in all aspects of life. Romans 2 speaks of the conscience in all peoples, which is the imprint of God’s image on humanity.

Just because these values are universal do not mean they are any less Christian. The Bible exhorts us to live out these values for righteousness’

sake and as a testimony to non-believers. In fact, Christians should be more courteous and noble than non-Christians because we have the Holy Spirit’s empowerment. By promoting good qualities in society, we act as salt and light of the world in preventing moral decay. We also point people to the salvation that is available in Jesus Christ.

Christians. We fear being “fired” from a job or losing someone’s admiration, friendship, etc. Remember: the Bible tells us that “the man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out” (Prov. 10:9). I can say confidently that no person who decides to obey God will ever regret it because His blessings far outweigh all else.

Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:18-35) illustrates how we must live. He said, “You know how I lived

**Qualities and Values of a Noble and Courteous Malaysian**

Belief in God, loyalty to king and country, obedience to laws and regulations, sincerity, mutual respect, love and affection, community spirit, knowledgeableness, physical and mental cleanliness, neighbourliness, cooperative spirit, moderation, thankfulness, competitiveness, valuing time, spirit of community living, giving and receiving pardon, self discipline, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness and justice, helping one another, agreeableness, care and concern, patience, understanding, tolerance, sympathy, humility, earnestness, respect for every individual’s rights, love of self, family, neighbours and society, holiness of heart, positive thinking, good conduct, sacrifice, sharing good and bad fortunes, genuineness, courage, generous disposition, confidence, contentedness, gentleness, directness, ambition, not taking others’ rights, and loving the environment.

It is said that the best way to show up a crooked stick is to lay beside it a straight one. By holding up such high standards, it will become clear that no one can meet them. Confucius was disappointed at the end of his life because he saw much injustice and wickedness and had no ultimate answer for them.

We have the answer – Jesus Christ – “who has been tempted in every way... yet was without sin” (Heb. 4:15), who has become “the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Heb. 5:9), and who will soon abolish sin and death forever. “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.” (Isa. 11:10)

That’s nation building and Kingdom building rolled into one!

the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia... I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God... I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing... ”

Let us declare the same to our family, friends, colleagues, and those we serve, that we have only sought to do right without fear of man or self-interest whatsoever. May the Lord bless our every endeavour as we determine to live lives of intergrity.

# Halting the HIV spread

## Is giving out free condoms and needles the solution?

Malaysia is perched on the edge of an HIV/AIDS epidemic and to curb the spread of the terrifying disease, the government is going ahead with a radical programme to distribute free condoms and syringes to drug addicts, despite criticism and opposition from several groups.

The pilot programme was swiftly drawn up following the warning from the World Health Organisation, which disclosed in its UN AIDS/WHO Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic 2004 that Malaysia was at the initial stage of an HIV epidemic.

According to the Health Ministry,

sexual activities.

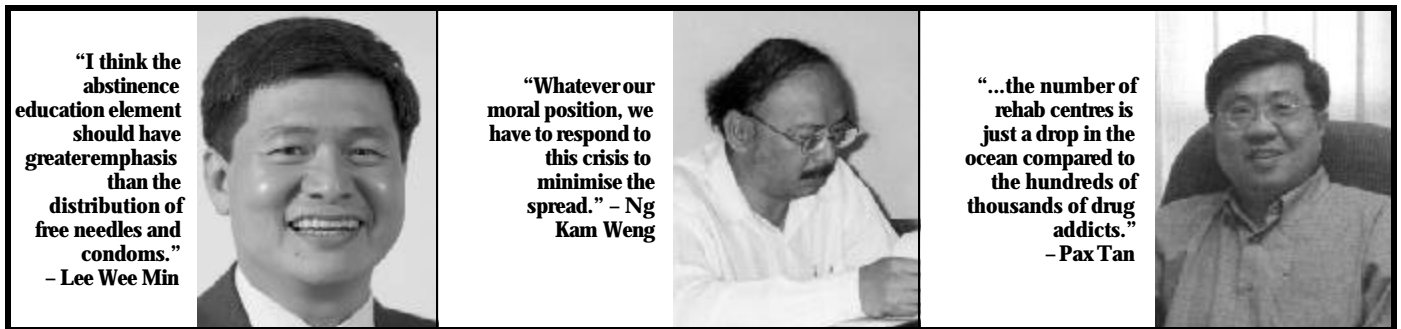
While it is a 'chicken or egg' situation, I would prefer a more proactive approach based on abstinence education because abstinence works every time. At the same time, there is a need to counsel and coach infected individuals who have the virus and, where necessary, provide them condoms and needles.

However, we must bear in mind that even when condoms are available, decisions on using them can be highly arbitrary. I think the abstinence education element should have greater emphasis than the distribution of free needles and condoms."

spread. In this context, we are willing to consider a *controlled* distribution of condoms and needles, but they must not be distributed indiscriminately.

In giving out free condoms, we must be cautious about giving them in the name of safe sex. Safe sex is just a cover-up for immoral sex. But where the poor are concerned, offering them free condoms is the right approach, so as to protect their wives, who are the innocent parties.

Needless to say, counselling should accompany free condoms. In the West, or in places where poverty is not an issue, giving out free condoms will only send



"I think the abstinence education element should have greater emphasis than the distribution of free needles and condoms."  
- Lee Wee Min

"Whatever our moral position, we have to respond to this crisis to minimise the spread."  
- Ng Kam Weng

"...the number of rehab centres is just a drop in the ocean compared to the hundreds of thousands of drug addicts."  
- Pax Tan

nearly 65,000 people have been diagnosed with HIV since 1996 and, if left unchecked, the number is expected to increase to 300,000 in a few years' time. Drug use lies behind the bulk of the HIV/AIDS cases in Malaysia, hence the free condom and needle programme.

Three Christian leaders share their views about the programme.

### **Lee Wee Min** **Executive Director** **Focus on the Family**

"I am appreciative of the government's efforts in trying to address the worsening AIDS situation, of which the majority of cases have been caused by the sharing of needles.

I commend the positive intention but I am uncertain about the impact. It is indeed a noble and positive effort to try to protect the innocent party from contracting the AIDS virus by giving out free needles and condom, but I feel this approach also propagates promiscuous

### **Ng Kam Weng** **Research Director** **Kairos Research Centre**

"Firstly, we must distinguish between our context and the Western context, which is premised on freedom of choice and the necessity to safeguard public health. Our approach should take into account compassion and education without compromising our moral values.

Abstinence is still the best Christian response to the AIDS situation; it should be the moral choice for Christians. But we are not addressing Christians alone. We have to recognise that it is unrealistic to expect people to follow the choice of abstinence. Because of this, we have to address the health risk these people pose to society.

The World Health Organisation has warned against an AIDS crisis. Let us not be judgemental but let us respond to the potentially explosive situation at hand. Whatever our moral position, we have to respond to this crisis to minimise the

the message of affirming their moral choice (of free sex). However, in places with poorer population, it has shown that making available free condoms does help in the battle against the HIV spread.

As for drug addicts, we recognise their plight and the complex circumstance they are in. The reality is that they are suffering, and in order to safeguard their health and the health of the public, external help should be offered to them but again, free needles must not be given indiscriminately. Again, the exercise should be carried out in a controlled environment where counselling is provided alongside the free needles.

As Christians, we must not be judgemental or seen to be judgmental. This will only drive away the very ones who need help. Drug addiction is a symptom of moral failure and we ought to help them to see the wrong and danger. Help them to address the underlying

moral weaknesses and sources rather than just treat the symptoms.”

**Pax Tan  
Senior Director of Prison, Drugs and  
AIDS, Malaysian Care**

“The government’s move is a special response to a special situation, which has reached an alarming stage. The primary thing is to arrest the virus from spreading, and the government’s radical approach is a practical way of dealing with the problem.

In theory, abstinence and rehabilitation are the best approach to stopping the virus spread. Don’t take

drugs, don’t have sex. But in practice, this is unreal. That 76 percent of the drug addicts are intravenous drug users (IDUs) indicate how the virus spreads, and that is through the sharing of needles. Needles are scarce because by law, we need a prescription to get a needle.

And most IDUs, because of their compelling need, will inject themselves wherever they are, even if they are undergoing rehabilitation in a rehab centre. True, the best solution and Christian approach is rehabilitation but the number of rehab centres is just a drop in the ocean compared to the hundreds



of thousands of drug addicts.

Given the circumstances and the dilemma we’re in, the Health Ministry has seemingly no alternative but to go ahead with this to stem the spread.

## School funds get boost from Charity Fund

NECF Malaysia presented cheques totalling half a million ringgit to principals and representatives of 33 schools nationwide to help them upgrade their school facilities and equipment. Each school received between RM10,000 and RM20,000.

The money, which was donated by Malaysian evangelicals who participated in last year’s Merdeka 40-day Fast and Prayer, was given away by Deputy Education Minister Dato’ Hon Choon Kim at a simple ceremony in Kuala Lumpur in June.

In his speech, Dato’ Hon expressed gratitude to NECF Malaysia for sharing the government’s burden of educating Malaysian children by helping the 33 schools. He said the

Government spent a quarter of its budget on education to educate five million students taught by 320,000 teachers in 10,000 schools.

“Education is not the sole responsibility of the government. The government needs the support of the community and non-governmental organisations to help educate the millions of children,” he said.

Earlier on, NECF Vice-Chairman Rev. Dr Eu Hong Seng said NECF was channelling the 2004 collection to education because it “recognised the supreme importance of education for nurturing the younger generation and preparing them for gainful employment and good citizenship”. The donation was specifically meant to help improve school facilities, which include building and equipment.

Rev. Eu also called upon the Christian community to once again participate in this year’s Merdeka 40-Day Fast and Prayer, which begins on July 21, and contribute the money saved from skipping their meals to charity in response to Isaiah 58:6-7.

In his welcoming address, NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong remarked that in recent years, evangelical Christians have become increasingly conscious of their role as citizens of the country and have sought to contribute to the country’s development in every sphere – social, economic, education, and others.

“NECF believes in helping everyone irrespective of race, culture, philosophy or religion. In the past years, the money from the Charity Fund has helped victims of the JE epidemic and the earthquake in Turkey, children in war-torn Sudan, as well as given to Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, North Korea, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

“The list includes Muslim as well as communist countries. This is evidence that we hold no prejudice against any group of people and find that it does not conflict with our faith to help people who are different from us... because we are all made in the image of God,” he said.



(Left pix) In response to the Government’s effort to instil a deeper respect for the national anthem, the ceremony started off with the singing of *Negaraku*.

(Bottom pix) Dato’ Hon (2nd from right) receiving the mock cheque from Rev. Eu. Sharing the moment are NECF Hon. Treasurer Sam Ang and Hon. Secretary Elder Kong Yeng Phooi (left and 2nd left respectively) and Rev. Wong (right).



# Women to Women



## KD Bok, My Father In Memoriam

BY DAVID BOK, FEBRUARY 2005

*Sons remember  
Dad and Mum in this  
issue of Women to Women.  
David Bok and the Chew  
brothers recall with  
gratitude the gracious  
work of the Lord in the  
lives of their  
Dad and Mum.*

KALASTRI Devasingam Bok, or KD Bok as he was known, was my father. He died suddenly, and quietly, on Dec 6, 2004. My mother had preceded him in 1991. In many ways, who we are is determined by our parents. Without them we do not exist. So a part of me – my genetic source code given by God – has gone, permanently.

### **My father & his family**

My father grew up in the Malacca Chetty community, a half millennium old hybrid of traders from India and local Malaysians. My mother was an orphan adopted by the same community. After their marriage, my parents settled in Kuantan on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

They had four children: 1) Me, the eldest – Devastri Parasurama aka David.

youngest, Devasingam, studied, married and settled in Melbourne, Australia.

Between us we gave my parents six grandchildren. Their names all begin with J: Jabez (23), Jared (21), Jessica (20), Jade or Ghaik Hoon (19), Jasmine (18) and Jihan (14).

### **My father & I**

In 1985 I was on a Navigators trip to Kuching, East Malaysia. A friend, whose father had just died in his sleep, told me that he had always meant to get to know his father. But his father was now dead, and this purpose was no longer possible. His plea: "Please don't make the same mistake I did. Don't procrastinate getting to know those you love." These "what I wish I had done" sermons are pretty powerful. So, the next year, I volunteered

an impossible task. Until one day when I was startled by a verse in the Bible that agreed with me: "*With **men** this is impossible, but **not** with God. **All** things are possible with God*" (Mark 10:27). I wrote my parents' names beside this verse, and with that encouragement, began praying regularly for them to understand God's plan for their lives.

In 1991 my father had a stroke, and asked if he and my mum could move to live with us. My wife and I saw this as an answer to prayer. In the first home we owned in Taman Tun Dr Ismail, Kuala Lumpur, my parents heard and discussed the gospel extensively with my wife Annabelle's mother, and during the weekly Bible discussions in our home.

In 1992 my family and I were on a Navigators assignment in Colorado Springs. My parents came to stay with us for a few months, during which time my mother died of a sudden heart attack. The week before, in our *après-diner* Bible discussions, almost daily our topic was death. Comments that she made assured us that her loyalties had changed from her previous gods to Jesus. At the memorial services, immediately after her death in Colorado Springs, and eight months later in Kuala Lumpur, my father went public in explaining his journey to faith in Jesus.



I've been with the Navigators, a Christian organisation, since 1966, when I began university in Kuala Lumpur. 2) Next, my brother, Sithambaram Kalastri aka Boy. He was the one who took after my father in his love for hunting wild boar. He drowned during a hunting trip in 1974, aged 24. 3) Then, my sister, Lena Periachee. She's been a dentist all her working life, the last few years back in our hometown of Kuantan. My father lived with her until his passing. 4) The

to take my father to Melbourne to visit my brother. It was the first of many trips when I took my father with me: going on family holidays, visiting my mother's grave in Colorado, visiting his parents' graves – to try to know and appreciate him.

### **My father & Jesus**

I had helped a number of people come to personal faith in Jesus, but whenever I thought of helping my parents, it seemed

# WITH THANKS, FOR DAD

## A true follower of Jesus Christ

I had prayed that when my father believed in Jesus, he would not default into a church-going Sunday Christian, but become the genuine article – a true follower of Jesus Christ.

In the first five years of his faith, my father finished reading the Bible nine times. After breakfast and the morning papers, he would leisurely read the Bible. One of my prized heirlooms is an indexed book with notes from his Bible reading on topics like baptism, the Holy Spirit, love, obedience, prayer. He also began waking up early every morning to pray for all his surviving relatives.

My father began to share his faith with relatives. This spawned another Bible study group with him and some relatives, all over 70 years old. One was blind, one deaf and one lame. The blind didn't see, the deaf didn't hear and the lame didn't walk, but over the three years that they met, they all "had the good news preached to them" (Luke 7:22).

My father was hard of hearing, and one time misunderstood and snubbed a younger man, whose words he had misheard. When I pointed out that he had misheard the other man's words, and an apology was due, he equivocated, "But".

I said, "the Bible says you have to apologise." "Where does it say that?" he replied. I pointed out some passages. One month later he showed me a photocopy of the letter of apology that he had written to the younger man.

A man of 85 apologising to a younger man, in my books, is a miracle of transformation – brought about by my father's love for God's word and willingness to submit to God's will.

When my father died, he received no Christian funeral because he had declined to be baptised. His study of the Bible had convinced him that baptism was primarily spiritual, not physical. He thus did not appear on any church register, and was therefore not entitled to a burial plot in a Christian cemetery.

## A spiritual assessment & legacy

What do you call a man who, after coming to a personal faith in Jesus Christ, sought the Bible diligently to discover God's purposes for him in Christ, obeyed God's will as he understood it, even if it went against his previous way of life, but who was not baptised, didn't take on a Christian name (his middle name *Devasingam* is the Hindu lion god), and never became a member of any official church?

In the words of Jesus, in Matthew 7: 20–21, 24–5

*"By their fruit you will recognise them. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven . . . Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.*

I would call him a true follower of Jesus Christ.

At his funeral in Kuantan, members of his Bible study group shared the following about him:

- 1 He always kept his word. If he said four o'clock, he meant four o'clock, even if it was raining.
- 2 He loved the Bible and made great effort to understand and obey it.
- 3 He had a sense of humour. Without any attempt on his part, this has transferred to the men in our family.
- 4 He liked to help people. Many people of odd shape and situation passed through our home, to ask and receive help from my father.
- 5 He cultivated a large network of friends. His diaries had long lists of names, and he maintained an extensive correspondence with people around the world.

**David is married to Annabelle and they have three children. The Bok family now lives in Singapore.**

*By their fruit  
you will  
recognise them*







# Mum's Legacy

## Our Mother, A Teacher

BY CHEW PHYE HUAT AND CHEW PHYE KEAT

AS we reflect upon our mother's legacy to us as a teacher, there are two values in her teaching life that we inherited from her. These values were learnt through her life's experiences rather than from her teacher-training days. She taught us these values more through her life than her instructional moments with us. Although both of us have not ended up in the teaching profession, we carry these values with us and uphold them in our respective church teaching ministry.

### The two teaching values we learned from Mum

**1** One must be a student before one can be a teacher. Mum grew up in a discouraging family environment for a budding teacher. Firstly, her parents were not keen on her going to school! This was in the 1930s in Kuala Lumpur when education was optional.

However, due to a timely intervention by an aunt who mentioned matter-of-factly

that if Mum did not go to school to be educated, she would not be able to read a letter from a mistress to her husband-to-be.

Thus, Mum was permitted to attend primary school! God certainly does work in mysterious ways.

Mum just loved going to school. She would diligently do her housework both before and after school just to make sure that her parents had no cause for complaints. However, her education went beyond the study of just school subjects. Being in the Bukit Bintang Girls' School which was a Christian mission school, she studied and excelled in Bible Knowledge.

Truly, Mum did not give up her love

for education and Bible reading to her dying days. During the last two years of her life when diabetes had affected her eyesight and she found it difficult to read, Mum would still get up at 6a.m. every day just to read her Bible (with the aid of notes) and the Daily Light (a collection of daily Bible readings).

Throughout her life, Mum was a fervent student, especially of the Bible. Moreover, she knew her content well (being an English and Geography major). Hence, she was able to impart her knowledge to others, whether they were students in school or women at the church Bible study.

**2** Beyond the classroom, one teaches through one's life and example. (Teaching is therefore more than the dissemination of information).

There are many former students of the Bukit Bintang Boys' Secondary School who speak of Mum's love for Geography. Mum inspired a generation of BBBS students to

note the five *Great Lakes of North America*, the hot, dry summers and the mild, wet winters of the *Mediterranean* climate. She was known

as a strict teacher and did not tolerate tomfoolery. However, nobody would disagree that her no-nonsense approach had good intentions. Basically, she wanted every student to excel in his or her studies.

Her attentiveness to her students did not end at the classroom level; she took an active interest in them. Instinctively she knew if students faced difficulties at home. She had gone through similar experiences as a student herself and wanted every student to have a fair chance

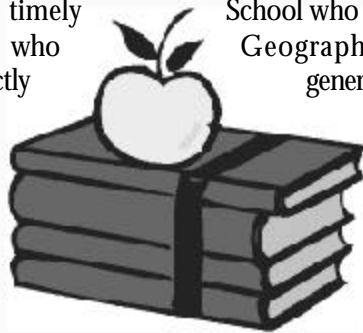
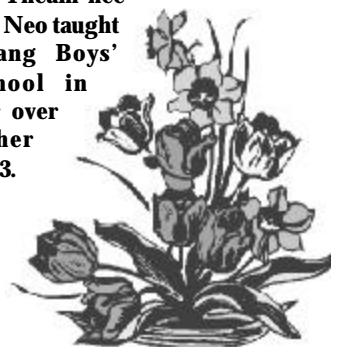
at succeeding. She also made the welfare of her students an item of her personal prayer life. She was never timid about her Christian faith. Openly, she encouraged attendance at Scripture Union and Chapel services.

Immediately after her retirement from teaching, Mum spent a lot of her free time leading women's Bible study groups and visiting the sick and lonely church members. It was then that we saw another side of her, which we had not witnessed before in her teaching career.

As Mum could not drive to do the pastoral visits, she had to rely on some ladies in the church for transport. As these women drove her to the different places, Mum mentored them in the art of doing pastoral visits and praying for the people in need. Some of these women are still doing this type of pastoral care today. They would remark that Mum showed them the way to serve in that capacity.

Undeniably, the Lord Jesus Christ was the motivating force behind Mum's life and mission as a teacher. She loved being a teacher because of the debt of love she owed to the Great Teacher who gave himself to die for her. Therefore, she saw her teaching vocation as an extension of the mission of the Great Teacher.

**Mrs Chew Chye Theam nee Madam Ong Lim Neo taught at Bukit Bintang Boys' Secondary School in Petaling Jaya for over 20 years until her retirement in 1983. She went home to be with the Great Teacher on Feb 11. Used with permission from TCF In Step 2005**



# The Man I Want

BY TERESA LIM



**“Before you marry, open two eyes After you marry, close one.”  
– Jamaican Proverb**

HOW did you end up being a pastor’s wife?’ someone asked me one day.

That question brought me back to Gladys Alyward’s book, *The Small Woman*. I was given the book for Christmas when I was fifteen. Gladys was a remarkable woman missionary who served with the OMF.

Her ministry to the Chinese people was an inspiration to me. I had wept as I read about her passion for the Chinese people, her courage in speaking up to the Mandarin leaders, and her unwavering faith in the Lord. I knelt down beside my bed, eyes puffy with crying, and said to the Lord, ‘She’s not even a Chinese! I’m Chinese! Send me!’ But God had other plans.

On 1st May 1978 I met Tony at a parachurch organization while volunteering to help out with some work there. He was seated beside piles and piles of books. He wore a white and blue checked shirt and white trousers. He introduced himself with a disarming smile and asked for my name.

‘Teresa,’ I answered politely. He held on to my hand. ‘Teresa... what?’ he asked. ‘Chen,’ I replied. What did it matter what my surname was, I fleetingly wondered.

I had been praying for a husband. My pastor had preached many sermons on love and marriage. He had implored us the young people, ‘Start praying for a life partner now. Don’t wait until you get involved. It’ll be too late then. You won’t want to listen to God anymore.’

‘How wise,’ I thought to myself. Seated in the front pew Sunday after Sunday, I resolved to do just that. I determined to marry with both eyes open. During that time, I came across a poem, *The Man I Want*. The poem was written by a teenage girl looking for a husband and it was expressed as a prayer to the Lord. My heart resonated with every word.

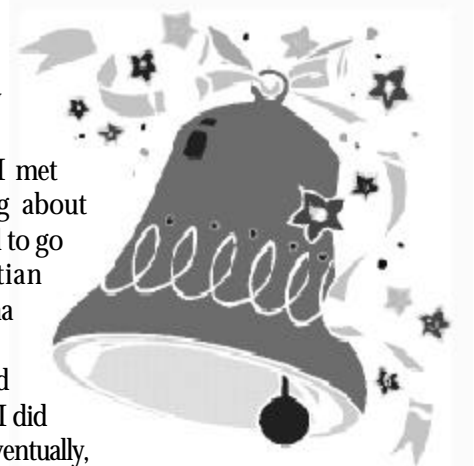
*“Dear God, I pray all unafraid  
As girls are wont to be  
I do not want a handsome man  
But make him, Lord, like Thee.  
I do not need one big and strong  
Nor yet so very tall,  
Nor need he be some genius  
Or wealthy, Lord, at all;  
But let his head be high, dear God,  
and let his eye be dear,  
His shoulders straight, whate’er his fate  
Whate’er his earthly sphere.  
And let his face have character,  
A ruggedness of soul,  
And let his whole life show, dear God,  
A singleness of goal,  
And when he comes as he will come  
With quiet eyes aglow  
I’ll know, dear Lord,  
That he’s the man  
I prayed for long ago.”*

The poet’s name was Ruth Bell. She later met and married Billy Graham.

On 1st May 1978, I met Tony. He was praying about being a pastor. I wanted to go into fulltime Christian service. Suddenly China seemed so far away.

I married Tony and became a pastor’s wife. I did not go to China. But eventually, years later, China came to me in the form of hundreds of students. That was when I taught them English in college.

**Note: This is a sneak page of a book Tony and Teresa Lim are writing. Watch out for its soon release!**



## WOMEN to WOMEN

Advisor/Co-ordinator: Goh Poh Gai

*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.*

Nationwide 40-Day Fast & Prayer  
July 22 – Aug 30, 2005

# Turn to our Father in heaven



**T**hat prayer is important for our nation cannot be overstated. While fasting for his nation, John Knox prayed, “Give me Scotland or I will perish”. And when the national day of prayer and fasting was designated in America, Abraham Lincoln charged all Americans “to observe and keep that day according to their several creeds and modes of worship, in all humility and with all religious solemnity, to the end that the united prayer of the nation may ascend to the Throne of Grace and bring down plentiful blessings upon our country”.

The biblical illustration of fasting and praying for the nation is best represented by Daniel’s example where he gives his “attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes” (Dan. 9:3).

“Everything about nations is intended to provide an arena, a way in which God’s glory and His goodness can be unveiled,” Max Lucado once said in an interview with Focus on the Family in regards to the US national day of prayer.

If one person’s prayer can make a difference to a nation, how much more so when thousands of people join in prayer nationwide.

It is time to seek the Lord until He rains righteousness on our nation. As we stand in the gap for our land, we will see greater transformation of churches, communities and the nation.

“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour” (1 Tim. 2:1–3).

This is the season of prayer and fast for our nation. We bid

Christians throughout the land to come in one heart and mind to entreat God’s mercy and grace on our nation.



#### **Pray with us for:**

- Wholehearted participation, fervency in prayer, and unity in one heart and spirit. This year’s 40-day Fast & Prayer from July 22 to August 30 is themed “Turn to Our Father in Heaven”.

- The three national prayer conferences – that lives will be impacted and participants will be inspired with an increased desire to seek God and love the nation, and be filled with compassion for the lost.

English-speaking national conference (25–27 Aug)

English-speaking children’s intercession workshop (26–27 Aug)

Chinese-speaking national conference (23–25 Aug)

BM-speaking national conference (29–31 Aug)

Conference speakers – for wisdom, insight and discernment of God’s purpose for Malaysia. They are Peter Tsukahira and Pr Djohan Handojo (English); Jeffrey and Irene Chew, and Eunice Wong (Children’s intercession); Rev. Dr Xiao Wan (Chinese); and Rev. Rachmat T. Manullang (BM).

- Merdeka prayer rallies in all major cities and towns between Aug 29 and 31; Klang Valley: Aug 28 at 7:30pm at Dewan PGRM, Kuala Lumpur

We also encourage you to sign up for the conference and the round-the-clock prayer at [www.necf.org.my](http://www.necf.org.my); and take part in the Merdeka prayer rally in your town.

# Pastors: 'We're Open'

**HOW are Malaysian pastors faring in their relationships with their congregations? Are they willing to be transparent with their members, or do they shy away? What goes through their minds when members leave the church? NECF Malaysia Research Executive LIM SIEW FOONG shares her findings based on the responses filed by 192 pastors on the *Emotional Connection Between Pastors and Congregation Survey* conducted last year.**

Fellowship or *koinonia* – used in the New Testament to mean the living bond that unites Christians – is the essence of church life. Church has therefore been described as an 'association' that involves close, altruistic, mutual relationships and participation to the point of even sharing in suffering (2 Cor. 8:1–5; Phil 3:10). Since one of the issues in relationships is to co-ordinate all activities that benefit all parties, conflict of interests is bound to happen.

Church life is about people and relationships. While Scripture tells us to be at peace with all men, conflicts within churches on the globe have increased considerably. Perhaps this is because today's Christians are more knowledgeable and outspoken than those of yesteryears, and pastors or leaders may view such forthrightness as a challenge to their authority. In fact, many of the pastors surveyed listed members' lack of submissiveness as one of the greatest challenges.

The 2001 NECF Survey of Churches, Pastors & Christians indicated that more than half of Malaysian churches were either going through or had had one or more significant conflict(s).

Two-thirds of the pastors surveyed in this 2004 survey agreed that irreconcilable differences are a common reason for discontinuation of pastoral service. But conflict in itself is not necessarily evil. Conflict, if handled appropriately, develops great leaders, matures the Church and strengthens the body of Christ. However, unresolved tensions not only divide the Church, they also rob us of effective ministers and ministries to fulfil God's mandate.

The Consultation on Conflict Resolution organised by the NECF Research Commission in July 2003 identified several causes of

unmanageable or poorly-handled conflicts in churches.

Among them were personality clashes; suspicion towards one another; lack of commitment to building and maintaining lasting relationships; ineffective communication skills; differences in vision and mission; differing leadership styles; and differences over church management, especially on practical issues such as money and resources. These factors are confirmed by many pastors in the 2004 survey as difficulties that test their ability in the ministries.

The good news is 77% of pastors surveyed perceive their relationships with congregations as satisfying and beyond the superficial level (Table 1).

TABLE 1	
Pastors think:	
Relationships with congregation beyond superficial level	77%
Relationship with congregation satisfying	77%
Irreconcilable differences cause pastors to discontinue their service	66%

While we believe that all pastors value relationships and are aware of the need of conflict management, some pastors may be better equipped with skills in resolving conflicts and/or are committed to a ministry of reconciliation.

Discerning that honesty and building a relationship on trust is one of the keys to successful leadership, NECF Malaysia attempts to assess pastors' perspectives on honesty towards their congregations. 82% of the pastors in the survey say that their members want them to be honest.

Although honesty enhances the development of a relationship, it may also be hazardous since it requires a certain amount of self-disclosure. Revealing personal information, particularly

TABLE 2	
In the congregations where relationships are claimed to be satisfying and beyond superficial level, pastors' perception on honesty is as follows:	
Not afraid to share weaknesses	62%
It's a risk to disclose oneself	32%
Congregation may lose respect of me	29%
Congregation may see me as weak	32%
Congregation may think that pastors are stuck in sinful habits	33%
Willing to share weaknesses <u>in order to</u> help congregation to grow	75%

TABLE 3	
Pastors' perception on high turnover in church:	
Feel responsible	54%
Cause a pastor to lose enthusiasm over his ministry	43%
Members feel that pastors do not care enough for them	38%

weaknesses, makes one vulnerable to certain risks such as rejection, loss of control or betrayal.

Despite these potential hazards, 68% of the pastors would rather be transparent with their members than build walls to protect their image. In congregations where relationships are claimed to be satisfying and beyond the superficial level, 62% of the pastors are not afraid to share their weaknesses while 33% think that it is risky to do so. However, 75% are willing to share their weaknesses if that will help their congregation grow.

To appreciate the contributions made by our pastors, we must make an effort to understand their world and challenges they face (Table 3).

How do pastors feel when their members leave the church? 54% feel responsible when there is a high turnover in their respective churches, and the predicament may result in some pastors losing enthusiasm over their pastoral ministries. Finally, it is significant to note that 80% of the pastors surveyed admit that they need to be needed because they too are human, just like any other member in the church.

**•Next issue: Pastors' emotional outlet and relationship with the church leadership.**

# Good Effort By Melaka Churches

THE NECF Foundation's first anniversary dinner gathering in June was a showcase of unity for Melaka churches, which worked together to produce a highly enjoyable and yet meaningful event. The dinner was attended by some 320 guests who were treated to a host of high quality performances of songs and dance.

Award-winning singer Juwita Suwito sang three songs and promptly gave an encore to a cheering crowd. Real Love Ministry Director Edmund Smith also presented four songs while children from

The Salvation Army and the Hosanna Assembly Church provided a sentimental touch to the evening with their well-rehearsed dance routines.

The dinner also saw the soft launch of the NECF insurance plan that offers financial protection against premature death, disability or critical illnesses, and retirement fund in the event that no claim was made.

Thanks to the dinner, Melaka churches now have a better understanding of the ministries of NECF Malaysia and the presence and purpose of the Foundation.



Juwita (top) and Edmund Smith (right)



## Prayer Reps Seek United Intercession

ABOUT 100 Christians involved in the intercession ministry came from all over Malaysia to share, discuss and pray over issues affecting their states at the annual NECF National Prayer Consultation in May.

The consultation, held for the second time, saw a representation from all the 14 states, signalling the great concern Christians of all denominations have on the need for united intercession for the nation.

As if sensing this concern, Grace Hee welcomed the participants with a call to them to be "single minded to seek God in a concerted effort to hear what He has to say to us during this time". The NECF Prayer Commission Chairperson said the one thing that the commission hoped to achieve through the consultation was to strengthen and intensify prayer networks throughout the country to help fulfil the Great Commission.

Besides this, the consultation also aimed to come up with a five-year plan for strategic prayer over the nation, which it did at the end of the three-day deliberation. For this purpose, the country was divided into six regions – North, East Coast, Central and South (for the peninsula) and Sabah and Sarawak (East Malaysia).

The five-year plans include strategies to strengthen prayer

YB Tan Cheng Liang (holding microphone) praying with participants.



networks and inter-church relations; and prayer targeting crucial issues within the region, such as socio-economic issues, politics and evangelism.

One of the highlights of the consultation was the session by Jawi State Assemblyman Tan Cheng Liang who shared how she was called into politics, how the Lord confirmed her calling ~~to save the rakyat~~ with the increased margin of victory over the three elections, and the challenges she faced as a Christian politician. The winsome and articulate politician had the participants roaring in laughter with her quips, and yet managed to stir them to seriously intercede for the many issues facing the country and to pray for the leaders and the Christian politicians.

### Should we sing *Negaraku* during Sunday Worship Service?

**THE** Government has made it compulsory for the singing of *Negaraku* at the beginning of all government functions and any private sector functions attended by government representatives. The move is part of the *Kempen Pembudayaan dan Penghayatan Lagu Negaraku* launched in July to instil love and respect for the national anthem and inculcate a sense of patriotism.

The move is in keeping with the Merdeka season and as Christians spend this time praying for the country, should churches also play the national anthem during the Sunday worship service? What do you think? After all, the national anthem is a symbol of our pledge to be good and loyal citizens of our country. E-mail your views to:

editor@necf.org.my

# Mediation and Conflict Resolution Workshop



NECF Malaysia's first mediation and conflict resolution training programme will kick off with a foundation workshop from Sept 13 to 15 at PJEFC Heritage Centre, Petaling Jaya.

The six-month programme is run with the help of Eagles Mediation and Counselling Centre (EMCC) Singapore, the only agency in Singapore appointed by the Singapore Subordinate Courts to mediate divorce cases.

EMCC will conduct the foundation

workshop and the advance workshop, scheduled for next January.

The fee for the foundation workshop has been heavily subsidised from RM1,880 to RM450 to enable more churches to participate. The workshop will be conducted in a lively and highly interactive manner, and participants can look forward to an exciting time of learning together.

To register and for more information, contact NECF at 03-7727 8227.

# NECF Tamil Conference



THE conference aims to unite Tamil pastors and workers together, and inspire a renewed vision for the Tamil work in Malaysia. The two-day conference, organised by the NECF Tamil Commission, will be held at Wisma Eagles, Subang Jaya, and begin August 23. Speakers are Rev. David Mohan and Rev. Mohan C. Lazarus, both from India.

Rev. Mohan started New Life Assembly of God church in Madras in 1973. Today, the church runs six Sunday services for over 15,000 people. The church has also planted over 120 churches.

Rev. Lazarus serves with Jesus Redeems Ministry which has sent out 104 missionaries through over 20 mission agencies throughout India. The conference fee of RM20 (subsidised) covers meals and materials.

# Youth Workers Consultation

TODAY'S youths grow up in a new culture – that of globalisation, information and communication technology (ICT) and postmodernism. MTV and the Internet are just two media which have radically moulded their thoughts, value system and lifestyle.

In view of these developments, it may be difficult to reach them effectively using the methods of yesteryear.

The NECF YouthNet is organising a Youth Workers Consultation to discuss and devise strategies to strengthen youth ministries. With better knowledge and new strategies, we will be able to help our young people navigate the unavoidable challenges of adolescence and modernisation.

The consultation will be in two parts – plenary sessions taken by speakers and roundtable discussions where participants exchange information on problems facing youths and youth ministries.

The speakers are:

- **Rev. Kenneth Chin** (Senior Pastor of ACTS Church and founder of Asian Youth Ambassadors);
- **Dr Herbert Tan** from Malaysia Campus Crusade for Christ;
- **Rev. Koh Gim Lam** from Scripture Union;
- **Dr Leong Tien Fock** (Malaysia Campus Crusade for Christ Research Coordinator); and

- **Rev. Wong Kim Kong** (NECF Malaysia Secretary-General).

The roundtable discussion will discuss issues such as raising youth ministers, new ways to reach non-Christian youths, how Christian Fellowships in schools and universities can be effective witness in their places, and how the NECF YouthNet can better serve the Malaysian Church.

The discussions will be facilitated by:

- Pr Margaret Loy (DUMC Youth Pastor);
- Ms Annette Arurajah (Fellowship of Evangelical Students General Secretary);
- Rev. Christopher Rao (Trinity Methodist Conference National Youth Director);
- Mr John Yip (Malaysia Sports Coalition Leadership Training Facilitator);
- Mr Joshua Liong (Focus on the Family Curriculum Coordinator of *No Apologies* Programme); and
- Mr Jason Fong (Scripture Union General Secretary).

The three-day consultation will be held at Genting Highland's Awana Country Resort beginning Sept 26.

Cost is RM330 per person (inclusive of food and accommodation).

This consultation is a timely and crucial meeting to address the challenges and needs of our youths. All those involved in youth ministries are strongly urged to attend. Call NECF office 03-7727 8227 for more information.

**40-Day  
Fast and Prayer**  
July 22 to Aug 30

**Be part of this year's prayer  
movement and see the hand of  
God move in our land.**



# Neighbour Focus



**WE continue with our prayer focus on South-east Asian countries in preparation for the 3rd South-east Asia Prayer Consultation which will be held in Kuala Lumpur in October. Representatives from 11 countries will attend to share and pray over their countries.**

**This issue, we highlight Thailand and Singapore (shaded black on the map, top and bottom respectively). The reports are provided by the NECF Research Department. We hope to raise awareness of our neighbours and the urgent issues facing them, and may the increased knowledge enhance our prayers for them.**

## T H A I L A N D

**Population:** 65,444,371 (*Est. CIA Factbook, April 21, 2005*)

**Ethnic groups:** Thai 75%, Chinese 14%, Others 11%

**Religions** (estimated): Buddhism 95% Muslims 3.8%, Christianity 0.5%, Hinduism 0.1%, Others 0.6%

THAILAND is often called the 'land of smiles' and is noted for its food and gentle culture. On the seedier side, it is notorious for cheap prostitution and sex tourism, and suffers from pollution, corruption and moral quagmire.

In 1932, a bloodless coup transformed Thailand from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy. Thailand was ruled by a series of military governments until the 1992 elections when it became a functioning democracy with constitutional changes of government. In 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra became the prime minister and his party won the recent February elections, but lost all parliamentary seats in the southern provinces of Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani.

A culture of corruption permeates not only the executive branch, but also the local government authorities and some units of the security forces. Thailand ranks 64<sup>th</sup> (out of 146 countries) in the 2004 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index. The disregard for rule of law helps perpetuates illegal activities, including human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and prostitution.

Generally, the government respects human rights, but persistent clashes between civilians and authorities in the southern region may indicate otherwise.

When martial law was declared in the region in early 2004, the army and police personnel were reported to have used excessive force and caused the deaths of some 570 people.

There have been occasional arbitrary arrest and detention. At times, security forces infringed on citizens' privacy rights. The Government may restrict freedom of speech (and press) in order to preserve national security, public order and morals, the rights of others, and protecting royal Family and Buddhism. The fear of political or economic repercussions has also encouraged some form of self-censorship.

Violence and societal discrimination against women are problems. Rape and other kinds of sexual abuse have increased tremendously (AP, May 24, 05). Trafficking in women and children, coerced prostitution and forced labour are grave concerns. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS, especially among sex workers, is the subject of media and academic attention. Societal discrimination against hill tribes and religious and ethnic minorities continues; they face restrictions on their movement, have no citizenship, cannot own land, and are not protected by labour laws.

The law provides for freedom of religion and citizens can proselytise freely. There are five officially recognised ecclesiastical groups: Buddhist, Muslim, Catholic (which includes four Protestant sub-groups), Brahmin-Hindu, and Sikh. Under the Religious Organisations Act, a new religion can be registered if a national census shows that it has at least 5,000 adherents, with a uniquely recognisable theology, and is not politically active. (The government has not recognised any new religious group

since 1984.) Unregistered religious organisations, however, operate freely. Foreign missionary groups are free to work throughout the country. However, the activities of Muslim professors and clerics are under scrutiny on grounds of national security. The Penal Code prohibits the insult or disturbance of religious places or services of all the recognised religions. Religious instruction (on recognised religions) is required in public schools at both the primary and secondary education levels.

There are no reports of religious prisoners or detainees or forced religious conversions. The relationship among religions is generally amicable. The heightening tension between local Islamic and Buddhist communities in the southern regions has not resulted in open communal conflict.

Discrimination, if any, appears to be linked more to ethnicity than to religion. While we thank God for religious freedom, Thai Christians face the challenges of syncretism and social pressure. Buddhism, animist beliefs and Thai social structure greatly affect their ideas and understanding of God. Overall church growth has been disappointing.

**PRAY FOR:** A just and transparent government and judiciary, honesty and integrity among the ruling officials and the prime minister; **An** effective legal and social framework to break the culture of corruption and increasing crime rate; **Protection** and greater awareness of the plight of women, children and the hill tribe minorities; **Spiritual** renewal and high standards of holiness in church life, and for godly leadership; and **Effective** partnership among churches and Christian organisations.

# FOR YOUR PRAYERS

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: NEIGHBOUR FOCUS

## SINGAPORE

**Population:** 4,425,720

**Ethnic groups:** Chinese 76.7%, Malay 14%, Indian 7.9%, Others 1.4%

(Statistics: CIA Factbook, May 17, 2005)

**Religions** (2000 Government Census): Buddhist (incl. Taoist, Confucianist) 51%, Muslim 15%, Christian 15%, Hindu 4%, Others 15%

SINGAPORE, known as the squeaky clean and orderly 'Garden City of the East' is politically stable, economically rich and highly developed with a remarkably open and corruption-free environment. It is also one of the world's most prosperous nations, comparable to the leading nations in Western Europe.

Singapore has been ruled by the People's Action Party (PAP) since becoming a parliamentary republic in 1965. The Government believes that social order can only be established by placing society above individual self, and therefore some degree of personal freedom must be sacrificed. Although the new prime minister, Lee Hsien Long, has called for an "open" and "inclusive", "a broad array of restrictive laws remained in place, curtailing the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly" (Amnesty Human Rights Report 2005).

The judiciary is efficient and constitutionally independent with some official limitations on the judicial review. Government leaders have reportedly used court proceedings, in particular defamation suits, against political opponents and critics (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2004, released February 2005). This inhibits political life and engenders a climate of self-censorship among journalists. However, some progress towards greater openness has been seen in recent years.

Although the Constitution permits official restrictions on freedom of speech

and freedom of expression, the Government generally respects human rights. The police force is well trained, effective and highly disciplined. Corruption is not a problem. There are no substantiated instances of police abuse of detainees. Some laws – the ISA, the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act (CLA), the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA), and the Undesirable Publications Act (UPA) – have provisions for arrest and detention without a warrant or judicial review, and the detainees are not entitled to a public trial. It is also believed that telephone conversation and the use of Internet are routinely monitored.

The Parliament may impose restrictions on the rights to assembly in the interest of security, public order, or morality. Organised political activities are prohibited (except by groups registered as political parties or political organisations).

Singapore has not been marked as a gross abuser of human rights. In terms of religious freedom, the Constitution provides that every citizen or person in the country has the right to profess, practice, or propagate his religious belief so long as such activities do not breach any other laws relating to public order, public health, or morality.

Some religious groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church, are banned, but the Government does not arrest members merely for being believers.

The 1992 Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA) gives the Government the power to restrain leaders and members of religious groups and institutions from carrying out political activities, "exciting disaffection against" the Government, creating "ill will" between religious groups, or carrying out subversive activities (International

Religious Freedom Report Sept 2004). Violation of a MRHA restraining order is a criminal offence.

Mindful of the past inter-communal tension, the Government has taken measures to ensure racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural non-discrimination and harmony. Activities that could upset inter-communal relations, such as unsolicited public proselytising, are discouraged. In 1974 the Government "advised" the Bible Society of Singapore to stop publishing materials in Malay.

In late 1988 and early 1989, a group of leaders, including the then PM Lee Kuan Yew, condemned "insensitive evangelisation" as a serious threat to racial harmony.

There is no state religion, and the amicable relationship among religions has contributed to religious freedom.

Today many young people go to church. However, the lure of a luxurious lifestyle, and responsibility to parents within the culture's strong family ties, are constant challenges faced by the Church. It has been reported that many young believers become inactive once they marry and are caught up in the career chase.

**PRAY:** For Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and cabinet leaders for righteous leadership; **that** the Government continues to uphold religious freedom and favors the Church; **for** unity among churches; **for** churches to disciple congregations to cope with affluence, materialism and commercialism; **for** wisdom, sensitivity and boldness for churches in outreaches (Malays represent 14% of the population and are considered Muslim by birth. Few of them get to hear the gospel because Christians are fearful of upsetting their culture); **and** more missionaries to commit to longer-term missions and projects.

