

EDITORIAL

THE UNHOLY ROUTE

Wealth and status are not enough these days. For the extra edge, we now need to prove our intellectual ability, and what better way than a PhD honorific to our name, a qualification that has become more attainable due to the growing affluence of our society.



The World In The Church

But not everyone has the time nor the mental capacity to travel the traditional route to obtain it. Out of desperation comes the clever idea of cash, or other means, in exchange for the prized PhD. Where there are willing buyers, there are even more willing sellers.

The local newspapers uncovered a can of worms when they recently exposed the scam of one purported prominent person who had conned a number of people into buying PhDs from an Italian university for at least RM20,000 each. Following the exposé, a daily reported, “Some fake schools in the US were awarding as many as 500 PhDs every month.”

It is understandable if the world pursues titles, from *datukships* to doctorate degrees, for personal glory. What is alarming is that there appears

to be a similar lust in Christendom.

For some time now, reports have been circulating of Christian ministers obtaining their PhDs from institutions – such as churches and para-church organisations – which clearly do not have or lack the credentials to award the title. It is also a fact that there exist seminaries which almost guarantee any applicants their PhD with low entry requirements, cheap fees and little effort.

Similarly, we hear of doubtful practices in the awarding of honorary PhD, which is meant to be a special award bestowed by universities to people who have contributed significantly to society in various fields. Like some shady secular universities, we now have seminaries offering honorary PhDs for reasons that are only known to the recipients.

All these dubious practices have caused people to become suspicious of

anyone with a ‘Dr’ to his name. People are now inclined to wonder if the doctorate is genuinely earned or obtained the ‘*pasar malam*’ (flea market) way, or worse, bought.

For those who are pastors and church leaders, the challenge to maintain the equilibrium of leading-to-serve is a tough call. One of the real dangers faced by leaders is the temptation to seek greater recognition. One way to achieve this is to get a title, and since knowledge is highly regarded these days, a PhD honorific has become the ‘in-thing’.

Lest one gets the wrong impression, pursuing higher academic qualifications seek knowledge and understanding. But we need to ask: “What is the goal of our pursuit of the PhD (or any title) in an unworthy manner?”

Renowned historian Prof Emeritus Datuk Dr Khoo Kay Kim recently said in an interview with *Star Education* (Jan 26, *Sunday Star*): “Conventionally, people do their PhD because they either want to do research or teach in a university, take a leading role in developing policy based on research, or some combination of these goals. The underlying reason to enrol in a doctoral programme, however should be the desire to become more intellectually engaged and more critically sophisticated in the study of some issue or field.”

The Goal of All Pursuits

We Christians can learn from this wholesome perspective towards education. But we can go one step further – by adopting a Kingdom mentality to our PhD (or any title) quest. Somebody once asked, “Is leadership a function or

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No Short Cuts

Two local seminary principals share with *Berita NECF* their concern over Christians' fixation with the PhD title. **DR EZRA KOK** of Seminari Theoloji and **REV. DR TAN KIM SAI** of Malaysia Bible Seminari also call for a re-thinking of giving out honorary PhDs, a practice that is slowly becoming a contentious issue.

How is this 'pasar malam' PhD trend developing in the Malaysian Church?

EK: Since people always recognise the PhD degree as an academic degree – and no one can actually get the degree overnight without doing some serious studies – there are Christians negotiating for *honorary* titles, such as Doctor of Divinity or Doctor of Ministry. And some would opt for minimal studies to be awarded a doctoral degree, which has no academic value at all.

Do you think seminaries are lowering their conditions or making it easy for Christians to earn the PhD degree?

EK: No seminaries I know of dare to grant such degree for low academic performance since it's a recognised academic degree. But there are some seminaries granting Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) for very minimal work or research. Therefore, one must learn to differentiate different kinds of doctoral degrees. I would suggest that one list down exactly what are the degrees and the names of the university or seminary.

TKS: Malaysian seminaries that I know of are not offering the PhD. As for seminaries elsewhere, the tendency and danger (of lowering standards) is definitely there, as education has become big global business today.

How are seminaries that dubiously offer the PhD affecting Christian education at large?

EK: When such seminaries give out low (or no-) standard degrees, it threatens our integrity as a Christian college of higher learning. Such dishonesty only brings shame to us and to God. Secondly, it sends a very wrong message to Christians at large. Some people may think that scholarship is worthless, and is cheap to come by.

TKS: Such seminaries are lowering not only the standard of Christian/theological education, but also the prestige and integrity of the genuine degree holders (which is injustice to them). Consequently our degrees may be despised, bringing down also the name of the Church.

What are the reasonable criteria for one to achieve a PhD degree?

EK: In the British tradition, it requires at least three years of full-time research and a high standard doctoral dissertation. The PhD dissertation is expected to break new grounds in terms of knowledge and is publishable. The entry qualification is a good master degree or first class honours in the bachelor degree. A good PhD dissertation is always internationally recognised.

• See next page

• From previous page

a status?" Similarly, we ask, "Is a PhD title a function or a status?" How will it serve the purposes of God?

A local Christian businessman, one of the wealthiest and most influential in the country, recently told a group of people of his wish to be the richest man in the world. Before the stunned congregation could react to his remark, he quickly added it was so that he could then tell everyone that the provider of his riches is Jesus Christ. The businessman said his thought was inspired by a report in a magazine quoting Bill Gates

as saying that he relied only on himself to gain his wealth.

Finally, in all our pursuits, let us as Christians travel the righteous path as a testimony of integrity. If a reputable non-religious doctoral degree normally takes four years of labour and sacrifice, shouldn't we match that standard? If a secular university stints in its awarding of honorary PhD, bestowing it after a stringent and thorough process to a really deserving recipient, shouldn't we take that stance too?

• From previous page

TKS: Generally speaking, the candidate concerned must have at least five years of substantial post-graduate study. For instance, to qualify for a PhD in theology, biblical studies, or missiology, the candidate must have had at least two to four years of master's programme (MA/M.Div/M.Th or equivalent), plus another three years or so of doctoral programme. Of course, the doctoral programme must come out with a substantial academic product. A D.Min. must have at least four years of intensive post-graduate studies, plus a few years of professional experience.

Also, how long does it normally take for one to complete the doctoral programme?

EK: Since it requires at least three years of full-time research, not that many people can complete the dissertation in that time. However, one should aim to complete and defend the thesis within four years. Nowadays, some universities allow students to do the research part-time, which is no shorter than six years. Again, the question is not so much the length of time, but the quality of the product; in this case the dissertation and advancement of knowledge.

TKS: At least about three years of intensive study and research after a solid master's programme.

What do you think should be the criteria in awarding the honorary PhD?

EK: Personally, I don't agree with awarding honorary PhD at all. If one wants to be awarded an honorary degree, negotiate for something else and don't confuse the public.

TKS: I think the PhD should remain as an earned degree and not an honorary degree. In the case of an honorary degree, the word 'honorary' should appear with the designation, for instance: Honorary Doctor of Ministry, or Honorary Doctor of Theology.

Do you personally know of any seminaries or institutions or para-church organisations that are conferring PhD (honorary or otherwise) without having the accreditation or rights to do so?

EK: No, but I do hear of schools granting honorary doctorates with very minimal research, and some with so-called recommendation. In some case, all that is required is to pay a small sum of money.

TKS: Not in our Malaysian context. But I have come across a couple of D.Min. holders who obtain their degrees by submitting B.Th-standard papers or through correspondence courses. In the first case, the D.Min. holder only has a B.Th to start



Rev Dr Tan took just over three years of full-time study at Fuller Theological Seminary, USA, to obtain his PhD in Intercultural Studies. The total tuition fee alone cost about US\$25,000.

with. The one by correspondence was based on a Bachelor in Engineering degree, and was not even a full-time pastor.

What do you say of such institutions?

EK: I think it is better for them to close down. It is shameful. For those who were granted such degrees, may I suggest that they disown the degree for the sake of God and integrity.

TKS: Such institutions are doing harm to Christian theological education and the church.

Do you think the increasing number of people pursuing higher qualifications is due to the higher expectations from the Christian community?

EK: Yes, the Christian community is certainly expecting their leaders or pastors to acquire higher degrees, as does the society. Society is changing drastically, and we need to keep on pursuing knowledge in order to respond to the needs. But we need to look at the challenges in the right perspective. The higher expectations are urging us to give our best to the Lord. We pursue knowledge, not for the sake of knowledge, or for our own fame or popularity, but for God.

TKS: I think a healthy congregation would not expect the pastor to hold a doctoral degree. Rather it would expect the pastor to be a faithful and efficient preacher and teacher of the Word, and a loving dedicated servant-leader worthy of emulation. A doctoral degree is non-essential.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENT AND FEE COMPARISON FOR A DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAMME

	Fuller Theological Seminary	Seminary X
Admission Requirement	A Master of Divinity or its equivalent of at least 124 units from an accredited school. Professional full-time ministry position with a minimum of three years' full-time ministry position after receiving M.Div. or M.A. degree. A graduated grade point average of 3.0 or higher (3.0 on 4.0 scale). Three quarters of Greek or two quarters of Hebrew. Evidence of academic writing proficiency – a copy of an academic research paper submitted with application. TOEFL score of 550 (paper test) OR 213 (computer test) is required for applicants for whom English is a second language.	An earned Master in Theology or an earned Master degree in any field with three years of ministerial experience or an earned Bachelor degree in Theology and five years of ministerial experience.
Course Fee	US\$ 11,376 for a 48-unit programme US\$ 18,012 for a 76-unit programme	US\$ 1,000

Note: We have withheld the name of Seminary X, which has a local office in Kuala Lumpur and is affiliated with a Christian institute in the US. Of late, more and more similar seminaries are sprouting up.

Redeeming the D.Min.

BY DR LEONG TIEN FOCK

It is accepted that the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) is a professional and not an academic doctorate. We can safely generalise that a D.Min. programme is significantly less demanding academically than a theological PhD programme. In this sense they are of different categories: professional vs academic.

It is like contrasting the professional J.D. (Doctor of Jurisprudence) and M.D. (Doctor of Medicine) with their academic counterparts: the PhD in legal studies and medical studies respectively. The question then is whether the D.Min., being a professional qualification, should come

with the Dr title.

Note that someone with a J.D. is not called Dr So-and-So. Someone with an M.D. is called Dr So-and-So because he is a (medical) doctor! It can be argued that a D.Min. could be called Dr So-and-So because, unlike the J.D. and M.D., the D.Min. programme includes a dissertation.

This can be compared with the Ed.D. (Doctor of Education) degree (the alternative doctorate to the PhD in education), which requires a dissertation and carries the Dr title. But then, unlike the Ed.D., the D.Min. is structured as a continuing education programme (one need not leave one's

ministry to do the D.Min.).

Does this matter? I will just lay down the facts without arguing whether the D.Min. can rightfully carry the Dr title. (Note that professional doctorates are basically an American affair and are hardly found in British universities.)

Before I share my personal opinion concerning the D.Min. degree, it is necessary that we take a brief look at how this degree came about. I will quote from David F. Wells' book *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (see below) According to Wells, it was the concern for professional status that led to the creation of the D.Min. degree.

WELLS' CRITIQUE

“ But why has professional status become so important in ministry ranks? The answer is not hard to find. In general, the esteem in which we are held by our contemporaries has little to do with the intrinsic value of the work we do. The research that has been done on social stratification all seems to indicate that standing in society is determined by the values functioning in that society.

In America, importance is conferred by professional standing. By the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s, ministerial standing in society was plainly in need of serious professional upgrading... ministers were suffering serious status anxieties. The power that inward calling had once exerted on private consciousness, the sense of “standing” before God, of doing his work by making known his truth, apparently was not enough.

The realisation that the ministry was culturally adrift proved both alarming and disconcerting, and the response that was made across the board, under the careful direction of the Association of Theological Schools (A.T.S.), was to upgrade degree nomenclature. What had been the B.D. (Bachelor of Divinity) became the M.Div. (Master of Divinity) in the early 1970s, and, for those seeking upward mobility, the D.Min. was shortly thereafter added to the arsenal of social tools.

For those middle-class congregations that wanted to be served by a professional and those ministers who wanted their service validated by a doctorate, remedy was now at hand. Thus was the D.Min. born; in two decades, over ten thousand of these degrees have been issued.

It was, of course, the old market mechanism at work. In the 1970s, many seminaries were hard-pressed financially,

and the D.Min. was a lucrative new product to sell... At the same time, many ministers were hard pressed psychologically as they sensed the decline of their profession, their growing marginalisation in society, and the corresponding loss of power and influence that entailed. And so the shotgun marriage was consummated.

The direction that this degree has taken since its inception has not been very reassuring... The quality of D.Min. degrees undoubtedly varies a lot, but there are a substantial number whose academic or intellectual demands are not great.

What in many professions are simply summer courses for updating, refresher courses mandated for continuing certification in the profession but with no significance for any degree, became the royal route that many ministers travelled toward a doctorate.

But what draws ministers to these minimalist degrees, and why do seminaries offer them? It strains one's credulity a little to think that it is only a love of learning that has produced this happy match. After all, among those who have graduated with the degree, 78 percent expressed the view that they now expected to be more respected in the community, and 73 percent expected to be paid more.

The upshot of it all, in fact, is that some seminaries that might have suffered an ignominious demise survived because of the D.Min. degree, and ministers who might have floundered in their careers have now gotten ahead. At least they are seen to have gotten ahead, and that, in a world where image counts as much as reality, is what actually counts. ”

• From Page 3



Dr Kok obtained a PhD for his exegetical and theological study on Gal. 2:15–21 which he took nearly four years to complete at the University of Durham, England. The tuition fee alone was 5,500 pounds per year, but thankfully, he had a scholarship from the British Methodist Church.

Will achieving higher qualifications really enhance one's ministry?

EK: No. In fact there are people trying to divert attention from their failure by pursuing higher degrees. Thus, it is important to look at one's calling to ministry. What is God's purpose in me? What is the focus of my ministry? Furthermore, pursuing a higher degree does not make one cleverer. One must also learn to integrate knowledge and thus to grow in wisdom. For Christian pastors and scholars, we must integrate knowledge with spirituality and our love for God.

TKS: If (the course is) related and relevant to the ministry, generally speaking, it should help enhance one's ministry. But enhancement can come by various ways. The most important is life-long spiritual, moral, intellectual, and ministerial pursuit of the pastor himself.

What is your advice to the church and to Christians about academic qualifications?

EK: There is nothing wrong with academic qualifications. We are not anti-intellectual. In fact I always encourage our younger pastors to pursue higher education whenever possible. But one must remember: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). As for the church, we must not idolise degrees. Earning a degree, even a PhD, does not make one a spiritual leader, pastor or scholar. At the end of the day, it is who we are, and not what we do or what we acquire, that counts before the Lord.

TKS: Give due respect to hard-earned and recognised degrees. Reject counterfeit or cheap stuff from 'pasar malam' (flea market) type of degree mills and the commercialisation of degree within the Christian circle.

• From previous page: *Redeeming the D.Min.*

'Born Again' Degree

So the D.Min. was birthed by market forces and for the wrong reasons! But can God still use it? Even taking Wells' critique to heart, I will not write off the D.Min. in a blanket manner.

But granting that many (most?) D.Min. students have little real interest in intellectual or academic learning but is basically after a relatively easy-to-get 'Dr' title for status sake, there *are* Christian workers who genuinely want to upgrade themselves to better serve God but lack the discipline or capacity for independent study.

And what if the most appropriate programme available to them happens to be a D.Min.? And what about seminaries that offer the D.Min. not for financial gains but because they genuinely want to help more Christian workers upgrade beyond the Masters degree?

Even Wells acknowledge that the quality of the D.Min. varies. Some schools have higher standards than others. And since the courses are offered as modules (the instructors need to meet the students in class for as short as only one week) some schools even invite highly respected scholars as guest professors to conduct the modules for which they do not have

qualified resident teachers.

There are D.Min. students who are dropped early in the programme because they do not make the grade. There are students who are not allowed to proceed to the dissertation because their average grade is not high enough. Also, the dissertation, when properly supervised, will be much more than a "summer updating or refresher course".

So despite its illegitimate birth I suggest we evaluate the D.Min. programme and the student taking it on a case-by-case basis.

The D.Min. was indeed born in sin but, if it repents of its sin it can be born-again. But Wells' critique should warn Christian workers concerning their motives for wanting a D.Min. as well as their choice of school to attend.

Besides the reasons given by Wells, another reason the D.Min. is so popular is that most 'lay Christians' do not realise that there is a difference between the PhD and the D.Min. To them, all Drs are the same.

So there are even those who could have done a PhD but opted for a D.Min. instead simply because all they wanted is to be called a Dr So-and-So. Why then slog through a PhD? We live in a society preoccupied with man-made honorific titles. The temptation to get it quick and easy is

high. Jesus rebukes this preoccupation in Matt. 23: 6–7.

In conclusion, my personal opinion is that though Wells' critique is on the whole valid, it is possible for some (a few?) seminaries and students to avoid the pitfalls that trap many (most?) seminaries and students. Not every Christian worker who can do intellectual work beyond his Masters degree has the capacity or opportunity to do the PhD.

A programme like a 'born-again' D.Min. makes sense and can be of service to God, especially in South-east Asia where there is hardly any opportunity to do a theological PhD locally. As a matter of fact even the quality of the PhD (in seminaries and secular universities) varies.

And Christians pursuing the PhD may also fall into the same temptations that stumble those after the D.Min. The only difference is they have the resources and opportunities to go after the PhD instead of settling for the D.Min.

Dr Leong obtained his M.A. in Old Testament Studies from Wheaton College, U.S., and his PhD in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures from University of California, U.S. He is currently supervising the D.Min. dissertation of a Singapore Bible College student.

Keeping Churches Informed

NECF Malaysia kicked off this year's church visitation programme in January with visits to churches in Ipoh, Johor Baru and Kluang. The programme aims to update churches on the current issues in the nation and developments within the Christian community, and to discuss the role of the Church in light of the challenges posed.

In **IPOH**, the Ipoh Pastors Fellowship rallied some 30 pastors from the English, BM and Chinese churches for a one-day seminar.

NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong highlighted the major issues – such as the Islamic State, the proposed National Service (NS) and religious extremism – and shared what NECF is specifically doing in response to each issue.

For example, on the matter of NS, NECF will put forth to the government a list of proposals including in-camp chapel service for Christians unable to go home during the weekend. NECF will also propose to churches to organise pre-NS camps to prepare Christians before starting the NS

training. Rev. Wong also touched on the relationship among the pastors, and encouraged them to continue working together as a visible demonstration of



Christ's love to the community. He also urged them to "exchange pulpit" as a way of strengthening inter-church ties.

The keen response during the dialogue session following Rev. Wong's sharing showed that Ipoh pastors generally are concerned about national issues and how they relate to their churches' spirituality. Food and fellowship were a fitting end to a

well-spent day for the pastors.

Likewise, the pastors and leaders in **JOHOR BARU** and **KLUANG** who attended the NECF meetings were similarly receptive and enthusiastic. In JB, the NECF team met the BM, Chinese and English pastors separately.

NECF Church Relations and Special Projects Executive Secretary Rev. Lai Moo Him shared with about 40 English pastors and leaders the current trends and challenges affecting the Malaysian Church.

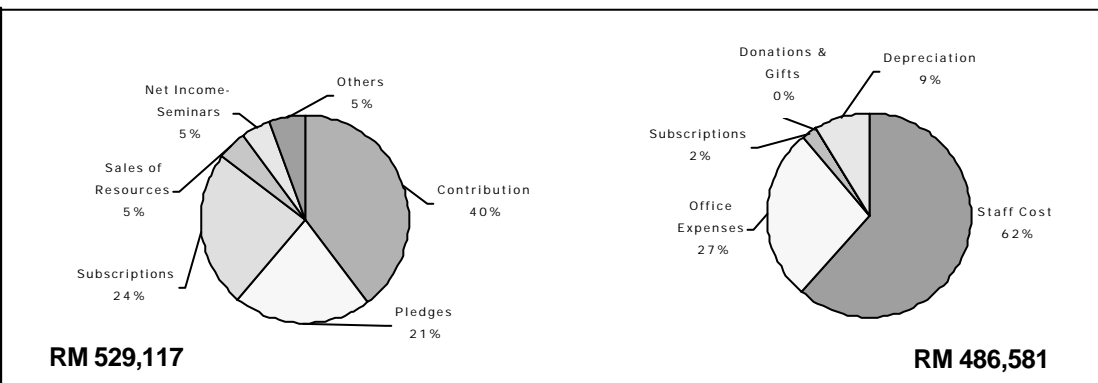
NECF BM Executive Secretary Alfred Tais gave the same briefing in BM to about 70 people from the BM churches. NECF Chinese Executive Secretary Ngeh Hoong Eng held a dinner meeting with committee members of the JB Chinese Pastors Fellowship.

They expressed their excitement over NECF's latest move in expanding its ministry to the Chinese churches.

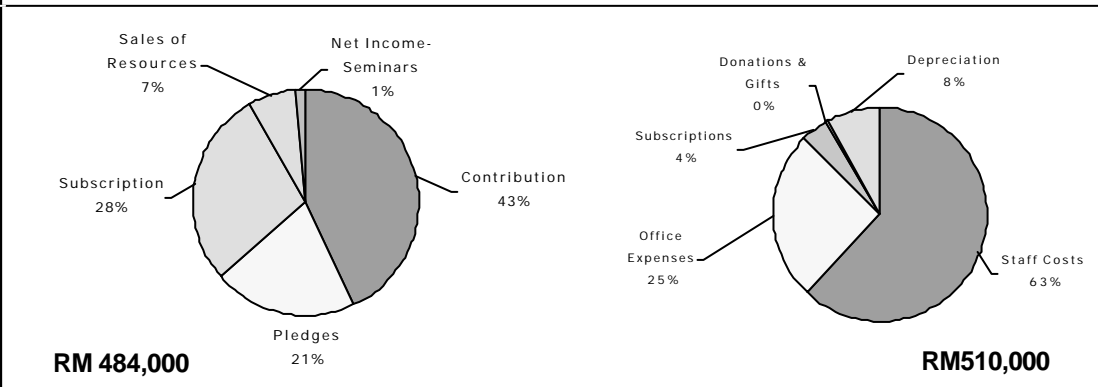
In Kluang, the NECF team shared with some 30 pastors and leaders from the English and Chinese churches.

NECF Malaysia Financial Position

Analysis of Income & Expenditure for 2002



Our Needs for 2003





Evangelical Fellowship of Asia Commission On Women's Concern

An extract of a report by Miss Valaporn Viriyakovint and Miss E. Leelavathi Manasseh presented at the Executive committee meeting held in Kuala Lumpur from February 13 to 15. Let's be informed and pray for the ministry of women's commissions.

1. Follow Up of Consultation on Women in Asia

Follow-up work continues in every nation through the evangelical alliance and women continue to play their biblical role in the family, Church and society. Breakthrough blessings are seen in churches.

2. Formation of National Women's Commission

Leela Manasseh was able to minister in the national Women's Conference held by the Evangelical Alliance of Nepal in 2001 and at the end of the conference the Women's Commission was formed. For the first time a national women's conference was held in October 2002. Mrs Shantha Chetri and Mrs Odno have been chosen as secretaries to give leadership to the Commission in Nepal and Mongolia respectively. We are in the process of helping the Evangelical Alliance in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh to form the Commission.

3. Fulfilling the Great Commission & the Great Commandment

This continues in every country through the CWC. In order to do this, issues that affect women and family were identified and the process has begun to create sustainable initiatives that serve real needs of women. Efforts were made to network with Christian women leaders and groups. We would like to expand our horizon to various evangelical and ecumenical women groups whose

members are not members of EPA.

4. Facilitating Integration of Women's Gifts into Mainstreams of Ministries in churches, Christian institutions and mission bodies.

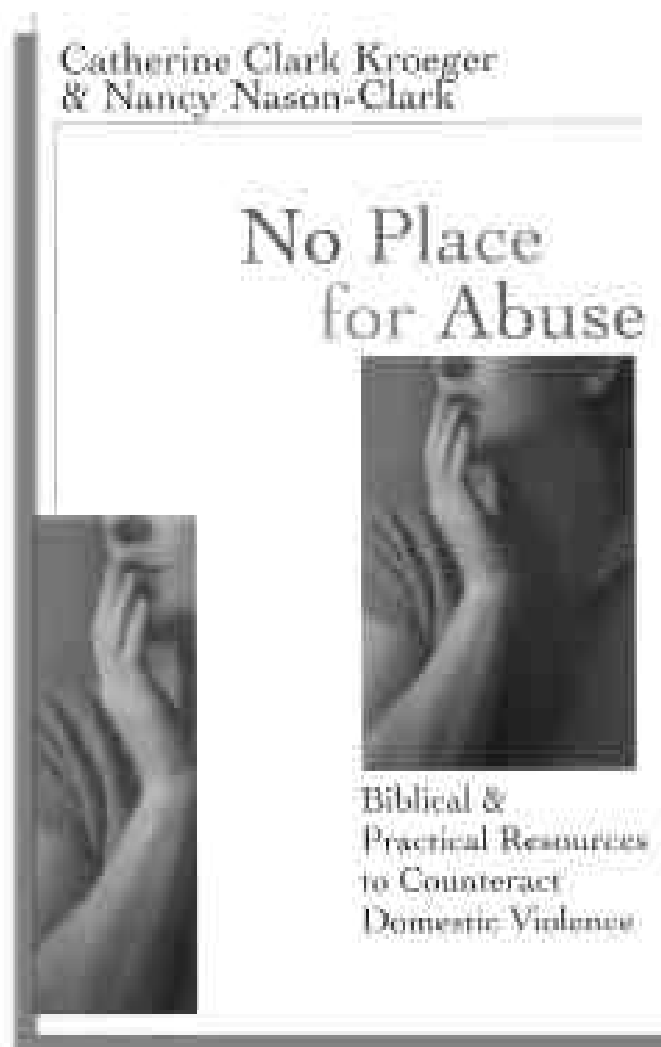
Gender or Giftedness seminars were held in different ways. Several women leaders have expressed the need to translate the book authored by Mrs Marilyn b Lynn Smith (published by CWC of WEA) into Asian languages for greater impact.

5. Focusing on Contemporary Issues

We have been able to make an ongoing analysis of issues related to women. We are currently addressing the issue of abuse of women and widowhood. We need to generate funds for these projects. We seek your guidance and help to translate the book *No Place for Abuse* authored by Dr Catherine Clarke Kroeger & Dr Nancy Nason-Clarke – a project of the task force of CWC of WEA.

6. Forum for Women in Ministry Leadership

(This) is the need of the hour in Asia. We need to focus on regional women leadership development and encourage partnership of men and women leaders in the Body of Christ for greater impact.



• From previous page

This is being done through a few national evangelical alliances.

7. Future Focus: Please pray with us for the following:

• **Pan Asian Christian Women's Assembly:** We would like to initiate this event in 2004 and see that it is held once in four (quadrennial) years in different countries.

• **Empowerment of Widows/Married & Unmarried Singles/Victims of HIV-AIDS:** We are looking into this issue in every nation. The Evangelical Fellowship of India held a national seminar recently which has been effective.

• **Publications:** Asian men and women writing books on gender issues in the Asian context is the need of the hour.

• **Support:** We seek your guidance and help to raise financial support for our Commission work. Women in every nation have requested for financial assistance for projects and further/higher theological education.

• **Integration of Women into Decision Making Bodies and Mainstreams of Ministry:** We are grateful to the EFA Body for considering our request and integrating one woman into the EFA Executive Council. We further request that women be integrated into every mainstream of EFA's ministry such as Commission and major events.

Conclusion

Under God, women continue to play a significant role in mobilising prayer movements for unity, justice and righteousness to prevail in every nation as well as for world evangelisation and discipleship ministries.

There are tremendous challenges and needs in Asia that we need to address. We are grateful to you for your continued prayer support and encouragement. We are thankful to all the General Secretaries for their support to women. We would like to record our thanks and appreciation to EFI General Secretary Rev Richard Howell for releasing Leela Manasseh to develop the Commission. To God be the glory!

SILOAM HOUSE Bhd

(Incorporated in Malaysia Reg No.554087 Mon 23 Jul 2001)

Siloam House has just celebrated its first anniversary.



Why a Siloam House?

There is an estimated population of 200,000 people with intellectual disabilities in Malaysia and many of them have no proper homes where they could live after the death of their carers. There are only around 500 who have managed to find places in government institutions or group homes and a very small number are in homes run by NGOs.

With the demand being so great, the institutions and homes are always overcrowded and could not adequately provide the needed attention and nurturing that people with disabilities need. Those who have been abandoned from young grow up never experiencing the joys and warmth of a family.

Siloam House is founded to assist people with intellectual disabilities in their dire need for a place they can call their own.

Vision and Objectives

The main objective of Siloam House is to set up homes in various places for small groups of people with intellectual

disabilities. The vision is to see them living together as a family and know that they truly belong.

It is also to see that as a family, they become self-supportive. For example, two or more of the family members can be trained and then find employment or have their own business whilst others who cannot find employment can stay at home to look after the home.

The aim is so that they can help each other to live meaningful, purposeful lives, with dignity and self-respect and be independent of handouts.

Plans: Steps to achieving the Vision

We started Siloam House with four family members, two men and two ladies: Robert Lee Kong Yuen, Thong Kong Weng, Soo Phooi Sun and Loh Mee Ying on March 1, 2002. Later in the year, Lee Teng Cheong also came to join us.

We are now preparing ourselves to live as a family and learning how to manage a house on our own. All of us

Soul Goals

What is a soul goal? It is a goal that positions us for the very best life has to offer: real contentment, instead of the restlessness of soul that drives many women to keep moving, redecorating, acquiring better things; deep joy that is evident in the midst of any life circumstance, good or bad; a growing relationship with God that leads to inner peace and a profound sense of well-being; a deeper commitment to others that connects our souls to them at the most intimate level.

Only a well-cared-for soul can deliver these goods. Here they are:

1. I want to delight God.

Scriptures say that God's eyes scan the earth searching for those whose hearts are right toward Him. I desire to be one of those with whom He can constantly find comfort and pleasure.

I want to 'make His day' as Noah did. Even in a dark day, God found pleasure in Noah. That is the kind of relationship I want with God.

I want Him to find comfort with me and experience delight when He thinks about me. I want to learn to hear God's holy laughter regarding me. I want that delight in life that only an open, intimate relationship with God can give.

2. I want to 'practise heaven' by enjoying God now.

The Westminster catechism declares that the chief end of humankind is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. I want to experience the pleasure of

knowing God with greater intensity as I age.

I want my soul to become skilled and comfortable in the practice of heaven – praising and enjoying God. I'm acclimating my eternal soul, my intrinsic self, to the values of heaven now.

3. I want to have a part in advancing God's kingdom.

Nothing would please me more than knowing I had seriously thwarted the destructive plans of the Evil One.

I want there to be no doubt about which side benefited from my loyalties. Understand, I am not envisioning some kind of Joan of Arc role here.

I am not wanting to be grandiose or spiritually ambitious. But I want to be increasingly available and skilled for the part God might want me to play in His holy drama.

4. I want to remain open to the unexpected, off-the-beaten-path plans of God for my life.

I intend to nurture an adventuresome spirit. Why not be open to things in my 60s that I would not consider at a younger age?

Forget the small



"I intend to nurture an adventuresome spirit"

shockers like spitting and picking flowers from other people's gardens. I want to drape my soul in purple and be open to experiencing mission work in Kenya at 60 or a house filled with children at 70.

I want to develop an eagerness for the unconventional, path-less-travelled life. I am not motivated by the shock appeal, however, but by the awareness that God can use people whose boundaries are unconventional and well off the beaten path.

5. I want to grow in loving graciousness in my relationships.

I want to mellow toward others as I age. I want to be remembered as a truly loving person, not a tough, old bird! I would like to become more of a safe place for the people in my life. I would like my connections with others to be increasingly

• See next page

"I want to 'practise heaven' by enjoying God now"



• From previous page: *Soul Goals*

marked by compassion and an ability to connect with others soul-to-soul.

6. I want to laugh more.

I just like the way a laugh rings in the face of evil. There is a holy craziness to an ageing woman who can still laugh.

*I want to reaffirm
my desire to
excel in
prayer!*



'I have confidence in God!' is what that kind of laughter communicates. I love that!

7. I want to think less like a victim and more like a survivor.

I have some significant life wounds by

this point. Don't we all! But I want to feel that I have done more than suffered with these pains. I want to know that I have turned them into learning experiences, builders of interior character.

I want to experience 'beauty for ashes' as I review the unfolding of my life. May my life deepen, not wither because of painful life experiences.

8. I want to reaffirm my desire to excel in prayer!

I want my ageing to be impacted by contact and communion with God. May I become more astute at hearing God's voice and seeing things, not just from a human perspective but from God's perspective.

The picture of the soul these goals capture is a soul that is intimate with God. It is not an ominous relationship, marked by heaving sighs and flowing tears, but one characterised by mutual delight. The soul is relaxed, open, flexible, full of joy and ready to connect deeply on many relational levels. — Valerie Bell, *She can Laugh at the Days to Come, Zondervan*

• From page 8: *Siloam House Bhd*

except for Phooi Sun, have opted to go out and work and to contribute to the household expenses, such as electricity and water and washing detergents.

Robert works as a petrol station

assistant, Kong Weng as a waiter, Teng Cheong and Mee Ying wash cups at a coffee shop and Saw Gaik does a few other jobs too. We would like to be the first household to model and guide others on how to live together as a family.

Once our first building is completed,

we will be able to invite participation from the following people:

1. People who have lost their parents and have no means of support and may be living in places not suited to their needs.
2. Individuals who want to find open employment in hotel and catering services, animal husbandry, and farming may also join us for a short-term training programme.
3. Individuals who want to learn some self-help skills, leisure skills and other skills which can help them to be more independent at home can also join us on a short term arrangement.
4. Individuals can also stay with us for a few days while their parents are busy.

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.

(For further details please contact Siloam House at 03-91313940.)

NECF Malaysia Statement

Israel-Palestine Conflict



Christians everywhere are called by Almighty God to “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Mic. 6:8). Far from being passive, we are enjoined to “seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless and plead the cause of the widow” (Isa. 1:17). These and many other verses in Scriptures inform us that we are not to condone, much less support, injustice and unrighteousness whenever they occur. We are to be “salt and light” to the world through our thoughts, words, prayers and deeds.

The Palestinian problem ranks as one of the most critical and complex geo-political issues in world affairs. Its recent origins lie in the atrocities committed against the Jews in Europe starting from the late 19th century and later compounded by the political intrigues of Western powers.

These foundations have made the region highly volatile and, with the now globalised nature of the problem, a flashpoint for wider tensions and conflicts. The toll in terms of lost innocent lives, both Palestinian and Israeli, is already significant, but, with the derailment of the peace process and escalation in violence, is mounting at an alarming rate.

In this conflict, the Church is neither appointed referee nor tribunal. Christians are charged to clearly and prophetically communicate the truths, principles and values contained in God’s Word and to bring about healing and reconciliation. The reality, however, is sadly different.

Various Christian denominations and groups have, over the years, made separate and collective proposals for peace but the suffering and deprivation – including desperate cries of help by Palestinian Christians – have largely gone unheard.

Instead, Christians have been more inclined to take sides and so pour fuel on an already raging fire. We need, in all humility and brokenness, to confess our

complicity and willful neglect through acts of commission and omission.

We fully appreciate that Christians the world over have strong emotional bonds with Israel and are theologically divided over its role in God’s end-time plan. Many who study biblical prophecies reasonably expect the nation to be restored when our Lord Jesus returns. For them, Israel’s continuing security and well-being takes the highest priority. Other scholars believe that the Church effectively takes the place of Israel and that the physical nation is no longer central to God’s plans.

In all these, we are reminded by the Apostle Paul that we can for now only “see poorly” and “know in part” and wait until “perfection comes.” Nevertheless, three things are eternal: “faith, hope and love,” the greatest being “love” (1Cor. 13:10–13).

It is critical to stress that whatever teachings one subscribes to, the need to uphold the demands for justice, mercy and, most of all, love, is a constant.

Our understanding of biblical truths must be consistent with, and set in the context of, the entirety of our Lord’s teachings and not just selected parts.

In His divine sovereignty and omniscience, God can use both righteous and unrighteous situations to serve His perfect will and purposes. As His children, however, we do not have the same privileges or rights.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy is that the substantial efforts that have been invested in the peace process now lay waste. For all their faults and shortcomings, the 1993 Oslo Interim Agreements, the 1998 Wye River and 1999 & 2000 *Sharm el-Sheikh* Memoranda, and the January 2001 Taba, Egypt talks, made it possible to catch a glimpse of peaceful co-existence between Israelis and Palestinians.

As stated by the *Sharm el-Sheikh* Fact-Finding Committee, “the results achieved (since Oslo) were unthinkable less than 10 years ago.” The Taba Israeli-Palestinian Joint Statement, issued just before the

Israeli elections, concluded that, “the two sides were never closer in reaching an agreement between them than today.”

Since then, events appear to have put paid to the peace process and, in particular, the pivotal permanent status negotiations. What was supposed to have been characterised by gradual confidence building has quickly degenerated into a tremendous loss of faith, trust and respect in the process, even greater oppression and hostility, mutual recrimination and, obviously, a spiraling cycle of deadly violence.

The Palestinian Authority’s inability to rein in extremists (PLO) and the failure of the Sharon Administration to abide by the terms forged are now leading to a voicing of demands that negotiations and interim agreements make way for more forcibly imposed measures.

We urge all Malaysian Christians to pray for a rapid restoration of the peace process. Intercessions should be made that the global sponsors to the Middle East peace process will, in partnership with neighbouring countries and in concert with international organisations, act responsibly by reminding the parties of their commitments, facilitating an immediate cessation of violence, and inducing parties back to the negotiating table.

Obstacles – such as the demolition of Palestinian homes and orchards, the renewed construction of Jewish settlements, border closures, curfews and the excessive use of force – must stop, as must assassinations, suicide bombings and other acts of terrorism and destabilisation.

We further call on Malaysian Christians to act swiftly and compassionately to help alleviate the suffering of all those affected by the conflict, but in particular those that have been among the hardest hit by economic restrictions.

The Church should mobilise the financial, material and technical resources at its disposal. In order to blunt the criticisms that will accompany this effort, assistance should be offered for the welfare of all.

S I G N S O F T H E T I M E S

The Real Stars

By Dr Lee Kiong Hock

A Call to Christians to be Teachers in the 21st Century

There are teachers that I still remember as if it were only yesterday. Mr Lim, my English and Geography teacher, taught me to aspire for the lofty heights. “The higher you aim, the higher you climb,” he would say, “and the higher up you will be even when you fall. Aim low, and when you fall, you fall right to the bottom. So, always aim high.” There was also my Malay language tutor Encik Ahmad who made learning fun and taught me that there was nothing too difficult if you only set your heart on it – not even learning what was then our first go at *Bahasa Kebangsaan*.

There are, unfortunately, teachers that I don't really care to remember. Mr Thigarajan, my History teacher, used to walk into the class in his woollen sweater in our Malaysian heat only to proclaim that it was too hot to teach, and then summarily ordered us to take turns reading aloud from our history textbook, one paragraph per student until the bell rang.

Then there was also my Additional Maths teacher, a graduate from the University of Queensland, who declared that dy/dx is zero. I remember his response when I asked him why dy/dx should be equal to zero. His curt reply was, “When I say ‘jeelo,’ I mean ‘jeelo’!” To this day, I cannot remember his name.

I thank God for the laughs I still get out of my many school memories, and most of all for the Mr Lims and the Encik Ahmads who instilled in me the spirit to learn, and to learn some more. Yet, we didn't make stars out of them. All that was almost forty years ago.

The unsung heroes

Zoom ahead to the 21st century and little has changed that is good in the way that we treat our teachers. We live in the age of the ‘stars’. Day in and day out, the media focuses on the stars of entertainment, sports, politics, and the arts. There is, however, hardly any focus on the true unsung heroes of the 20th and 21st centuries – our teachers. As the Royal Bank of Canada notes in one of its 1989 newsletters, “Nobody ever got a Nobel Prize for teaching achievements.” Yet, good teachers have become even more important in the 21st century than in the 20th.

We are now living in an evermore-uncertain world, particularly for the young. The emerging global economic order is making it more difficult for young people to make successful transitions from school to work. We are, some argue, heading for a global catastrophe of youth unemployment.

It is now becoming increasingly clear that if youths are to avoid falling into repeated

cycles of unemployment and even poverty, we must equip them with the ability to thrive in high-productivity work organisations and the flexibility to respond rapidly to an ever changing economic environment.

In particular, we need to equip our children with the traditional three Rs (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic) plus Reasoning and Relationship skills, according to reports from the U.S. Office of Science and Technology Policy, Executive Office of the President; and the International Labour Organisation.

Effective teaching and effective teachers

There are two important questions here:

1) How should we then teach our children? and 2) What kind of teachers do we need?

The keys to effective teaching and effective teachers are to be found in the way God instructed Israel to teach its people. Deut. 11:18–21 states:

“So commit yourselves completely to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands as a reminder, and wear them on your forehead. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that as long as the sky remains above the earth, you and your children may flourish in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors.”

To escape false worship and find prosperity in the Promised Land, Israel needed an effective and wholistic education programme. Important as they may be, the key educational inputs are not the quantitative inputs such as pupil-teacher ratios, class size and the availability of pedagogical materials. An effective and wholistic education programme calls for the best of human values because education is essentially about human values and interactions. In particular, Deut. 11:18–20 tells us that an effective education calls for:

1. A Clear and Shared Vision – God shared with Israel the vision of its children flourishing in the Promised Land;

2. High Expectations – Israel had to set high standards for all its children for they were required to know God's word in all

• From previous page

aspects of their lives;

3. Effective Leadership – for Israel’s education to be effective, they needed effective leadership on the part of the leaders and the entire adult community in ensuring that God’s words would be in their hearts, and in the hearts of their children, whether they were awake or asleep, going in or going out;

4. A High Level of Cooperation – the entire community had to work to ensure that God’s words were tied to their hands and foreheads, written on their doorposts and gates, and they were to always talk about God’s word; and

5. Complete Commitment – God expected them to commit themselves completely to His words.

In addition, a wholistic education calls for an emphasis on:

6. Religious Knowledge – knowing God’s word, and knowing it well.

We can sum up the keys to effective education as: a common vision, high expectations, effective leadership, community involvement, and commitment. Recent students of successful transformations of high-poverty, *low-performing* schools into high-poverty, *high-performing* schools have found these same key elements.

However, as Deut. 11 tells us, a wholistic education programme also calls for the teaching of the sixth R – Religious Knowledge; not in the sense of rules and regulations, but in the sense of wisdom to make the right choices in life, particularly in the post-modern age of relative values. Interestingly, in the world of formal education these keys are in fact not of recent origin.

Looking back, we find these same key elements at work in the early Christian mission schools in Malaysia and Singapore. In a tribute to these mission schools, the Malaysian Government states, “The Missions were also pioneers in education for girls and fought resolutely against conservative opposition and prejudice...

“It is a striking tribute to the selfless service of those men and women that they should have gained the ready confidence and affection of both parents and children despite differences in religion and culture”, as cited in Rev. Loh Soon Choy’s 1993 paper, “*Past Christian Contributions to*

Malaysian Education”.

Similarly, Singapore’s former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew remarked in a 1980 issue of *Far Eastern Economic Review*, “The missionaries did a good job in producing leaders... Christianity brought mission schools and they laid the foundation for an elite class of administrators who still carry the burden of the bureaucracy.” More recently, the honourable Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak paid tribute to the La Salle Brothers for their “deep commitment and tireless efforts of the La Sallian brothers, especially during the formative years of the country...” (*The Star*, December 29, 2002).

Rekindling the pioneering spirit of the early mission schools

How did the pioneering missionaries accomplish so much? Rev. Loh, in his same paper, argues, “What made them special was the fact that they were not just people out to ‘do a job’. These pioneers of Malaysia’s modern educational system also had a transforming vision...

They taught ‘the Three Rs’ (Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic). But they also gave more by their examples of wholistic living, morals, work ethics, reverence for God, life, and sex; and respect for people of any race or creed, transforming values which no book education can give.”

Rev. Robert Hunt in his 1993 paper, “*Past Christian Contributions to Malaysian Education: A Response*”, argues that it was the ability to forge a critical spirit that was the greatest contribution of the missionary schools to modern Malaysia. In short, the early missionaries had:

1. A transforming vision for those they sought to educate;
2. High expectations as they sought to forge a critical spirit in the boys and girls under their charge;
3. Effective leadership by men and women who set themselves out as examples for their pupils and students to follow;
4. High levels of cooperation as they worked with the local communities to gain their confidence;
5. Commitment; and
6. Sound religious values.

A catastrophe of youth unemployment will be particularly severe in developing countries because “changes in the global

economic architecture, including capital market liberalisation, have enhanced risks, *beyond the coping ability of many developing countries* (our emphasis)”, as noted by the Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz in his keynote speech to the ILO Global Employment Forum in Geneva last November.

We can however minimise, if not avoid, the pain of dislocation by teaching our children the six Rs. To do so effectively, we need teachers of high calibre. We need teachers with transforming visions; high expectations for those under their charge; effective leadership by example; the ability to work with children, youths, parents and other teachers; commitment to carry through the task; and strong religious values to equip our children and youths with the sixth R.

This is a call to the Christian community

“... *the reward in participating in the effective and wholistic education of all our children is seeing each of them shine as stars, as mature and responsible citizens...*”

to steer increasing numbers of our young people into the teaching profession so that they, and the Church as a whole, can rekindle the pioneering spirit of the mission schools and play a major role in transforming the lives of young Malaysians in the 21st century.

There are no stars here, and we cannot promise that the world will ever make stars of our teachers. But the reward in participating in the effective and wholistic education of all our children is seeing each of them shine as stars, as mature and responsible citizens contributing to the overall growth and development of a caring, and even prosperous Malaysia.

Who else better to teach the six Rs to our children, regardless of class, colour and creed, than those with strong religious values whose God is love!

(Dr Lee was a Professor of Economics at Universiti Malaya. He is temporarily residing in Washington, D.C. and working as a consultant to the World Bank. The complete version of this article is available on our website www.necf.org.my at the Signs of the Times section.)

Conflict Not A Religious Issue

THE conflict between the United States and Iraq is neither a religious one nor a civilisation clash between the West and the East, and Malaysians must therefore guard against any exploitation of the issue by any political or religious parties, said NECF Malaysia Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong.

“Christians advocate peace and harmony, and they therefore, must make every effort to prevent war from taking place,” he added when commenting on the US-Iraq conflict at an MCCBCHS press conference to announce the group’s support for the ‘Malaysians for Peace’ campaign.

(MCCBCHS is the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism of which

CFM is a member. NECF is a member of CFM.)

In its press statement, MCCBCHS expressed its deep concern that the possible US action would bring destruction to innocent human lives, catastrophic impact on the environment and trigger a cycle of retaliatory measures. It denounced “any expression of injustice, oppression, underlying motives that lack good faith and actions propelled by personal or national vendetta and hidden agenda.”

“Peace can only be attained when all parties have a will for it, work for it, achieve it and promote it in the fear of God,” it said.

The council called for an amicable solution, and urged adherents of different faiths to seek God for His divine intervention.

Tamil Leaders Meet

THE NECF Malaysia Tamil Commission was officially launched at its inaugural seminar, attended by about 100 Tamil pastors and leaders from 45 churches all over the country.

At the seminar, entitled “Current Trends and Challenges facing the Tamil Churches and Indian Community”, NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong dedicated the members of the commission, which is chaired by Rev Dr John Nagamuthu who also is an NECF council member.

Besides Rev Wong, the other speaker was Dr Dennison Jayasooria of Yayasan Strategik Sosial Malaysia. Rev Wong explained the role of NECF and its relationship with the Christian Federation Malaysia, the official body representing the total Christian community in Malaysia.

Dr Jayasooria shared how Tamil churches can help the Indian community by tapping on the government and non-governmental organisations resources that are available.

Following their talks was a dialogue session that had many participants querying how the Tamil commission can empower the Tamil churches and pastors to face the modern challenges.

WEA Calls For Prayer

In light of the current global crisis we live on our planet, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) has affirmed the following statement:

“World Evangelical Alliance is a global, evangelical network of churches and Christians where no one nation or person is dominant or in authority over the others. In allegiance to Jesus Christ and with humility, we prayerfully seek the best for the people, nations, regions and world in which we live and work. We work for reconciliation, justice, righteousness and peace.

With compassion, we also seek to protect the poor and down-trodden, to heal the sick, to feed the hungry and to give a voice to the voiceless. We strive to speak the truth with each other in love.

We call for righteousness in public officials, and challenge all authorities to do justice and act mercifully toward all the citizens and peoples of a nation. We stand in solidarity with our suffering Christian brothers and sisters of every country, ethnicity and language group in every part of the world.

We acknowledge that the task of just and wise government in today’s world is complex, even where there is a will to do right.

We believe that war or violence is almost always the worst solution for resolving conflict. Insofar as it is possible, all paths to peace should be explored and all possible means should be used for resolving any conflict.

So we join with the Apostle Paul who, living in days of imperial oppression and uncertainty, wrote to his young disciple this call to prayer, whose specific purposes apply to all times and places: ‘I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth’ (1 Timothy 2:1-4).”



New Members

We welcome the following into our fellowship as Ordinary Members:

- **Tabernacle of Victory, Kajang, Selangor**, pastored by Susie Devaki Arumugam
- **Vineyard Music Mission, Kulim, Keday**, pastored by Mark Shanmugam

We also welcome three individuals as Associate Members. They are Rev Dr Robert Chelladurai s/o Innasmuthu, Mr Chan Hin Cheong and Ms Leong Yew Lai.

COMING UP



National Missions Conference with PATRICK JOHNSTONE

THE author of renown mission guidebook *Operation World* will share the latest developments in world missions at CANNING GARDEN BAPTIST CHURCH, IPOH on June 5–6. The theme of the conference is *Missions In The Changing*

World and during the mornings, Johnstone will speak on topics such as *God Still Reigns!* and *A New Mobilisation Needed*. He will spend the two evenings on *The Spiritual DNA – God's Design for His Church*. Contact NECF office for more details.

Jacobs at the National Prayer and Intercessors Seminar in



NECF Church Visits

THE NECF travelling team will be visiting churches at the following places in the coming months:

April 24: BUTTERWORTH

April 25–27: PENANG

April 28–29: ALOR STAR

July 5–6: TAIPING

July 8–9: KOTA BARU

July 10: DUNGUN

July 11: KUALA TERENGGANU

July 12–13: KUANTAN

Pastors and church leaders will be updated on current issues in the nation and how these issues affect the Church. At the same time, NECF will hear from the participants the concerns and problems in their churches. Besides the exchange of information, the NECF visits also aim to strengthen relationships among the churches through the fellowship of their pastors and leaders.

'Watch and Pray Month' for JB Chinese Churches

From Mar 23 to April 23. This is the first time that the Johor Baru Chinese Pastors Fellowship is rallying the Chinese churches from various denominations in JB to come together in prayer. Participants will follow a daily prayer guide to pray for revival for their leaders, churches and the city. For more information, contact 07-3886815.

Nationwide 40-Day Fast and Pray

THE yearly fast and pray period will begin on July 21 and culminate at the Merdeka Prayer Rally on Aug 29 night at PGRM, Kuala Lumpur. Cindy Jacobs will be the guest speaker.

As usual, NECF will provide a 40-day daily prayer guide (based on the book of Esther) to unite prayer participants. The booklets will be available for distribution in June.

Once again, the nationwide Charity Campaign will run throughout the 40-day period. Money collected from the campaign will be distributed to charitable organisations. Contact Ann Low at NECF office or 013-3649239 for more information.

Natural Church Development Seminar

Dr Bob Logan will share how healthy churches multiply through the eight principles of Natural Church Development at this two-day seminar from July 9 at Glad Tidings Assembly, Petaling Jaya. Dr Logan is Executive Director of CoachNet and President of Strategic Ministries, Inc. His written works (authored and co-authored) include *Beyond Church Growth* and *Raising Leaders For The Harvest*. The seminar is jointly organised by Bethel Church, Melaka; Glad Tidings Assembly; Metro Tabernacle; and Penang Christian Centre. Seminar fee of RM50 per person includes materials, lunch and tea. Contact Bethel Church, Melaka. 06-3368077 or e-mail bethelncd@pd.jaring.my

National Prayer Conference with CINDY JACOBS and BARRY BOUCHER

THE prayer conference will be held on Aug 27–29 at Wisma Eagles, FGT Subang, Petaling Jaya. Themed 'One Voice in Prayer' (in conjunction with NECF's general theme), it will be the prelude to the annual NECF Merdeka Prayer Rally.

Participation is by registration only. Contact Ann Low at the NECF office or 013-3649239.



Churches are encouraged to designate one Sunday this year to appreciate and honour their pastors, full-time workers and leaders. Depending on their needs, congregation members may consider holding a special service of affirmation or a dinner event, or personal deeds such as babysitting their children (so that they and their spouses can have a night out) or pledging to pray for them. *Appreciation Day* is initiated by NECF Malaysia as a follow-up to the *Pastors Prayer Shield* programme.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

I R A Q

Iraq is a secular Arab socialist state, not an Islamic state, and as such has had a fairly good record of religious freedom for Christians. Religious tension has been rising however, primarily due to the start of the 'War on Terror', described by many Muslims as a 'Crusader attack' on Islam. In such a time of heightened religious tension, Iraqi Christians predictably may be challenged or even targeted by Muslims who question their loyalty to Iraq. Yet Iraqi Christians, like Christians everywhere, love their homeland. Please pray that God will protect and deliver believers attacked because of their faith. Meanwhile, the impending US-led war against Iraq has stirred a global wave of protest and even churches and Christians have joined in the chorus of condemnation against the US' intention. Pray for God's continuing sovereignty.

C O N G O

Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) could be Africa's richest nation if it were not shredded by war. Great suffering has created a hunger for God and a revival of prayer in a country where last century, the Christian proportion of the population rose from 1.4% to over 95%. Today there is complete religious freedom, and mission continues despite indescribably cruel, savage and inhumane atrocities. Cannibalism, butchery, executions, systematic rape, torture and kidnapping are used as weapons of war against civilian Congolese men, women and children. A UN spokesperson has described the armed rebels as 'freaks' who are 'out of control'. The Church is really the only viable, credible national structure surviving in Congo, providing education, health care and community leadership. The Church is suffering intensely from what is really demonic persecution. They need our prayers.

B O L I V I A

Around half of the world's cocaine is grown here. Pray for evangelicals, who have been a growing influence, not least because there has been a significant turning to Christ

among the upper class in recent years. Twenty years ago there were few born-again people from this strata of society, but there are a sizeable number of them today.

C H I N A

China is presently a paradox. There is real movement towards reform but severe persecution persists. Li Rui, Mao Zedong's secretary through the late 1950s, is one of many significant Chinese voices calling for full democratic reform and respect for freedoms and human rights. Religious reform is on the agenda and the US-China Human Rights dialogue held last mid-December was very encouraging. However, severe persecution still plagues the Chinese house church movement. Monitors of persecution continue to report numerous incidents of detention, beatings, confiscation and destruction of property, and even the torture of believers by police. Please pray for religious liberty in China.

N I G E R I A

Missions have not been very successful in taking the gospel to Nigeria's desert tribes. But through the dedicated work of an Open Doors trained husband-and-wife team who lead Caravan Gospel Mission, the Holy Spirit is touching hearts and changing lives of many of these people. Pray for this ministry and for others braving hardship to bring God's plan of salvation to these people.

P A K I S T A N

Several ministries working here have called for more worldwide prayer for the land of 150 million people, especially that they open up to the gospel. There is a tremendous desire and searching for truth, largely created by the overthrow of the Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan and terrorist activities within the country itself. Pray for effective evangelism and church planting, and for the local churches to be bold but wise in reaching out.

S R I L A N K A

Violent persecution against Christians is on the increase in Sri Lanka as Buddhism seeks to regain its historic position as the religion of East and Southeast Asia. Thanks to the work of courageous Sri Lankan evangelists

and church planters, evangelical Protestant Christianity is growing phenomenally. In response, militant Buddhist nationalists have destroyed churches and violently attacked Christian workers. They even want an anti-conversion law, with support from Muslims, Hindus and all static growth faiths. The leader of a house church ministry in southern Sri Lanka, Mrs Indrani Abeysinghe, and her four children, were violently attacked in their home around midnight last Christmas. They barely escaped with their lives and are severely traumatised. Please pray for their recovery, and for God to protect and use his servants reaching out to Sri Lanka with the gospel; for the government to uphold religious freedom and justice; and that plans for an anti-conversion law will be thwarted.

B U R M A



Pix from *Pray For Burma*

This Karen couple told one relief team how the Burma Army burned their two infant children alive. Many families have experienced separation and disruption due to the persecution by the Burma Army, which have been aiming their attacks at the ethnic minorities and anyone who opposes them. There is no stability or tranquility for those living the war zones of Burma. At any moment villagers can be uprooted and forced to flee their homes with only what is on their backs. Over one million refugees have fled to neighbouring countries. Some 150,000 are in refugee camps in Thailand and Bangladesh, but the rest are scattered. Last November, the Ethnic Nationalities Consultation representing 10 ethnic groups of Burma joined together to actively work on the problems of internally displaced people and human rights violations by the Burma dictators. Pray for God to intervene and for His light to shine through.