

Berita NECF

Editorial

Nation Building – With or Without God?

Someone said that nation building can be a friend or a foe. It is a friend if it draws us closer to God, but becomes the most dangerous foe if it takes our focus away from God. Malaysian Christians have become increasingly aware of the call to help build our nation, and many are responding to the call. This is a good time to establish a biblical worldview that bears upon the subject of nation building.

Three points are worthy of note:

1. God deals with nations as with individuals

Christianity has been often labelled as an individualistic religion. The claim is that while the Christian religion gives much encouragement towards personal piety, it is very weak when it comes to making recommendations for structuring communal or social life. This charge is untrue if it means that Christians dismiss the importance of the community. We place the focus on the individual merely because we believe that change must begin (but not end) with the individual.

It is very clear from Scripture that

God deals with nations as entities in themselves. The Old Testament is full of accounts of God dealing with nations, Israel and her neighbours in particular. Nations were blessed or cursed according to their conduct and moral behaviour. Acts 17:26 says: *“From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.”* God’s eyes are on the nations. Even in modern history, we see God’s concern for nations. Prophecies were often directed at nations.

Do we believe that the nation is an object of concern for our God, or merely an arbitrary human agglomeration that we must work with? Or do we go to the other extreme and think so much of the nation that it supercedes all other human groupings which also deserve our loyalty, such as the family, the Church, etc.? Do we see the nation in a right biblical perspective?

2. History as His Story

Most of us are used to thinking of history in linear terms, with a beginning, a middle course and a specific end. This view is actually based on the Judeo-Christian per-

spective. Prior to Christianity, the Classical Greek thought supported a cyclical view, in which historical events were repeated over and over by consecutive societies. The Eastern view of history is quite the same.

Even so, not everyone who adopts the linear view finds God in history. The humanist believes that humans will continue to evolve upwards until they attain perfection and paradise, the perfect society. The Marxist believes that the dialectic of class struggle will eventually produce the classless society (communism), which is their version of the perfect society. Both ideologies

Continued on page 11...

Inside this Issue

My Hope is in God!	2
Peacemaking & the Church – A Reflection	4
Gay Church: A Response	6
Close-door Dialogue with MCA	7
Current Concerns for Your Prayers	8
How to Fail in Evangelism	12
State Spot – Perlis	14

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Chairman's Message

My Hope is in God!

As we celebrate and review our country's 50 years of nationhood, and with the general elections round the corner, it does seem that we are caught between problems and positivism.

Problems indeed abound. Before the older generation of the 80s has got a chance to forget the Bank Bumiputra fiasco, the Perwaja Steel scandal, new scandals emerge over a huge development in Port Klang, and the National Service purchases, and now the latest bad news is the Judiciary debacle.

Then there is the "malady of positivism". With rumours of elections round the corner, the Government and media are sure to churn out the "good stuff" about the nation, and how other nations should emulate us. Sure, there is much to celebrate, and to be grateful for. I am proud to be a Malaysian, but I have no plans to die blind.

Recently, a senior Public Accounts Committee official lamented about having the right to highlight and query without the right to prosecute. This is but one of the many sad testimonies of our lack of political will to put things right in our country. Furthermore, in this modern day and age, one can still be detained for one's religious belief. It is small wonder that William Backman bemoans that Malaysians can be so taken up with "Malaysia Boleh" when we are actually close to becoming "Malaysia bodoh"¹. I don't agree with the spite in which it is said, but an "outside perspective" can be sobering.

I believe many fail to see that our God wants to be merciful to our nation. This is my hope.

We are naïve to think that if we don't talk about it, all is well – we Malaysians are becoming well known for solving problems this way.

The Church is caught in between.

What are we to do? Amidst the myriads of solutions, one stands out – straddled between problems and positivism, I believe the Church must be prophetic. And part of the Micah's prophetic message is to "do justly" and "love mercy"².

It's obvious what to "do justly" means. May the Church continue to speak out against, inter alia, lack of transparency, abuse of public funds, and corruption. But the prophet implores us at the same time to "love mercy" – this to me is the missing key. To love mercy is to move away from "blind positivism" and at the same time, refusing to stand with naysayers. This delicate balance is not easy to achieve.

I believe many fail to see that our God wants to be merciful to our nation. This is my hope.

We have won the war against communist insurgency, we are rich in natural resources, hardcore poverty is set to be eliminated by 2010, the income divide



By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

has been narrowed, we have a fairly impressive GDP, survived the Asian financial crisis – understandably Joseph E. Stiglitz describes us as the "Malaysian miracle".

So not only is there hope, but there is *much* hope for our country.

Someone once asked Mother Teresa how she could remain undaunted by the enormity of the task. She replied that she used subtraction. Every time she cared for a destitute person, she was subtracting from the despair and adding to hope.

Every time you and I do a good deed, speak a good word, and propagate whatever good we see in our nation, we contribute to the "math of subtraction" – this is to love mercy and to be prophetic. Let us do just that... there is indeed much hope for our land.

¹Article "While Malaysia fiddles, its opportunities are running dry" dated Nov 15, 2006

²He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic. 6:8, NKJV)



Group photo – Sally is standing 2nd from the left

From the day Rev. Wong mentioned to the staff that the Kuching Ministers' Fellowship wanted to bless the NECF staff with a holiday, the decision was then made to take up the offer. We fixed the dates and booked the air tickets (at our own expense).

September 12: After all the waiting we finally left for Kuching (with the exception of Rev. Wong who was unable to join us). On arrival we were met by Pr. Matthew Ling, Pr. Jerry Teoh and others. We were given two vans and directions on how to get to Holiday Inn Resort at Damai Beach. We were to stay there for two nights. On the way, we stopped by a seafood place and had dinner. On arrival, we were struck by the impressiveness of the hotel and the size of our rooms.

September 13: In the morning we visited the Cultural Village near the hotel. Personally, I found this place very interesting as we walked around examining the different cultural structures. The first time I stepped into a long house, I was amazed at the simplicity of it and just wondered how a few families could stay together under one roof. We truly enjoyed ourselves at this village especially when we were at the "bottom" of this big house (under the stilts) where Yvonne and Sangan performed for us the bamboo dance with Ying and Sian operating the two long bamboo poles to the beat of the dance. In the evening, we went to another

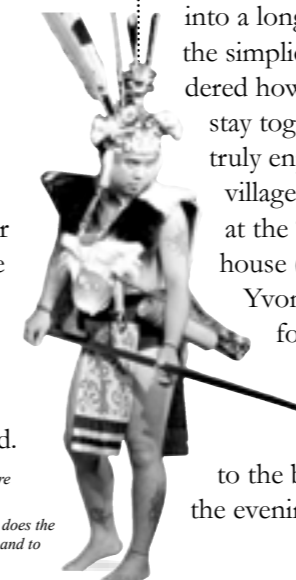
seafood place but unfortunately, many of us got bitten by hungry mosquitoes. (For the record, Sandy and Siew Foong were not bitten by the mosquitoes as they opted not to join us. They had nasi lemak at the Treez Café on a hill.)

September 14: We left Damai Beach after breakfast and headed back to the city of Kuching. On arrival, Bro. Ronald took us to the apartments where we were to stay for the next two nights. Later we visited several museums including the Sarawak Museum.

September 15: Our guide for the day was Bro. Ah Seng who took us to the waterfront. We had a good time shopping at the "bazaar" opposite the waterfront. It started raining and Ah Seng took us to his sister's shop to have the famous "kolo mee". Then we visited the Cat Museum. At night, we came out again and visited the well-known Satuk Market.

September 16: Sunday – we were ready for church. We split into two groups – one group worshipped at Calvary Family Church while the other group worshipped at Good News Fellowship. Then it was "bon voyage" as we headed for the airport after lunch.

To sum up, we had a wonderful and enjoyable retreat, being able to interact as well as get to know one another a little better. We were well taken care of by our brothers and sisters over there and were blessed by their kindness and hospitality. We thank the Kuching Ministers' Fellowship for the generous treat, and above all we thank the Lord and acknowledge that this was blessing from Him.



Peacemaking & the Church

- A R E F L E C T I O N

by Living Lee Chai Peng, Ph.D
Member of NECF Research Commission

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Rom. 12:18)

Just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. (1 Cor. 10:33)

Introduction

Recent events in Malaysia point to rising ethno-religious tensions. This appears to be true in schools and universities where racial polarization is widespread, and in society at large, where religious tensions seem to be on the rise. Some Muslims feel threatened when Malaysians of non-Muslim and Muslim faith hold forums to uphold the supremacy of the Federal Constitution and the unalienable rights that it gives to all Malaysians. They see this as an attack on Islam. High profile cases of conversions of Muslims have been highlighted in the media and have brought out into the open the debate about the right of a person to choose his or her own religion. All of these have contributed to a heightening of tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims and, to a lesser degree, among Muslims.

Economic distribution policies have also contributed to strained relations among the different races. These have been in place for almost forty years but were less acutely felt when the economy was fast expanding. Now that the economy is slowing due in part to globalization and in part to inappropriate policies, there is greater competition for limited economic opportunities. This is leading to greater strife between different groups and individuals in the struggle for survival.

In this environment, politicians and community leaders are often tempted to play the racial or religious card in order to be “champions of the people” and garner popular support. This forces Malaysians of various races to take extreme positions on issues because to refuse to do so will be made to look as if one is a traitor betraying one’s own kin. This further segments and threatens to fragment society.

Malaysians should be thankful to God Almighty that we have so far been able to manage the situation and been able to co-exist stably, at least on the surface. This is no guarantee, however, that this state of affairs will continue indefinitely into the future. We must all work to preserve the peace or we will lose it. Christians, in particular, need to be frontrunners in this regard. We, above all, have been given the mandate to be world’s peacemakers by following the footsteps of the Prince of Peace.

The Christian’s Dilemma

We would be dishonest to ourselves, however, if we did not admit that we face a fundamental dilemma. As Christians who believe in the Bible, we hold that only Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Thus, we feverishly seek to share the Gospel with others and try to bring them into the kingdom of God. The problem is that while

some may see the light and convert to Christianity others will resist because they are not convinced that what we proclaim is the truth and the only way. They believe that their own religion is just as good, if not better. This leads them to ask us to accept what they believe or even try to convert us. Being good Christians, we naturally feel compelled to politely refuse. Where does this leave us? We can end up being more entrenched in our belief of our rightness and continue our “warfare” against the “forces of darkness”. Or we can capitulate and adopt a universal position. Neither is a viable solution. We cannot pretend that all roads lead to God, neither is it possible to go on not declaring the uniqueness of the Gospel.

That brings me now to a very poignant question: Could we have somehow got it wrong when we say that Jesus is the only way means that someone must hear the Gospel, confess his sins, believe Jesus died on the cross for him and accept Jesus before he can taste salvation? The answer, I’m inclined to believe, is “maybe”. The salvation that Christ won on the cross was certainly not just applicable to those who heard and believed. It would apply to many more including those born before Jesus, those who have never had a chance to hear the Gospel and those who are incapable of responding

because they are babies or mentally incapacitated. The stock answer we have when asked about them was God is a just God and will deal with them fairly. They will not be lost merely because they cannot hear the Gospel and respond to it. Those who do have the opportunity to hear and still do not believe, however, have spurned the grace of God and will be punished with eternal damnation.

Does that mean we stop preaching the Gospel and let our neighbours go their own way hoping that God will somehow save them? This is the fear of particularists or exclusivists who are opposed to the inclusivist idea that the salvation won by Christ on the cross is far more effective in its application than just to those who hear and believe. People do not primarily go to hell for not believing in Jesus Christ. They go to hell because they chose evil over good and “their” way instead of “God’s” way. Even those who choose good over evil (and that can be a very tricky business because our hearts are so deceptive viz.

the Pharisees and other religious people who thought they were loving and serving God when it was in fact the opposite), we are imperfect and need the grace of God ministered through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for the sins of all mankind to pay the price demanded by the law. But who is to say who will benefit from that supreme sacrifice of God’s Son on the cross? Only He who judges the innermost thoughts of every man’s heart knows. We do not.

Does holding an inclusivist position enable us to live in harmony with one’s non-Christian neighbour? Who is our common enemy? The Evil One that

seeks to destroy what is good and noble and kind. Who are the children of God? They are certainly not exclusively those who belong to other religions. After all, many will call Him “Lord, Lord” on Judgement Day will find out that they don’t belong to Him as they thought they did.

Are people saved because they are Christians? Or, they are saved because they desire God and believe in Him and live lives of faith unto One higher than themselves? Many hear the invitation of Christ and respond

Could we have somehow got it wrong when we say that Jesus is the only way means that someone must hear the Gospel, confess his sins, believe Jesus died on the cross for him and accept Jesus before he can taste salvation?

to His call. Others unable to hear such an invitation nevertheless live out their lives to the best ability in the light their consciences afford them. Can we not put aside our religious labels and work alongside those who seek to promote good and fight against evil? We stand together to fight against the destructive elements within each religion and culture but do not tear down or destroy that religion or culture as a whole because in so doing we make enemies of those who should be friends.

We seek to dialogue but not debate with those from other faiths. It is not trying to convert you to my religion but to open up your mind to what

God is doing in our midst today. You can perhaps discover a deeper and truer relationship with God if you extend your search beyond your traditional boundaries.

Conversions are necessary but not just from one religion to another. Conversions can take place within as well as between religions. It is not the religious label that counts but a genuine encounter with God. Hence, we do hear of conversions not just from other religions to Christianity but also of disaffected Christians who had

found the Christianity they grew up with wanting and who converted to other religions when they could not find the answers to the deep questions of their hearts in their churches. One can attribute such conversions to all sorts of reasons and blame the Christian communities or churches that failed them, but we cannot stop them from following after the cry of their hearts for what they perceive as getting in touch with the real God. If we say we support the individual’s right to choose his

or her religion we must be prepared to accept conversions out of Christianity as much as into Christianity according to the individual’s conscience. The only thing we need to fight against is the evil of forced or underhanded conversions.

The sharing of the Gospel has to be done lovingly and wisely, not in a triumphant and offensive manner but as someone puts it “one beggar sharing with another where to find food”. The onus is on us to share what God has done in our lives and what He can do in theirs but it is entirely up to them how they choose to respond to the Gospel. There is indeed no compulsion in religion. *Continued on page 13...*

The recent “gay church” issue in Malaysia has caused considerable uproar within the relatively “peaceful” Christian community. The phrase itself may be an oxymoron to many Christians since homosexual behaviour is considered an abomination to the God of the Church. Such behaviour is believed to be smearing the reputation of the Church and scarring the witness of the Christian community in the country.

Gay Church: A Response

by Lim Siew Foong, Executive Secretary (Research)

Indeed, Christians are often criticized for being intolerant of the homosexual community. Rev. Wong Kim Kong, Secretary-General of NECF Malaysia, in an interview by the media, explained, “One of the reasons for the emotional reaction is because Christians do not want others to assume they condone such a thing... It is clear that the Bible prohibits sexual relations between people of the same sex. If a person condones same sex marriages, he is definitely violating Christian principles.” (The Star, Aug 10)

While the Malaysian Church does not wish to take God’s grace for granted and compromise on the biblical stand, she seeks to understand and to show compassion towards the homosexuals. As the Church accepts their struggles and respects individual choice of lifestyle, she firmly believes that homosexual behaviour does not please God. Having said that, Christians have to ask whether their negative attitude towards the homosexual community is based on stereotypes and prejudice.

Tracing the Origin

Research studies and the controversies generated in tracking the source of homosexual orientation continue unabated. This is largely due to questionable methodologies and inconsistent results.

In the early days, however, homosexuality was predominantly regarded as a mental illness or psychological disorder. This notion was radically challenged in the 1970s in the face of mounting pressure from the ever evolving empirical evidence and the changing cultural views on homosexuality.

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official manual that listed mental and emotional disorders. Two years later, the American Psychological Association passed a resolution supporting the removal and reaffirmed its position in 1997 that homosexuality was not a disorder.

While the debate continues over what determines sexual orientation, many scientists and mental health professionals concur that it is the result of a combination of biological, cognitive and environmental factors including childhood experiences. In short, there are probably many reasons to a person’s sexual orientations. As Christians, we should not be too quick to condemn.

Regardless of the origin, some people believe that sexual orientation is a conscious choice like any other lifestyle choice, while others argue that one cannot change his or her orientation at will. Still others opine that sexual preference is a private matter, that is, what one does in the bedroom stays in the bedroom.

A Christian Response

How then should Christians respond to the setting up of a “gay church” at their doorsteps? Rev. Wong put it aptly, “It is the deviant sexual behaviour we do not condone. We cannot stop him wanting to set up such a kind of church, but the evangelical churches will inform followers of our stand and advise them not to follow this teaching.” (The Star, Aug 10)

Homosexual behaviour, while deemed

a moral abomination according to Christian belief, should not be criminalized. NECF Malaysia has, in the past, spoken out against policing morality based on the tenets of a particular religion¹. We believe that religious conviction should not be incorporated into legal sanctions in a pluralistic society like ours. Suffice to say that our existing Penal Code remains sufficient in maintaining public order, public health and morality.

NECF Malaysia consistently upholds religious freedom in Article 11 and the provisions of fundamental rights (including free speech) enshrined in the Federation Constitution. The rights of every individual residing in Malaysia are safeguarded by the Constitution. We believe that violation of these provisions would bring unintended consequences to our freedom to worship. At the same time, NECF Malaysia faithfully abides by the biblical principles, recognizes the fallen nature of all human beings and remembers that God’s plan is redemptive. Therefore, our stand on the issue of “homosexual behaviour” remains clear:

1. We continue to affirm God’s love and concern for all humanity (John 3:16).
2. We do not condone homosexual behaviour because it is incompatible with God’s will as revealed in the Scriptures.
3. We believe in educating our congregations on the subject matter so that Christians will be able to respond with wisdom and discernment.
4. We continue to affirm that monogamous heterosexual marriage is the form of partnership uniquely intended by God for sexual relationship between men and women.

¹<http://www.necf.org.my/newsmaster.cfm?&menuid=12&action=view&retrieveid=732>

Close-door Dialogue with MCA

On November 16, 2007, the NECF Malaysia organized a close-door dialogue with the *Wakil Rakyat* from MCA at the NECF Conference Room. Over a hundred pastors and Christian leaders attended the session from 10.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. The objective of the dialogue was to allow the evangelical Christian community to voice their grievances and the other side to clarify their stand and explain the steps they have taken or are taking to resolve the problems.

Several issues were raised by the floor and responded to by the panel of *Wakil Rakyat*. At the end of the session, a memorandum was submitted to MCA.

Summary of the Memorandum

Preamble

On behalf of the Evangelical Christian Community, the NECF Malaysia takes the opportunity to draw to the government’s attention our concerns and express our commitment to engaging in nation-building. We faithfully adhere to God’s mandate, that is, to seek the welfare of the country where we live, and pray to Him on her behalf, so as to achieve a Malaysia where diverse communities continue to live together in unity, peace and harmony.

Our Stand

The NECF Malaysia:

1. Acknowledges and recognizes that mutual enrichment and mutual respect for one another regardless of ethnic-religious background is crucial to sustain a harmonious pluralistic society.
2. Believes that the platform for peaceful co-existence of various people

groups is a democratic governance that values pluralism, defends the fundamental liberties as provided by the Federal Constitution, and upholds that “all persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law” (Article 8[1]).

3. Upholds that Malaysia is a constitutional-monarchy with the Agong as head of State and where the Federal Constitution is the supreme law of the land.

4. Objects to any notion of Malaysia being declared an “Islamic State”.

5. Respects that Islam is the religion of Federation for ceremonial purposes, and all other religions can be practiced in peace and harmony.

6. Is, however, concerned and saddened by the fact that all the above have not been fully reflected in our pluralistic society. Various incidents over the years represent a grave setback for a progressive and moderate society.

Our Concerns

1. National unity is in jeopardy and democracy is in its apparent decline.

2. In efforts to gain political mileage, statements made or actions taken by national leaders and certain *wakil rakyat* have alarmingly set forth the basis for radical Islamization and deepening ethnic-religious tensions. While the MCA Youth’s responses have been laudable and encouraging, the non-Malay communal parties of the Barisan Nasional as a whole have, unfortunately, not shown their abilities and political will to defend the rights of their respective communities.

3. Unresolved constitutional and legislative problems have demonstrated partiality and injustice, especially in

cases involving both Muslim and non-Muslim parties. This violates the Rule of Law and undermines the supremacy of the Federal Constitution.

4. The problem of setting up a generally accepted mechanism to determine the legal status of a person who has left Islam continues unabated. The communal parties of the Barisan Nasional have not been seen defending religious freedom of an individual nor making any effort to resolve the problems.

5. The overzealousness of the State Religious Enforcement authorities relentlessly infringes the personal and family domain of the non-Muslim citizens. The increasing trend of moral-policing according to Islamic tenet is alarming.

6. Discriminatory actions of local authorities concerning places of worship.

7. The use of certain Bahasa Malaysia words in Christian literatures.

8. Despite the Prime Minister’s attempts to paint a moderate picture and a government that cares for all citizens regardless of ethnic-religious background, the use of inflammatory language at UMNO General Assembly has not been adequately curtailed.

9. Malaysia is not an Islamic State. Our Constitution and a binding decision of the Supreme Court have rejected any such notion. Islam as the official religion does not make Malaysia an Islamic state. However, there have been irresponsible and reckless declarations by some quarters.

Conclusion

We sincerely hope that the government will be able to halt the above decline as we pledge to work together towards achieving a true national unity.

Street Demos

On Nov 10, a coalition of opposition parties and non-governmental organizations calling itself Bersih (Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections) organized a rally of some 10,000 people marching to Istana Negara with an election reform petition. The memorandum meant for Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Mizan was submitted by Lim Kit Siang of the DAP, PAS President Datuk Seri Abdul Haji Awang and Parti Keadilan Rakyat adviser Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to an official at the gates of Istana Negara. The palace later issued a statement that Tuanku Mizan was unhappy with the claims that he and the Palace had approved and supported the demonstration.

The Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) had planned a similar rally on Nov 25, this time to march to the British High Commission to hand over a memorandum to Queen Elizabeth II of Britain. They charged that the status of Indians had not improved since Independence and “our economic situation is likened to one living in the 19th century”. Three Hindraf leaders were arrested a couple of days before the rally. At the last minute, the handing over of the memorandum was called off after crowds were dispersed by police.

Both gatherings were illegal as they did not have a police permit.

The rallies led to massive traffic jams leading into KL as police mounted roadblocks leading into the city. Tourism and business were affected. On Nov 16, businessmen and representatives from 80 non-governmental organizations held a press conference in protest against the Nov 10 demonstration. The NGOs included the Kuala

Lumpur Taxi Drivers Association and many others. The placards said: “We want peace” “We want stability” “Street Demo is not our culture” etc.

All Malaysians want peace and stability and to find amicable ways to resolve issues. However, some parties may have been driven to desperation by the deteriorating situation. Pray for patience and understanding. Pray that the government and ruling party will have the political will to change.

“Lingam” Video Clip

A Royal Commission of Inquiry is being set up to investigate this case. The “Lingam” video clip allegedly shows lawyer Datuk V. K. Lingam discussing judicial appointments with a senior judge in a mobile phone conversation.

Home Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Radzi Sheikh Ahmad said: “The Royal Commission can summon anyone, the person who recorded the video, the actor, or the people mentioned in the clip. All the witnesses involved in the case would be forced to appear. This way, we will get to the bottom of it.” (NST, Nov 19) The Cabinet has to decide on the terms of reference, the scope of power and the members of the commission.

Pray that the case is resolved quickly so as to restore the people’s faith in the judiciary.

Economy

Several projects under the 9th Malaysia Plan (9MP) are behind schedule. This was revealed in a circular dated Nov 7 issued by the Chief Secretary to the Government. As of Oct 15,

only 29.9% of the allocation for the 9MP had been spent and this was not according to the implementation schedule. “This is happening because of the lack of detailed planning by the implementing agencies,” the circular reported. Also, some high impact projects had not even begun. (NST, Nov 19)

On the positive note, national carmaker Proton was reported to have experienced a turnaround with stronger sales and a higher Consumer Satisfaction Index. Exports have also improved. Proton is expected to make a smaller loss this year compared to last year. As a result, talks with several foreign carmakers such as Volkswagen and General Motors concerning possible strategic alliances were called off.

Pray for swift implementation of plans to better the lives of all Malaysians.

Elections

Malaysians are on the edge of their seats waiting for the coming General Elections. The Prime Minister said it’s his call to dissolve Parliament and call for elections. Nobody knows for sure when the elections will happen.

Once again, the future of our country lays open. Pray for peaceful elections and pray that the moderates would once again gain control of the country. Let us pray to God and vote wisely. (The Citizen Think Tank (www.citizenthinktank.com) uses six criteria to identify and rate elected representatives – personal integrity; performance in elected or appointed office, ability to resolve problems, public visibility, knowledge of economic issues, and diligence.)

Youth Workers’ Consultation Report

by Larry Lee

“The Malaysian Church is one generation from extinction if it lacks the conviction and concrete plan to reach the next generation disciples and then empower them to be disciplers for Christ!” warned Pastor Timothy Loh, Senior Pastor of Eagle Covenant Fellowship.

Pastor Timothy was addressing some 65 youth workers and pastors attending the Youth Workers’ Consultation on September 24-26 at Heritage Hotel, Ipoh organized by NECF YouthNet. The participants, who hailed from 34 para-church organizations and churches and 8 states, gathered to brainstorm issues facing Malaysian youths and youth ministries.

The long-term effectiveness of youth ministry was called into question and substantial concerns were raised about the future of the Malaysian Church. The Consultation resolved to take 3 broad steps to move youth ministries forward.

1. Discipling and helping youths transit in life

The issue of youths dropping out of church has been a hot topic for several years. However, to date, there is hardly any quantitative study on this issue in Malaysia. Hence, we have to rely on facts and figures from abroad.

This year (2007), LifeWay Research completed an extensive study on this issue in USA and discovered that 70% of young adults (ages 23-30) dropped

out of church for at least a year between the ages of 18-22.

“Although such studies have yet to be carried out in Malaysia, we do observe similar trends in Malaysia. For example, churches with huge Sunday Schools should eventually see corresponding growth in their youth fellowships. But often this is not the case,” commented Scripture Union’s General Secretary, Jason Fong.

He then cited a study in England that discovered that about 1,000 children and youths below age 15 left churches each week throughout the 1990s. He also emphasized that whilst these youths left church at about age 12-14, the decision to leave was made around age 7-10.

Since these researches were carried out in the context of a society familiar with Christianity it could be adapted to raise a more significant question for Malaysian Christians today: How do we as Christians today go about discipling our next generation of Christians?

Many agreed that one of the major causes of youths drifting away from

God is identity crisis. As they grow older, their mind starts to question their heart resulting in them struggling to find faith/purpose and God’s call in their lives. The following were proposed to handle such physiological changes adequately so that we could help youths grow in their faith as they grow older:

- Develop a trans-generational approach i.e. a ministry approach/mindset to help youths/children grow in their faith as they transit from one age group to another
- Be relational and stay relevant to their age group/changes and at the same time address their issues
- Help them develop core values and principles because these are hard to change
- Encourage them to serve, and support, guide, mentor, nurture and help them discover their strength and identity in God
- Meet with parents to gain their support and partnership
- Organize exposure or mission trips to help them see how blessed they are and how much they have that can be of value to the Kingdom. For example, there were cases where youths stopped wasting food after seeing firsthand the hunger and poverty outside of their comfort zones.

Besides transitioning in age, youths might also transit geographically. For example, they may leave their hometown after SPM to attend college in a bigger city in the Klang Valley. Hence, the Consultation agreed that there has to be more dialogues and partnerships between churches of small-big towns to establish bridging programmes or initiatives that will facilitate/help youths with their transitions geographically.

Pastor Lindy Ong shared several bridging examples from her experience and church context (SIB KL). She emphasized that before bridging programmes can be developed, relationships among the leaders of different age groups/zones must first be bridged so that

the transition of youths can be more intentional and synchronized. SIB KL adopts a model that seeks to empower the older generation to sow into the next generation.

2. Partner with parents to develop a more holistic youth ministry

The Consultation agreed that there is a great need to “tie” the youth ministry to the family. Family remains the main context where children or youths grow up. After all, they spend more time at home and only a few hours in church each week. Hence, the church needs to educate parents to shift mindsets on the following:

- From “dumping” their troubled teens on the youth workers to working synergistically and strategically with the church – youth ministry starts at home!
- From emphasizing academic excellence to including spiritual excellence i.e. don’t just set priorities for tuitions but more importantly encourage youths to attend and serve in a youth group
- From trying to make their children better to becoming better parents/leaders first e.g. reading and attending workshops on parenting, plan family devotional/altar, etc.
- From being the complainer/nagger to their children to being a positive role-model e.g. by providing a safe/healthy environment for children to make mistakes
- From being mere bread winner or needs provider to God’s transforming agent/steward in the children’s lives

It was proposed that there should be multi-layered dialogues among parents, youth workers (church) and youths as follows:

- Parents–youth workers dialogue to examine relevant issues faced by youths and plan ways to reach them
- Parents and youth workers partner



to organize activities for the youths
 - Youths can also organize activities to educate their parents and the youth workers
 - All 3 parties can co-organize activities for all – termed as “Inter-Generational” activities. These activities can be in the form of workshops, carnivals, mission trips, fun events, forums (see below), etc. on relevant topics and problems such as peer pressure, exams, sex, music, Internet, media, financial stewardship, career planning, bridging generation gap, relating to parents (for children) and parenting/mentoring skills (for parents).

As part of the Consultation, an Inter-Generational forum was held at the Canning Garden Baptist Church, Ipoh to facilitate and enhance better understanding between parents and youths. This public forum was opened to both parents and youths and was moderated by Dr. Herbert Tan, a FamilyLife consultant and trainer with Malaysian Campus Crusade for Christ. This unique forum provided parents with windows into the Youth World to help bridge both the Generation and Cultural Gaps. It also provided a spring-board for youths to develop in a holistic and godly way either in youth ministry or at home.

3. Develop personal leadership competencies to stay relevant in youth ministry

Rev. Clement Wong highlighted that the youths today face the same bombardment as the previous generation. It is a myth to think that youths drop out simply due to negative external-

ties or influences from media, music or fashion. It is more important to look internally i.e. church structure and personal leadership competencies to see if we have the knowledge, skills and abilities to stay relevant to the next generation without diluting the truth or message of the Gospel.

Dr. Herbert Tan stressed that leadership development is important because it affirms our mission as a Church to present the Gospel to a lost world, build and multiply disciples for His Kingdom and nurture succeeding generations with excellent leadership to increase the Church’s capacity to pursuing our mission with excellence. He proposed a 5E process in training and developing leaders:

1. **Equipping** – what do they need to learn?
2. **Exposure** – who can help them grow?
3. **Experience** – what do they need to do?
4. **Environment** – organizational culture conducive to growth
5. **Evaluation** – self-awareness

Finally, the following were also proposed during the Consultation:

- Leaders need to be more intentional in raising/discipling/mentoring the next generation of leaders
- Youth ministry needs to emphasize more on heart and relationship – not only skills, activities, programmes, etc.
- Concrete plans and processes need to be systemized so that there is consistency in leadership development
- Leaders need to see a bigger picture of how God is working in Malaysia through a variety matrix of ministry, each different and unique yet working together in unity
- Leaders need to encourage the youths to dream big and engage/transform the world through the media, arts, entertainment, science and technology, education, etc.

Lawas Churches Doing Their Part

“The churches in Lawas were very happy and excited about this project,” said Pr. Penggiran who coordinated the recent 40-day Fast & Prayer project in Lawas. “We never prayed like this before, and we intend to participate again next year.” He told



From Lawas with love – envelopes filled with charity

Continued from page 1...

are based on the theory of evolution which does away with God. On the contrary, Christians believe that God is active in history. George Bancroft, an eminent historian in the 19th century said, “Providence is the light of history and the soul of the world. God is in history and all history has a unity because God is in it.” The providential view of history is the correct view of history. The end of history, or His Story, is the resurrection and judgment and the eternal life beyond for those who believe.

One area we can very clearly see God at work in history is the march of the Gospel. God has determined the time for each nation to hear the Gospel. He directed Paul and his companions where they should preach and He is still directing missionaries today.

Do we see God’s hand on the nations, and on our nation too, or do we think God is interested only in Israel? Do we need to spend more time studying our nation’s history to see where God is leading our nation and the Church in Malaysia? Do we believe that we, in cooperation with God, have a role to play, a part in shaping history? Or

Ann Low who’s in charge of NECF Prayer Ministry that they used the prayer booklets provided, though they had to photocopy some when they could not get hold of enough copies! Sunday school teachers also made use of the children’s version and taught the kids to pray (though they did not fast). Lawas comprises 6 districts, namely Trusan Laut, Trusan Tengah, Ulu Trusan, Lawas Damit, Merapou and Jalan Trusan. There are over 60 churches in Lawas with an average of 30 members, all under the Sidang Injil Borneo denomination.

The participating churches recently sent in their charity collection.

do we think as like the humanists or Marxists that we are but helpless spectators in the inexorable march of history? Our belief will shape our action.

3. The Primacy of the Church

The Apostle Paul reprimanded the Corinthians: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!” (1 Cor. 6:2-3) While the main point was not to bring lawsuits before unbelievers, there is a more general application. We Christians should be the most capable of people to deal with issues of this life and this world. We must take the lead in transforming the nation and the world.

One person who stood for the primacy of the Church was Wang Mingdao, a Chinese pastor. In the first half of the 20th century, anti-Christian sentiment was strong in China. A group of Christian intellectuals took the modernist path and sought to defend Christianity as a rational, practical and relevant faith well suited to address the problems facing the Chinese people. They responded to negative senti-

Christ Found Them



54 National Service trainees at the Camp Juara Serian, Kuching received Christ during the last NS session in June-September 2007. Most of them came from a nominal Christian background, with a few from another religion. They were all happy to know their new-found faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank God for the Bible League who helped lighten our burden by subsidizing the Berita Baik (Bahasa Malaysia Bible). The trainees received a copy each (Old and New Testaments). To God be the glory!

Reported by Pr. Tram Epoi

ments by building schools, hospitals, etc. Unfortunately, they also believed that God works primarily through the world at large and the Church is just a part of this movement of God. At that time, they believed, God was working through communism. If the Church joined the struggle, then good. If not, even the Church would be swept aside. Wang, however, emphasized the necessity of personal repentance and salvation, and presented the Church as The Alternative Community. Personal transformation on a large scale is the catalyst for national transformation, especially when Christians work together to achieve this. God works in the world primarily through the Church.

Do we believe that God works primarily through His Church, His Body? Or do we try too hard to be “relevant” to the world? Do we honour God by setting the standards or do we just blindly follow the fashion of the time?

Let us set our thinking on God and His Word as we embark on nation building.

How to Fail in Evangelism

by Sandy Tan

Usually, at the commencement of her work, a speaker or writer would want to establish her credibility for the work. My credibility for writing an article with the above title is the fact that I have been a Christian for 14 years and I have only made one “convert”. Yup, only one, in spite of all my “efforts”.

Why this miserable “failure”? This must be the topmost question in your head. As if it's not the topmost question in my head! But anyway, as I look back, I think I employed the wrong approach. I always had it in my head that Christianity is the “true religion” and I consciously and subconsciously set out to prove it. Prove it through all kinds of “evidence”. But my audience was not the right kind to be receptive to this approach. They were mostly well educated and widely read. They knew that their own religion and others had their “evidence” too. I was told this a few times but I did not take it seriously. Until recently, I lent the book *God's Smuggler* by Brother Andrew to a Muslim friend. Of course I asked him what he thought of it after he finished reading it. (At least he finished reading it.) His response was very interesting. He learned that God did not just help the Muslims. He told me he had read many similar books about Muslim missionaries who went out in faith and how God worked miraculously on their behalf. So I am not sure if he's more surprised that God also helped Christians or I that God also helped Muslims!

Some Christians will fall back on verses like: “He causes his sun to

rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Matt. 4:45b) Which is true but shallow. Others dismiss the miracles as coincidences, which is even worse because it is stubborn denial. My point is, Christians can be so naïve; we live in the rabbit-holes of our churches and try to survey the sky from the bottom of the well (Chinese proverb). Looking back, I have to admit that if I were in my friends' shoes, in those days, I wouldn't have been attracted to Christianity.

But what's different about our faith then? Or is it different? I believe it is. But the difference is more than skin deep. It goes right to the heart of man. A person who becomes a Christian must believe that he's a sinner who has fallen short of the perfect standards of God and that only Jesus can save him. This is ultimately something we need to believe. And only the Holy Spirit can cause someone to believe. This is good news and bad news. Good news because it's not our job to “convert” people. Bad news because it's out of our hands and, well, it's gonna take more effort on our part to prepare the ground. It has been said that God's timing is usually slower than ours!

I think 1 Pet. 3:15b provides a good model for evangelism: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” This is how I understand it, in practical terms, at least when applied to people like my friends. “Always be prepared to give an answer” means learn more about our

own faith and other faiths. We need to speak confidently about our faith. The Holy Spirit will help us, of course, but this is no excuse for laziness. Also, we need to talk about other faiths accurately, and not be misrepresent them as something they are not. That would be laughable to anyone who knows better. “To everyone who asks you” means sometimes it is better not to say anything but wait until people ask us. For them to ask us, we need to spend time with them and share our lives with them. No hit-and-run evangelism. “Reason for the hope that you have” means why we do not shipwreck our faith despite the many storms that we encounter. We need to show by our lives that Jesus is different. We show this by being different ourselves, but superficially but in times of great difficulty. “Gentleness and respect” means we mustn't assume that others are stupid. Evangelism is not a project. If we sense it when others make a project out of us, and we hate it (no matter how nice they try to be to us), we ought to know that others also sense it and hate it (no matter how nice we try to be to them).

Now I only hope that the rest of my life shall be long enough, God willing, for me to apply the above. Hopefully by the end of my life I shall be qualified to write an article with a different title. Proverbs 11:30 says: “He who wins souls is wise.” But some versions read: “He who is wise, wins souls”. I guess if we are wise in our approach, we will eventually win souls. May God use us and bless our sincere efforts to bring our friends and loved ones to Him.

*The Council,
Commissions and Staff
of NECF Malaysia
wishes all our Ordinary
Members, Associate
Members and Friends
a Blessed and Mean-
ingful Christmas. May
Christ be in our midst
as we celebrate
His birth!*

Thank You.

NECF Malaysia is always appreciative of your financial gifts. Please continue to partner with us in the work. *Please use the enclosed envelope should you like to make a gift.*

Continued from page 5...

Other Aspects of Living in Harmony

There cannot be peace and harmony until all the citizens of a country feel secure that their needs are met, their rights respected and they have a common future together where everyone will be cared for. This utopian vision is hard to achieve in reality but people will be satisfied if they at least see that there is an honest attempt to go in that particular direction.

History has taught us that as long as we are fighting for our own rights at the expense of others', nobody wins. We must fight for the rights of everybody so that all win. Human nature is such that we will fight for and defend our rights more than that of the others; but if we continue to do so we only intensify our striving against one another and may end up destroying one another. Compromises have to be made, sacrifices given especially to those who are left behind socially and economically irregardless of race or religion. When we can love and help the poor and needy, even and especially those not from our own community or ethnic group, it speaks powerfully of the love of God in our hearts. It is hard to fight against love.

How then shall we live? I believe that we have to start loving our neighbours and desiring their good. We do so by entering into their world, understanding their position and helping them in practical ways. We don't need to talk to our friends but our enemies. We have to help create an atmosphere whereby we can have genuine friendships, knowing we can trust each other because the other is not out to do me in but to do good in my life. When we can build bridges of genuine friendship and tear down the walls of hostility and suspicion, then perhaps we can experience lasting peace. It never works to wait for the other side to take the initiative. We must start the ball rolling by doing what is good and right irregardless of the response we get from the other side. Their suspicions would be overcome, their fears allayed and their hearts opened if we persist in loving them as we love ourselves.

State Spot

The 9th Malaysian Plan brightens the economic future of Perlis, one of the poorest states in Malaysia. Under the recently launched North Corridor Economic Region project, the smallest state in Malaysia is to be developed into a commercial scale agro-based region, producing high quality agricultural products that should rival world-famous produce.

History in Brief

Originally part of the Kedah Sultanate, Perlis became an independent territory in 1842, when the 20-year war between Kedah and Siam ended. The grandson of the Sultan of Kedah, Syed Hussain Jamalulail of Arab descent, became the first Raja of Perlis. The state continued to be a vassal of Siam until 1909. The Anglo-Siamese Treaty saw Siam relinquishing its imperial claim to the northern Malay states (Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan & Terengganu).

Under British protection, Perlis experienced radical administrative changes and progressed rapidly, despite being a rice-growing state highly dependent on Kedah.

During World War II, the Japanese returned Perlis to Siam for its cooperation and alliance with Japan. When Japan surrendered, Perlis was re-taken and placed under British Administration until it became part of the Malayan Union, then the Federation of Malaya in 1957 and finally the Federation of Malaysia in 1963.

Since 2000, the hereditary monarch has been Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, who was the Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia from 2001 to 2006. The Menteri Besar is Dato' Seri Shahidan Kassim of Barisan Nasional.



Perlis

Perlis, Perlis Indera Kayangan,
"Perlis Heavenly Paradise"

Capital: Kangar

(Royal Capital): Arau

Raja (not Sultan) Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin
Putra Jamalulail

Chief Minister: Dato' Seri Shahidan Kassim

Statistics (Malaysia Statistics Dept., 2005)

Population 0.23 million (est.): Malay 83.9%, Other Bumiputera 0.3% (Siamese), Chinese 9.8%, Indian 1.3%, Others 2.9%, Non-citizens 1.8%

Religious Breakdown (2000) Islam 84.5%, Buddhism 11.4%, Taoism/Confucianism 1.4%, Hinduism 1.0%, Christianity 0.0026%, Others 1.1%, No Religion 0.1%

Incidence of Poverty (2004) 6.3% (Hardcore: 1.7%)

Islamization & Religious Freedom

Although Siamese (Thai) influence is evident in many aspects of life, the Islamic movement has been an essential force in the development of this Malay-dominated society. PAS was said to have had a significant stronghold in Perlis until 1995 when UMNO strengthened its grip in its effort to "out-Islam" the former.

The state government's conservative Islamic policies on numerous social issues have created an extent of controversy. For example, smoking is *haram* [forbidden]; singing becomes *haram* if the lyrics arouse listeners to "lose themselves" [*membawa kepada kelalaian*], if the singers do not cover their *aurat* (certain parts of the body which Islam rules as not fit for public viewing), and if the performance features a mixture of males and females.

Apostasy

The state of Perlis does not make any provision in regards to apostasy. However, it is interesting to note the response of the Menteri Besar who, last November, vowed to thoroughly investigate an allegation of apostasy against a national mariner, a Perlis citizen.

zen. He told the press that "apostasy is included in the law of every state" and "we fear that we would be accused of not doing our job and not paying attention to such matters" (The Star, 2006-11-7).

For the record, Perlis did pass the Islamic Aqidah [Faith] Protection Bill in 2000. The bill proposed among other things that Islamic "deviants" and apostates be detained in a faith rehabilitation centre for a year. Although the word "apostasy" was not explicitly mentioned, the bill made references to "any act by a Muslim who is a *mukallaf* [adult subject to Islamic laws] on his own free will either by word, deed or by any means that may be interpreted as an attempt to change his *aqidah* [faith] and belief towards the religion of Islam".

At the same time, there was strong protest against a similar Bill, the Federal Territory Restoration of Faith Bill which was to be tabled in the Parliament. The government eventually announced that the Bill would not be passed and that the Perlis law would not be enforced.

To safeguard the interests of the Muslim community, the state adopted the Control and Restriction Bill in 2002, prohibiting the "propagation of religious doctrine and belief which is contrary to the religion of Islam". Four years later, the Administration

of the Religion of Islam Enactment 2006 allows the *Syariah* High Court to declare a person is no longer a Muslim or declare a deceased person was a Muslim.

More controversially, the state is said to have a non-gazetted *fatwa* (i.e. not enforceable yet) that a female Muslim convert who wants to return to her original religion should be killed, but, because this is not permissible under Malaysian law, she should be imprisoned for life.

The Mufti

The new Perlis Mufti, Dr. Mohd. Asri Zainul Abidin, believes in addressing the reasons for apostasy rather than calling for punishment. He, nonetheless, feels that non-Muslims should not be prejudiced against the *syariah* court because Islam promises justice for all.

The young progressive-thinking Mufti has boldly spoken out against conservatism and called for a modern and compassionate face of Islam. He becomes the first Mufti in Malaysia to recommend Muslim converts retain their original surname. Earlier, he demanded the state government to issue permits for the Chinese Muslims to build mosques and suraus for their own community. "Understanding Islam is not about being Malay. One is still a Muslim without neglecting the mother tongue, culture and tradition which are not against Islam," he reportedly said. (NST, Feb 07).

Dr. Asri has also openly condemned the overzealousness of the religious authorities prying into people's privacy, saying that "to invade an individual's privacy is against Islam". As a result, the Perlis government plans to amend its religious law to prevent officers from spying on couples, but the law against *kebahwat* remains (NST, Feb 07).

Other Issues

Corruption

Perlis is in dire financial straits. It has a reputation of ineffective management and weak enforcement, resulting in the loss of millions in revenue and delayed low-cost housing projects among others.

In 2006, the state was reported to have mishandled a special fund for the poor, using it to pay for a nation building course attended by state employees (malaysiakini.com).

Crime

Perlis recorded the lowest crime incidences in the year 2006 and the first half of 2007. No murders were recorded this year. There were two cases last year.

In terms of racial harmony, it is said that both Malays and non-Malays in Perlis speak the same colloquial language and display the kind of solidarity and genuine friendship that one does not see in the Klang Valley.

The Church

There are only eight churches in Perlis with a Christian population of approximately 600 people. One of the major challenges faced is the crisis of leadership and manpower due to years of "human drain" for education and economic reasons.

The year 2006 saw the churches' conviction for unity. The first pastors' fellowship was formed and combined prayer meetings were initiated.

The fairly young Universiti Malaysia Perlis with approximately 3,000 students and a workforce of more than 600 people has brought much excitement to state, the Christian community in particular. Stirred with a passion for the lost and concerns for the young people, campus outreaches and youth ministries are on the move. With the

Celebration of Hope Malaysia initiatives, the local churches roll up their sleeves looking forward with great expectancy to witness to God's mighty work.

Pray

1. State government and local councils:
 - a. Capable men and women of integrity, who are trustworthy and respect the rule of law, who uphold religious freedom for all;
 - b. Good stewardship and wise management of state funds for public good;
 - c. Effective measures and efficient implementation to eradicate rural poverty;
 - d. Commitment in expanding the agriculture-based economy, more job opportunities and improvement in people's standard of living and quality of life;
 - e. Just, transparent and effective implementation of plans in helping poor farmers and budding small business holders.
2. Any subversive element or illegal activity intended for public harm and social disorder to be exposed and removed.
3. Moderation and respect for one another, against the spirit of religious overzealousness and extremism.
4. Church: Christians to be in the forefront in addressing social concerns; sufficient manpower and more labourers in the harvest field; stronger ties among the local churches; greater bonding among church leaders state-wide; strong pastors' fellowship; fruitful and vibrant youth work; powerful prayer movement.

A Prayer for the Persecuted

When Sennacherib the king of Assyria invaded Judea (2 Ki. 18 & 19) he sent a letter to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem, boasting that the Assyrian army was invincible and asserting that the God of Israel was no god at all. Hezekiah took the threatening letter into the temple, “spread it out before the Lord” and prayed: “O Lord, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see... Now, O Lord our God, deliver us . . . so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God.” (2 Ki. 19:15-19)

The Lord answered Hezekiah’s prayer through the prophet Isaiah, assuring Hezekiah he knew of Sennacherib’s belligerence, boastings and blasphemies and reminding him that God is sovereign, righteous, just and faithful. Finally God promised to defend and save the city for his own sake, and the sake of his servant David.

Today there are many “Sennacheribs” in the world – people who rage against, repress, persecute, terrorize and threaten God’s people. They are bold for the same reasons as Sennacherib – they wrongly believe they are invincible and that our God is no god at all.

Today multitudes of Christians are persecuted, besieged, terrorized and threatened. This may be due to external forces (like Sennacherib) or else by repressive dictatorship or religious intolerance or racism at a state or local level.

In conjunction with the **International Day of Prayer** for the Persecuted Church (observed in Malaysia in November) let us, the Church, united as one body with Christ as our Head,

stand before the Almighty God to intercede as Hezekiah did for the persecuted, besieged, terrorized and threatened Church and for the honour, glory and praise of the Lord our God.

A PRAYER FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH – based on Hezekiah’s prayer

It is true, O Lord, that Islamic fundamentalists and militants are struggling for Islamic ascendancy and seeking the subjugation and even annihilation of the Church where they have control or exert influence. Therefore Christians living in increasingly radicalized or Islamized Muslim communities are suffering unprecedented repression, persecution and threat.

It is true, O Lord, that totalitarian religious and political dictators, threatened by the increasing openness of the age, are repressing all opposition and anything else that threatens the status quo as they fight for their survival against all odds. Therefore Christians living under such regimes are systematically harassed, intimidated, persecuted, beaten, imprisoned and killed.

It is true, O Lord, that in newly independent nations and emerging democracies religion is being increasingly exploited by the politically ambitious. Therefore Christian minorities are coming under attack from traditionalists as well as Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu nationalist militants and even neighbours incited to fear and hate them.

O Lord, while we pray for protection and deliverance, also be at work in us, purifying, sanctifying and unifying Your Church.

We appeal to You concerning the incitement and threats of Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri along with all other national and local fundamentalist and imperialistic Islamic organizations in the world.

We appeal to You concerning the incitement of India’s Hindu nationalist ideologues in the Sangh Parivar, the BJP and VHP as well as the threats and violence of the Hindu nationalist militants in the RSS and Bajrang Dal.

We also present to You the militant Buddhist nationalists of Sri Lanka.

We appeal to You concerning state leaders whose political ambition, belligerence, totalitarianism, megalomania, religious intolerance or racism hurts Your people: President Aleksandr Lukashenko (Belarus), Muslim President Haris Siladzic (Bosnia), General Than Shwe (Myanmar), President Hu Jintao (China), President Fidel Castro (Cuba), President Isaias Afewerki (Eritrea), President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (Indonesia), President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the wider Iranian administration along with the Ayatollahs and Revolutionary Guards (Iran), the “Dear Leader” Kim Jong-Il (North Korea), President Choummaly Sayasone (Laos), Colonel Moammar al-Ghaddafi (Libya), President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (Maldives), Northern Nigeria’s Sharia governors, the ruling royals and the religious establishment of Saudi Arabia, Islamic rebel leader Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys (Somalia), President Omar el-Bashir and Islamist ideologue Hassan al-Turabi (Sudan), President Islam Karimov (Uzbekistan), President Nguyen Minh Triet (Vietnam), President Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe).

We ask You O Lord our God to encourage, preserve, strengthen and deliver our repressed, persecuted, terrorized and threatened Christian brothers and sisters. In nations wracked by war and turmoil, protect, defend, sanctify, strengthen and unify Your Church so she may emerge in days of peace and liberty to be a remnant that takes root and bears fruit. May those who seek to silence, subjugate or eradicate the Church be frustrated and turned back.

We also pray for the terrorists, militants and dictators themselves, and ask You O Lord to display Your “arm” for the benefit of the Church. We pray for judgment and for mercy, for You are a just and merciful God. May the Church be able to say of them as was said of the Apostle Paul, “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” (Gal. 1:23)

*For the sake of Your Kingdom and Glory,
AMEN.*

Adapted from the Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin, No. 452 (Oct 31, 2007) of the WEA Religious Liberty Commission