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Berita NECF

Editorial

Corruption and the Culture of the Cross

The cross is the emblem of Christian culture. God could have used His power to destroy Satan and his works, as quoted by *de Bracton*, but instead, He used the cross to defeat Satan. An important thing to note is that the cross symbolises the means God used to redeem mankind from sin, including corruption. That is why in Christian culture, corruption can be dealt with only by taking a severe, unbending approach.

This was demonstrated by our Lord when He entered the temple and drove out the traders. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. Then he said, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. But you have made it a den of robbers" (Mark 11:15-17)

Three thoughts to meditate on the culture of the cross.

The cross and morality

God is holy. Moral law is real. God will judge (and had judged) sin. But the holy God does not need to destroy sinners, for Jesus Christ has taken the sin of the world upon himself. Forgiveness is possible.

That is what Good Friday and Easter mean to followers of Jesus Christ. Thanks to the cross of Christ, we now have a firm basis – empirical, historical and philosophical – for affirming moral absolutes without that same moral law condemning us. That is why we regard the cross as not another religious idea but in fact, it is good news – the gospel.

It is the only available force that can withstand and push back the storm of moral relativism that is coming upon the secular world. Without the cross, the world has no foundation whatsoever for affirming moral absolutes, for calling corruption by its name – sin. The cross also delivers us from sin.

The cross and suffering

The practice of corruption has no regards of who might suffer. In fact it widens the gap between the rich and poor. Jesus was mocked by the men who were guarding Him. They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophesy! Who hit you?" Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him by dressing him in an elegant robe, placed a crown of thorns on his head, stuck him with a staff and spat on Him. They then took off the purple robe and put His own clothes back on. Even when He was hung on the cross, one of the criminals hurled insults at Him, "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" Jesus had to endure the system.

Three areas of suffering that Jesus went through.

1. Shame – He refused to be ashamed of what they wanted Him to be ashamed of. Instead,

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Chairman's Message

By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

Preserving the *Bride's Beauty*

The Church of Jesus Christ in Malaysia is maturing and is becoming more and more the beautiful Bride He is returning for.

He gave Himself for her that He might sanctify and cleanse her, that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle but holy and without blemish. And so as a member of the Bride of Christ we must do all we can to keep the Bride beautiful.

Some of the things that we need to do collectively to keep the Bride beautiful are: practise the highest moral standards (Rom 13:12-14); know, teach and defend sound doctrine (Jude 3); and protect the unity of the Church (Eph 4:1-6).

I wish to elaborate on the last. Every believer needs to say: "It is my job to protect the unity of the Church". Unity is a critical component of God's plan for Christian community and we must do all we can to promote it. The Bible gives several pointers on how to protect the unity in our church and the Church.

Focus on what we have in common, not our differences. We are called to be united, not uniform (1 Cor 12:27). Therefore, you and I need to focus on what we have in common and not get hung up on small issues (Rom 14:19).

Common sense dictates that we be realistic in our expectations. We need to realize that no church will ever be perfect since churches are composed of sinful people (Eph 4:32).

There will be seasons in the life of the local church where there are difficult situations and challenges. We need to bear with the church through her struggles and imperfection. Too many just jump ship in times when their church needs them the most.

Every believer needs to choose to encourage rather than criticize (Heb 10:24). We are to be involved and contribute to the church rather than stand on the sidelines and complain about what others are doing.

Many who serve in church come early, leave late, listen to too many complaints and are seldom thanked for the work they do.

We must decide to refuse to listen to gossip (Eph 4:29). By listening to gossip we are being part of the problem. We are to separate ourselves from those who are gossips. Obviously gossip is one major unity buster.

Today the enemy is using the Internet to slander just about anything that moves – there seem to be no boundaries. And today's gossip is wickedly slanderous.

The Bible reminds us, "Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people." Lev19:16a NLT. We all need to learn to tame our tongues!

Another very important aspect of protecting the unity of the church and keeping the Bride of Christ beautiful is to practise God's method for conflict resolution. We are all familiar with the biblical model of conflict resolution in Matthew 18:15-17 and we do well to follow it.

We bring disrepute to the testimony of the Church when we forget His injunction and by taking matters into our own hands.

The Bride of Christ is also kept beautiful when we support our shepherds. God has given our pastors

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Prayer Mountain in the clouds

COUNTLESS Christians have enjoyed the cool, crisp Genting Highlands air and been blessed by the cosy facilities at PeaceHaven, a campsite owned by FGA KL.

Bigger blessings are now in store, especially for those who seek a secluded place to pray at a higher altitude. On April 9, FGA KL officially opened the prayer closets at a service attended by church leaders and staff from NECF Malaysia. The prayer closets are a fulfillment of a prophecy given by Rev. Cho Yonggi's mother-in-law when she visited the church in 1995 that God would give them a "prayer "mountain".

The new mini-chapel has 14 closets with a few more at the basement of the retreat centre. The church also intends to turn the existing bungalow at the campsite into a prayer centre.

These new facilities are opened to the Body of Christ nationwide and come at a critical juncture in our nation's history where intense, continuous prayers are much needed.

For more information about the prayer closets, please contact FGA KL.

Pix from top: Mrs Koh Poh Kim (wife of the late Elder Koh Eng Kiat) of FGA KL addressing the attendees; ushering God's presence into one of the prayer closets; checking out the closets.

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He made them ashamed of what they ought to have been ashamed of.

2. Persecution – In the garden of Gethsemane, the disciples fled and left Jesus to face the persecution alone.
3. Martyrdom – the cross is the way into the kingdom of heaven because it makes death – the ultimate weapon of the kingdom of Satan - impotent.

The cross and community

Repentance means to take individual responsibility for our sins and to accept God's grace for our salvation. It is right to be concerned with the flaws in our society, but the cross calls us, first of all, to come to terms with our own flaws and transgressions.

The centrality of the cross draws individuals from all walks of life to form a community. This community has its identity in Christ which adequately embodies faith, hope and love. The cross has triumphed because it succeeded in creating a voluntary community of disciples – the Church.

Corruption is a social issue, and community problems usually do not have individualistic solutions. For example if a village is infected with malaria caused by mosquitoes that breed in stagnant water, you cannot resolve the problem by just cleaning your own backyard caused by the mosquitoes that breed in stagnant waters, Our safety is dependent on an organised, united effort by the whole community. So it is with corruption.

Corruption is a highly infectious and debilitating disease. It has become a major issue all over the world and will increasingly become a concern if it is not checked.

The Church has been called to play the role like that of the anti-virus program for a computer. Its presence in a community should deal a blow to corruption that is happening in the community and put a stop to the rot. That is the ideal that the Church should labour tirelessly towards.

Why Our Prayers Yield Little

"The more we persevere, the greater the possibility of ultimately stopping the flow of collusion, bribery, and corruption. In most parts of the world there are prevailing circumstances that face people to swim in the dirty waters of corruption, but no one is forced to drink of that water." *– Graham Power (right) in "Not by Might Nor by Power" which he co-authored with Diane Vermooten*

Which praying Christian doesn't know 2 Chron 7:14 by heart? "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face…"

And so pray we all do, with much ranting and pleading with the Lord to "heal their land". However, there's a sneaking suspicion that we often omit the inherent imperative of the verse to "turn from their wicked ways".

Without obeying this imperative, is it any wonder then that our prayers yield little? This is the stinging reminder left by Graham Power at the pre-GDOP gathering of over 550 pastors, leaders and intercessors from the Klang Valley churches in March.

Power, whom God has used to champion the colossal worldwide Global Day of Prayer (GDOP) movement, challenged the attendees to make a concrete stand against corruption and to to live lives that are "unashamedly ethical" according to biblical values.

Then, God will "hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land". However, swimming against the tide of corruption requires an unshakeable focus and tough stamina but take heart as God will supply the necessary strength to those who stand for godly ethics and values, said Power.

Graham's sharing affirmed what Malaysia as a nation is currently embarking on through Transparency International Malaysia and the Government's Key Performance Index aimed at wiping out corruption at every strata of society. Malaysian Christians should therefore take the lead in signing the "unashamedly ethical" pledge.

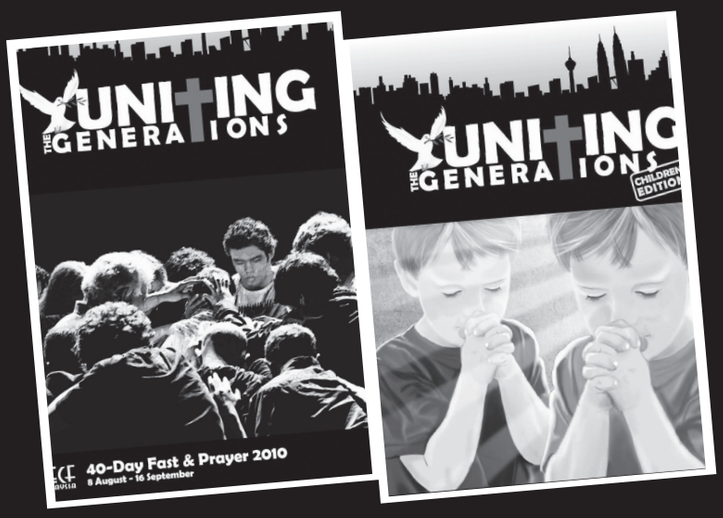
This year marks the 10th anniversary of GDOP, which the Malaysian Church first participated in 2006. God has paved the way for the coming GDOP gathering on May 23 to be held at the Shah Alam Malawati Stadium.

More than 12,000 Malaysian Christians from every denomination are expected to turn up and pray alongside over 200 million Christians from over 220 nations.

The gathering is envisioned to spark "a new mind and a new spirit" paradigm towards a national transformation for a better and safer nation.

40-Day Fast & Prayer 2010

Get your prayer booklets now



This year's 40-day Fast and Prayer will begin on Aug 8 instead of the usual July 22 and ends on Sept 16 when East and West Malaysia became one.

As in past years, NECF Malaysia has produced a prayer guide to help us in our intercession for the nation. The theme, "Uniting the Generations", focuses on galvanising Christians of all ages to serve God's purposes for Malaysia.

We need to appreciate and empower every generation to make a synergistic impact on the nation. That is why we must heal, build and unite the generations for the nation.

The prayer guide is available in English, Chinese, Bahasa (adult and children editions), and Tamil (adult edition only). Available from NECF at RM1.80 each (own collection); RM2.10 and RM2.30 (including postage) for West and East Malaysia respectively.

Learning from Piper's 'Silence'

On the outside, everything looked fine and dandy. In fact, he is one of the finest examples of a model pastor but during a routine Sunday Service recently, he dropped a bombshell on his congregation. No, there's no adultery, no "coming out of the closet" to declare he's gay, no illegal dipping into the church funds, no heresy, nothing. So, what's the problem?

John Piper (left) is the pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church and a higly-regarded world-renowned speaker and author who has edified countless lives.

On Mar 28, as he stood in front of his congregation to give his usual sermon, he requested the church for an eight-month unpaid leave to sort out some personal issues. Subsequently, he wrote a letter to his church which is uploaded on www. desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2010/4555

Do read his letter as his thoughts and choice of words will impact you.

In his message, Piper expressed his concern for "several species of pride in my soul that, while they may not rise to the level of disqualifying me for ministry, grieve me, and have taken a toll on my relationship with Noël (his wife) and others who are dear to me."

So, even though there is nothing specifically immoral in his life or his ministry, Piper is taking this leave of absence for deep, serious assessment of his personal life – a kind of reality check in the light of God's Word. It is humbling to think that such a dear and effective servant of God needs to take this drastic step to examine his life.

Piper's brutal honesty with himself and his congregation presents a great challenge to all of us to keep our hearts pure before our holy God.

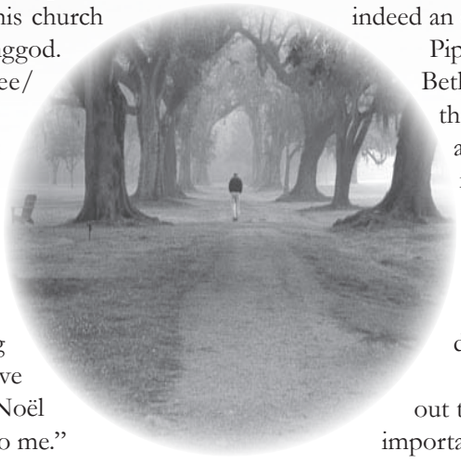
What would captivate us is the phrase he used – "several species of pride in my soul". In his letter, he apologised to his church, not for a specific deed, but for ongoing character flaws that he felt had affected the church and his family members. He highlighted to the church three things he would do d uring his absence.

Levels of Idolatry

During his leave of absence, there will be no blogging, no Twitter, no article, no reports, no papers and no speaking engagements. His desire was to have very special times of refreshment with his wife Noel. Piper sees this as a kind of fasting to discern levels of addiction. The phrase he used was "no prideful sipping from the poisonous cup of international fame and notoriety".

Culture of Transparency

He will be accountable to a group of people to stay in touch and keep them informed. That a man of his stature should choose to submit himself to his peers is indeed an example for all leaders to emulate.



Piper and the other pastors of Bethlehem Baptist Church know well the insidious dangers of going it alone and so, among their other strategies for sanctification, they hold each other accountable with a simple questionnaire that they each fill out weekly. It addresses issues from days off to diet, and personal devotions to pornography.

They would all agree that filling out the form is not what matters; what's important is the heart behind it – the desire to be pure and holy.

No Financial obligation

Piper requested a no-pay leave for the entire eight-month period. He did not want his church, Bethlehem Baptist Church, to be financially burdened as they would have to hire people to do his work in his absence. Additionally, he apologised to his staff for the inconvenience they would face as a result of his absence. His no-pay leave request was turned down by his church leaders

Thousands of ministers who have learned from Piper through his books and sermons will now get to learn from his silence. Realising the grave danger of pride in his soul, this great man of God will give up all public engagements for eight months and retreat to spend time with his Creator and his wife of many years.

Piper's conclusion in his letter is an apt reminder for all leaders that "neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow." (1 Cor.3:7)

Forgiveness Leads to Transformation

Many people find it hard to accept that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is the only means of finding forgiveness for their sins.

The fact is that among Jesus' last words were, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" Luke 23:34. That explains why Christians have taken the observance of both Good Friday and Easter, celebrated recently on April 2–4, with deep gratitude.

The forgiveness our Lord demonstrated on the cross sets the example for His disciples to emulate.

As Christians, we need to resist the temptation to keep those who have sinned against us in an emotional penalty box, making them serve endless hard time for their offences. The act of forgiveness releases the emotional guilt they have to carry.

True forgiveness

Listen to what Jesus says in Luke 17:3-4 "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent', forgive him."

Example: if I sin against you, there is only one way for me to get right with you, and that is for you to forgive me. Because sin is against God, the only way to get right with God is to receive forgiveness from Him.

But sometimes the nature of the offence and the attitude of the offender require a more direct response like, "I need to let you know how much you have hurt me. You need to know what this has done to our relationship. I feel that you have betrayed my trust."

Recently there were two incidents that led to public statements on forgiveness. The Senior Pastor of Metro Tabernacle Church that was fire-bombed said, "The church did not condone such acts but would forgive those responsible. We have a congregation of about 1,700 who are godly and forgiving." (The Star, Jan 9)

Kuala Lumpur Roman Catholic Archbishop Tan Sri Murphy Pakiam, when he received the public apology from the editors of Al Islam, said, "I accept the apology and no legal action will be taken against Al-Islam on this 'matter'."

Earlier on, he had said, "Forgiveness is in our blood. Everyday, we pray for God to forgive us, and for forgiveness for those who have sinned against us." (The Star, Mar 5)*

The role of forgiveness in nation building

Genuine reconciliation is something we long for at all levels, in our communities and in our personal lives. Most of all, we need God's forgiveness. God's forgiveness offer is comprehensive, complete and final.

The point is that sin incurs a debt that must be canceled or forgiven. The more aware we are of how much we've been forgiven, the more love we will have toward the one who cancels the debt.

That is where forgiveness transforms lives because it leads to genuine reconciliation at various levels of society. This is essential when a nation desires to build a caring society. It goes beyond tolerance because we have deliberately made the choice to accept modest sacrifices for a common good.

For Christians, Jesus is the only way to forgiveness because no one else has ever become sin for the world. God declares, "There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

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* Two reporters from the Al Islam magazine had posed as Christians and took part in a Catholic Mass to probe allegations of Muslims being converted for their article in the May 2009 issue. They admitted to receiving Holy Communion and actually spitting the wafer out, an act Catholics consider desecration.

Continued from pg 2...

and leaders the responsibility and authority to maintain the unity of the church. We are to help them in this task in every way possible.

We are also to honor our spiritual leaders through encouragement, love, prayers and appreciation (Heb 13:17, 1 Tim 5:17).

Pastors and leaders, we must not forget our fatherly duty not to "exasperate" the sheep under our care nor use our position to "muddy the waters" and abuse them.

Sheep are not necessarily the only guilty ones! Pastors, let us not forget we are called to be shepherds, not just leaders. The Bible mandates each and e-v-e-r-y Christian to maintain unity.

There are many "little foxes" that spoil the vine; indeed both shepherds and sheep sometimes do the many "little things" that can hurt the unity of the church.

He desires a beautiful Bride and I do not intend to mar or maim it in any way.

Adamant about 'Allah'

Why the pursuit for freedom to use 'Allah' must continue

Many well-meaning Christians have asked (some even demanded) that we stop fighting the 'Allah' issue. Many do not understand why the Christian leadership is so adamant that the government has erred in barring non-Muslims from using 'Allah'. In this article, we highlight some of the often-heard remarks to support dropping the case. Berita NECF invited Rev. Loh Soon Choy, a lecturer emeritus at Malaysia Bible Seminari and member of the NECF Research Commission, to respond to the remarks.

It's just a word. Can't the Bahasa-speaking Christians use other words in place of 'Allah'?

It's a bit like asking: "Can't they eat other food than rice – which has been their staple food for generations. Many counter-questions immediately arise. Yes, there are many terms for god as there are many substitutes for rice. But 'Allah' (like rice) is a staple. It is a generic term used all the time in personal and public prayers, worship, preaching and everyday life. Without it, our BM-speaking Christians cannot even pray properly. The other terms (or food) are used for specific occasions. Even 'Tuhan' (Lord) cannot replace 'Allah' (God) as not all 'Lords' are the true 'God'.

Orang Asli Christians also worship in the Bahasa language. File pix of Orang Asli retreat last December organised by NECF.

Imagine the trauma, when without proper consultation, rice-eating (or the use of 'Allah') is criminalized as a "solution" to prevent some other rice-eating people from being "confused" when the matter has never been an issue for generations, both inside and outside Malaysia! Why now? What's happening? What next? Have the authorities any proof that rice-eating (or the use of 'Allah') has caused any problem to social or national security? Any empirical evidence that the practice has confused people?

In fact, in the very two states of Sabah and Sarawak where 'Allah' is most used by BM-speaking Christians who number many more than our Peninsular Malaysian Christians, JAKIM statistics show that between 1990 and 2001, 11,818 Sabahans and 9,603 Sarawakians converted to Islam. This meant that these two states had the highest number of Muslim converts by far than any of the other states in Malaysia.

The problem affects only the BM-speaking Christians. They're not the majority. So we should drop the case for the sake of the greater good.

Four remarks can be made to address possible wrong assumptions behind the above statements.

1. The Sikh religion also uses 'Allah'. They too have protested under the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism.
2. BM-speaking Christians may not be the majority in our total Christian population when Sabah and Sarawak are included. If you include Indonesian Christians, then BM-speaking Christians are a majority in our region.
3. There is no future for a nation if "majority" arguments are used insensitively and unconstitutionally. It's a basic moral and human right that even minority people must be respected! Of course where there is conflict, there can be proper negotiation and arbitration.

For the very sake of an ultimate "greater good", we should NOT "drop the case" as this case represents much more than the word 'Allah'! When viewed from larger perspectives in this modern world – morally, philosophically, socially and in terms of true nation building (with all the implications for economic and intellectual freedom and development) – Malaysia's diversity of peoples and cultures can accept one another given the chance even when we do not always agree.

Indeed, there are also many Malay or Muslim people of reason, goodwill and adequate learning – as the recent firebombing of churches have further shown – whose views should be respected rather than thugs who forcibly terminated closed-door dialogues and extremists who misuse or even criticized the Constitution. Only then is there hope for some adequate solution(s) or 'middle-ground' when all sides that have real fears and suspicions are allowed to talk to one another and to the government.

Jesus teaches us to "turn the other cheek". Why don't we be gracious and let them win?

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The New Econ
for 1Mal

A commentary by Eug

Much have been said about Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's New Economic Model (NEM). For a relatively technocratic solution to a problem confronting any modern nation state, the NEM has attracted the usual attention not only locally but internationally as well.

Practical wisdom suggests that this reaction is probably premised on undue expectation upon the NEM by both proponents and detractors alike.

As it turns out and after much fanfare, we discover the NEM was thought necessary by, among other things, the following compelling factors:

- A lower rate of Malaysia's economic growth rate in the decade since the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–98. This is illustrated by the fact that by 2007, Malaysia seems far away from the World Bank's notion of a high income economy. In contrast, the Spence Commission on Growth and Development has identified Malaysia as one of only 13 countries that had for more than 25 years grown at rates exceeding 7% annually (Quah, 2010).
- Perceived decline in economic competitiveness as evidenced by smaller rates of overall private investments and in particular, foreign direct investments. This aspect is also contributed by the 2008 global financial crisis which in turn translated to a precipitous drop in exports. In fact, the announcement about the NEM was first made at the end of 2008 when things were looking very bleak and hope was badly needed.
- The rise of new global leaders such as China, India, Korea and Brazil has sharply increased their per capita incomes in the past decade, giving rise to Malaysia being described as being caught in the "middle income trap" and running the danger of being left behind.

The above factors highlight the critical need for the Najib administration to work towards boosting the sagging economy before it's too late.

Currently, Malaysia's real GDP per capita is around US$7,000 whereas the OECD average is around US$30,000. It thus reveals the urgency to raise the economy before Malaysia can hold herself out as a developed nation in line with the Vision 2020 aspirations.

But what does the NEM entail? Eight strategic reform initiatives (SRI) have been suggested:

- Re-energising the private sector so it could lead the process of economic growth;
- Developing a high quality workforce and reducing dependence on foreign labour;
- Creating a competitive domestic economy;
- Streamlining and strengthening the public sector as facilitators for private enterprises;
- Move to affirmative action that is transparent, market-friendly, merit based and conditioned on need;
- Building infra-structure for knowledge base;
- Enhancing the sources of growth; and
- Ensuring sustainability of growth.

Of all aspects of the NEM, it is these SRI that have drawn the most attention and criticism.

Some argue that the NEM has several distinctly positive characteristics, such as growth through enlargement in productivity, growth to private sector leading to local autonomy and decision making, and the use of local talent and skills contributing to transformation.

While many may agree that such characteristics may be different and distinctly packaged under the NEM, they are hardly new or innovative enough to yield desirable results.

Detractors say that the NEM is mere rhetoric and designed purely for public relations and/or political purposes; that the Government does not have the political will or wherewithal to pursue the SRI.

One compelling argument offered against the NEM is that for the targeted growth of US$15,000 per captia income to be reached, it will require economic growth that is faster than China! This is certainly unachievable at the rate our country is going.

A Christian response

How then should Christians respond to the NEM? While admitting that details of exact policies are still to come, one can't help but wonder if Christians as citizens of Malaysia can come out in support of the NEM?

The barrage of views and criticisms that have been offered for and against the NEM does not help either. Where do we go from here?

As a starting point, we note that the NEM is a creature and expression of political economy. By political economy, we have in mind the management of resources for the production of wealth to best meet the basic needs and requirement of life of the populace as determined by the political order.

That the NEM is imbued with this inherent characteristic is borne out by the fact that it is subordinate to and subsidiary to another greater and wider political good – that

onomic Model
Malaysia?

by Eugene Yapp

of 1Malaysia.

The connection between a social perspective of political economy and Christian theology is "stewardship".

The word "stewardship" is a translation of a biblical word which has come to encompass the meaning of "common decision about managing the resources of the common life and developing the techniques and structuring the institution to do so effectively" (Stackhouse, 1992: xiii)

It is therefore the task of the church and Christians to live out the calling to regard the political economy in the words of the pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy*, as "one of the chief areas where we live out our faith".

This entails identifying and participating through what God is doing in relation to building and managing the "public household" and to express God's life and words in visible and concrete expression in this area.

In practice, such an effort involves economic management.

> *Economic management is about ensuring the best possible livelihood for everyone. It is about liberating economic structures to ensure that no one is exploited or treated as 'strangers and aliens' incorporating everyone into the household of God (Eph.2:19-22). It has to do with the establishment of a household within which the goods necessary for survival and for functioning as free and equal citizens take priority over such goods that are not included in this basic core. (Vicencio, 1992: 219)*

To this end, Christians must be prudent and avoid one of two of the contrasting extremes within the political spectrum in thinking through the NEM.

Firstly, Christians must avoid adopting the leftist position of the liberals who are calling for a total dismantling of any affirmative action policy often to the disadvantage of the poor and the marginalised.

That this is unacceptable is evident in the message of the Gospel which speaks decidedly in concerted concern for the poor and dispossessed. And it is here that the NEM provides a radically different affirmative action: eradication of poverty irrespective of *race or ethnicity*.

Given that economic disparity often leads to ethnic tensions and struggles, the NEM is expected to restore balance between the special position of the Bumiputeras and the legitimate interest of the minority.

Christians must therefore ensure that the NEM remains focused on its stated objectives and in particular, the bottom 40% of the income strata who will form the bulk of the beneficiaries because they constitute the largest component of the disadvantaged rather than on self-selected interest groups.

The other contrasting position is represented by the Malay rights groups such as Perkasa who has criticised the NEM for its lack of Malay agenda. They argued that if the NEM is implemented based on its present form, the Malays will eventually lose their competitive edge leading to a severe weakening of their position. Whether such a proposition holds true remain to be seen.

What is however disconcerting is that behind Perkasa is the call for a race-based affirmative action policy premised on a Malay-based agenda and politics (Pereira, 2010). This should not be the case as economic justice demands working out a form of "complex-equality" for all ethnic groups in meeting deferring and variegated needs.

Christians must therefore draw on common grounds with the other social communities irrespective of ethnicity and religion to press for a growing participation in loosening the feudal mentality and shackles of such a mindset and advocate for change to embrace a more inclusive mentality and fair-minded sentiments.

For better or for worse, it appears that Malaysians are better off with the NEM than without it. This is especially so given the prevailing trends in social disharmony and the rise of crime rates and corruption. Unless the economic growth engine can be revved up, chances are income will continue to worsen and create frictions that place even more stress on society.

The upshort of this is Malaysia's population will remain young for the next three to four decades and this will create more pressure on job creation.

For those of us who wish for a better Malaysia, it may do well to give the benefit of the doubt to the PM for a robust and genuine implementation of the NEM to turn around the current sorry state of the Malaysian political economy.

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Pastors' Fellowship to Collaborate with Schools

Efforts to bridge schools with churches that are concerned with the welfare of schools and students within their community got a kick-off in April with a meeting between teachers from a secondary school and the Kuala Lumpur North Region Pastors' Fellowship.

The meeting was initiated by as part of its nation-building efforts within the education sphere.

At the meeting, moderated by NECF Prayer, Evangelism and Discipleship Executive Andy Chi, several matters were discussed as to how Christians and churches may help and promote the welfare of schools in their community.

Some of the challenges highlighted are:

1. The shrinking number of and ageing Christian teachers and principals in the local schools;
2. Reluctance of Christian parents to release their children into the teaching profession;
3. Reluctance of Christian teachers to take up the position of school principal;
4. Drop in number of students taking BK for SPM;
5. Mission schools' principal position being left vacant or filled by non-Christian principals;
6. Government policies that marginalise mission schools; and
7. The constant efforts needed to promote the welfare of mission schools.

On what support the pastors' fellowship could give, the school asked for prayer and other practical support for the school. The meeting concluded with prayers by the pastors and a visit around the school premises.

6th NECF Tamil Pastors and Leaders Conference

All Fired Up

Tamil churches in Malaysia are geared up to serve in the power of the Holy Spirit after the recent Tamil Pastors and Leaders Conference in March.

Organised by the NECF Malaysia Tamil Commission, the conference at Wisma Eagles Subang Jaya saw an unprecedented turnout of over 970 delegates who came from more than 181 churches.

In his messages on "The Man after God's Heart", conference speaker Dr Ezekiah Francis (of Berachah Prophetic Ministries of India) inspired the delegates to have the heart of God.

His wife, Benita, proved an equally powerful preacher and shared on deliverance from bondages and curses. The Spirit of God hovered over the meetings to release His anointing and power and many delegates found release and were restored to a new sense of confidence and joy.

The conference brought a new dimension of power and anointing into the life of the Tamil churches. A great revival is on the thresholds for the Tamil churches in Malaysia. And they are ready to serve in the power of the Spirit.

Continued from page 7...

Jesus (as with all religious leaders) also uses figures of speech which are not meant to be taken literally. This remark here is figurative language from Matthew 5:39 to define that Christians should be radically different in spirit and attitude from the people of the world. He likewise talks about "going the second mile". They illustrate the "Beatitudes" (Be-these-your-attitudes) earlier in chapter 5:1-11.

When struck on the cheek (John 18:22-23), He maintained a meek, dignified, unresisting attitude but He did not literally "turn the other cheek". Nor did He literally walk an "extra mile" when made to carry the cross. Translated into the modern language of action, the issue is not about winning or losing but about not being arrogant, combative or vengeful even in the face of injustice or mistreatment. Like Jesus, we live and stand by God's fundamental truths but it must be with a spirit or attitude or in a manner worthy of Jesus.

You may even, like Jesus, be seen as stubborn, foolish, arrogant and inviting more trouble. Applied to the 'Allah' issue, it may even be to keep on peacefully pleading for open dialogues within the framework of the Constitution and be prepared for the consequences such as may happen (get more slaps) when you "turn the other cheek"!

When pastors hit the wall

Pastor John came to know the Lord at an evangelistic meeting at the mission school where he studied. Fervent in his new-found hope, he was zealous in bringing many of his classmates to Christ and later responded to the call to be a pastor. Many souls were added into the kingdom through his ministry and he went on to disciple them and groom some of them to be key leaders in the church.

Sounds like a fairy tale that ends with "and they lived happily ever after". Unfortunately, it wasn't so. John committed adultery and embezzled the church funds. Oh, he still loves his wife and family dearly but somewhere in his church's success and members' adulation, John began to feel a spiritual emptiness within him which he couldn't share with anyone, not even his wife.

He managed to overcome the restlessness of his soul when his church embarked on a building programme. Like Nehemiah, he challenged the people to "arise and build" and felt so good when the funds rolled in like a mighty wave. But as soon as the building campaign ended, that emptiness returned.

He tried attending some overseas conferences and was charged up with passion but again, the vigour dissipated quickly once he landed on Malaysian soil. Having "morning watch" was good and refreshing but he soon burned out undergoing the daily regiment – spiritual though it may be. It must be the devil then! You know the outcome…

Be it the Church at large or the Malaysian Church in particular, many church leaders can identify with this fictitious Pastor John. While there can be many reasons for the "emptiness syndrome" (which King Solomon experienced to the hilt), one possibility could be that God wants to move us deeper into Himself.

This was the topic at one of the workshops at the recently-concluded Eagles Team Leadership Summit organisd by NECF Malaysia. Entitled "Leadership Emotional Health: Stress, Sabbath and Spirit", the seminar examined the necessity of our "Journey through the Wall" (otherwise known as "dark night of the soul") to shed incomplete or immature ideas about God.

Like many leaders, Peter Scazzero – author of "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality" – also experienced the "Pastor John" syndrome Having "hit the wall" in his ministry, he finally experienced a breakthrough in his life when he journeyed inwards in his stages of faith.

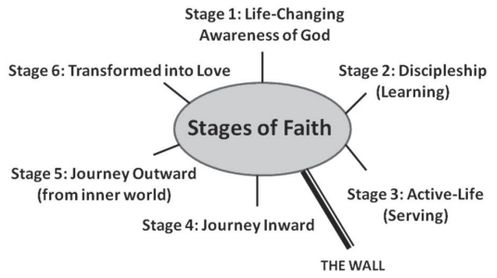
While the workshop facilitators borrowed the concept from Scazzero, they had their own pilgrimage stories to tell. To help the participants start their inward journey, "A guide to a one-day silent retreat" was given with tips on how to quieten themselves and allow God to speak deeply into their lives.

Workshop facilitator Elizabeth Lee, who took 10 years to learn this principle, concluded with an exhortation to the participants to avoid learning the principle the hard way.

For those who want to read more about this inward journey, Scazzero's books, "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality" and the accompanying "Emotionally Healthy Church", are available at local Christian bookshops. Perhaps this may be God's antidote to break the staleness in your walk and kick in another cycle of love and faith in Him.

JOURNEY THROUGH THE WALL

Chart taken from Peter Scazzero's "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality". Used with permission.



Note: According to Gladsounds manager, Scazzero's two books have been sold out. The next shipment is expected to arrive in June.

Reading their way out of poverty

NECF Malaysia Executive Secretary Andy Chi witnessed a Reading Bus session in Kuching recently and was amazed that a simple activity like reading could ignite change to a village of children.

The Reading Bus is a mobile library that conducts a reading program in English targeting rural children in Sarawak aimed at eradicating academic marginalisation in the country.

It is initiated and run by Pr Cheli Tamiliselvam and his wife, Lai Mei, under their organisation, Bethany Ministries (see Berita NECF Jan–Feb 2010, pg 6).

Below is Andy's story.

A child being tested to check his reading progress while the other children patiently wait for their turn.

Kampung Lebur in Serian is located 80 km from Kuching and it took us over an hour to reach there in Pr Cheli's van.

When we arrived, the reading program had already started. It was conducted by three of the Reading Bus staff who had come from Kuching and stayed the night before. The Reading Bus program is conducted every fortnightly and runs for two days.

There were about 30 children participating in this program and they were about to be tested to check their reading progress.

The children were divided into several groups. First, they read the Ladybird 1A book together. Then they read it individually as the Reading Bus staff checked and recorded their progress in a reading chart.

When all the individuals in a group have completed their reading, they will move on to the next book. If a member of the group fails to complete his/her reading, the group cannot advance.

The child will then be taught by the staff or those who have completed their reading. From here, the children learn teamwork and how to support one another.

The impact of this reading program was evident in the children's enthusiasm and excitement towards the program and their confidence in reading. This program has certainly heightened their interest and motivation to learn English.

What's more amazing is that these students are from SK Kampung Lebur/Remun, one of the 30 "SPR" schools in the nation. (SPR stands for "Sekolah Prestasi Rendah" or low-performing school).

But the wheel of change has begun to revolve if what I've observed that afternoon continues to take place.

Perhaps one day in the future, their school will be re-assigned "SPT" – "Sekolah Prestasi Tinggi" (high-performing school).

Note: To learn more about the Reading Bus and its activities and impact on the rural communities, check out http://thereadingbus.blogspot.com/

NECF Foundation

Testimony from Pr Christie M Judhisthi of Bethel Assembly Of God, Kluang

"I have been a pastor of Bethel Assembly for the past 32 years. In 2002, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Since then, I was given injections to suppress the cancerous cells so that I could continue to serve the Lord faithfully. Every three months, the medical treatment cost RM1,300.

In 2004, I made an appeal to the NECF Foundation for welfare aid and started receiving aid from November 2004. I am very grateful to the NECF Foundation for supporting me. The money given to me really lessened my burden and helped me to stay focused on my ministry.

Early this year in January 2010, I went for my usual appointment with my urologist. After a series of blood tests and consultation, I decided to stop further treatment/injections as my PSA level had improved and my blood count was high.

I want to thank the Lord for His healing hand on my life. I sincerely want to thank the NECF Foundation for their faithful support throughout the years of my treatment. May God bless the ministry with more funds so that more full-time workers who are in need can receive help."

Young Christian Women to the Fore

Envision Your Destiny Seminar for Young Christian Women

The NECF Malaysia Women's Commission organised the seminar to particularly inspire young Christian women in our country to seek God's calling and rise up to fulfil their God-given destiny. Over 100 participants attended seminar at the New Life Restoration Centre, Petaling Jaya, in March.

A panel of five invited speakers comprising YB Hannah Yeoh, Tricia Yeoh, Malar Moses, Rosaline Yong and Juwita Suwito each shared their personal life stories of how God touched, prepared, equipped and empowered them to do His Will in their lives. Evidently, their lives were changed as a result of loving, following and obeying the Lord.

YB Hannah Yeoh, a Selangor state assemblywoman, challenged the young women to know and obey God's word. She advised them to always align what they do with His Word.

Tricia Yeoh, research officer at the Selangor Chief Minister's Office and member of the Centre for Public Policy Studies Advisory Panel emphasised the courage to change and to stand for truth. Both speakers encouraged the participants to remain faithful at their place of calling and to be willing to be used by God as change agents for the nation.

Malar Moses, a corporate image consultant, testified how she overcame the limitations in both her career and personal life by simply enjoying an intimate relationship with God. She encouraged the young women to trust God completely despite adverse circumstances and to surrender their lives to serve Him first.

Award-winning singer cum songwriter Juwita Suwito shared about the reality of God as her "father" after she lost her earthly father. Combining her God-given talent and passion for music with her desire to serve people, God has led the former Malaysian Idol mentor to a successful career in the music industry while helming the position of YWCA Malaysia Secretary-General.

Rosaline Yong, who is currently pursuing her PhD in Public Health and preparing to be a missionary in Japan, gave a moving account of how the Lord transformed her and prepared her for outreach mission work in Japan. She shared about her struggles, fears and submission in obeying God's call on her life. She also challenged the participants to obey and heed God's Great Commission to save lost souls.

Following the speakers' sharing, there was a question-and-answer forum moderated by Commission chairperson Grace Hee. It was engaging and instructive as the speakers answered various questions on recognising, ascertaining and obeying God's voice and calling.

The seminar ended with prayers and an altar call.

Throughout the seminar, the young women were challenged to arise and serve the nation and His Kingdom. With God's enabling, ordinary women can do extraordinary exploits.

Juwita Suwito (holding microphone) answering a question from the floor.

Ministry time: Trisha Yeoh (in white) and Juwita praying for participants.

Speakers line-up (from left): Hannah Yeoh, Trisha, Malar Moses, Juwita, Grace Hee (NECF Women's Commission Chairpeerson), and Rosaline Yong.

NECF MALAYSIA

Welcomes NEW MEMBERS

ORDINARY MEMBERS
Jesus Loves Fellowship, Ampang, *pastored by Tewasukayam a/l Chandanam*; Fourth Wave Christian Centre, Penang, *pastored by Rev. Isaiah Koid Chin Ooi*; Jesus Comforts Church, Serendah, *pastored by Sanjay Gunatilaka*; Joy Baptist Church, Ipoh, *represented by Francis Kok Seng Cheong*; Business & Professional Ministries, Kuala Lumpur, *rep. by Peter Ng*; Good News Community Church, Klang, *pastored by Rev. Ding Yong Kong*; Canaan Land Assembly, Bintulu, *pastored by Wong Ching Hung*; The Rock Community Church, Sg Petani, *rep. by Dr Kevin Lo*; Hope Kampar, *pastored by Bong kit Siang*; Hope Seremban, *rep. by Lim Hot Peng*; Sanctuary of Christ, Kepong, *pastored by Steven Sagaya*; The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Taman Maluri Kuala Lumpur, *rep. by Ephraim Andrew A.*; and The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Klang, *rep. by Ephraim Andrew A.*

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS
Pr Yew Chee Wai; Christine Khaw Yew-Mei; Rev. John Nagamuthu; Wang; and Rev. David Veerasamy Rengasamy.

COMING UP . . .

Nationwide 40-Day Fast & Prayer

August 8 to September 15

Persevering in prayer for a righteous, just, honest and compassionate Government and a passionate Kingdom-minded Church.

Pastor's Kids Retreat

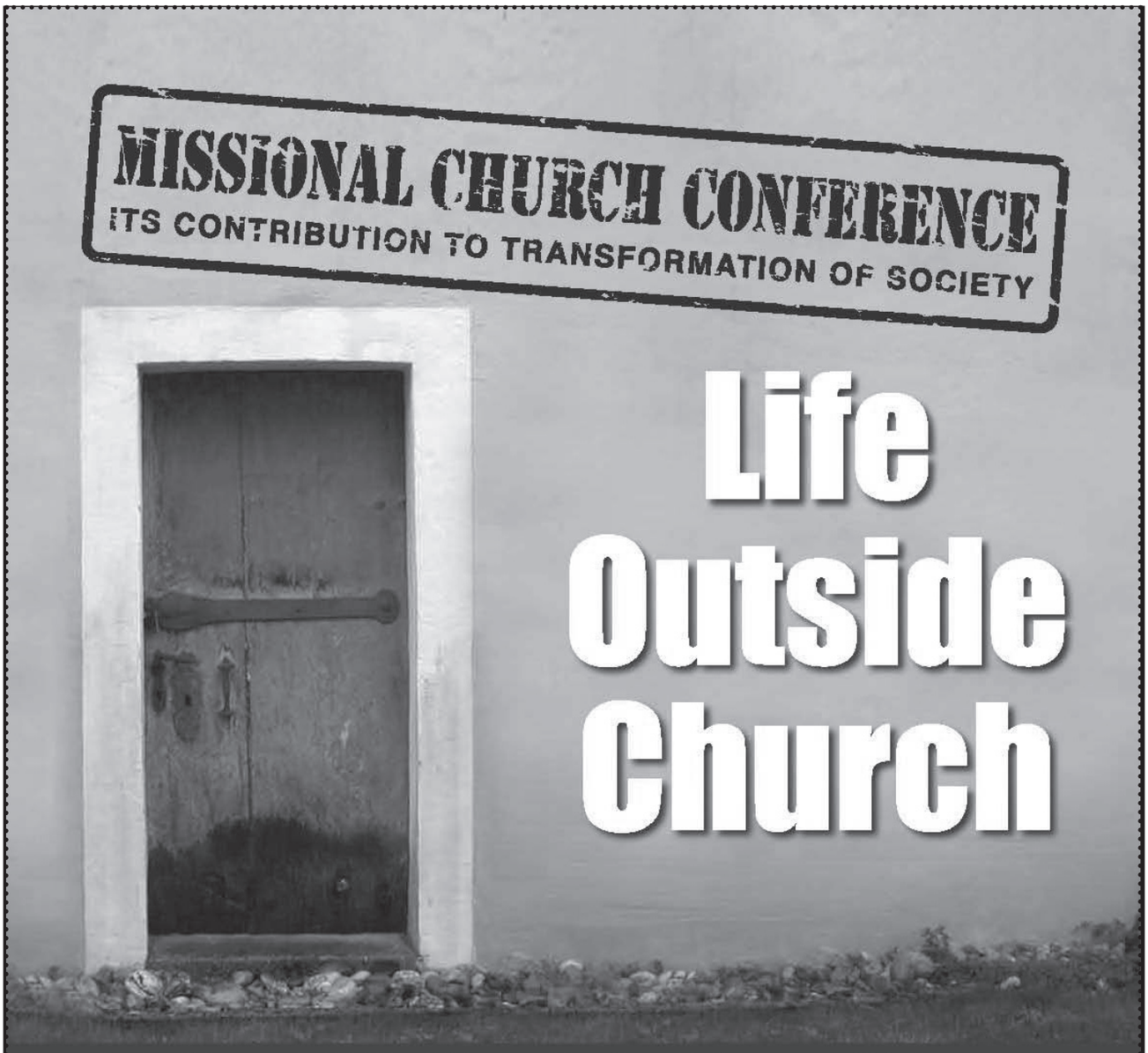
Date: Dec 7-9 December

Venue: Swiss Garden Hotel, Kuantan

Participants' Age: 15-22 years

Cost: Fully sponsored, limited to 2 youths per family.

Look out for more details in the next issue



26–27 August 2010 • Wisma Eagles, Full Gospel Tabernacle

EVERY CHRISTIAN IS A MISSIONARY.

Whether you are serving in a faraway God-forsaken place or right in the comfort of your community, YOU are a missionary.

That's the essence of "Missional Church", a concept that was coined in the late 1990s to denote the Church as God's missionary people for everyone, anywhere and for all things. The Missional Church therefore takes the church out into the community to serve the needy there.

It is a church that touches lives, uplifts standards and transforms society. So engaging is the Missional Church concept that NECF Malaysia is organising a conference in August to prod Malaysian churches to step out of their door and to mobilise their members to be agents of transformation in every sphere of society.

There will be workshops to propose some community projects that churches can get their hands on, such as vocational schools and dialysis centres, and engaging in public policy think-tank groups.

Looking out Looking up

CENTRAL ASIA Secret believers in Central Asia are often accused of receiving money in exchange for becoming Christians as people often assume that financial reasons must be the underlying cause for changing religion.

In Central Asia, Christianity is usually associated with Russia. The god of the Christians is seen as a Russian god.

Those who convert to Christianity are plagued with feelings of isolation and fear that are so overwhelming that often times, it is almost impossible to publicly persevere in the Christian faith. Some have had to publicly renounce their new-found Christian faith after buckling under pressure by their families or religious leaders.

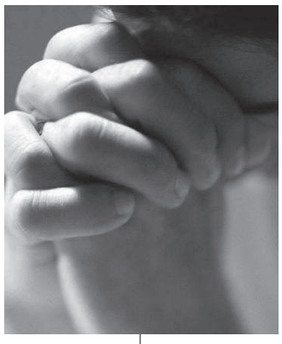
One such person is Alfia who came to faith in Christ through her friends. Concerned about the family's reputation, her husband gathered the village religious leaders and together, they pressured her into renouncing the Christian faith.

Finally, with a heavy heart and flowing tears, Alfia gave in as she feared the consequences of maintaining her Christian faith. But she still loves Jesus and now struggles with feelings of guilt. She also misses the fellowship with other Christians.

PRAY

- For Alfia and many other secret believers in Central Asia;
- They will find assurance in a gracious God; and
- They will be strengthened in their faith somehow.

CHINA The Church in China is still the fastest growing church in the world. However, in spite of the economic open door policy, there remains a great need for Bible-based training, production and provision of Study Bibles and practical support for the house church.



Believers caught in unauthorised distribution of religious materials are charged with "disrupting public order" while people who are involved in religious activities not sanctioned by the State run the risks of arrests and imprisonment.

PRAY

- God will release His bountiful resources through His people from outside China;
- He will raise young leaders with strong biblical foundations who can teach and lead His people to stand firm in their faith;
- Pray also for children under 18 who are prevented from hearing the Gospel through regulations that prohibit organising Sunday School. Pray that God will inspire creative ways among His people to bring His Good News to the young ones and that Christian parents and adults will be mindful to share Jesus' love with their children.

IRAQ Six years ago in April, Saddam's reign ended. Today, the situation seems worse, but this is also a period of new possibilities for the Church. Praise God for the opportunities to distribute Christian literature. Praise God too for several socio-economic projects, such as a woodwork shop, that are ongoing in Iraq.

PRAY

- The Gospel will change Iraq from the inside out;
- That young men will be trained and become good carpenters so that they can make a living by it; and
- For the teams involved in the translation of Scriptures and Christian books into the two main Kurdish languages.

NORTH KOREA In 2009, life got worse for the 200,000 to 400,000 Christians in North Korea which topped the Open Doors World Watch List for the eighth consecutive year.

The list, compiled annually by Open Doors, ranks the 50 hardest countries in the world in which to practise Christianity.

A 150-day "combat" campaign saw strict house searches that resulted in hundreds of arrests of Christians, many of whom were sent to join roughly 50,000 to 70,000 other Christians in concentration camps.

Said a veteran North Korea watcher, "Christians are the target of fierce government action, and once caught, are not regarded as human – this year we have evidence that they are used as guinea pigs to test chemical and biological weapons."

Despite these extreme conditions, the number of Christians in North Korea has grown in the past 10 years.

PRAY

- That our brethren will remain steadfast in their hope in God. May they experience God's divine joy despite their sufferings;
- They will receive God's ever-present help in every situation; and
- For God's protection from the evil one who can harm their bodies but cannot touch their souls.