

EDITORIAL

FOR almost 500 years, Protestant churches have largely functioned within traditional denominational structures of one kind or another. But in the last century, particularly the last decade, new structures for ministry have emerged, taking the form of loosely-structured apostolic networks with greater personal authority given to those called “Apostles”. This has given growth to a new phenomenon called the NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION.



The original twelve apostles with Jesus as depicted by Leonardo Da Vinci in his famous painting.

Will the Real Apostle

Please Stand UP?

There is a strong emphasis today on the recognition of apostles. The International Coalition of Apostles, headed by Dr C. Peter Wagner, is the talk of the day. There are also other similar groups promoting the necessity of apostles in building God’s Kingdom. We shall try to assess this development by asking three pertinent questions.

What is an Apostle?

Apostles were first appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ. “[Jesus] appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.” (Mk. 3:14–15)

Their role revolved around personal fellowship with Jesus, and representing Jesus in preaching the good news and driving out demons. The Greek word *apostolos* means delegate, envoy, messenger or agent.

The group of twelve expanded after Pentecost. The primary “qualification” of an apostle then was seeing the resurrected Christ and being personally commissioned by Him as a witness to His resurrection. “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our

Lord? ...” (1 Cor. 9:1). “... and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles...” (1 Cor. 15:5–9).

Other marks of an apostle included “signs, wonders and miracles” (2 Cor. 12:12) and suffering for Christ’s sake. In 2 Corinthians chapters 11 and 12, for example, Paul defended his apostleship with a lengthy personal history of sufferings for the gospel.

The apostles were the authoritative teachers of the Early Church. Apostolic writings and doctrines form the content of the New Testament canon. The Church is “built on the foundation of

the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). The apostles also undertook disciplinary action but they were not involved in the daily administrative running of the churches.

Are there Apostles today?

This question touches on the issue of apostolic succession. Conspicuously absent from the New Testament are efforts to appoint successors to the existing apostles (except when Judas was replaced by Matthias to maintain the number twelve before Pentecost).

In contrast, great care was taken to institute and maintain certain other offices in the churches, such as those of overseers (*episkopos*), elders (*presbyteros*), and deacons (*diakonos*) (Acts 14:23, 1 Tim. 3:1–12, Tit. 1:3–9, etc.).

In line with this, some argue that apostles are mentioned first in Eph. 4:11 (the five-fold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) because they are foundational and not because the office is continuous.

Rather, the point of the verse is not



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PRINTED BY CALVARY PRESS

Appreciate Your Pastor

Paul says, "It was He (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Your pastor is a gift from the Lord to you. He or she has been called and anointed by God to be your shepherd so that you will grow spiritually to serve the Lord and also be a blessing to others.

Paul also says, "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work" (1 Thessalonians 5:12). Honoring those who serve as pastors and overseers is scriptural and pleases God.

In conjunction with NECF's Ministers' Appreciation Month this October, I would like to suggest three meaningful ways by which you can be an encouragement to your pastors and leaders.

Pray for your pastors

Pastors shoulder a heavy responsibility. They have been called to preach and teach the Word, nurture and equip the people of God for the work of the ministry. In doing this, they sometimes encounter obstacles and challenges.

Paul understood the importance of prayer for those in leadership. He said, "...pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith" (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2).

Pray that God will bless your pastors with daily wisdom and strength as they serve the Lord and His Church.

Provide for your pastors

The Bible teaches, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages" (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

Providing material support for pastors and leaders is a God given responsibility and is an appreciation to God for providing shepherds for His people.

Partner with your pastors

The work of the Lord is accomplished not by one person alone but by believers working together. The Body of Christ is made up of people with diverse personalities and gifts and yet united in a common cause (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). The apostle Peter reminds us that "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10).

Be a blessing to your pastor by your willingness to serve and assist in the many ministries of a local church such

as worship leading, teaching, hospitality etc.

Take advantage of special occasions to appreciate your pastor. Significant anniversaries recognising years of faithful ministry and landmark birthdays are wonderful opportunities to express your love for them. These occasions will also be a blessing to the church as they strengthen bonds within the church family.

Finally, as you honour God by honouring His servants, you too will be blessed. The Bible says, "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" (Proverbs 11:25).



that ministry is five-fold but manifold.

Also, some believe that Paul's "last of all he appeared to me also" indicates that Paul was the last apostle ever commissioned by Christ.

However, we must acknowledge that the apostolic gifting is alive and functioning in the Church today. We see this gifting in those who plant churches, head missionary work, and spearhead other ministries.

No matter how clearly the line is drawn between contending sides on this issue, no one will claim that the so-called apostles today are in exactly the same shoes as those in New Testament days (for example, they do not produce authoritative doctrines).

At the same time, no one will contend that the apostolic gifting has ceased to operate.

Should the 'Apostle' title be used?

Concerns have been raised regarding the International Coalition of Apostles' (ICA) efforts to 'confer' apostleship on selected people. It must first of all be noted that ICA does not actually ordain or commission apostles; it merely gives recognition to people who are already exercising the apostolic gifting, and whose lives and ministries have been observed over the years.

The express aims of ICA are to facilitate meaningful networking among peer-level apostles for the acceleration of creative strategies in order to fulfill the Great Commission, and to provide a forum for accountability to one another.

These are noble aims. Besides, ICA does not claim to be the exclusive society of apostles (see www.apostlesnet.net). Within this framework, the use of the title in itself is not a major problem.

At the same time, the following legitimate concerns should be raised concerning the activities of ICA and those of similar groups.

Theologically, the larger context of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) must be understood. The current

phenomenon is not entirely new; it has roots going back a few hundred years to other movements. As a result, many accumulated theological assumptions are just taken over without critical judgment.

While many proponents of the NAR do not exactly believe the same things, a major feature of the movement is the 'Kingdom Now' teaching. It is believed that the restored apostles and prophets will lead a new and reconstructed Body of Christ in bringing about a gigantic end-time revival that will 'conquer' the kingdoms of the world and usher in the Kingdom of God on earth.

While the Bible promises that the Church will ultimately be victorious, the 'Kingdom Now' teaching is too triumphalistic and may lead to disillusionment and disappointment. We must remember that Scripture also teaches that God's people are a remnant in the midst of the majority, and this small group of believers is a prime subject of persecution.

Structurally, it must be recognised that

titles and positions, to church buildings, and other material substance, and the fire fizzles out.

It has been said that if the Holy Spirit were to leave some sections of the Church today, they will still continue to function. While this diagnosis cannot simply be hoisted on to the present movement, it would be foolish to ignore this historical trend and human weakness.

Isn't it possible for those apostles to network informally and non-exclusively without the present set-up? Practically, the process of conferment gives grounds for concern.

Despite ICA's claim that it only recognises those who are already apostles, the way the recognition is given – the special ceremony, the pronouncement, laying of hands, et cetera – creates the inevitable impression that something is being added to the conferee and that the conferrer possesses special authority or mandate.

There are also 'apostles' who have become proud (a small minority, we hope) and insist on being addressed as 'Apostle So-and-So'.



"No matter how clearly the line is drawn between contending sides on this issue, no one will claim that the so-called apostles of today are in exactly the same shoes as those in New Testament days..."

the conferment of titles is a form of institutionalism. While some measure of institutionalism may be inevitable, one will be wise to avoid too much 'structure'.

Paul said it well: "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Gal. 3:3)

This is a good summary of the rise and decline of many revival movements. A move of the Spirit brings revival, and then human efforts creep in to try to maintain or even fan the fire (with much sincerity, it must be granted).

Slowly but surely, the focus shifts to

Conclusion

The Church in every generation has her issues of contention. It is often possible to accurately discern the true nature of a burning issue only after the dust has settled. We can only act according to the light given to us. This article is a small contribution to this end.

Let us "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). We call upon all apostles to serve with humility to prove their calling. We call upon all Christians to "fix (their) eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). ■



What's in a Title?

A title, when conferred on and accepted by a person in the right spirit, can be a tremendous blessing to the body of Christ, says Pr Daniel Ho whose church recently hosted a conference on apostles and prophets. The senior pastor of DUMC, Petaling Jaya, shares his thoughts with Berita NECF about the current controversy surrounding the 'Apostle' title.

THE 'Apostle' title is stirring a lot of flak within the Christian community. What are your comments?

Firstly, we must recognise that apostleship is a gift from God according to Eph. 4:11 onwards ("It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets...") Today, we have no problem calling so-and-so 'pastor' or 'teacher' or 'evangelist'. Even the term 'prophet' is reasonably well-accepted increasingly. But we become nervous with addressing somebody 'Apostle'.

I understand the apprehension because it seems that people nowadays are more concerned about titles than anything else. We print name cards (bearing the title) and we point out 'so-and-so is an apostle, so-and-so is not'. That's my first concern.

My second concern is elitism. It seems that 'apostle' is the highest office or title to aim for or go for and if one achieves that, then one belongs to the 'super-class'. This is totally alien to Scripture which recognises 'apostleship' simply as a gift like any other gifts. Such attitude, if any, must be repented of.

My third concern is that some people are preoccupied with their parameter or their boundary of influence, about getting networks under them. Some of the so-called apostles are going round the world trying to get people under their control, influence and direction. They have missed the point altogether.

But, just because there are some people who use the title and/or influence in this manner doesn't rule out the apostolic gifting. This gifting comes from God and is not conferred by others. That's the first thing that marks an apostle.

Secondly, an apostle is somebody with a father's heart. He has a fathering spirit as stated in 1 Cor. 4:15 ("Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel"). He (the apostle) wants his children to do well and succeed in life, to do better than himself. He's not there to control and dominate them, which is a wrong understanding and exercise of apostleship. (But) he is someone who comes below everybody, who lifts them up, helps and guides them. Because he's more concerned about how well his children are doing, he sometimes has to make sacrifices. A person with that fathering spirit is one who truly has the apostolic gifting and he has genuine spiritual authority as well.

People with some measure of spiritual maturity will recognise a person with spiritual authority and they are happy to submit to him and his spiritual direction. This is not foisted upon them but they willingly and cheerfully do so. This authority is not based on title or office. One may have the title or the office but sometimes do not have the spiritual authority.

WHAT then do you think about Dr Peter Wagner and his team going around conferring the title on selected Christians?

I know Peter. I know his heart and where he is coming from. They (Dr Wagner and his team) don't go around conferring on any Tom, Dick and Harry. They would have watched the lives and ministries of these people whom they have known them for a long, long time. Furthermore, these people are highly commended by other Christians and Christian leaders. So what they are doing is simply recognising what God is already doing in their lives.

Not that I go along with it (conferring of title) necessarily, but within the Body of Christ, we must have the big-heartedness, the generosity to say that this may not be my cup of tea but there is no need to kill ourselves, kill one another by tearing the whole thing apart and say this is totally not of the Lord. This is not going to destroy the work of the Church. This is not going to be a stumbling block to God's Kingdom. The Church is stronger than this! But we cannot avoid the fact that there is the gift of apostleship in Scripture.

BUT if this thing is stirring up big-headedness in certain people...?

I don't see it that way. Those people who have been conferred are recognised leaders in their countries. They are already exercising their (apostolic) gifting. They are not fly-by-night operators who pop up from nowhere with no ministry to prove, no church to show. You can examine their lives, their work and their churches.

If these people are already recognised leaders, why then

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do they need the title? What does the title add to their ministry?

APOSTLE

Let's take a pastor for example. It's important that a pastor be called 'pastor' because it carries spiritual authority. Let's say a pastor walks into a funeral and often, there are non-Christian family members in a funeral. A pastor walks in and introduces himself and tells them this is the way the funeral is going to be conducted. They will all listen to him even though some or many of the family members and relatives are not Christians.

Why? Because he is a pastor. There's spiritual authority. Also, as Christians, we're dealing with principalities and powers. In the spiritual realm, the evil one recognises a pastor as a man with authority.

The title confers the person the authority and I've seen again and again, when a person is conferred a title, his ministry takes off incredibly because he is recognised in both the physical and spiritual realm. Of course I'm referring to a sincere servant of the Lord who is genuinely working for the Lord. You can confer the person rightly, and the person humbly accepts it and the person humbly exercises it.

Some people dare not take on the title because they are afraid of the cost involved. There are certain things they can do and certain things they can't do anymore. Likewise, an apostle. There's a cost involved. If you take on the title, you are now a 'father'. You have no choice but to help other people succeed. You have to lift other people up and not yourself up.

When all the apostles who really have the gifting make the call in a city, for example, people will come to them and gather together in unity. This means that, firstly, they're fulfilling the prayers of Jesus for unity in the Body of Christ in John 17. Secondly, they're fulfilling Psalm 133, that incredible blessing will flow when we dwell in unity. Non-Christians will see this and will want to belong to such a community.

There are good things that can come out of a title. It

challenges people to exercise the anointing God has given them. If these people reject the title because of their fears or unwillingness to pay the price, they are being disobedient. Then, everybody gets shortchanged. People who should receive the blessing from these anointed ones miss the blessing.

THE anointed ones can carry on serving quietly without the title?

Sure. After all, as I have said, we should be more concerned about the ministry than the title. If we're caught up with the title or the office, then we miss the point altogether. Let's be concerned about the Kingdom, not just my church or denomination. Let's advance God's Kingdom and be a blessing to the Body of Christ and to the world. ■

Nothing wrong with 'Apostle', but...

THEOLOGICALLY, there is nothing wrong with the usage of the term 'Apostle' to recognise the apostolic function. This was stated by the NECF Research Commission, which however, expressed concern at the manner the word has been used and understood by the Christian community at large. The commission raised the following points at their recent meeting in August:

The authority The church has not thought through the biblical teaching on authority, which is in the office. The act of conferring the title, though it is meant to recognise the contribution or function of a leader, has mistakenly placed the authority on the person rather than the office. This disturbs lay leaders and may confuse young Christians.

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Go for the Kingdom, ditch the title

Berita NECF asked several leaders about the current practice of carrying the word 'Apostle' as a pre-fix to their name. All expressed dismay and concern at this latest development in the evangelical circle.

"I'm not for it (the 'Apostle' title). It cheapens the apostolic movement," Pr Chew Weng Chee of SIB Kuala Lumpur bluntly said.

"I believe in the apostolic anointing but we can do away with the title, which has become so branded that it is elevating self. The people behind this must search their motive and agenda

and be careful that they are not using this to promote themselves," he cautioned and urged Christians to "forget about the title and go for the Kingdom".

Dr Tan Nget Hong pointed out that the title in itself was not wrong, but it should be reserved for the New Testament apostles. "When we say apostle, we have the impression of the New Testament apostles who wrote part of the Scriptures, who broke new ground," the elder of PJEFEC said, adding that he was uncomfortable with the current trend of bestowing and using the 'Apostle' title.

Pr Micky Kua of Cornerstone Doulos concurred with Dr Tan's view that the word 'Apostle' brings to mind writers of the Bible. "Apostles are people who gave us part of the infallible Word of God," he said.

"I have an uneasy feeling with people using apostle as a title in the present day. Really, we do not need the title to function."

Another pastor who declined to be named said there was no need to use titles because "people with the apostolic gifting would be known by the fruits and others will automatically give them the due respect."

A title carries heavy weight and responsibility, he reminded. ■

A Call To All Christians

Individuals conferred honorary doctorates have been barred from using the title “Dr”. The Malaysian Cabinet made this decision in July out of concern over the growing incidence of bogus claims.

Two years ago, NECF Malaysia highlighted the issue of the proliferation of doctorates within the Christian community, in particular among Christian leaders.

While we recognise that many are worthy of receiving the honorary title for their contribution to the community and nation, the title “Dr” has unfortunately been brought into disrepute by those who obtained it through dubious means,

whether the doctorate is honorary or “earned”.

As a national body representing the evangelical Christian community, NECF Malaysia seeks to defend the credibility and integrity of our membership and of the evangelical witness.

In line with the Cabinet decision, the Council of NECF Malaysia has decided to amend its official directory accordingly.

As we do not know the status of your doctorate degrees, we shall in general remove all ecclesiastical academic titles in our salutation, unless otherwise informed by your good-self in writing to include in our directory. ■

(This is a statement of the NECF Malaysia.)

Plea to Restore Academic Integrity

THE Cabinet’s decision to stop holders of honorary doctorates from using the ‘Dr’ pre-fix has restored academic integrity. Christians not only ought to abide by the ruling but lead the way, according to Kairos Research Director Dr Ng Kam Weng

“Somebody once said that the way the Ph.D is being given out, we might as well give it with the birth certificate,” he jested.

Dr Ng stressed that he was not against honorary doctorates, but they should be given to truly deserving people. He quoted John Stott and F.F. Bruce as two exemplary holders of honorary doctorates.

“John Stott was known to have refused all honorary doctorates until Cambridge University felt ashamed not to bestow him one. In his case, it was the university which wanted to have a share in his honour, to be identified with him, and not the other way round,” he pointed out.

In contrast (to Stott), people are

buying doctorates, whether honorary or academic, to elevate themselves so as to gain more respectability, Dr Ng lamented.

He also questioned holders of academic doctorates who obtained them without going through the laborious academic rigours of studying, researching and writing.

“The public assume that a person with a doctorate degree has spent many hours researching and writing to clinch that Ph.D. But there are people who get their doctorates by just writing six papers. This conveys a misleading message,” he said.

Meanwhile, Ph.D student Lim Kar Yong lauded the Cabinet’s timely decision in an e-mail to *Berita NECF*. The University of Wales, Lampeter, student said, “We Christians should be the ones refraining from using and abusing such titles in the first place even without the Cabinet decision.”

He also concurred with Dr Ng that Christians who obtained their academic



Ph.D student Lim Kar Yong is putting in at least 40 hours of studying a week for the next three to four years before he can gain his doctorate degree.

doctorates without going through the proper route is “deceptive and not truly deserving of a *real* doctorate”.

“There are Christian institutes that confer unaccredited ‘Dr’ titles on those who merely submit some papers based on some devotional reflections or life experiences. No previous master’s degree required.

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Women to Women



Do we Malaysians ever consider why we were born in this country? A country that is full of resources, that enjoys peace and where there is an absence of natural calamities like earthquakes, typhoons, volcanic eruptions and tornadoes? Do we ever



By KOH SOO CHOON

consider that being Malaysians is a gift?

In God's kingdom work, we are specially blessed and suited to work cross culturally....

- We live in a country with different races. We learn to be patient and have a spirit of "give and take" so that we can continue to live peacefully. When we go overseas to work, we learn to be sensitive as a result of our experiences at home. Compare that with our sisters and brothers from countries that are basically mono-cultural, like Korea or Japan.

- We understand and learn about the different religions in Malaysia. We participate in the different festivals and celebrations. We know that Muslims pray five times a day, fast during Ramadan; we know what Deepavalli is all about and what Buddhists believe. We are sensitive to what is considered

clean or unclean, proper or improper behaviour, etc. We have such a rich learning environment. Unfortunately, we take this for granted. Do you know that someone from the US might not know that

Muslims bow towards Mecca when they pray?

This is just one example of the wealth of knowledge that we have. Others have a sharp learning curve to tackle as far as the major religions of the world are concerned.

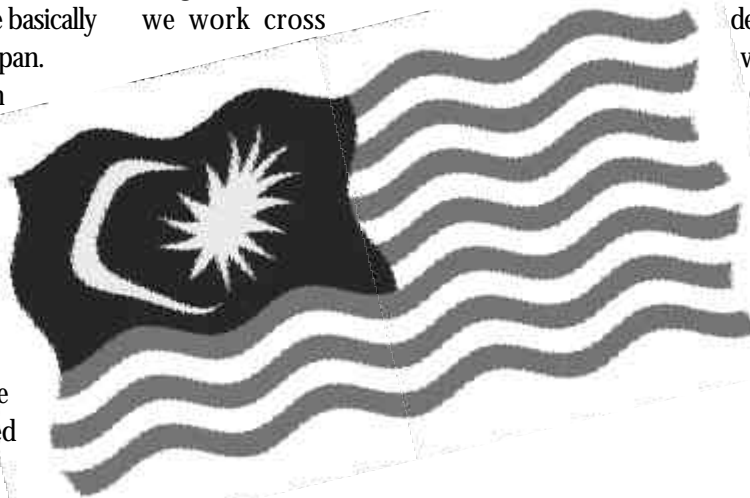
- How many of us speak at least two languages? This is the minimum number! We speak three languages on the average. This enables us to have a better ear for different sounds and it is easier for our tongues to twist around when we work cross

culturally and need to learn a new language. Compare this with our brothers and sisters who come from a mono-language country. We have had a good head start!

- As a result of the exposure and cultural mix of the different races, we have come to appreciate each other's food. Just look at the way people of all races and ages in Malaysia eat heartily of different types of food. Food is essential for survival. We are more open to try all kinds of food with different texture, smell and taste! This is an advantage we enjoy compared to others who have less exposure.

- Food – we are always talking about food and eating! We are prepared to eat anything anywhere once it is known that

a particular stall serves good food. In the process, we have developed "iron stomachs" as we eat in all kinds of settings. Of course, we have the occasional bout of diarrhea but our resistance has built up over the years. I know of our counterparts from some "super clean" countries who spend lots of time being horizontal, and



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Malaysians are Super Special!

Siew Kin (not her real name), our schoolmate at seminary used to be very moody and it was generally difficult for others in the women's dormitory to get along with her. She, however, got along fine with some of the men.

She confided that she had had a difficult childhood and did not have a relationship with her mother at all. We thought she was using that as an excuse for her poor interaction with the women.

She graduated and married one of her seniors. Together, they pastored a church for several years. Then they decided to go to Australia for the husband to pursue further theological studies and they also hoped to settle there. We heard that they

By Ronnie & Teck Ai Teoh

fully exploited. The cause can be traced back to her lack of relationship or bonding with her mother in the growing up years. It is something not difficult to understand but frightening, nevertheless.

Bonding takes place in the pre-teen years of life, from the time a child becomes aware of his or her sexual identity. Its function is to help a child understand his or her special characteristics as a boy or girl and be secure in them.

When it is properly accomplished, it

“When bonding is properly accomplished, it will help the child to have a healthy interest in members of the opposite sex.”

dressing and shopping etc. a boy learns from the example of his father, and a girl her mother, the peculiar things and ways of each sex.

It's the most natural of interactions, we would think, and that is the way it is meant to be but sometimes things go dreadfully wrong due to our lack of consistency and understanding.

We can also go out of our ways to enhance bonding, for example, let the boys (father and son) go do their own shopping for their toiletries, clothes, underwear and shoes while mother and daughter can go to do some other suitable ladies' things together.

Bonding

The important ingredient needed for a healthy sexual orientation.

had a couple of children there and then there was a news blackout until years later when the husband came back alone!

What happened? Eventually we found out from the husband that Siew Kin had met a lesbian in Australia and the relationship became so serious she eventually left him and their young children to live with her gay partner.

Special arrangements were made for the children (as citizens) to continue their education in Australia and the heart-broken husband came back to try and resume his fulltime calling here.

Over the years, as we came to understand more about gays and the reasons for their sexual orientation, we understood in hindsight that Siew Kin's case was actually *a weak link just waiting to break!*

It was a matter of time, and meeting the 'right' person (a catalyst, so to speak) would lead to the latent weakness in her emotional-psychological makeup being

will help the child to have a healthy interest in members of the opposite sex, beginning in the teenage years of life, and leading ultimately to a healthy life-long sexual orientation. The cause for a number of confused sexual behaviour in adults (although not all) can actually be traced back to a lack of bonding in childhood.

Because of its very nature and function, the most important requirement for bonding is for it to take place between a parent and child of the same sex, so that a girl learns from her mother what it is like to be a girl and woman, and correspondingly a boy from his father.

How true it is when we say that a lot of important things in life are *caught* more than *taught*; they are learnt in the process of interaction and relationship.

A boy needs to observe and learn to do certain things like his father and if necessary, interact with him and ask questions. From watching television to

Mothers who usually oversee such activities for young children should sometimes make a grand show of letting the boys do their own thing. Needless to say, mothers have a lot of input into the life of her young male children and fathers need to treat their daughters like princesses but same sex bonding is something we need to actively consider and make special provisions for.

Parents, look seriously into this matter of bonding with your children and act on it. On the one hand it is not an impossible task to fulfill but on the other, failing to accomplish this is sending your children into the world with a weak link in their emotional and psychological make-up making them vulnerable to being exploited by gays!

In today's world, we never know who our children will meet and interact with when they leave home for studies, work or just to live on their own.

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Ronnie says...

Because we have two boys in our family, some of the special things I did with them was when I took the time to teach them to ride their bicycles and fly kites when they were little boys; we played baseball; I coached them in tennis and later used to watch live football telecasts with them. I did the spanking when it was necessary.

Very quickly, they have now become adults in their own right and hopefully, through all the interaction over the years, they have caught from me what the male sexual identity is all about. Ladies can figure out what you need to do with your daughters. That is what bonding is all about.

What are some danger signs (indicating a possible lack of bonding) to watch out for?

- When either parent becomes so busy with his or her career and is unable to give quality time to the child of his or her sex to do things together.



- When the personality trait of a parent makes it difficult for a child or children of the same sex as him or her to be close to and confide in that parent.

- Boys are especially vulnerable in our society because there is a lack of the male model in a lot of



Teck Ai and Ronnie

places. Most teachers (especially in primary school) are female; women are often solely saddled with the care of the children in dysfunctional family situations.

In our churches, the Sunday Schools and other ministries are invariably led by women. Some steps ought to be taken to correct this trend. The place to begin is the home.

- Single parent families would normally have problems with the issue of bonding.

In certain places in the United States, surrogate-parent programmes were initiated to help single parents deal with this problem: mature and well established men and women volunteer to help single parents with the bonding needs of their children of a different sex. ■

Pastor Ronnie and his wife have many years of pastoral experience.

who are constantly on medication. As a result, they are bogged down with lack of energy to work full swing. They have to take more stringent precautions in food preparations and abstain from consuming outside food.

- Eating with our fingers – most of us are familiar with the proper way of using our fingers. This helps us in our cross cultural learning as people from a number of cultures sit on the floor and use fingers to eat.

- It is easy for us to squat. Squat? What is so great about that? In many underdeveloped countries 'squatting' toilets are the norm. Many people from the west do not know how to squat. What difficulties there would be if one

constantly has diarrhea, has difficulty in squatting and there is no access to 'sitting' toilets!



- Finally we have one BIG PLUS – our passports! We do not need visas to go to hard-to-get-visas places like Iran, and Turkmenistan! Other countries include Krgyzstan,

Cambodia and Vietnam.

Do we appreciate this fact? If you have been working cross culturally, you would know that to have a visa is like having gold.



The process takes ages and some countries are not keen to grant visas.

We are especially welcomed in Muslim countries. Malaysians have wonderful opportunities to strike up interesting and meaningful conversations by the simple

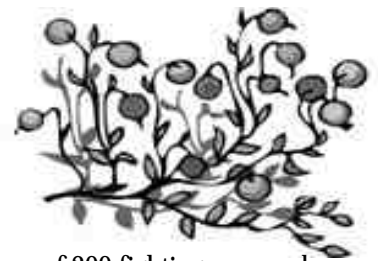
fact that we come from Malaysia! Americans have asked me how they can get our passports! When we are Kingdom people, we see things from a different perspective. We have this special Malaysian privilege that God has blessed us with.

With privileges come responsibilities.

God will ask what we have done with the resources that He has blessed us with. Are we using them to be in partnership with Him to build His kingdom on earth among peoples whose languages are yet to be represented in Heaven? Are we going to say "Boleh!" and "Amen" to our Father who has predestined us to be born in "Boleh Land"?

(Read her interview with Kairos overleaf.) ■

Lessons from the field



Koh Soo Choon has travelled and served in different parts of the world. This is an extract from an interview by Kairos magazine.

Being a cross cultural worker and single, do you struggle with loneliness? How do you cope?

Loneliness is part of life whether one is single or otherwise; in the jungle or in the city. I try to convert loneliness into aloneness and solitude. Spiritual disciplines like meditation and quiet are indispensable.

I recognise loneliness as something that is natural so there is an expectation which aids in acceptance. I have a passion for life so there are so many things that interest and fascinate me.

I ask God for a prayer partner and folks to do fun things with wherever I am. Today I am still in contact with these valuable friends of mine. In some countries I can keep a journal. Often I reread when I experience times of low.

I also have a "joy box." In it are little things that have encouraged and inspired me. I go to the box when I need to be reminded. A spiritual mentor – she has been my faithful support all these years. Having email nowadays is very helpful.

I also have a band of prayer friends whom I can send a quick SOS.

My first test was when I lived in the jungle of Papua New Guinea on my first venture out of Malaysia. We were allowed to go to the town three times a year for a week. There was no electricity or email. The plane came in once a week and that was the highlight. However, bad weather often interrupted the schedule, sometimes for weeks. Not having letters was difficult.

The refugee camp was made up of 200 fighting men, only five women. How could one find a soulmate? There were only two of us foreigners working there and the camp commander was a "woman, wine and song" man.

It was during this period of my life that I became very sensitive to the voice of God as I had no one else to share my heart. This was the start of the invaluable lesson of the spiritual discipline of practising the presence of God.

I was given a puppy and he grew up to be my physical listening ear, did fun things with me and was with me all the time.

As an insider looking on from the outside so to speak, what would you say are issues the church and Christians living here have to grapple with?

- To beware that we will not remain in our comfortable holy cuddles.
- To be aware of what is happening around us, how policies are made and implemented.
- Question ourselves why we have been born in Malaysia and what is God expecting us to be involved in.
- To look at the big picture, what are the trends and possible projections for the years ahead.
- We have to remind ourselves to major on the majors and not minors.
- Constantly remind ourselves that we are not of this world and so should adopt kingdom values in every area of our lives, be it careers, children, their future, etc. How easy it is for us not to be any different from the folks around us. ■

Grace is New Chairperson

NECF MALAYSIA has appointed Grace Hee to head its Women's Concern Commission. Grace also sits on the NECF Council, and in addition, heads the NECF Prayer Commission.

NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong announced the appointment at a meeting with the commission members in August. The commission also agreed to expand its membership to include theologians, politicians, social activists,

and corporate figures to enhance the commission's role to empower churches in the area of women's ministry.

Besides Grace, the other commission members are Chan Tean Yin, Dr Cheah Soo Ngoh, Ong Eng Lee, Carol Tang, Nesam Ebenezer, Shereene Wong and Goh Poh Gaik. Despite her hectic schedule, Grace accepted the appointment because she feels a deep burden for women's issues.

"Women are just so special. They are great influencers, communicators, caregivers, lovers of life, and the backbone of family and society. And yet, paradoxically, they are relatively 'downtrodden' with a very small voice in three key institutions of life – the Government, the church and the family," she observed.

She expressed admiration for the current commission members who are passionate about helping local churches develop their women's ministry, and also advocating important issues that affect women and the family. ■



WOMEN to WOMEN

Advisor/Co-ordinator: Goh Poh Gaik

Women to Women, a project of the NECF Commission on Women's Concerns, is a bimonthly supplement to *Berita NECF*.

It has the broad objectives of:

- educating and raising awareness of the social and theological issues affecting women
 - stimulating efforts towards networking and dialogue amongst women
 - encouraging one another in the use of our gifts and talents for the Lord's Kingdom
- Your letters and contributions (feedback, suggestions, ideas, articles, poems, cartoons, etc.) are most welcome.

Send to:

The Co-ordinator, **WOMEN TO WOMEN**
NECF, 32, Jalan SS2/103,
47300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

The views expressed in this supplement do not necessarily reflect those of the Commission or the NECF.

Implications of converting to Islam

IF you convert to Islam, there are important changes in your legal status and what you can or cannot do. Your conversion to Islam will be registered with the Religious Department and the National Registration Department, both of which are computerised, so that access to this information is available throughout the country.

Under Syariah enactments of most of the 13 States of Malaysia:

1 Conversion back to your former religion is either (a) not allowed under the law, or (b) a criminal offence which means you may be fined, whipped, detained or imprisoned under most State Islamic laws.

2 If you are under 18 years of age, you require your parent's permission to convert to Islam.

3 Your identity card will record your conversion to Islam. Therefore,

even if you are no longer practising Islam, you may be fined, whipped, detained or imprisoned for violation of Syariah laws, such as praying in church, eating in public during fasting month, khalwat etc.

4 You cannot marry a non-Muslim. If you decide to divorce and attempt to convert out of Islam, you will lose custody of your children because they are Muslims.

5 Upon death, your non-Muslim relatives will lose their rights to any money, property, money etc. that you want to leave to them. The corpse of a convert to Islam will be taken away from his or her non-Muslim family for Islamic rites and burial even if you have not been a practising Muslim for many years.

6 In the event that your spouse converts to Islam, you may have no right to either your children or your spouse's property.

We know that certain Christians who convert to Islam for whatever reasons, are not aware of or do not consider seriously the implications of such conversion.

Hence the need to inform you. By this, we are neither against Islam nor freedom of religion, which is guaranteed for all Malaysians in Article 11 of our Constitution which give the right to an individual to freely choose his or her religion.

But to choose correctly, you need to know clearly what you choose and the consequences of your choice. ■

• *The above was a letter that appeared in HERALD (The Catholic Weekly) on Aug 14, 2005. It was signed by Archbishop Murphy Pakiam, Bishop Antony Selvanayagam and Bishop Paul Tan, SJ. Reprinted with permission.*

• FROM PAGE 6: RESTORE ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

"The award of such 'Dr' titles naturally does not correspond with the rigorous requirements of an academic doctorate. It is only morally right that we do not give false impression to others in both the award and use of such titles," added Kar Yong who is pursuing his Ph.D degree on New Testament at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the university.

A Ph.D degree, he said, requires an original contribution of between 80,000 and 100,000 words to the area that one is researching. To achieve this, it normally takes at least three to four years of full-time studies.

"For me, I shut myself in my study room and put in approximately 40 to 45 hours of work per week. In addition to this, there is also language requirement. For example, the focus of my research is in New Testament and as such, proficiency in both Greek and Hebrew is required. Furthermore, reading proficiency in German must also be demonstrated," he explained.

Kar Yong is currently focusing his research on Paul's suffering in 2 Corinthians. "My emphasis is on a thematic study on more than 20 verses on Paul's suffering in 2 Corinthians.

"It won't take us a minute to read all these verses, but it will take me at least three and a half years trying to make sense of them," he quipped. ■

• FROM PAGE 5: NOTHING WRONG WITH APOSTLES, BUT...

The commission also questions who has the authority to confer the 'title'.

The perception How the term is generally being understood by believers today is a major concern. The word 'apostle', which literally means 'the sent out one,' can also mean envoy, delegate, or messenger in the New Testament.

It is, however, used predominantly for those who were commissioned by Jesus Christ Himself for a particular task and has therefore taken on a technical or specific meaning, different from the usage of the term 'pastor,' which refers generally to any person who is shepherding a flock.

If a title is conferred upon a leader, would the leader be perceived as someone whose writing would be as weighty as John's, James' and Paul's, whose writings are the canon of the Bible?

The Epistles pointed out the succession of an apostolic ministry, which emphasises the function rather the office. Further, apostles still existed at the time when Ephesians was written. Interestingly, in Matt. 19:28, Jesus told the disciples that they would "sit upon 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel". This is confirmed in Rev. 21:14 which mentions "there were 12 names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb." ■

The Pastor-Leader Tension

IN the last issue, pastors shared the struggles they face with their congregation. This issue, they talked about the challenges they encounter with their leaders (deacons and elders). Their sharing is gleaned from the *Emotional Connection Between Pastors and Congregation Survey* conducted last year by the NECF Malaysia Research Department. Over 190 pastors throughout Malaysia responded to the survey.

OFTEN, the greatest conflicts in a corporate organisation stem from the leadership's inability to coexist effectively and affably with one another. Similarly, church management suffers the same strife.

The survey shows that less than half the respondents agree that they work well together with the others in the ministry (Table 1). Although 85% of respondents feel that they can trust their leaders, 64% agree that differences with the leadership is often a cause for pastors to leave the church.

Leadership exists in all tiers in a church, from zone leaders to cell group leaders to leaders of various ministries. These leaders have the most impact on group behaviour and dynamics.

In answering the question on four biggest difficulties in ministry, 60% of the respondents relate their problems to leadership. About half the problems they face are attributed to the attitudes of the leadership, such as disrespect, and lack of submissiveness, commitment and responsibility.

On the other hand, there is increasing dissatisfaction among the leaders towards their positions, the church and the senior pastor. Most pastors in Malaysia do not consider their vocation as the most frustrating occupation, but many feel the tremendous pressure to succeed in leading their congregation. They desire to provide an inspiring vision for their flocks and lead members to higher planes.

They long to build trust and create a sense of purpose for them.

While recognising their primary task as a church leader to form and share a future vision, 26.6% of pastors are facing difficulty in communicating their vision to the leadership and congregation, and mobilising and enabling the church to move into the vision.

Clashes in visions or lack of common goals within the leadership are not uncommon. It can rouse bad feelings between pastor and leaders to the extent of severing the relationship.

Pastors' emotional outlet

91% of the respondents admit that they need people to talk to. Of this group, 77% say they have someone to talk to in difficult times (Table 2). Out of this 77%, 28% of them are discouraged in their current ministry (Table 2a).

Coping with emotional conflict or stress, handling disappointment or discouragement, being misunderstood and criticised, feeling unappreciated and lonely – these are just some of the challenges that the respondents listed. 66% of respondents said their greatest discouragement in ministry is the lack of recognition and appreciation.

It is also noteworthy that 87% of the respondents believe in the importance of having a small support or accountability group to keep them in check. 86% of those who have someone to talk to in difficult times are willing to admit their

TABLE 1 From their observation and experience, the percentage of pastors who think that:	
Most pastors work well together with other people in the ministry	45.6%
Pastors work well with people who can increase their sense of self-worth	54%
Disagreement with leadership is often a cause of pastors leaving the church	64%
Pastors who seek to make changes may appear to threaten the influential church board or leadership	42%
Pastors are unconsciously threatened by lay person's ministry ability	48.2%

TABLE 2 Pastors who believe that most pastors need someone to talk to:	
Have someone (other than their spouses) to talk to during difficult times	77%
Share their struggles with close friends (other than their spouses)	76%
Have mentors	66.5%

TABLE 2a Pastors who say they have someone to talk to during difficult times:	
Share their struggles with some one close (other than their spouses)	86.5%
Have a mentor	73%
Admit their failures and share their inadequacies in small accountability groups	86%
Feel discouraged in current ministry	28%

failures and acknowledge their own shortcoming in the accountability groups.

“Everything rises and falls on leadership,” says John C. Maxwell in *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Malaysian pastors have outstanding talent in every conceivable field imaginable. Aside from preaching and teaching, many are adept in administration, writing, public speaking, counselling, mediating and others.

They make tremendous effort to be effective at all levels and in all situations, to be successful in ministries as well as to preserve harmonious relationships with their families, leaders, co-workers and congregation at large. However, without a good team of leaders and co-workers, the pastors' ability to achieve anything of lasting value will be limited. More importantly, when disagreements arise, pastors and leaders need to remember that they are on the same side. ■

– **By LIM SIEW FOONG, NECF Executive Secretary (Research)**

“When disagreements arise, pastors and leaders need to remember that they are on the same side.”

MyKad Matters

Wrong Record May Reduce Size of Christian Population

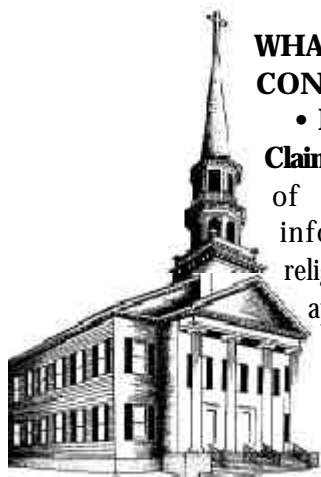
THE National Registration Department's 'mistake' in wrongly recording the religion of non-Malay MyKad holders could have serious repercussions on the non-Malay communities as it misrepresents the size of the Christian population and undermine the political clout of Christians in their participation in nation-building.

The issue of wrong recording was raised by the media, which have reported cases of non-Malays who found their religion wrongly recorded when they checked their MyKad data at the department (NRD). Some who are Christians were listed as Buddhists or Sikhs, while others who are non-Muslims were listed as Muslims.

The affected MyKad holders had said they stated their religion in the form when applying for the new identity card.

Since then, many people, particularly Christians, have checked their MyKad data, and many have found their religion wrongly recorded. This has aroused the suspicion that the problem is far more widespread than it seems.

In response to the errors, NRD director-general Datuk Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad said, "...changes on religion could not be made without proof as the department had to be accountable." (*NST*, July 17). NRD public relations officer Jainisah Mohd Noor later said the procedure of signing a declaration form was necessary for the department's documentation (*NST*, July 27).



WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS

- **Presumptuous Claim** NRD's claim of extracting information on religion from the applicants' birth certificates is presumptuous. A person may

have converted from the religion that is stated in the birth certificate. Hence the NRD ought to verify with MyKad applicants and not voluntarily profess a religion for them.

- **Inefficiency** NRD has not made changes even when applicants provide the correct information when they filled in the application form.

- **Inconsistent administration** Some NRD counter clerks are able to make immediate amendments, while others ask for proof of change of religion or refer applicants to higher-ranking officers.

- **Inconsistent responses** The NRD DG said changes of religion could not be made without proof, while the department's PRO said individuals only need to sign a declaration form to declare their new religion.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

- **No Legal Implication**

Even though the law empowers the Registration Officer to amend wrong information upon proof (Regulation 13 of the National Registration Regulations 1960), the change of religion (other than Islam) does not have legal implication, unlike a change of name. There is therefore no necessity to prove a change of religion.

- **Free to Choose**

Non-Muslims are not affected by the requirement imposed on Muslims to have the Syariah Court certify their religious status. Non-Muslims are therefore absolutely free to choose their religion – except Islam – and to change it at will. A pronouncement or declaration by an adult of evident sound mind should suffice, especially on matters on personal religion.

- **Minors**

In the case of a minor, it should be accepted that they follow the religion as dictated by their parents (until they decide to choose otherwise at 18 years).

- **No Need to Prove**



Holders' personal data is encoded on the square-shaped chip located on the left.

As religion is a personal matter for the individual, and as the provision for religious freedom in Article 11(1) of the Federal Constitution supersedes NRD regulations, there is therefore no necessity to prove religion (baptism certificates or declaration forms) as a procedural or evidential matter.

In response to the situation, NECF wrote to the relevant authorities, including the Home Affairs Ministry, expressing concern over the above issues and seeking assistance to rectify them. Following NECF's letters, Deputy Home Affairs Minister Datuk Tan Chai Ho directed its ministry's secretary-general Tan Sri Aseh Che Mat to rectify the mistakes.

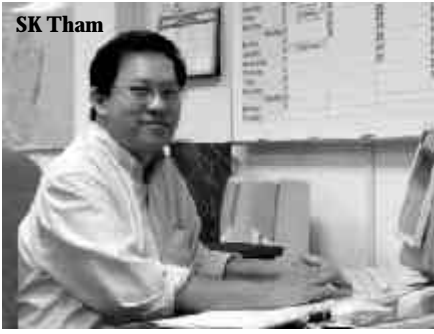
NECF also wrote to all its member churches informing them of the issue and urging them to check their MyKad data.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

Meanwhile, Malaysian Christians can do their part by ensuring their MyKad data are correct by taking the following measures. (The NRD is obligated to provide personal data when asked by MyKad holders.)

1. When collecting your MyKad, request for an immediate printout and check that your particulars, especially religion, are correctly entered.
2. Get an acknowledgement from the NRD officer when you surrender your MyKad for correction.
3. Request the officer to correct any error on the spot and ensures he/she enters the correct information into the computer.
4. Get another printout and check again.

SK Tham



NECF MALAYSIA has appointed SK Tham as Executive Secretary (Administration) in replacement of Patrick Cheng who has been re-designated Executive Secretary

Movements at NECF

(Leadership Development and Youth). SK, 50, has 25 years' working experience in general management, marketing and operations. He worships at Faith Covenant Tabernacle, Petaling Jaya, where he serves as a cell group leader and in the men's fellowship. Together with wife Bee Yen, they have two daughters aged 20 and 16.

Patrick, who has just completed six weeks of training at Eagles Mediation and Counselling Centre (EMCC) in

Singapore, will spearhead the mediation ministry within the local churches. For a start, he is responsible for organising the mediation workshop in partnership with EMCC.

During his Singapore training, Patrick followed the EMCC team to the family courts to witness real-life proceedings of family disputes and divorce cases. EMCC is the only agency in Singapore appointed by the government to mediate family disputes.

Eagles to train emerging leaders in Asia

EAGLES Leadership Institute (ELI) is kicking off a major programme to raise 50 Christian youth leaders in Asia with its first "Emerging Leader Development Programme (ELDP) next April.

Participants will come from four countries: Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia.

ELI has appointed NECF to coordinate the selection of 15 youth leaders aged between 27 and 40 to undergo the three-year programme. In turn, NECF has formed a three-man panel to choose participants serving in the church, government and marketplace.

The panel comprises Ong Hwai Teik,

President of Trinity Annual Conference (the English conference of the Malaysian Methodist Church); Rev. Wong Fong Yang, Senior Pastor of City



Partnership.

Participants will be placed in small groups of four or five under the care of a facilitator.

During the three years, they will meet regularly for personal mentoring and project work aimed at nurturing interaction and creating a leadership network that will transcend national, denominational, culture and ministry boundaries.

A ministry of Eagles Communications, ELI seeks to equip and empower existing and emerging leaders for the church and marketplace in Asia. The institute has trained over 5,000 leaders over the past 10 years.



Discipleship Presbyterian Church and former moderator of the Presbyterian Synod; and NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong.

Scheduled to start next April, the ELDP aims to develop and equip the next generation of Asian leaders who will impact the church, marketplace and government. The programme will focus on four key aspects in their training: Person, Performance, Perspectives, and

New Members

We welcome the following into our Fellowship as **Ordinary Members**:

- **Agape Baptist Church, Kuching**, represented by *Michael Ting*
- **GBM Gateway Christian Fellowship, Melaka**, pastored by *Goh Lee Neo*
- **GCI Network Bhd, Puchong**, represented by *Rev. Chin Keng Leong*
- **Khush Khabri Fellowship, Ipoh**, pastored by *Soodesh Kumar a/l Cachman Singh*
- **The Body of Christ, Kulim, Kedah**, pastored by *Aaron Vincent*
- **V-Community Centre, Kuala Lumpur**, pastored by *Steven Lim*
- **BEM Centre Bhd, Kota Kinabalu**, represented by *Jerry*

Dusing

- **The Foursquare Gospel Church, USJ, Subang Jaya**, pastored by *Jacinta Lai*
- **St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Kuala Lumpur**, pastored by *Rev. Dr Thomas J. Bower*
- **Jireh House of Prayer, Kulim, Kedah**, pastored by *David Simon*
- **SIB Cherith, Ipoh**, pastored by *Tan Seok Yi*
- **GA611 Bread of Life Centre, Petaling Jaya**, pastored by *Rev. Esther Kong Nget Har*

We also welcome five people as **Associate Members**: Patricia Teoh Kim Seing; Rev. Khoo Boo Wah; Rev. Dato' Dr Yeoh Beng San; Pr Chan Choy Leng; and Pr Peter Mariae Pragasam.

Neighbour Focus

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

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

PHILIPPINES

Population: 87,857,473 (Est. CIA Factbook, July 2005)

Ethnic groups: Malay 95.5%, Chinese 2%, Others 3% (including 2% of Mestizos – combination of ethnic Malay and other racial groups)

Religions (estimated): Roman Catholics 81%, Evangelicals 2.8%, Iglesia ni Kristo 2.3%, Aglipayans 2%, Other Christians 4.5%, Muslim 5%, Buddhists 0.08%, Indigenous & Others 1.7%, None 0.5% (2000 census)

THE apparent lack of political maturity in the Philippines' political development suggests two characteristics: people power, and an inherently corrupt and uncertain political system. Philippines ranked 102nd in the International Corruption Perceptions Index 2004 (out of 146 countries) and scored 2.6 (with 10 as highly clean).

The culture of corruption, entrenched at all levels, contributes greatly to socio-economic inequity and injustice. About 40% of the population lived below the poverty line of USD255 per year.

The Government itself respects human rights and has made efforts to strengthen the rule of law and the protection of human rights. Credible reports, however, show that some security forces, police and local authorities are responsible for arbitrary, unlawful, and, in some cases, extrajudicial killings; disappearances; torture; and arbitrary arrest and detention. The Philippines National Police has been described as the worst abuser of human rights.

Violence against women and abuse of

children remain problems. Societal discrimination against Muslims persists. The use of underage workers in domestic service is ongoing. Child prostitution as well as trafficking in women and children continues. Children are also used by insurgent groups as soldiers.

Serious defects in the administration of justice perpetuate human rights violations. There have been reports of judges being assaulted and killed in the line of duty.

There is no state religion although Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion. There are no reports of religious detainees or prisoners, nor reports of forced religious conversion. However, long-term socio-economic disparity between the Christian majority and the Muslim minority contributes to persistent conflicts in certain provinces.

The Abu Sayyaf Group, consisting less than 500 members, engages in violent crimes including bombings assassinations, and extortion. Its goal is to promote an independent Islamic state in western Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago but it has primarily used terror for financial profit.

The 12,000-strong Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the largest Muslim rebel group in the southern Philippines, is said to be responsible for a series of terrorist attacks in 1990s and bombings in recent years. It aims to establish an independent Islamic state in the south. The peace talks with the Government have so far been unsuccessful. Malaysia is presently involved in mediating peace talks.

There is also the long-standing,



nation-wide Communist insurgency. The New People's Army (NPA) aims to overthrow the Government through protracted guerrilla warfare. It is estimated to have 8,600 members.

There are reports of Muslim discrimination against Christians in areas where Muslims are the majority.

Animistic beliefs play a big part in daily living and greatly influence the lives of the majority Catholics. Filipino Christians are seeking an identity of their own.

PRAY: For an amicable solution to the present political turmoil and political maturity to handle the Arroyo crisis; **For** a just and transparent government; **For** an efficient and corrupt-free judiciary: for honesty and integrity among the ruling officials; **For** godly and courageous Christians to be placed in positions of influence; and **For** the relationship between Christians and Muslims, that they will learn to respect and trust each other.

PRAY FOR THE CHURCH: To be grounded in biblical values with adequate discipleship and accountability while they are seeking an identity of their own; for godly leaders that will help to bring unity across denominations; **To** be willing and able to respond to gross inequalities, corruption and moral failures in society; **For** humility, sensitivity and safety for the foreign missionaries (some have been kidnapped and killed by guerrillas, criminal gangs and religious extremists; **For** God to intervene in all matters relating to the conflicts between the Government and the insurgent groups; and **For** protection for civilians, especially women and children.

• SEE NEXT PAGE

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: NEIGHBOUR FOCUS

EAST TIMOR

Population: 857,000 (UN, 2005)

Ethnic groups: Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian), Papuan, small Chinese minority, Mestizos (mixed race people)

Religions: Roman Catholic 98%, Muslim 1%, Protestant 1% (Most citizens retain some practices of animistic beliefs which are regarded as more cultural than religious.)

EAST TIMOR, one of only two majority Roman Catholic countries in Asia (besides the Philippines), is the youngest nation of the new millennium. It was internationally recognised as an independent state on May 20, 2002.

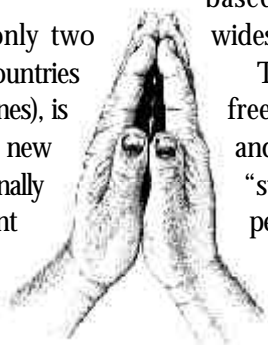
Today, many in East Timor still feel that justice has not been served, for Indonesia has “failed to give a credible judicial accounting for the 1999 atrocities”.

In July, a UN Commission of Experts was set up, giving the Indonesian government six months to prosecute the perpetrators of crimes against East Timorese in a special tribunal with “a team of international judicial and legal experts, preferably from the Asian region”.

Meanwhile, the governments of Indonesia and East Timor also set up a 10-member Commission of Truth and Friendship to look into the past violence against East Timorese.

In general, the political climate in the country is less than stable. Corruption in the executive and legislative branch is reported as not significant. The provision for an independent judiciary is respected but the system has by far been inefficient and at times inconsistent.

It remains weak, overloaded, with a lack of human resources, training and oversight of official in the legal system.



As a result, the rights to due process and fair trial are often denied. The National Police Service is poorly equipped, under-trained and influenced by political pressure. There have been numerous allegation of excessive use of force and corruption.

Although the Constitution guarantees equal rights and responsibilities for men and women, women continue to be marginalised in the social, cultural, economic and political sectors. Gender-based violence is serious and widespread.

The Constitution also provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship for all persons and “stipulates that no one shall be persecuted or discriminated against on the basis of his or her religious conviction”. Nonetheless, it has been reported that non-Catholic religious groups are sometimes viewed with suspicion. At times, some Muslim groups and non-Catholic Christian groups have been victims of harassment.

The Catholic Church is the dominant religious institution in the country, and its priests and bishops are highly revered by the locals. Its strong and pervasive influence sometimes affects government decisions. In April, the church has in fact called for protest against the Government and for the prime minister’s resignation after a disagreement over the school curricula. The Church wanted the Catholic faith to be taught in schools while the Government rejected the move based on the country’s constitution that it is a secular state.

East Timor is ranked 158th out of 175 countries in the 2004 Human Development Report in terms of life expectancy, educational attainment and adjusted

real income. It is said to be the worst performer in East Asia and the Pacific, the world’s poorest nations at independence.

It is still facing “myriad problems caused by the legacy of Indonesia’s brutal occupation” and has yet to rebuild much of what was destroyed. The country is heavily dependent on foreign assistance. Meanwhile unemployment is skyrocketing and poverty remains widespread. 42% of the population live below poverty line.

PRAY: For political stability resulting from an efficient and righteous government; For men and women of integrity and of wisdom to be placed in leadership positions; Against all forms discrimination; For protection and respect for women and those of the minority religious groups; and For policies that will effectively eradicate poverty and improve economic performance.

PRAY FOR PROTESTANT CHRISTIANS: For unity, perseverance and courage to continue to be salt and light in all areas; and For restoration, reconciliation and healing. ■

MALAYSIAN POPULATION Latest Statistics from the Statistics Department

RACE	NUMBER (Million)	%
Malay	13,190.2	50.50
Other Bumiputera	2,870.3	11.00
Chinese	6,154.9	23.60
Indian	1,834.8	7.00
Others	311.8	1.20
Non-Malaysian Citizen	1,765.7	6.70
TOTAL	26,127.7	100.00