

## EDITORIAL

Conflict is as old as the human race. But the stress of modern life and the influence of the culture of free expression have led to more conflicts or more open conflicts in Malaysian society today.

The Church is not exempted from this trend. From petty quarrels between Christians to ugly church splits, these conflicts do not honour Christ, and it is time the Church confront the problem in its face.

### Be Aware

The average church member is “aware” of conflict in his or her congregation. Too often, however, this awareness is taken with a sense of resignation or becomes fuel for gossip. To be truly aware, one needs to think clearly about conflict.

The three main causes of conflict are doctrinal differences, personal wrongs and personality clashes. Doctrinal battles, for better or worse, are less keenly fought at this time when unity and ecumenism are emphasised. Personality clashes, on the other hand, are becoming increasingly prevalent.

This is partly the result of structural relationships in churches and denominations becoming more complex, and partly due to the swelling ranks of dynamic leaders. Whatever the classification of a conflict, however, the ancient “I” factor remains a key player. *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?* (Jam. 4:1) The demands of

## Finding Peace In CONFLICTS



modern life and rising expectations tend to aggravate tensions in interpersonal relationships.

The consequences of conflict include hurt and unforgiveness (and their attendant ill effects) at the personal level and the stifling of growth at the church level. Unresolved tension between the pastor and other church leaders often robs a church of effective leadership, and affects the enthusiasm and morale of a congregation. Disputes between Christians in business may even lead to lawsuits.

In the *NECF Survey of Churches, Pastors and Christians Year 2001*, 47.2% of Christians reported that “relationships in their church are generally harmonious”; 26.9% reported “no outburst of conflicts but undercurrents and discontentment are felt”; 17.7 % reported “one or more

conflicts (in the past two years) but they are resolved amicably”; while 8.2% reported “one or more conflicts and people are leaving the church”.

In the more recent *Emotional Connection Between Pastors and Congregation Survey 2004*, 65% of pastors agree that irreconcilable differences are a common reason for people to discontinue the services of their pastors, while 64% believe that disagreement with leadership is often a cause of pastors leaving the church.

### Be Prepared

*Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional.* ~ Max Lucade  
Preparedness to deal with conflict is essential for the lay

Christian all the way to top church leaders. Conflicts of different natures are to be dealt with differently. A framework for thinking about conflict resolution is necessary.

A basic paradigm is the “Slippery Slope of Conflict” ([www.HisPeace.org](http://www.HisPeace.org)) that arranges responses from one extreme to the other extreme. “Escape responses” (peace-faking) at the left-hand side of the spectrum include suicide, flight, and denial.

These are followed by “conciliatory responses” (peace-making), which are overlooking the issue, discussion, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and church discipline. On the right-hand side are the “attack responses” (peace-breaking) of litigation (going to court), assault, and murder. The lesson is to stick

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• FROM FRONT COVER

to the “conciliatory responses” without slipping to the left or right!

Some offences are small enough to overlook. *A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offence.* (Prov. 19:11) Besides, Jesus taught us to first remove the plank from our own eye before looking at the speck in our brother's eye (Matt. 7:4–5, Lk. 6:4–42).

If an offence cannot be ignored, the procedure of Matt. 18:15–17 should be followed. *“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”* These four stages correspond roughly to discussion/negotiation,

“Let us not fight as the world fights, but obey the guidelines in the Bible. If the Church walks the way of love, the world will know that we are Jesus' disciples.”

mediation, arbitration, and church discipline.

Mediation, a middle-ground response, is fast becoming a popular resort of Christians in conflict situations. Oftentimes, a mediator is called in by mutual consent.

A mediator, who is a neutral party, does not impose his or her solutions but guides the discussion along productive channels and helps the conflicting parties find their own solutions. This is done by asking appropriate questions and helping the two parties understand each other, and by giving helpful suggestions. The aim is always redemption and restoration.

(An arbitration is where the arbiter imposes a solution that both parties must accept. The arbiter is typically someone with great spiritual authority.)

It is essential for churches to train mediators either for their own church or to be shared among churches. Good intention in itself cannot resolve a conflict.

Knowledge and practice in identifying disputed areas, developing options, evaluating alternatives, et cetera, are necessary if the mediation process is to be successful.

Churches should not take for granted that they will not face serious conflicts in the near future. Well-trained Christian mediators can also be made available to help the community in response to the Government's call to resolve outstanding court cases through mediation.

More generally, church members should be exposed to the various techniques of peace-making or even avoiding outbursts of conflict by building more transparent interpersonal relationships. There are a number of good resources on this subject and more is on the way.

### Expand the Pie

*Creativity comes from a conflict of ideas.* ~  
Donatella Versace

When we speak of conflict, we automatically think of the competitive negotiation style that is based on the assumption of a “fixed pie”.

If A wins this much, B loses by the same amount. Instead, we should try a different and more productive approach, which is cooperative negotiation. Here, each party looks not only to his or her own interests, but also to the interests of the opponent(s) (Phil. 2:4). The aim is a win-win solution.

It is essential to distinguish an issue, a position, and an interest. An issue is an identifiable and concrete question. A position is a desired outcome or what someone wants to see happen on an issue.

An interest is what motivates people and gives rise to positions – a concern, desire, need, limitation and others. While positions on an issue are often contradictory, key interests of opposing

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# National Unity: Backward Reflection, Forward Action

## How 'Integrated' Are We After 48 Years of Independence?

THE Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) held its 7<sup>th</sup> National Christian Conference in October to reflect on the Church's response to *National Integration and Unity*.

The conference brought together 125 leaders from the Catholic Church, the Council of Churches Malaysia, and the NECF Malaysia, which together make up the Christian Federation of Malaysia.

At the conference, the participants took the opportunity to reflect and review the extent of integration after 48 years of independence. The following is the statement unanimously endorsed by the participants at the end of the conference:

"We, the participants of the 7<sup>th</sup> National Christian Conference organised by the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM), gathered together in Kuala Lumpur on 20-22 October 2005 to discuss and reflect on *National Integration and Unity: The Church's Response*. We give thanks to God for the 20 years of existence of CFM – comprising the Catholic Church, the Council of Churches of Malaysia and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Malaysia – and express our gratitude for His blessings on our beloved country, Malaysia.

We acknowledge having achieved much unity and integration since Independence in 1957 for Peninsular Malaysia (1963 for Sabah and Sarawak), but there remains room for improvement to defuse communal and sectarian divisions.

We recognise the value of Affirmative Action and social justice for the poor and marginalised, but its implementation has been divisive and not as effective as it could have been.

Considerable progress has been made in nation building and in reducing inter-ethnic inequality; yet the issues of an inequitable society across many dimensions have to be tackled.



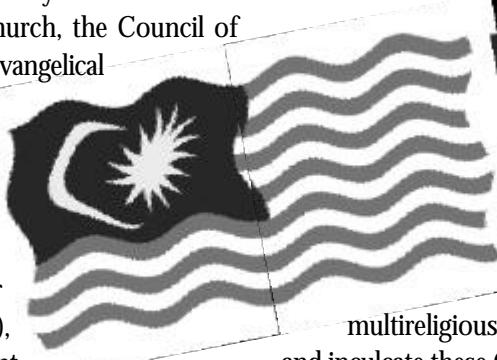
Conference participants expressed their commitment to pluralism, respect for democracy, dedication to justice and solidarity with all in need; and called on all churches to unite and pursue an open discussion with other sectors of society, including legislative bodies, on the issues that hinder national integration and unity."

The gap between the rich and poor, regardless of ethnicity, must be narrowed to further the cause of national integration. Some basic civil liberties have deteriorated over the years. Trust has to be built so that suspicion among communities can be reduced. There is ethnic discrimination in employment in both the public and private sectors.

Recognising that the Federal Constitution guarantees the fundamental rights of all Malaysians, we uphold its primacy and reject any attempt to undermine it in favour of any other legal system, which may not be widely accepted in a multicultural and multireligious society. We need to safeguard, defend, and inculcate these Constitutional provisions so that the social contract ensures justice and equity for all. We need to engage courageously with lawmakers and be more vigilant about any future amendment that may be made. We also ought to identify more closely and reach out in solidarity with the poor and marginalised.

To achieve national unity, we express our commitment to pluralism, respect for democracy, dedication to justice and solidarity with all in need. We reiterate our commitment to this country by engaging more actively in nation building, that is building linkages with other religious groups and civil society (including supporting the proposed Interfaith Commission), bridging differences, eradicating poverty, focusing on the marginalised and seeking avenues to participate in policy-making processes in order to strengthen national unity.

We are concerned about the interests of ALL communities in the country, where everyone should have a fair share. Given these realities and challenges, it is clearly critical that all our churches unite and pursue an open discussion with other sectors of society, including legislative bodies, on the issues that hinder national integration and unity."



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sides are usually compatible. The "trick" is to prayerfully search for creative solutions that satisfy both sides, thus expanding the pie!

### Conclusion

We should not shrink from conflict. Rather, we should embrace conflict as an opportunity to seek the Lord and enhance relationships. Let us not fight as the world fights, but obey the guidelines in the Bible. If the Church walks the way of love, the world will know that we are Jesus' disciples (John 13:35). ■

# Raising the Dry-Bone Generation

MALAYSIAN churches are in danger of losing their youths, like what is happening in Western churches, if nothing is done to *intentionally* grow the youth ministry. Already, one denomination in Malaysia has labelled its youth ministry “the sunset ministry”, warned Dr Herbert Tan, a consultant and trainer on youth ministries.

“The church is growing older. The average age of church membership in a well-established church is 60,” he said. “However, there are ‘points of light’ in churches or denominations which have intentionally addressed the issues and needs of youth ministry.”

Dr Tan was addressing some 70 youth workers and pastors attending the Youth Workers Consultation in October organised by NECF YouthNet. The participants from various para-church organisations, denominations and churches gathered to brainstorm issues facing Malaysian youths and youth ministries.

(NECF YouthNet, a ministry of the NECF Malaysia, is a network of Christian youth organisations and churches involved in the ministry to youths.) Many alarming and eye-opening issues were raised and at the end of the consultation, the participants resolved to take three broad steps to move the youth ministry ahead.

## 1. Raising and developing youth ministers

Participants first clarified that youth ministers include lay workers, and not just full-time workers. They agreed that churches must change their mindset in regards to preparing people for the youth work. It is a mistaken belief among church leaders that it is enough for youth ministers to have passion and concern for the ministry.

Dr Tan pointed out studies by anthropologists, which showed that the youth culture changed every four years; therefore youth workers must be trained

### Youth Workers Consultation

and updated to meet the changes. And since the youth culture changes so rapidly, there is a vast difference between the world of youths and non-youths. Therefore, it would help if churches think of the youth ministry as a type of cross-cultural ministry.

He also quoted a recent survey on youth counsellors and advisors which reported that 52% of them said they were “thrown into” the youth ministry. They were not called or set apart. “This is not wrong but it’s not intentional,” Dr Tan said. The survey also revealed that 25% of the respondents said they self-study to prepare for the ministry while only 9% had some form of formal training.

“Is this the way to prepare workers for cross-cultural missions? We spend time and money training workers for the mission field. What about our youth workers?” he challenged.

And there’s no excuse for Malaysian churches not to train their youth workers as there are many avenues for training. Some of them are TRAC and TAC (run by the Methodist denomination) and IBAYD (Brethren), Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, Baptist Theological Seminary, Malaysian Campus Crusade for Christ and SUFES.

General Secretary of Fellowship of Evangelical Students Annette Arurajah, who spoke on “Staying on in the Youth Ministry”, shared both her success stories and struggles as a youth worker for some 20 years. Youth ministry requires a lot of running around and this can easily lead to burnt-out and disillusionment. Furthermore, the lack of respect from church leaders and elsewhere, and inadequate financial remuneration due to the “junior” position perception, have led many youth workers to shorten their stay in the ministry.

She appealed for greater understanding and support from church leaders for youth workers by, for example, giving more consideration

for resource and finances, and training.

The consultation also agreed that churches must be *intentional* in identifying and developing future youth workers and gave some practical suggestions on how to effect this: parents can *intentionally* dedicate their children to serving God while the church leadership can *intentionally* challenge youths for missions; identify and set aside young people for ministry; and challenge them to tithe a tenth of their lifespan to youth ministry.

## 2) Developing relevant resources

The consultation agreed on the need to develop localised training manuals for youth groups. Presently, most of the materials available here are from the West.

## 3) Developing family ministry

The consultation agreed on the importance of the family institution in raising youth workers. Home is God’s base to produce tomorrow’s workers and leaders, and there is a great need to ‘tie’ the youth ministry to the family.

Sadly, most youth groups currently function on their own. Hence, some of the areas that the Church needs to work towards are: Increasing parents’ understanding of adolescent development; encouraging communication between youths and parents; involving parents in the youth ministry rather than just ‘dumping’ their troubled teens on the youth workers and expecting the workers to straighten them out; and arranging counselling sessions for youth workers and parents.

Another speaker, Dr Leong Tien Fock, spoke on “Teaching Biblical Truth to Postmodern Youth” as one of the important ways to pass the baton of faith and leadership to the next generation.

The Research Director of Malaysia Campus Crusade of Christ said the postmodern youth’s attitudes towards truth and the medium of communication

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# Where Have all the Youth Workers Gone?

CHURCHES from most, if not all, denominations are experiencing a dearth of youth workers brought about by the lack of emphasis on youth ministries in the past, according to participants at the recent NECF YouthNet Youth Workers Consultation.

The Evangelical Free Church has 12 churches but only two youth pastors, and even these two are imported from other denominations. Most of their youth ministries are run by lay people, and the churches are on the lookout for youth pastors.

Meanwhile, the Methodists are experiencing a season of drought in full-time workers. The number of members, especially the youths, entering full-time ministry is dwindling.

The Brethren have thus far relied on lay people to do the work because of their emphasis on the “priesthood of all believers” teaching. However, a number of their churches have started engaging full-time youth workers in view of the fast-moving world and the pressures of modern-day living faced by their lay workers. They realise the need for full-time workers to draw the ministry together in greater cohesion and integration for greater impact on the youths and the community.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malaysia (ELCM) denomination is seeing the retirement of some 75 percent of its pastors in five years’ time. They have also considered the worst-case scenario of “no more ELCM churches” in 10 years’ time due to the lack of youths. They have started looking into hiring youth pastors and workers.

For the English-speaking Presbyterian churches, there was a lack of emphasis on the youth ministry in the past, but this changed some four years ago when the denomination realised the long-term impact of this neglect. Since then, the churches have been challenging their youths to go into full-time ministry and the initial number of 30 respondents has steadily increased through the years.

The increased number of youth workers has impacted the churches’ outreach to non-believers, as has happened at the Agape Presbyterian Church in Kluang, Johor, where half of those attending the youth meetings are non-Christians.

The Baptists have introduced a specialised degree programme for youth ministry at their Baptist Theological Seminary to train and raise youth workers for their churches. ■

## Participants’ Comments...

### **Pastor Chan Theam Lai, *Canning Garden Baptist Church***

This consultation revealed the concern by many in the churches that the youth issues must be addressed, yet there is a struggle to communicate the urgency of these issues with the leaders.

The consensus is that the leaders’ support and understanding for the ministry – in terms of budget, personnel and strategy – are instrumental to enhance the effectiveness of youth workers in the church.

### **Rev. Sivin Kit, *Bangsar Lutheran Church***

All the plenary sessions provided useful frameworks to get our minds on the same track. Frequently, we were challenged with the immensity of the task before us and the importance of not just thinking out of the box, but also the need to think “intentionally” and “integratively”, relating youth ministry concerns with family, church leadership and social-cultural changes.

My prayer is that leaders in Malaysian churches will see the complexity and

interconnectedness of the issues at hand and give full support to this kind of endeavour.

### **Major Andy Lim, *Salvation Army Youth Department Territorial Youth and Candidates Secretary***

This consultation has opened my eyes to what’s happening in the Malaysian churches, what our youths are like, why we need to stay the course in youth ministry and how we actually share a common privilege and challenge in working with our youths. This time together also reinforced the need for us to partner one another as we face this complex generation.

### **Elder William Chang, *Elim Gospel Hall, Ipoh***

From this consultation, I have seen the need to bring back families into youth work. Many youth workers have isolated their work and ministry from the youth’s families. The Bible clearly says it is the role of the parents to teach their young ones and bring them up in godly ways. The youth workers only come in to assist.

### **Youth Workers Consultation**

### **Goh Kim Guat, *Trinity Methodist Conference***

This consultation helped to forge that unity of purpose in serving God in this ministry and the sense that God is indeed moving in marvellous ways in youths in the local churches as well as in the national church as a whole. At the end of the consultation, key issues and areas of concern were identified that the Malaysian Church must begin to take if we want the youth ministry in this country to deepen and grow. ■

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are very different from the present generation of churchgoers – they are more comfortable with images than words, more receptive to narratives (stories) than propositions (facts), and more dependent on feelings than reasoning.

In conclusion, Dr Tan challenged the participants to visualise the youth work as a “sunrise ministry raising the dry bones generation”. With churches and youth organisations working in partnership, the synergised network will turn the visual into reality. ■

# Tamil Church Shifting to Higher Gear

THE recent Tamil National Conference was a breakthrough for the Tamil Church in Malaysia as it managed to inspire the delegates to look beyond their individual churches to the Kingdom. This was brought home by speaker Rev. Mohan C. Lazarus whose message centred on the burden of churches to build God's Kingdom, and the power and authority that result from the unity of churches. The evangelist from India cited an example in India when many churches once banded together to pray against the tabling of a law against proselytising. He said as a result of their united prayers, the law was withdrawn.

On Kingdom building, Rev. Mohan said a "Kingdom-conscious" perception would remove all fear and rivalry from churches and bring the right kind of oneness in the Church of Christ.

Rev. David Mohan was the other speaker at the two-day conference, which saw a turnout of some 600 delegates from 145 Tamil congregations throughout Malaysia. The pastor of a

15,000-member church in India spoke on leadership succession, challenging the delegates to "raise your tomorrow team today".

He urged delegates to identify and train successors now and gave four key qualities to look for in potential leaders – faithfulness, availability, submission and teachability.

The conference was organised by the NECF Malaysia Tamil Commission. Earlier in his opening address, commission chairman Rev. Eu Hong Seng stressed the urgency to work in unity to empower the Tamil churches by "leaning on each other and sharing their resources".

NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong took this point further in his closing address when he challenged the pastors and leaders to work together so



Participants responding to the altar call at one of the night rallies.

that the Tamil ministry in the country could grow. Spurred by the impact of the conference, the commission members have unanimously agreed to organise another national conference next year. They are also on the lookout to appoint a full-time coordinator for the Tamil Commission. To add impetus to the Tamil ministry, NECF has also appointed Rev. Simon Chandran as a member of the NECF Council so that views and concerns of the Tamil Church can be directly expressed to the council. ■

## Foundation Aid Given To Date

BY year-end, the NECF Foundation would have disbursed over RM106,000 to help needy full-time workers and their family members.

Of the 11 recipients, seven are receiving help for their children's tertiary education, two for medical expenses and two for welfare purpose. Under welfare, the Foundation is giving a monthly allowance to a former pastor, who is unable to work because of poor health, while another full-time worker is receiving a monthly allowance to help engage a maid to care for his handicapped son.

The seven receiving aid for tertiary education are getting interest-free loans which are repayable when they start working.

Besides giving financial aid to needy ministers, the Foundation is also setting up panels comprising doctors, specialists and others such as optometrists, to

provide services to ministers at special rates.

Meanwhile, over 850 pastors, full-time workers and Christians have signed up for the NECF-Great Eastern insurance scheme that was launched in September. The NECF Foundation, which initiated the scheme, has helped to subsidise half the premium of more than 250 pastors in rural areas.

The *Group Multiple Insurance Scheme Investment Linked with Critical Illness* offers insurance coverage on injuries or death due to accidents and medical ailments at only RM30 or RM50 per month. Full-time workers may seek help from the NECF Foundation if they cannot afford to pay the premium.

Commenting on the scheme, Freddie Acho Bian – the Chairman of the Administration and Finance Committee of SIB Sarawak – said it was timely and

would serve the insurance needs of pastors and their family members.

Barnabas Boon, a former staff worker with OMF and now a Research Officer with Forest Research Institute of Malaysia, shared the sentiment. "It is a very good scheme for individuals as well as for pastors and full-time workers", he said. A church leader said the scheme was God-sent as he had planned to increase their critical illness insurance coverage but it was beyond his budget to take up individual policies. With the NECF-GE scheme, they are now able to increase their coverage.

To encourage people to join the scheme, those who sign up before October 31 need not undergo medical examination. Thereafter, all applications will be subject to underwriting and if required medical examination. However, churches may request for the promotion by contacting Lawrence Liew of Great Eastern at 019-3382687. ■

# Women to Women



## Remain Hidden

### Inward Stature: Criteria for Ministry

BY PASTOR SUSAN TANG

**T**hroughout Bible history, we realise that when God raised up His vessels, He first hid them.

Unfortunately, when men do the raising (or when we raise ourselves) they cannot wait to expose them, display them or publicise them. Thus they hand these vessels over to an early death. God is never in a hurry or frenzy, but men are.

There are definitely reasons why God wants to hide us. He knows that there are things that must be worked into our spirit as we spend time in seclusion and solitude with Him – things that cannot be learned elsewhere.

Indeed, we need time to build an inward stature. So many of God's vessels had moved under God's anointing and the gifts of the Holy Spirit without possessing an inward stature or inward maturity. To minister under God's powerful anointing without possessing an inward stature or that inward steadfast maturity is sheer foolishness.

What caused Jacob to stand steadfast and un-intimidated in front of the formidable Pharaoh? His inward stature. Jacob was prepared for the experience inwardly. He did not try to impress Pharaoh in any way. He did not abuse his privileges, neither was he ashamed of his own shrivelled image. He did not have to 'hype' something up. Even though Pharaoh was the most powerful man on earth and his benefactor, Jacob knew he himself was the greater on the inside because of what he carried within. As a result, he unashamedly extended his wrinkled hand to bless Pharaoh.

And so it was with his son, Joseph.

By the time Joseph was brought into the presence of Pharaoh, Joseph knew he had the power and the inward stature to counsel and to instruct Pharaoh. Joseph was not intimidated. He did not 'bluff', flatter, lie, boast or 'hype' his way through. He spoke as God had directed him. He revealed as God had shown him.

When he finally sat on the right hand of Pharaoh to become the Prime Minister



**"...when men do the raising (or when we raise ourselves) they cannot wait to expose them, display them or publicise them."**

of Egypt, he had within him that stature that could carry him through in his high position with godly integrity. Inward stature and maturity are important. So many today possess the outward anointing without the inward stature. This is why they cannot keep their position and their ministry.

#### **Forty years to 'Kill' Moses**

Could Moses have learned from elsewhere the things he learned from the 40 hidden years in the wilderness? Definitely no. God hid him in the desert for that long a time because God wanted to 'size' him down. God wanted less of Moses and more of Himself in Moses. Moses, who had grown up in the court

of Pharaoh, carried that 'Pharaohic' stench of pomposity, carnality, sensuality and self-confidence too strongly.

The 40 years among sheep took care of that. What smell do you think you will exude if you have spent 40 years among sheep night and day? And if most of what you heard for 40 years was only the bleating of sheep?

By the time Moses stood before Pharaoh, he probably smelt like sheep and no wonder he couldn't speak! He had no confidence to speak to Pharaoh and Aaron had to do it for him. Was Moses afraid that instead of speaking coherently, he might stammer out a 'blah... aah'?

Remember, he had conversed with sheep for 40 years! God understood. This is why He agreed to give him Aaron.

Which school or seminary is able to produce such humility, submission, power and trust in God and make a person adequate to pastor a congregation of three million people without being lifted up with pride and arrogance or breaking down with stress and anger? The seminary in the desert, the one where a man trains among sheep and is hidden for 40 years under very trying conditions.

#### **Ten years to conform to His Master's vision**

Elisha served 10 years as Elijah's personal assistant doing menial and lowly work before he inherited his master's prophetic office. Even though he came into his own office and ministry later on, he was still known as the one 'who poured water on Elijah's hand,' or as Elijah's servant.

Elisha observed his great master for

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After a certain age in young adulthood, it's quite likely that most of us would rather go on holiday with friends than with our parents. As much as we love our parents, they can be complicated and fussy to travel with. Their interests also tend to be predictable and less, well, "exciting". At least this was how I felt as a young adult. But recently, I've discovered what holidaying with elderly parents could mean.

In my childhood, my parents took me on plenty of domestic holidays. We went to various beaches and hill stations in the country, when there was still a diversity of flora and fauna to see and when Nature, not theme parks or five-star hotels, was the draw. We went to the caves in Mulu, Sarawak, and to Mount Kinabalu and Sipadan Island in Sabah.

These holidays planted the seeds of my love for adventure and travel. Papa, especially, fed that sense of adventure, teaching me about plant and animal life, how mountains were formed and that at one time, the sea covered the land we stood on.

I was too young to appreciate my

parents' tiredness. The packing, unpacking and then the re-packing again. The drive there and back, the change in diet, resulting constipation, and lack of sleep due to unfamiliar beds, were simple irritants that they took in stride. Mum and Papa always looked happy, always ready to play a game, always eager to point out unusual sights and offer interesting facts – they believed vacations should be educational.

Adolescence came, the period when children tend to drift a little from their parents. Soon, it was time for university and after that, working life. I preferred taking holidays with friends who were more easy-going and with whom I had common interests. Though the family lived under one roof, our lives evolved distinctly, and "family times" were reduced to once-in-a-while dinners together and prayers before bedtime. It became a long time since we had a family vacation.

With the passing of time I grew vaguely aware of certain transitions that meant my parents were getting older; vague because they were so part and parcel of daily life that I did not immediately grasp their significance as small milestones. I looked up from my

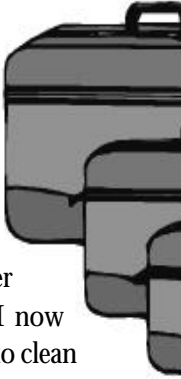
# Travelling Ageing P

own absorption with work and friends, and gradually realised that my parents were no longer so sprightly and eager to participate in activities outside the house.

There were certain house chores that Mum could no longer perform which my sister and I now had to, like climbing on ladders to clean the ceiling fans. There were new diagnoses of various health complications and an increased number of runs to and from the hospital or clinic.

And, unlike before, Cantonese, Mandarin and Korean serials were now an important daily staple and a dominant topic in conversation. This was a sure indicator that my parents had joined the ranks of the geriatric Chinese serial faithful.

Recently, I went on holiday with my parents in London. London, capital of



• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: REMAIN HIDDEN

10 years and this proximity with his master produced something in him. He came to love the things his master loved and hated the things his master hated. God hid him with Elijah for those years so that Elisha's spirit could be one with Elijah.

How wonderful. Elisha knew that if he had to carry on the work of his great master, then he must have his spirit. When the right time came for Elijah to die, there was obviously much work to be done, and Elisha knew he needed a double portion of his master's spirit to get it done.

The years of observation and faithfulness at his master's side had paid off. He asked his master for a double portion of his spirit so that he could continue his master's work with double effectiveness. He got it.

God knew that the 10 years that Elisha had had with Elijah would produce in him what he needed to steer the cause of Jehovah and to stand up against an apostate Israel.

### **Great Seclusion Follows the Great experience**

The apostle Paul took his years of hiding in Arabia after his great experience with the Lord. He did not 'jump' into ministry

as many do today. Indeed, he went immediately into seclusion before he even met up with the rest of the apostles (Gal. 1:17–21). Paul did not go into frenzied ministry. He waited on the Lord. He knew he needed some sharpening, and definitely a lot of polishing, before he could get into public ministry.

There is no need to hurry, to pursue 'self-advertisement,' to strive and clamour for ministry, just because you have had some great experience with God. When God wants to use a person, He really knows how, when and where to 'dig us out,' like the way David dug up the five stones from the jungle streams.

These stones, smoothed by years of friction with the swift currents of rushing waters, were hidden in the stream. They were not exposed. Yet, when the right time came, each one was dug up by David and used in the slaying of the giant.

### **'Readied Hidden Stones' will one day be dug up**

Each stone has that 'giant-slaying' potential, so it does not matter which one David pulled out of his little bag. If the lesser David knew where to pick up his stones, surely our Lord, the greater David, will know where to look for His 'living or lively stones' (1Peter 2:5).

In the meanwhile, may all His living stones allow God to



# g With My arents



the world, is the kind of city you soak up by walking its crowded pavements and squeezing together with other bodies on its rattling Tube system. Because it is such a vibrant city, it can be a challenge to visit with elderly parents. But it had always been one of the places my parents had longed to visit all their lives.

Mum and Papa are now in their 60s. Each has a health problem or two, a special quirk or idiosyncrasy, a particular food habit, and the burden of being their age which limits how long they can go out and how far they can walk. But there are advantages too, especially their entitlement to senior citizen discounts on tickets for sight-seeing, the theatre, and transportation. Better yet, they usually want to pay for everything!

I was excited about spending time

with them, yet also a little anxious. There's a saying that the best of friends don't always make the best of travelling buddies. The same could be said about family, who know your faults better more than anyone else. The stress of travel can easily bring out our less-than-pleasant sides. I would have to adjust to my parents, and they to me. It was on this holiday that I got an inkling that our roles could, one day, be fully reversed: I would be the caregiver and guardian, and my parents the dependants.

I realised this when I had to take slower steps in order to walk alongside Mum. I had to help her up and down the stairs in Tube stations, and we would miss the train as a result. Thankfully, the London Underground is efficient enough to have trains coming along every few minutes. I found that because I was quicker at navigating our way through the city, by default I became the itinerary planner and tour guide. I sometimes ended up being the spokesperson in buying tickets or when requesting information. I could not move as fast as I wanted to, because I had to consider two older people.

Here are some tips you might find useful when travelling with elderly

parents:

- Always locate the nearest toilets wherever you go.
- Allow for regular periods of rest, even if it's simply just for them to rest their legs.
- Always have drinking water, an extra jacket or windbreaker and some energy snacks to eat on hand.
- Ask them if they have their vitamin supplements, medication or whatever pills they need to take packed for the day's outing.
- Run through the whole day's itinerary briefly with them before you set off; they like to know what to expect.
- Be prepared to repeat everything you've already said another two or three more times, like when explaining which direction you are next headed for, or the number of the bus you are about to board, or the next stop in the itinerary.
- Speak clearly and loudly.
- Walk s-l-o-w-l-y.

And we survived! More than that, we thoroughly enjoyed London and each other's company. We went to the theatre, traipsed through museums and other

• SEE NEXT PAGE

hide them and to let His currents work on them, to smoothen them and to place a 'giant-slaying' potential into each one. God knows the right time to expose you: after, not before, you have been sharpened, polished and smoothened.

If he has not moved you on yet, then could it be that you have not allowed Him to do anything in your life? You have not given Him the time to sharpen and to polish you? God cannot work with a blunt, dull and un-smoothened vessel.

When the time came for Elijah to move on, God caused his brook to dry up. He was 'flushed' out of his hiding and out of his secret sanctuary. When the time came for Moses and the nation of Israel to move on, God spoke unmistakably to them, 'You have compassed this mountain long enough, now get up and move on!' When it was Nehemiah's turn, God stirred up his inner being so that he had no peace to stay within the courts of royalty but had to return to Jerusalem.

With Isaiah, the divine vision he saw so impacted him that he had to cast off his complacency and volunteer to be God's mouthpiece. God knows how to move people on and to expose them. There is no need for self-exposure.

God knows that over-exposure is bad for His chosen vessels.

Familiarity with people, and with fame, crowd pressure, man's favour and city hype is not conducive in the making of a man/woman of God. If it is, then God would not have hidden His many choice vessels while they were in the making. Jesus knew that being over-exposed, being over-familiar and courting the crowds with fame was not desirable. This is why He often retreated from the crowd to seek solitude with the Father. ■

This is an extract from *Remain Hidden* by Pastor Susan Tang. Used with permission. You may purchase the book from Christian bookstores.

## 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.

# Saturating SEA With Prayers

OVER 130 participants from 11 South-East Asian countries and four countries outside the region attended the Third South-East Asia Prayer Leaders Consultation (SEAPC) in Kuala Lumpur in October.

South-East Asia  
Prayer Leaders  
Consultation

Phan Huu Thinh, a participant from North Vietnam shared the vision he



Participants marching in with their countries' flags at the opening of the consultation.

Hosted by the NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission, the consultation saw all 11 countries represented for the first time. Many who had attended the previous two consultations agreed that this consultation was the best so far in that the participants were united in mind and purpose. "At the first consultation, we were meeting for the first time, getting to know one another and trying to figure out why we were meeting to begin with. The second one, we were more familiar with one another, but still it took a few days to really get deep into intercession for one another and for the region," said Lena Wan, secretary of the South-East Asia Prayer Council.

"This consultation took off from the very beginning. Prophecies flowed freely from the first night. The spirit and anointing of the worship team helped greatly in bringing us to a place of deep intimacy with God.

"People were crying out to God for the transformation of our nations and region. This is the whole purpose of the consultation: that we will be united in prayer for the transformation of South-East Asia," she added

saw when participants took a prayer walk from the hotel to Suria KLCC. "When we reached KLCC, I stood in front of the building and I had a vision of Jesus crying. The passage in Luke where Jesus wept over Jerusalem came to my mind. I realised that every church needs to love its nation like Jesus loved Jerusalem and was so burdened for it that He cried. We must feel like this for the lost," he shared.

Phan added that the consultation had inspired him go back and share with the churches the great need to unite in prayer and to do more '24/7' prayer.

Another participant, Bruce A. Hutchinson said that through the consultation, God had revealed His plans and purposes for the different countries. "God has also brought knowledge and understanding of what Satan is doing in the nations and showed us how we can pray so that churches can be freed from the chains that have been binding them. Then, His power and love can be released to the churches to flood the nations," said the Strategic Prayer Facilitator from the Cambodia Prayer Council.

The consultation had "raised our faith level", he added. "Just this morning, one Vietnamese participant told me, 'Today, I am assured that God is doing something'."

The SEAPC is held every year to link and strengthen prayer networks and ministries in the 11 countries, helping especially the networks in access-restricted nations. The 11 nations are: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste (East Timor), and Vietnam.

The idea of the SEAPC was birthed at the International Prayer Leaders Consultation in South Africa in 2002, which was attended by 300 prayer leaders from all over the world. Through that gathering, delegates from South-East Asia, many saw the need to unite in prayer in a more cohesive manner, and the first and second SEAPC was held in Cambodia in 2003 and 2004.

Through each of the meetings, participants have felt the burden and needs of the Body of Christ in South-East Asia in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Breakthroughs are needed in the areas of governmental restrictions against the spread of the gospel, outreach to unreached people groups, poverty, persecution, diseases, terrorism, trafficking of drugs, women and children, and natural disasters, all of which are happening in South-East Asia.

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: TRAVELLING WITH AGEING PARENTS

historical sites, bought economical but tasty ready-packed lunches from Tesco's and Sainsbury's (yes, we did indulge in the higher-end Marks and Spencer's), and had lunch in the parks and picnics on the grass. Mum was thoroughly wide-eyed at the spring flowers and tulips, and Papa looked more relaxed than ever. He rather

grew to like lying down on the grass for naps. London with my parents in their golden years will be a precious memory to treasure. It was when the child and parents recognised and embraced a different side of each other, given the changing seasons within the family.

My relationship with my parents has moved through phases of child-like trust, then self-absorbed adolescence, and

independent young adulthood. And now, the discovery of a different level of relationship with my parents in which I learn to adjust myself to them. It reminds me of my own evolving relationship with my Heavenly Father. ■

Debbie Loh is a reporter with a local English newspaper. Reprinted with permission from Kairos.

# Experiencing God through the Scriptures

By Dr Leong Tien Fock

**A**braham Kuyper (1837–1920) was an outstanding theologian, journalist, pastor and prime minister of Holland. As an evangelical, he was ahead of his time when he taught that Christians acquire a knowledge of God through the “soul in its totality”, which includes the “understanding, feeling and imagination”.

Evangelicals not aware of recent developments in evangelical theology may still object to the idea that we know God through our feeling and imagination as well. Historian James E. McGoldrick in his recent biography, *Abraham Kuyper: God's Renaissance Man*, faults Kuyper on this point. He claims that this teaching cannot be consistent with Kuyper's high view of the Scriptures.

But how is truth about God revealed in the Scriptures? Scriptures are mostly either narrative or poetry and sometimes both. Narrative and poetry are designed to speak through the imagination to recreate experience and communicate feeling.

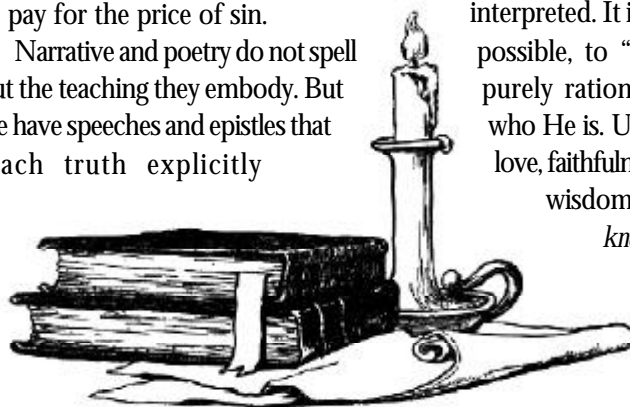
When we read the parable of the prodigal son, we cannot say we understand what it is teaching about God's love unless through our imagination we recreate the experience of the father and feel how he felt toward his wayward son. And to more fully appreciate God's love towards sinners we also need to get into the skin of that son and feel the unconditional love he experienced from his father.

When we read Psalm 23, we cannot say we understand what it is teaching about God's faithfulness unless through our imagination we recreate the experience of the sheep and feel the deep sense of security it enjoys because of who the shepherd is. To help us feel how deep this sense of security can be, the psalmist complicates the poem by suddenly switching the imagery of the shepherd to that of a generous host who prepares a feast for his guest in the very presence

of the guest's enemies. Imagine ourselves securely enjoying a feast while those seeking to harm us could only stand and watch. How secure can we be, when God is our Shepherd!

Of course the Bible is not just narrative and poetry. If it were so we will likely misinterpret it. For instance, if the parable of the prodigal son is all we have to teach us about God's forgiveness of sin, we may wrongly conclude that God could forgive sin without having to pay for the price of sin.

Narrative and poetry do not spell out the teaching they embody. But we have speeches and epistles that teach truth explicitly



through propositions. These propositions help provide interpretive controls for us to experience the truth embodied in narratives and poetry.

For instance, Romans 5:8 spells out that for God to forgive sins out of His love, Jesus had to die for us. And from His speeches Jesus teaches that He is God and that God is a Trinity. This means Jesus did not die for us as “an innocent third party”, but as a member of the Triune God, the involved party whom we sinned against.

Thus to forgive sin, God must Himself bear the consequence of the wrong done against Him (which is death). With this insight we can see that the forgiving father in the parable did pay the price of sin by bearing the consequence of the son's wrong. He had to bear the insult, hurt and shame his son caused him all by himself. Thus human forgiveness resembles divine forgiveness.

It is important to note that even in Romans 5:8 when Paul is teaching truth propositionally and logically, he tries to make us feel God's love. He says that

one would hardly die for a righteous man though someone may dare to die for a good man. But God loves us so much that Christ died for us when we were yet sinners. Through this comparison he seeks to evoke our imagination to feel how much God loves us.

Thus when we talk about getting to know God through our understanding as well as our feeling and imagination we are talking about feeling and imagination evoked by Scriptures properly interpreted. It is not enough, and is not possible, to “know” God through a purely rational “understanding” of who He is. Unless we also feel God's love, faithfulness, sovereignty, holiness, wisdom, etc., we cannot say we know God. If we are only informed of who He is we will have a hard time trying to trust or obey Him.

The Bible is not only full of narratives. Genesis to Revelation is one overarching narrative, interspersed with laws, poetry, biographies, speeches, epistles, etc. The Bible records the very beginning of the world to its very end and on to a new beginning that has no end. As Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen shows in *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, this overarching narrative has both cohesion and direction. It is important to read, study and teach the Bible as such. This is not just for the sake of comprehending the message but also for living it out. According to Bartholomew and Goheen,

“Many of us have read the Bible as if it were merely a mosaic of little bits – theological bits, moral bits, historical-critical bits, sermon bits, devotional bits. But to read the Bible in such a fragmented way is to ignore its divine author's intention to shape our lives through its story.

*All human communities live out of some*

• SEE NEXT PAGE

# Learning to negotiate the tortuous turns of conflicts

NECF Malaysia's first mediation workshop was an eye-opener to the 44 participants who gathered from all over the country in September to learn the ropes of mediating conflicts.

The trainers from Eagles Mediation and Counselling Centre (EMCC), Singapore, set the tone for the "Mediating Family and Church Conflicts" workshop by giving a biblical perspective of conflict and the types and causes of conflicts.

They then took the participants through the actual process or stages of mediation, from making opening statements, to sharing perspectives, generating and assessing options and reaching agreements.

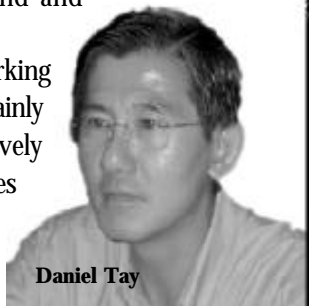
Finally, to reinforce learning, participants were engaged in role-play case studies.

Participants expressed gratitude for the workshop which has helped them in various ways. Lawyer Daniel Tay from Muar Assembly of God felt the workshop has helped to reinforce the importance of building and maintaining a right relationship with Jesus, without which he could not even consider the idea of becoming a mediator.

"The workshop has helped me to know how to deal with conflicts within my family. In this regard, the session on types and causes of conflict was enlightening. It has set the stage for me to become a better husband and father," he shared.

"As a practising lawyer, a working knowledge on mediation will certainly help me to negotiate deals effectively and apply the necessary techniques in trying to reach an out-of-court settlement in any legal disputes."

Elder Mary Tok of Gereja



Daniel Tay

Grace Presbyterian Church, Batu Pahat, felt mediation was a skill for life and "we all should be properly equipped in order to be effective in our role as 'peacemakers' whether in the home, in our work place or in the church." The workshop has therefore helped her to better understand the role of mediation and how to stay objective and look at real issues in any conflict.

For Pr Matthew Ling, attending the workshop had given him the confidence in managing conflicts. "The principles I have learned and the biblical values attached to them will help me to be an able mediator especially in the area of family life," said the pastor from Calvary Family Church, Kuching.



Mary Tok



Pr Matthew Ling



Ee Joo Lian

Participant Ee Joo Lian, a lawyer attending First Assembly of God Kuala Lumpur, believed that mediation is a life skill which should be taught to every one because consciously or unconsciously we do have to mediate on a daily basis.

"It is better to do preventive maintenance than to do remedial maintenance. Therefore, to maintain a healthy and harmonious relationship, the best way is to take care of the needs and concerns right from the beginning or whenever they change, rather than to neglect them and allow them to develop into a walking time-bomb," she said. ■

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

story that provides a context for understanding the meaning of history, that gives shape and direction to their lives.

If we allow the Bible to become fragmented, it is in danger of being absorbed into whatever other story is shaping our culture, and will thus cease to shape our lives as it should.

The dominant cultural story of the secular Western world has been twisted by idolatry. If as believers we allow this story (rather than the Bible) to become the foundation of our thought and action, then our lives will manifest not the truths of Scripture, but the lies of an idolatrous

culture. Thus the unity of Scripture is no minor matter: a fragmented Bible may actually produce theologically orthodox, morally upright, warmly pious idol worshippers!

If our lives are to be shaped by the story of Scripture, we will need to understand two things well: that the biblical story is a compelling unity on which we may depend, and that each of us has a place within that story...."

We need to be familiar with at least an outline of this overarching narrative and "make the Story our story, to find our place in it (somewhere between Acts 28 and Revelation), and to indwell it as the true story of our world".

Even when we are only studying a part of Genesis-Revelation, we still need to be immersed in this Story and allow the text being studied, be it a narrative, a poem or an epistle, to shape or reshape our thinking and feeling. It is like reading a well-written novel or watching a well-made movie and being changed by the message embodied by the story.

The crucial difference is that through the Bible we can also experience and encounter God, the Reality behind the Truth it embodies. Is this the God we serve? ■

This article is a contribution of the NECF Malaysia Research Commission.

# What is the 'Social Contract'

IN his speech at the Asia Media Summit in April, Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi cited Malaysia as a successful example where *social contract* had ensured peace and stability for 50 years. He said: "Perhaps the most significant aspect of the *contract* was the agreement by the indigenous people to grant citizenship to the immigrant Chinese and Indians. Chinese and Indians now sit in the Federal Cabinet and state executive councils. In return, the immigrant communities agreed to special economic privileges for the indigenous people given their disadvantaged position."

What is this "social contract" and what role does it play in Malaysia's inter-racial relations? One cabinet minister recently touched on this when addressing a convention and his remarks roused the ire of certain quarters. While giving his keynote address at the Anak Malaysia Convention, Primary Industries Minister Dato' Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik commented that politically-motivated reminders to the Chinese and Indian communities that the granting of citizenship to them was a favour would be an obstacle to building a Bangsa Malaysia. He said this "historical burden' must be removed".

The enraged quarters retorted that Dato' Lim's remarks challenged the social contract upon which the nation was founded. Datuk Dr Ma'amor Osman, president of Muslim Consumers Association of Malaysia, said the statement "was purposely made to anger the Malays and other bumiputras and belittled Malay supremacy" (Bernama, Aug 14 2005). UMNO Youth Chief Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein warned against questioning the issue of social contract (Bernama, Aug 15 2005).

There seems to have been a shift in interpreting and understanding the social contract. Some believe there has been a misinterpretation of its history, while others think that this social contract has been simplistically reinterpreted based on the premises of Islam as the state religion and the Malay supremacy (Ketuanan Melayu).

Historically, the social contract was originally the negotiation from various groups under the Reid Commission prior to 1957, before the drafting of the Merdeka Constitution (MC). Law experts have suggested that the contract must be read in light of both Reid Commission and Cobbold Commission reports.

## How it came to being

In 1956, a Constitutional Commission headed by Lord Reid came to Malaya for the drafting of a constitution for an independent Malaya. In the process, UMNO – the leading partner of the then UMNO-MCA-MIC Alliance – was asked to agree to a 'common nationality for the whole of the Federation' that would allow "all persons (in Malaya) to qualify as citizen either by birth or by fulfilling requirements of residence and language and by taking oath of loyalty".

The leaders of the three communal parties agreed to first resolve differences and to speak with one voice to the commission. This was the origin of the social contract between the UMNO and the MCA leaders. MCA acknowledged that the special rights of the Malays should be protected, and UMNO in return conceded that Chinese and other non-Malays should be granted easier citizenship rights based on the principle of *jus soli* (by birth). The Chinese were also allowed to continue to play a dominant role in economy.

The Reid Commission's draft proposals were published in 1957 and were then reviewed and amended by a working committee in Malaya, representatives of the Alliance, the Malay rulers, and the British government at a meeting in London. Thus emerged the MC. The Yang Di-Pertuan Agong was given the responsibility for safeguarding the "special position of the Malays" and the "legitimate interests of other communities".

Before the establishment of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, another consultative process was initiated with North Borneo (now Sabah) and Sarawak in 1962. From this process came forth a social contract (contained in the Cobbold Commission Report) similar to the consensus acquired in 1956–57. The core of the contract, as stated in the memorandum submitted by the Alliance, was that Islam was to be the State religion, but the "observance of this principle shall not impose any disability on non-Muslim nationals professing and practising their own religions and shall not imply that the State is not a secular state".

The MC provisions evidently provided the framework for the 1963 Federal Constitution. The latter continued to cover the provisions of special rights and privileges of the Malays, national language, and religion without depriving "any person of any right and privilege, permit or license accrued to or enjoyed or held by him" (Article 153). It also included "several other issues which were/are matters of contention between the Malays and Chinese".

In short, the Constitution, formulated in 1957 and 1963 through consultation and consensus of the nation's founding fathers, is based on the social contract on which the country is founded. The Constitution "epitomises a social contract among equal partners that promises equality of all citizens – regardless of race and religion – in a pluralist democracy," said Dr Ng Kam Weng, Director of Kairos Research Centre, in an article in *The Star* on Nov 15, 2003.

In the light of the spirit that the social contract was made by our forefathers, no ethnic group should therefore be made to feel it is lesser than another. This was affirmed by the Prime Minister who vowed at the King's birthday celebration last year that the Government would hold fast to the social contract by protecting all ethnic groups against any form of oppression or discrimination (*The Star*, Jun 6, 2004). ■

## Bringing Light To The Winter Solstice Festival

JUST before Christmas comes the Winter Solstice Celebration when Chinese relish the sticky glutinous rice balls in fragrant, sweet syrup. In conjunction with this celebration, a group of Malaysian Chinese Christians is holding an evangelistic concert to reach out to the Chinese, especially the elderly.

The concert will feature popular Singapore Christian artiste Michelle Pan Ying who will share songs and testimony.

Other highlights at the concert are



performances by a 24-drum group and traditional Chinese instrumental orchestra, and dance performance by senior citizens.

Renowned international evangelist Rev. Oh Beng Khee from Singapore will round up the night with a gospel message.

Organised by the Great Commission Social Concern Centre, the concert will be held at Dewan PGRM, Cheras, Dec 3 at 7.30pm. Tickets are priced at RM10 on a buy one-free-one basis and Chinese Christians are strongly urged to bring their elderly parents and relatives to the event.

The centre was established with a two-prong aim: to preserve the Chinese heritage and promote Chinese culture, such as calligraphy, Chinese dance and musical instruments and festivals; and to share the gospel.

Besides organising activities for the elderly and society at large, it has a special ministry helping those who are trying to quit the gambling habit. ■

## Honouring Ministers, Bonding Lay Leaders

IT was a moving moment for 75 pastors and full-time workers when their congregations turned up at an appreciation dinner in September, specially organised to honour them.

The hall in Ipoh was packed with over 650 members from 27 churches representing 40 English, Chinese and Bahasa congregations from various denominations in Ipoh, Air Tawar, Sitiawan and the Manjung district.

The occasion marked the launch of the NECF Malaysia Minister's Appreciation Month (MAM), which aims to foster a climate of appreciation for ministers to encourage them in their work for the Lord. NECF is urging churches to officially appreciate their ministers on one Sunday in October.

Rev. Wong gave a pointed message, reminding the guests that nobody was perfect and urging them to accommodate each other's faults. "Ministers are humans, and some of them carry baggages from their past, but we need to appreciate them for their strength and complement their weaknesses," he said.

At the end of the dinner, Rev. Wong presented each minister with a memento



Rev. Wong (left) praying for the full-time workers at the Ipoh appreciation dinner.

and a certificate of appreciation.

But the event did more than honouring ministers; it forged a bond within the organising committee comprising lay-leaders from various Ipoh churches, such that when the dinner was over, one committee member sadly sighed, "You mean this is the end..."

Pr David Tan of FGA, Ipoh, who was the coordinator of the organising committee, said, "Initially, we were almost a committee of strangers, but we began to gel. We began to enjoy the meetings and tasks and worked hard to ensure the success of this groundbreaking event.

"I thank God for sparking this initiative through NECF to bring about awareness of this important aspect of our Christian and church life – to cover God's workers with prayer and practical care as they look after God's flock." ■

## Novel Way to Affirm Pastors

GRACE Church Bukit Mertajam wanted a memorable pastors' appreciation service to thank its six pastors.

So, one month before the service, the church prepared six empty boxes – one for each pastor – and rallied church members to write thank-you notes to their pastors and drop them into the respective boxes.

On October 16, the church gathered its members from the four language services – English, BM, Hokkien and Mandarin – for a combined Sunday service and presented the boxes of thank-you notes to the pastors.

Members were also given the opportunity to go up and share testimonies on how the pastors have blessed their lives.

During the service, which was organised in response to NECF Malaysia's Ministers' Appreciation Month initiative, NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong gave the message where he stressed the importance of praying for their pastors as they are in the forefront of ministry. ■

# Neighbour Focus

**WE conclude our focus on praying for the South-East Asian countries in preparation for the 3rd South-East Asia Prayer Leaders Consultation which was held recently in Kuala Lumpur. This issue, we highlight two countries, both of which Islam is the major religion – Brunei (circled on map) and Indonesia (at the bottom of the map). The reports are provided by the NECF Research Department.**

## BRUNEI

**Population:** 372,361 (*Est. CIA Factbook, July 2005*)

**Ethnic groups:** Malay 67%, Chinese 15%, Indigenous 6%, Others 12%

**Religions** (estimated): Muslim 67%, Buddhist 13%, Christian 10%, Indigenous beliefs and Others 10%

BRUNEI is an Islamic Sultanate and one of the richest states in Asia, blessed with deep oil and gas reserves. Its citizens, who rank among the wealthiest, healthiest and most educated people in Asia, enjoy free education and healthcare, subsidised food and housing, old-age pension, no personal income tax and a relatively pollution-free environment.

It is however interesting to note that rising unemployment and crime rate have been attributed to economic reliance on oil and gas. Meanwhile, political and religious freedom remain wanting.

Brunei is ruled by the Sultan, the highest religious authority in the country. In 1959, Brunei achieved internal self-government from Britain. Brunei's first constitution, written in 1959, vested supreme executive authority in the Sultan.

A state of emergency was invoked when a revolt broke out in December 1962, but it was effectively crushed by the British military. Since then, Bruneians have not been allowed to vote. Emergency rule remains and has been renewed every two years.

Disagreements over financial arrangements and difficulties in determining the position of the Sultan among the Malay rulers ultimately resulted in Brunei declining to join the Malaysian Federation. In 1967 the Sultan abdicated

in favour of his eldest son, the present Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah. The 29<sup>th</sup> ruler became the prime minister when the government was restructured into a formal ministerial system after Brunei gained independence from Britain in 1984. The Sultan also serves as Minister of Defence and Minister of Finance. He is the absolute monarch and patriarch of the people in this highly stratified and hierarchical society.

Under the 1962 state of emergency, constitutional provisions safeguarding fundamental liberties remain suspended. Brunei is rated 6 and 5 for its political rights and civil liberties respectively (1: most free, 7: least free).

The Parti Perpaduan Kebangsaan Brunei (Brunei National Solidarity Party) is at present the only registered political party in Brunei. It does not play a prominent role in political affairs. Anyone deemed a threat to national security or public order is arrested under the Internal Security Act.

Nonetheless, there are indications that Brunei is slowly coming around to accommodate expressions of political and social discontent.

It is also understood that preparations have been made to introduce a revised Constitution incorporating certain freedoms of elections and representations.

The official religion is the Shafeite sect of Islam and non-Shafeite practices are restricted. Though the constitution guarantees freedom of religious practice, the government restricts religious freedom for non-Muslims including prohibiting proselytising, banning Christian literature and any import of Bibles, outlawing the celebration of



Christmas, and routinely ignoring requests to build or expand religious buildings. Religious symbols are routinely censored in magazines arriving in the country. Christian-based schools are not allowed to teach Christianity.

All schools must give instruction in the Islamic faith to all students. Muslims who wish to change or renounce their religion face considerable difficulties.

There is little current information on religious persecution in Brunei. The last of Christians who were detained for allegedly subversive activities was released in October 2001.

There has been little evidence of religious or communal strife and there are no reports of forced religious conversion. The indigenous people generally convert either to Islam or Christianity.

Muslims aim for Brunei to be a 'pure' Islamic state by 2020, and offer incentives such as jobs and houses to spread Islam.

**PRAY FOR:** The Sultan and Prime Minister Sir Hassanal Bolkiah and his cabinet ministers to rule the nation with wisdom, justice and righteousness; **God** to raise prayer teams who will intercede for the country; **God** to grant wisdom and favour to churches in nation-building, evangelism and building places of worship; **Christians** to be steadfast in faith, and that they will be able to reach out to their friends and neighbours with the love of Christ; religious restrictions to be eased and that constitutional freedom will be enforced.

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# FOR YOUR PRAYERS

## INDONESIA

**Population:** 225.3 millions (UN, 2005)

**Ethnic groups:** Javanese 45%, Sundanese 14%, Madurese 7.5%, Coastal Malays 7.5%, Others 26%

**Religions** (estimated): Muslim 88%, Protestant 5%, Roman Catholic 3%, Hindu 2%, Buddhist 1%, Others 1% (1998)

**Indonesia**, the world's fourth most populous nation with more than 300 ethnic groups, has been experiencing a series of socio-political upheaval and ongoing economic crises for decades. Analysts fear the Bali bombings and the 126.6% fuel price hike may cause even greater social unrest and short-term high inflation.

Despite the national motto 'Unity in Diversity,' ethnic rights and religious tolerance continue to underlie much of the issues of political power and economic justice in the world's largest Muslim nation. The ongoing Christian-Muslim conflict, though sporadic, in Ambon Island and central Sulawesi is said to be the result of government policies, ethnic migration and provocation. Ethnic animosity had caused the anti-Chinese riots in Jakarta and Solo in 1998 and the massacres of Madurese immigrants in Borneo in 1997 and 2001.

Indonesia has been rated as the 10<sup>th</sup> most corrupt country in the world. The epidemic of corruption penetrates every level of the society, from town councils to the national cabinet. Some analysts see the country's defective law institutions as one of the key factors.

The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) set up by the government in response to public outcry, has been slow and ineffective in investigating corruption cases due to lack of resources and personnel and the absence of political will.

The Constitution Court has recently ruled that KPK "has no retroactive authority to deal with past cases that took place before the commission's establishment". The ministers have so far not acted upon the President's declaration to combat graft. Public confidence in the political system is further undermined.

Indonesia does not have an official religion, although belief in God is enshrined in the constitution. Despite the country's moderate heritage and secular political system, Indonesia remains under threat from Islamist radicals.

The government has tried and sentenced Jemaah Islamiyah members for widespread bombings in the 2000 and 2002 bombings in Bali. It, however, continues to downplay the extent of the terrorist networks. The disbanded Laskar Jihad, responsible for massacres of Christians in the eastern areas, was reported to be regrouping in Papua and Ceram.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has lately sought to allay the concerns of creeping fundamentalism. The government also announces that it will revise the controversial 1969 decree that poses hurdle to Christians in building places of worship.

Yet, islamisation is a reality. The influential Council of Ulama in July issued religious edicts banning mixed marriages, religious pluralism, interfaith prayers and Islamic interpretation based on liberalism and secularism. The Council fears the erosion of Islamic values and proselytising by Christians. At least seven districts in Indonesia already have enforced some kind of Syariah law.

The government's human rights record remains poor in many areas. Human Right Watch, in its 2005 World Report, observes the significant barriers

to rule of law and humans rights such as the resurgent power of the military in social and political affairs, ongoing impunity of security forces, and repression in Papua where indigenous people are predominantly rural and Christian. There are also disturbing signs of intimidation of the press and criminalisation of the dissent. The government is also reported to have ignored the widespread physical and sexual abuse of young girls who are working as helpers in homes.

Forced child labour remains a serious problem.

Out of 177 countries, Indonesia is ranked 110<sup>th</sup> in the 2005 Human Development Report. Over half the population are living below US\$2 per

day. The Islamic Aceh and the tribal and Christian Papua remain poor despite a wealth of natural resources. Meanwhile, the Indonesians are not spared from natural disasters. Last December's tsunami disaster left more than 220,000 Indonesians dead or missing.

**PRAY FOR:** **President** Bambang and Vice-President Muhammad Yusuf Kalla to rule the nation with wisdom, strength and righteousness; **A** just and transparent government and judiciary, honesty and integrity among the ruling officials; **An** effective legal and social framework to break the culture of corruption and ethnic/religious conflicts; **Restoration** and healing in Aceh, Papua, Ambon, Sulawesi, and areas where violence reigns or had previously reigned.; **Christians** and Muslims will live in peace; **Unity** of churches and steadfastness of Christians despite opposition and persecution; **Religious** freedom, and also that Christians will have the freedom to share their faith without fear of intimidation; and **Against** Islamic radicalism. ■

