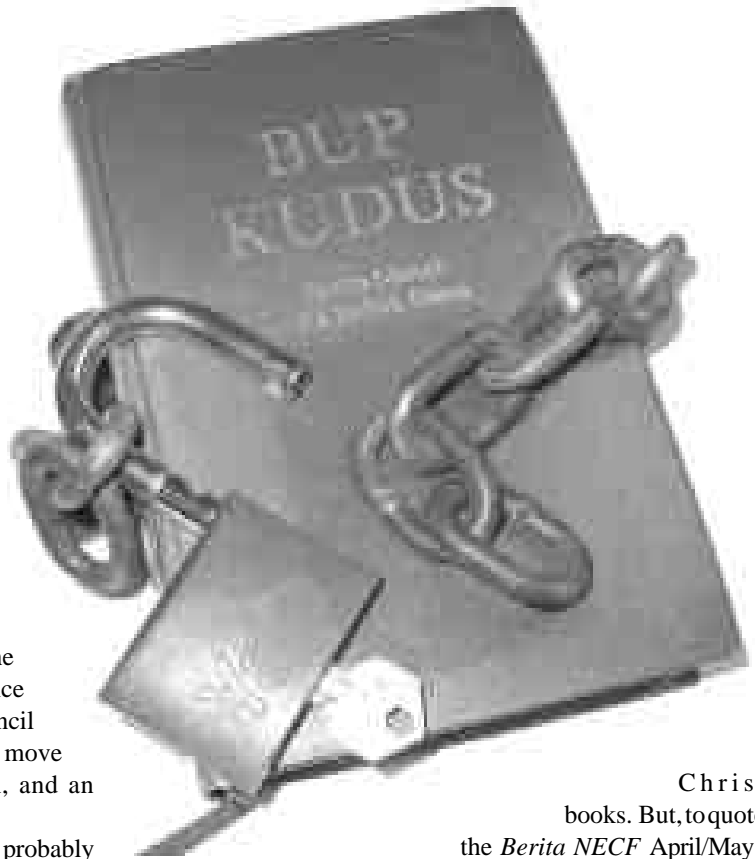


EDITORIAL

Lessons from the Ban



THE ban on *Bup Kudus* (the Iban translation of the Bible) has been revoked, the furore has calmed down but the jittery feelings may need some time to ease off. The ban lasted barely three weeks, but the brief spell was enough to rock, not only the Christian community, but also other religious communities in the country.

During the ban, many voiced their concern that the episode was another sign of the government's intolerance towards religions other than Islam. Even the Bar Council joined in the chorus of protests, calling the government's move an infringement on the right to freedom of religion, and an impediment to nation-building efforts.

But in all fairness to the government, the ban was most probably the work of some overzealous officers in the Home Ministry who had arbitrarily imposed it without following the proper guidelines and consultation with the relevant religious groups. Word has it that the top-rank leadership did not even know that *Bup Kudus* was a Bible.

Generally, the government has good policies that encourage multi-pluralistic harmony, but often the implementation of the policies is flawed by the religious bias of some civil servants.

Nevertheless, we must continue to pursue – in a calm, sensible manner – what is good and godly, while maintaining our convictions and practices.

Good Implementation Needed

Bup Kudus was banned along with 34 other books on April 8 for being “detrimental to public peace”.

However, the suspicion is that the Iban Bible was banned for containing the term “Allah Taala”, which is similar to “Allah”, the word used by Muslims for God the Almighty. For some time now, there have been difficulties over some words used in Islam that are also used in Christian publications. Some Muslim leaders are concerned that this may confuse Muslims who picked up

Christian books. But, to quote from the *Berita NECF* April/May 1991 editorial: “It is increasingly acknowledged internationally that words and language are not the private domain or monopoly of a particular ethnic or religious group, even though the words and language may have originated from them.”

Language, as a means of communication, is universal property. Furthermore, this Arabic word (Allah) pre-dates Islam; before Islam existed, Arab Christians were already using “Allah” in reference to God – despite the considerable differences in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic conceptions of God.

The Ibans have been calling God “Allah Taala” for the last 150 years since the first missionaries arrived in Sarawak. The Iban Bible was first released in 1988 and has been used freely for the last 15 years within the Iban Christian community. Many were thus nonplussed by the government's action. The matter was made worse by the government's silence when asked for the reasons for the ban.

In a multi-plural and multi-religious society, it is important for the government to go through a process of ‘natural justice’

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Church Representation and Nation Building

**"And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther.
So Esther arose and stood before the king." (Esther 8:4)**

BY REV. DATUK DR PRINCE GUNERATNAM

Voicing Church and Societal Issues

Queen Esther's virtuous attributes and position in the palace made her the best conduit for Mordecai to warn the king of the imminent danger to his life, and also to make representation to thwart Haman's secret plan to eliminate all Jews.

Today in Malaysia, NECF Malaysia, together with the other two component partners in the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM), plays the divinely-appointed 'Esther role' of advocacy, directly articulating issues facing the Christian community to the authorities charged with the nation-building agenda.

However, in having to voice common views affecting adherents of other religious faiths as well, CFM stands on a broader national platform through the MCCBCHS, that is the Malaysian Consultative Council on Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism.

The recent lifting of the ban on *Bup Kudus*, the Iban-language Bible, by the then acting Prime Minister (also the Home Minister) resulting from an appeal by the Christian community is evidence of fruit borne through healthy representation and bargaining on behalf of the Iban Christians.

This is a clear demonstration of the national leadership's positive and sympathetic review and ensuing decision to uphold religious freedom as enshrined in our Constitution.

Relational Positivism Envisaged

Such representations have also been blessed with timely and just responses in other

matters that come under the jurisdiction of other Federal agencies, state governments, statutory bodies and local authorities. In the light of such positive developments, we look forward to greater social justice, tolerance over religious practice and improved efficiency in service delivery.

They augur well as future problems facing the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Malaysian society could be resolved in the desired and mutually acceptable legal, moral and ethical perspectives. As fulfillment of the Great Commission cannot be given second place, initiatives by representatives as ambassadors for Christ in these matters should take priority.

The Essentials Of Professionalism

The professionalism and spirit of service of the NECF Research Commission and the recently-formed Roundtable Discourse comprising academicians, church leaders and professionals have contributed to the wisdom and ideas and compilation of credible cases on human rights, religious freedom and justice issues.

As for the local churches, it is pertinent for me to convey our heartiest gratitude to them for having adhered to NECF guidelines on matters relating to local authorities, land administration, immigration, and a host of government and church policies disseminated over time.

Donor churches and Christian individuals have contributed much to meet not, only the needs of local social welfare

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Govt Ban on BM Words Stays

MANY churches are ignorant of a government ban on the usage of four BM words in non-Muslim publications. They are: *Allah, Baitullah, Kaaba, and Solat*.

The issue of the forbidden words first arose when the Home Affairs Ministry issued in April 1986 a letter to Christian leaders announcing the proscription (ban) of 16 words, which the Ministry felt were 'sensitive' to Muslims. The ban was made on the basis that the words could be a source of confusion among Muslims and Christians.

The letter provoked strong protest from the non-Muslim community and hence, in December 1986, the Ministry wrote to Christian publishers, informing them they could now use in their publications 12 of the 16 words, but the ban on the usage of the other four words (as stated above) remained.

But "the Ministry's letters do not have the force of law and at best is evidence only of the Executive's perceptions of the issue at hand," according to a paper *Freedom of Religion in Malaysia - the legal dimension* written by Philip Koh and published by the Graduates Christian Fellowship in 1987.

Since the ban, Christians leaders have met several times with the Home Ministry (under different leaders) and were given verbal assurance that the four words could be used but only in churches. Bible Society of Malaysia General Secretary Dr Victor Wong recently told *Berita NECF*: "This (word ban) is a murky matter. It depends very much on which officer in the Home Ministry is in charge," he said.

Should Christians respect the ban and use substitute terms, so that the gospel may be preached unhindered? Or ignore the ban and stick to the argument that language is universal property and should not be monopolised by any one religion or race?

These questions have been debated among the better-informed Christians since the ban first arose. Dr Wong suggested the formation of a group of theologians and those with vested interest – such as lawyers and Bible translators – to study the matter in depth. The conclusions drawn can then be used as the guideline for churches to follow.

Until then, "it's a touch-and-go situation", he concluded.

Tapes and CDs Seized For Containing "Allah"

THE Home Ministry has yet to release 1,500 CDs and cassette tapes worth over RM 18,000 belonging to a Sabah church despite several appeals and the church's pledge to fulfil the conditions necessary for their release.

The tapes and CDs were confiscated last November because two of the 11 songs contain the word "Allah", among other reasons.

Entitled *Pujian Momosik II - Sediakan Jalan Bagi Tuhan* (Awakening Praise – Prepare the Way for the Lord) the recordings contain Christian songs performed by singers from the Kadazan Dusun tribe. They were produced by Maranatha Church, Penampang in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

The original recording was sent to

Kuala Lumpur last November for duplication and the 1,500 pieces were then sent back to the church. Officers from the Sabah State Home Ministry confiscated them upon arrival at the Kota Kinabalu airport.

In correspondence with the church thereafter, the ministry cited the following reasons for its action:

- Two of the songs contain the word "Allah";
- The phrase "For Christians Only" was not printed on the covers; and
- The producer did not provide a written assurance that the recordings would only be made available to the church and



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when deliberating on racially or religiously sensitive matters.

Even before making any decision, the government should first consult the organisations or groups concerned to get their input. Ample warning and opportunities for response should also be given to the parties concerned after a decision has been made.

Nonetheless, we are grateful to the then acting Prime Minister Dato Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for his willingness to meet with leaders from the Christian Federation of Malaysia and the Iban community, just two weeks after the ban was imposed. Dato Badawi expressed concern and understanding during the meeting, and several days later, announced the revocation.

He said since the word "Allah Taala" had been long used by the Iban community, he saw no reason for the ban and "caused anger among the community".

By his quick action, Dato Badawi has proven his sincerity and resolve as a considerate and firm leader.

not the public.

The matter has now been referred to the Home Ministry at the federal level.

In March, NECF Malaysia appealed on behalf of the church to the said ministry, but to date, no response has been received.

In its letter, NECF explained that the word "Allah" has been used in pre-Islamic Arabia. Furthermore, the word has been regularly used in Christian publications, which are confined to churches, and NECF appealed for this practice to be allowed to continue.

The letter also stated that Maranatha Church would display on the covers the phrase "A Christian Publication". As to the use of the materials, the church will ensure that they are sold and used within the Christian circle.

NECF has made another appeal.

West Woes of East Malaysian Youths

KUALA LUMPUR, April – Sabah and Sarawak churches must prepare their youths who are coming over to live in Peninsular Malaysia so as to avoid the problems that are currently plaguing many East Malaysian Christians living here.

This is one of the major proposals by the 43 participants of a recent consultation organised by the NECF Malaysia BM Commission to brainstorm ways to help solve the woes of East

Malaysians who are facing serious difficulties in adjusting to the life here. As a result, problems such as immorality, alcoholism and smoking, are rife among them.

Daniel

At the

consultation, three men shared their experiences and the specific problems they encountered in their ministry to the East Malaysians here.

Daniel Raut, a Human Resource and Administration Manager with an international manufacturing company in Johor Baru, told the participants – mainly BM pastors and church leaders – that most factories in Johor are reluctant to employ East Malaysians because of their poor working habits, ill discipline, and problematic lifestyle that includes poor financial management and loose morals.

The elder of SIB JB said most East Malaysian workers lack foresight and motivation for self-improvement. On average, they usually last 10 months in a company before they “disappear”, he cited from experience and discussions with his peers.

Kon Oon Sien, the second speaker, said

that generally most Christian parents, including those in East Malaysia, have the wrong perception that their children are “safe” as long as they are attending church meetings.

The reality is that regular church attendance does not guarantee freedom from temptations; in fact, a sizeable number of youths from Christian homes are involved in immoral activities because they are unable to withstand the temptations.

Kon, a former lawyer who now heads a non-profit organisation, stressed the need for East Malaysian churches and their Christian parents to instil strong moral values in their young ones.

Lawyer Hon

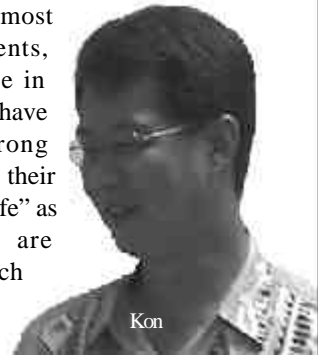
Kay Ping, the third speaker, provided information on how East Malaysian students here are faring. He observed that most of them bow easily to peer pressure out of a strong need to be

accepted. Many of them have picked up the smoking habit, but the greater danger is pornography addiction through the Internet and pornographic VCDs that are easily available, he said.

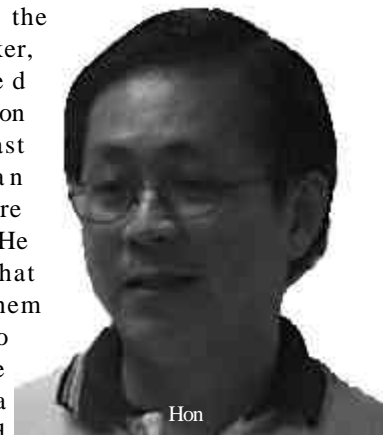
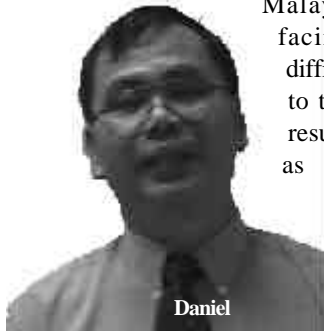
After the talks, participants gathered in small groups for discussions on how to overcome the problems. They concluded that a strong spiritual foundation would help to minimise, if not avoid, the potential troubles of living in the peninsula.

They also proposed that East Malaysian churches inform NECF of any youth coming over to the peninsula and their exact destination; NECF will then forward the name to the nearest BM church for follow up.

The NECF BM Commission will organise talks between churches from East and West Malaysia to discuss the problems and solutions.



Kon



Hon

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organisations, needy churches and church workers, but have also helped disaster victims and war refugees overseas.

Their contributions have immensely helped to improve the quality of representation and resulting response benefiting Christians. The prophetic and ‘watchman’ role of the contemporary church could help the national leadership to ‘see signs of the times’ rather than ‘things that happen’.

Ensuring Effectiveness of Representation

Effective church representation and contribution to nation building will depend on the multiplier effect of our ‘salt and light’ witness and being in the world but not of it. We need to be a convincing community of love and concern with the ‘Good Samaritan’ spirit. The Lausanne Covenant affirmed unequivocally that evangelism and social concern are inseparable if God’s redemptive and

restorative work is to be realised.

As Dr J.W. Dumbrell states (as quoted in the seminar paper *Social and Political Transformation* presented by Philip Koh at an NECF conference in 1985): “... the gospel of Jesus Christ claims the world as God’s domain, (it) is eschatological in the sense that it will settle for no less than the restoration of all things of mankind and his world”. Efforts made through representation have therefore to give preeminence to the tenets of peace and reconciliation.

Apart from ‘Esthers’, the nation also needs ‘Daniels’ to “stand in the gap” (Ezek. 22:30) for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1–4); ‘Nehemiahs’ to seek power from on High for ‘building’ purity, revival and renewal; and ‘Jobs’ to press on in suffering. More importantly, the restoration of sola Kristus, or foundational truth in Christ, needs to be given centre stage for the Church to become the “chaste virgin” (2 Cor. 11:2), able to lift up our heads as our redemption is near (Luke 21:28).

Intercession and Acts of Mercy for Suffering Iraqis

THE evangelical Christians of Malaysia are saddened by the destruction of innocent human lives, properties and environment by the recent war on Iraq. Iraqis now need all the help they can get to, not only, recover from the war but also, restore the democratic governance of the country.

We hope that the US' professed motive of liberating the Iraqis by restoring democracy to their country will not be sidelined by alleged claims to take advantage of Iraq's oil wealth through war reparations, expensive reconstruction projects and oil-for-food arrangement. Those who initiated the war must be morally responsible to ensure that the reconstruction of Iraq is carried out in a just and righteous manner.

NECF Malaysia calls on all evangelical Christians in the country to pray and intercede for the suffering Iraqis. This is the time for Christians to respond with united prayer and sacrificial acts of mercy.

We call on all Christians to support humanitarian aid and to even lead relief efforts to Iraq. The contribution of RM 100,000 by evangelical churches for the Iraqi Humanitarian Fund is just the

initial effort of the evangelical community.

NECF Malaysia also calls on all Malaysians to avoid spiritualising the war, as this will jeopardise the harmonious relationship between Muslims and Christians which the government and adherents of both faiths have fostered over the years in Malaysia.

We reiterate that the current conflict is neither religious nor a clash of civilisations between the West and the East. Neither is the Western civilisation synonymous with Christianity and the Church should not be perceived as a party advocating or involving in the present conflict.

We also denounce terror and weapons of mass destruction by all parties threatening the peace in the world. We therefore call upon the international community to end the development and possession of nuclear and biochemical weapons.

We advocate peace and harmony, and therefore appeal to all parties concerned to work towards a peaceful and amicable solution in resolving the present impasse.

**This is the time for
Christians to respond with
united prayer and sacrificial
acts of mercy.**

Small Token But Significant Sign of Love

RM 100,000 may not do much for a country desolated by war but it bears witness of the Church's concern for a suffering people regardless of their religion or race.

On April 22, NECF Malaysia presented a cheque for the amount – donated by Malaysian evangelical churches and individual Christians – to the Iraqi Humanitarian Fund established by the government to help rebuild Iraq. The cheque was received by Deputy Home Minister Datuk Chor Chee Heung, who represented the then acting Prime Minister Dato Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Datuk Chor said the donation from Christians was proof that the war on Iraq was not religious, but had to do with politics and personalities. Speaking on behalf of NECF, its secretary-general Rev Wong Kim Kong called on all Malaysians to pray for peace and harmony in the country during this time of heightened tension in the world.



From left: Secretary-General Rev Wong; NECF Vice-Chairman Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng; Datuk Chor; NECF Chairman Rev Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam; and NECF Hon. Secretary Elder Kong Yeng Phooi.

Life-Changing Encounter With BK

A retired teacher laments the low interest in the Bible among our teens

Christian youths are generally uninterested in the Bible, so much so that one retired teacher involved in teaching BK has called this state of apathy “a famine condition”.

And the Teachers Christian Fellowship (TCF) is pleading



with churches and Christian parents to encourage their teens to sit for the SPM Bible Knowledge (BK) paper so as to whet their appetite for God's Word and instil in them the discipline of systematically studying the Bible.

Said Mrs Kua Kun Han, who is now an associate staff worker with TCF: “Most churches are so self-absorbed they have dangerously left their youth in the care of fun-filled weekend programmes that

cannot even compete with the great octopus of entertainment with its many arms juggling every kind of addictive menu, which our young people gobble up in the remaining 99 percent of their time outside their church buildings.”

Don't believe this? Try organising a TCF Postal BK Quiz, Mrs Kua challenged. “Many church youth advisors and school Christian Fellowship advisors don't even have the courage to slot in the one-time Quiz as an annual activity.”

She added: “It's been famine so long it will take time to admit that the advisors and students have little appetite for the study of the Word. This quiz has turned out to be a thermometer, a gauge of interest.”

To substantiate her observation about our youths' apathy towards the Bible, she shared a real-life example of two students – a youth leader and a non-believer – participating in the quiz. The youth leader, who had been actively serving in his church for five years, scored less than 50 percent, while the non-believer scored over 80

percent after reading Luke from a borrowed Bible for two weeks. He became a Christian soon after.

The ‘Bible famine’ can be eradicated if churches and especially Christian parents have the courage to confront the truth and start watering their parched youths. Parents are often the main opposers to their children taking the subject for fear that they will fare poorly, Mrs Kua quoted her BK teachers as saying.

“BK is a ‘can-score subject’. There are those who took it as their 10th, 11th or even 12th subject and they scored the A just as easily as their other school subjects,” she assured parents and students.

She added that churches are the best place to prepare students for the BK paper as they have the resources, the venue and the contact with students through their own youths.

And while TCF is encouraging their teachers to organise BK classes in their own churches, church leaders are the best persons to spearhead this Bible-study programme for their youths because they have the influence over their teens.

Thanks to some churches, which have caught the vision and burden for their youths, there are encouraging signs of BK classes slowly sprouting throughout the country, Mrs Kua observed. Perhaps, this is because teachers in smaller towns are the key leaders in their churches.

For more information, contact TCF at 03-5637623 (tel.) or e-mail tcfmy@pd.jaring.my; Scripture Union at 03-77829592 (tel.) or e-mail sufes@po.jaring.my; or Malayan Christian Schools' Council at 03-7956530.

BK TEACHERS TRAINING SEMINAR

TCF and Malaysia Campus Crusade for Christ will jointly hold a training session for SPM BK teachers on June 21 from 9.00am to 4.00pm at the Malaysia Campus Crusade for Christ office in SS2, Petaling Jaya. The trainers are Ms Moey Yoke Lai and Mr Yap Kok Keong. The organisers welcome anybody with a burden to impact teenagers. The session is free of charge. Contact 03-79563610 for more information.

THESE Form 4 students at the PJ Evangelical Free Church BK class would have memorised chunks of Luke and Acts (perhaps even the whole two books) by the end of their two-year study, thanks to the laborious task of systematically learning the books every Sunday.

Schoolteacher Usha Devi is (standing) guiding the 13 students, who will sit for the SPM BK paper next year. Usha is a firm advocate of the BK paper, believing that the discipline the students undergo in studying the books will yield life-long results. Which is why she is willing to sacrifice precious hours and make great efforts to prepare the weekly lessons. She welcomes any students who wish to join the class. PJEFC also has a separate BK class for Form 5 students sitting for the paper this year, and two preparatory classes for lower secondary students. All over the country, most BK students are meeting in similar small groups in churches and homes.

Two-Year Study, Lifetime Impact...





Women to Women

Mothers

By Jill Briscoe

One of the most basic things I learned from my mother was her sense of openness and honesty. She could never bear to harbour anything and had to 'have it out' as soon as possible. She always had to tell us what was on her mind and clear the air. My sister practised a similar philosophy.

But for me it was harder. Telling half the truth, resorting to a little white lie, or taking 'anything for peace' stance never seemed to me any harm, but, whenever she could, Peggy pushed me into being truthful in my statements and actions.

She encouraged me to put things right with people immediately. It took the Lord Jesus Christ to change me and begin to help me tell my feelings and failings openly and honestly with people.

Peggy always respected Shirley and me and 'trusted us twice' – a skill mothers should cultivate. To trust once requires not much more than most can give, but to trust again when trust has been abused requires another quality of confidence altogether. That needs a belief in the child, a determination to think the best, and a confidence in God's intervention when everyone believes the worst.

What marvellous trust God placed in us, I thought in awe. And what a risk He took! Fancy allowing us the chance to build eternal values into our children's lives, telling us, 'Train up a child in the way he should go,' promising us then that

'when he is old, he will not depart from it.'

God had given us the ability as parents to guide our own, and as far as Stuart and I were concerned, that meant guiding them into the way of Jesus. I realised it was this dimension that made a Christian mother different from just a mother. She had the grand ability to know God and make Him known to her child.

Yes, I could teach our children the Eternal's ways, I thought excitedly. That would fill the lonely hours while Stuart was travelling. Then another thought occurred to me. The verse could have ended: 'Train up a child in the way he should go – and walk there yourself once in a while.' There has to be the training of example to go along with it, I mused. The do-as-I-do that I had seen in Peggy's life and that I could seek to emulate, and not just the do-as-I say bit.

Friendship's Treasures: If your mother is still alive, send her a packet of letters, each describing one lesson you learned from her example.

Courageous Friends

If your husband is a speaker, the public, I found, expects you to be able to follow suit. All sorts of doors of opportunities had opened up to me as soon as I had arrived in the States simply because of Stuart's already well-established ministry. 'But I don't want to speak to ladies,' I had complained to God. He knew I never liked it when lots of women were compressed in a confined space. What a row they made, for starters.

Having learned not to be a Jonah and run away from my responsibility to speak to people that I didn't particularly like, I had answered the invitations and

gone anyway. It really doesn't matter that I don't like them very much, I thought. After all, they needn't know. Just like Jonah! I marched into Nineveh (the situation I would like to have marched away from) and talked my heart out, retiring like that same angry prophet to my hill of disdain once the engagement was over. But God apparently used the messages, and I received requests to return.

Then one day I went to Memphis, Tennessee. Verla met me at the airport. She was a speaker and teacher, ran a rescue mission, talked to up-and-outers (the wealthy) and down-and-outers (the

poor), and was totally relaxed with both. She gave me an outsize uncomfortable feeling in the pit of my conscience the moment I saw her warm touch with the women.

We completed our meetings and she was very appreciative of my part, but everything she felt about me came right through her transparent personality. Or maybe she didn't feel like that at all, and it was just that her whole approach and ministry served to rebuke me outright, saying louder than any verbal complaint – 'Jill, you are technically a good speaker – but you do not love these women!'

Being with her was like hearing my slip was showing: it was a different sort of slip this time – the slip of disobedience was hanging down several inches. I

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And A Little Child Shall Lead Them. . . '

by Goh Poh Gaik

Once in a while God sends a special person into our lives to make a significant deposit of faith in our hearts and spirits.

When I first saw Alfredo Bimbingan, I thought, 'He looks so small!' He walked with uncertain steps and I took note of his spindly legs. Then I saw his eyes! He had unforgettable eyes – large and expressive, and we were to discover, eyes that were well capable of twinkling with mischief and delight.

Alfredo was three+ going on to four but he did not have the robust energy of a little boy his age. He had been unwell for quite a long while. The diagnosis: Acute Myloid Leukeamia. Dorta, his mother, looked tired. She had left behind family

and friends in Medan, Indonesia, and for months now, had been nursing her little boy in the University Malaya Medical centre. Dorta had that look of devotion and concern that mothers have who are nursing their children through a long and life-threatening illness.

Dorta and Alfredo had come to stay in the Caring Home set up by our church. The Home provides temporary accommodation for outstation cancer patients who are receiving

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knew that love was a conscious decision. I'd learned that from Mary. Also I knew, I had definitely decided against love.

The Eternal had long shown me that love was not just a feeling too big for words, for Jesus had said to His followers, 'A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another' (John 13:34). I knew that a person couldn't command a feeling. I had come to the conclusion that if love was a

command, then I must be able to obey it, which took it out of the realm of emotions and into the area of actions . . . loving actions that would involve me in the lives of the people I didn't 'feel' I even liked.

Seeing the love of God in action in Verla's life made me want it for myself. It seemed such a simple thing to do – reverse my decision, love the ladies, and then tell the Eternal about it. He was glad to hear the news, as He had – unknown to me – thousands more

women for me to meet. From that moment on, the Holy Spirit set about shedding abroad His love for them in my heart.

Friendship's Treasures: Invite someone outside your normal friendship category to have dinner at your house, or meet her for coffee at a restaurant that will be comfortable for both of you.

• "Mothers" and "Courageous Friends" are taken from "Selections From Thank You for being a Friend", Moody USA

Coming Up

'Psalms in a Woman's Life'

Speaker : Jill Briscoe

Date : 3 Sept. 2003

Time : 9.30am – 1pm

More details coming up

Organised by NECF Malaysia Women's Commission

•FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

treatment in hospitals in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor.

A Foundation in Medan had paid for Dorta and Alfredo's flights to KL and would also take care of the costs of the treatment. We provided accommodation and transport to and from hospital. We also extended emotional support and encouragement for this difficult period of their lives.

It was Christmas time when Dorta and Alfredo came to us. I remember the Sunday they came to church. Little Alfredo loved Jesus! He loved singing songs of praise and worship and we were delighted to see him unabashedly come up front and take hold of the mike to sing.

I can see him now. A little guy. Bald. Big, bright eyes and a cheeky grin. His mother is carrying him. He is holding the mike and we hear his earnest child-voice, a little raspy in parts, but he is singing with joy and conviction.

*Ku anak Raja
Kita semua anak Raja
Yo...yo...hallelujah!*

Alfredo loved to sing. He was always ready to sing and the parents in the children's ward remembered this. They also remembered his friendliness – he would call out greetings from his bed. Alfredo's favourite food was nasi with chicken.

We grew to love this little boy. He was inquisitive and intelligent. And he had a faith in the Lord Jesus that touched our hearts. He believed in prayer. He wanted us to pray for him. He would close his eyes, put his hands together and say, 'Amen' at the close of the prayer. Our church members gave him Christmas gifts.

I was there when he unwrapped them and the delight showed on his face ... and in his eyes. He loved the gifts, and talked about taking them back with him to Medan.

The course of treatment required chemotherapy several times a week and different church members provided the transport for mother and child. Dorta would carry him in a sarong strapped from her waist to her shoulders. Many times both mother and child would be worn out after each visit, Alfredo from the drugs and Dorta from the waiting and the caring of her ailing child.

We prayed that God would heal little Alfredo. We wanted to see him well and strong again. For a while he seemed to be doing well and then the day came when he had to be readmitted. He picked up an infection and it was giving him a lot of trouble. There were days when he could not eat or drink. He looked so small on the bed but he recognized us and remembered our Chinese names.

The little twinkle in his eyes never failed to encourage me.

And yes, he was always ready to *berdoa*. Eyes closed, hands held together and the Amen. Little Alfredo believed the Lord Jesus was listening when we prayed for him.

But Alfredo was not getting better. I went to visit one afternoon and could see he was growing weaker. He looked wan and tired. He had a pain in his head and he was crying. As always, he was ready for us to pray and to call on the Lord Jesus. But he had begun to tell his mother that he wanted to return to Medan. He communicated his request repeatedly and insistently. The little boy wanted to go home.

Then one evening, we received a call. We rushed to the hospital. Alfredo was hemorrhaging in the brain. He was gravely ill. For days he stayed in the ICU, heavily sedated, linked up to the respirator. The church prayed for the Lord to give him his heart's desire, to enable him to return home to Medan.

It did not seem possible but the Lord wonderfully did the impossible. Alfredo, although still unwell, was going home!

A doctor would travel with him, and we made the necessary arrangements with the airlines for this special passenger. The night before he was to leave, Vicky and I went to the hospital to pay him a goodbye visit. We brought gifts for him. He was subdued and weak.

Although he was very happy to be going home, it was clear to us that he was still very unwell. He had lost his voice. He wanted to say something and Vicky bent close to listen to him. Alfredo's voice was a hoarse little whisper but Vicky was able to make out what he was saying, '*Berdoa.*'

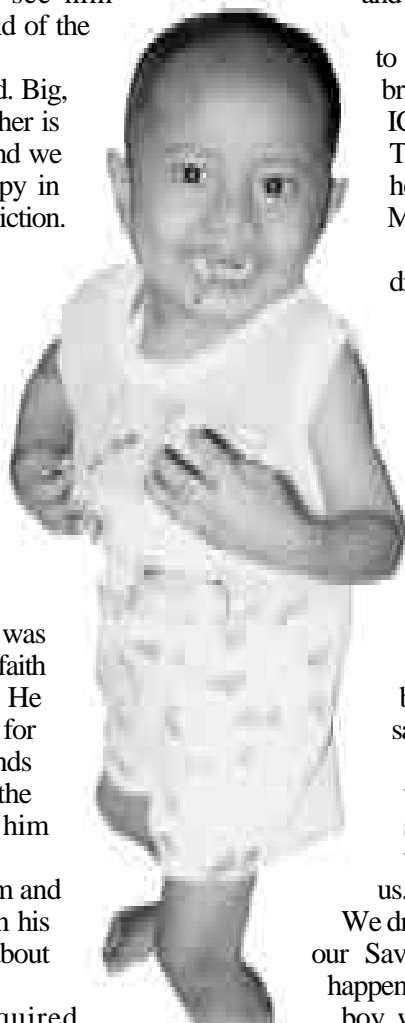
That was Alfredo's request. '*Berdoa.*' He wanted us to pray. His faith startled and strengthened us. He beckoned to his mother who was cleaning up in the bathroom to come and join us. Again his lips formed the word, '*Berdoa.*'

We drew the curtains and prayed. We prayed to Jesus, our Saviour and Lord who loves us and knows what is happening in our lives. We prayed for this precious little boy whose indomitable faith both comforted and challenged us. Our eyes were wet as we looked at him; the outward man was so weak and frail but the inner man was remarkably strong in the strength of the Lord.

We were at the airport to say 'Goodbye' to Alfredo and his mother, Dorta. He looked so small in the wheelchair. We were glad a doctor was accompanying them on the flight. We prayed. One last wave. Goodbye, little Alfredo.

A week later, Dorta rang from Medan. Alfredo had gone home to be with the Lord. He had run his short race well and finished his course. In those few short months with us, Alfredo's robust faith and love for the Lord Jesus had made its mark on our hearts and lives.

You showed us how to trust the Lord and how to rest in His love. Thank you, little brother. You are safely Home.



The Mother Daughter Connection

Working together...



THE relationship between mother and daughter is meant to be warm and intimate which portrays friendship, love and security. Mothers and daughters will always have that special bond with one another which

should not be taken for granted.

Therefore, mothers and daughters need to spend time and be involved in activities together so as to enhance their relationship. When this happens, they will actually begin to connect in a powerful and healing way. It is also an essential ingredient in family unity.

It is so easy to be caught up by the busy schedules of career and home that we overlook the importance of bonding, nurturing and imparting our values and beliefs to our children. As for mothers putting aside time just to connect with daughters – this is even less thought of and is rarely put into practice, especially in Asian families.

Focus on the Family Malaysia (FOFM) organised its pilot *Mother Daughter Connection* seminar on March 28–29 at the GoldCourse Hotel, Klang. Some of our objectives included helping mother and daughter to:

- Understand one another
- Build a life-long bond

- Encourage one another
- Have a special time together

It was an overnight event that provided a platform for the special relationship between mother and daughter to be developed and enhanced. There were opportunities to affirm, encourage and motivate one another as mother and daughter.

Facilitators for the event were Mrs Tan Ah Eng, Mrs Lee Swee Choo and Mrs Sally Sinniah. They helped the participants navigate the special challenges and joy of raising a daughter through practical insights and creative activities to discover ways in making powerful connections for a life-long bond. Forty pairs of mothers and daughters not only had a good and special time together, but they were also positively touched and encouraged.

Some of the activities which were organised for the participants were:

- Beauty and Beads, when they work together to string a chain of beads for each other
- Flowers and Friendship, when they cooperate to decorate a photo frame. This is then used for a photograph of mother and daughter taken during a special dinner prepared for two
- Media and Music, when they attend a talk to create awareness of the impact of music on young girls. Then they are given lyrics of some pop songs to discuss whether they are healthy or unhealthy to young minds.

Samples of feedback from the participants:

Mothers

Sally L : 'I've learned to hug my daughter.'

Jackie: 'Glad I came. It's God's blessing. Thank you, Focus on the Family. I'll tell my friends about this. Should organise event for daughters aged 15–18 years too.'

Suzannah: 'This event has been very encouraging. It helps us to overcome our shortcomings and not look at one another's weaknesses.'

Daughters

Zoe: 'Love is unconditional. I love you, Mum, and I hope you love me for who I am.'

Yen Yen: 'Glad I came to the seminar. Learn to listen properly and not 'pretend to listen.' Love you, Mum.

Trina Teoh: 'This special weekend is the best weekend I've spent with my mother.'

It is a privilege for FOFM to initiate the process of bonding and connecting between mothers and daughters. However, this is an on-going process and we must work at it to build a life-long bond. – Report submitted by FOFM

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.

Of Hawks and Doves: A Personal Journey of Discovery of War

By Steen Wong

Christians have been vexed for the past two millennia over the issue of war. As one would expect after such a long period of time, the problem is not that there are no answers but rather too many.

The battle lines of argumentation have become neatly drawn and positions deeply entrenched. It is only a matter then of choosing which side to defend, from 'just cause-just war' to 'unjust cause-unjust war' and every combination in-between.

With the rise in humanism on the one hand, and political participation on the other, 'doves' (those for peace) have possibly increased in numbers but given the numerous conflicts around the world, there are still enough 'hawks' who subscribe to violence as the answer to their problems.

Augustine was the one who originally said that Jesus' admonitions against violence were not to be taken literally but were a state of mind. If the mind is conditioned first and always by a love for God, he said, even forbidden acts are permissible. In any case, the individual never had a James Bond-like personalised licence to kill. He could only do so if instructed by God or by those in whom God had invested legitimate authority.

Aquinas likened the person who engages in a just war as a mere instrument of the state. Paul Ramsey, a 20th century Catholic theologian credited with rediscovering the tradition, could say that it was not an exception to the command of "thou shall not kill (murder)" but an expression of "moral and political responsibility."

The reformed church also bought into the idea that there is a morally and ethically right time to kill. During the Second World War, Reinhold Niebuhr, a disillusioned pacifist, developed the concept of 'Christian realism' to mobilise church support against the Nazis. Embedded in this concept is the idea that Christ's teachings can only be approximated in the world. It

represents an ideal towards which Christians strive but never grasp in a sinful world. Logic and common sense would seem to rule that we really cannot do otherwise.

If Niebuhr had not been successful in convincing the large numbers of pacifist American churchmen that fighting the Nazis was



right if Pearl Harbour had not happened) we might have ended up under German-Japanese rule.

On the other side of the Kingdom of God are the so-called 'peace churches'. Brethren, Quakers and Mennonites, for example, have all maintained a consistent peace stand, occasionally at great sacrifice to themselves. Their insistence is on the literal and specific application of scriptures.

The evangelical community itself seems to be divided into a war school and a peace school. (Indeed, there are those who positively jump for joy at the prospect of war since this "heralds" the Second Coming of Christ.) The former argues that Romans 13:1-5 gives nations the right to prosecute wars and to require Christians to fight in them. Like the early church fathers, a distinction is made so that what applies to

the individual does not necessarily also apply to rulers and those in authority.

Unlike times past, however, the citizens of many countries elect their governments and have the right not only to express a view against war but also demand that the government of their choice does the same. It is now no longer possible to so easily draw the line between governor and the governed.

Perhaps, the most damning indictments of just-war theorists (and Niebuhr for that matter) is one which Alan Johnson made in his 1985 article in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*.

Proponents of just wars, he says, just do not engage and reflect on the whole scriptures, not even highly respected theologians and churchmen writing on the subject.

Changed Along the Journey

A month before the Iraq war started, I had the eschatological imagery of Christians being 'powerless sitting ducks', oppressed and defeated in the flesh so that only Christ was able to save. As I delved deeper, this view changed.

First, God has, in the past, engineered or allowed wars in order to serve His purposes. There are also suggestions that He will continue to do so. Thus, I have no right to adopt an absolutist position that rules out war in a way that transcends His sovereign will.

Second, I must make a clear distinction between what is truth and belief. Often, when I say that something is 'right' or 'wrong' or 'good' or 'bad', I am expressing values, preferences and incomplete knowledge rather than any objective and verifiable truth. Only He is omniscient and infallible.

Third, even with the benefit of 'God-breathed' truth (2 Tim. 3:16), we can only see but a poor reflection as in a 'mirror and know (only) in part'. (1 Cor. 13:12). I have been guilty many times of being so sure of myself that it amounts to unfounded pride

Two More Towns to Participate in NECF Merdeka Prayer Rally

FOR the first time, churches in Batu Pahat and Segamat will hold combined-church prayer rallies on Aug 31 – Merdeka Day (Independence Day).

Christians in Batu Pahat will meet to intercede for the nation at Gereja Grace Presbyterian Church. The venue for the Segamat rally will be announced later. This brings to total 25 towns participating in the yearly prayer gatherings for the nation.

The decision to hold the rallies was the result of NECF's recent deputation visits to both towns where the NECF team shared with pastors and church leaders the current issues in Malaysia and the Church's response to the issues.

In **Batu Pahat** (BP), over 50 people were updated on the national issues by NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong, who also took the opportunity to share on the importance of unity among the various churches. He urged the church leaders to avoid "ministering in isolation" and encouraged them to "come together in a greater measure".

NECF Executive Secretary (Prayer) Ann Low then shared about the organisation's prayer initiatives and challenged the participants to consider joining other towns taking part in this year's Merdeka Prayer Rally. Moved by the challenge, several church leaders



Batu Pahat folks "coming together in a greater measure" through food and fellowship.

approached Ann after the seminar and agreed to organise the rally. NECF is now helping the BP churches to set up a committee for the rally.

The NECF team next visited **Segamat** and was encouraged to find out that the Pastors Fellowship has been holding combined-churches monthly prayer meetings at various parts of the town. Some 10 pastors and leaders attended the current issues seminar and again at the end of the talks, they enthusiastically responded to the call to participate in the Merdeka Prayer Rally.

The NECF team also visited Melaka and Muar. In **Melaka**, the NECF English seminar was attended by over 50 leaders from various churches, while the separate BM seminar saw a gathering of over 20 people. About 15 pastors and leaders in **Muar** attended the seminar.

• FROM PAGE 11

and arrogance.

Fourth, those who allow just wars are constantly faced with having to make decisions about the boundaries. In the end, it is always someone's call and the term 'just' can be no more than a religious salve to kill without guilt. I should not wish to be responsible or party to such decisions.

Fifth, notwithstanding the above, Christians of every persuasion are equally loved and capable of fitting into His divine plan. If Cyrus, the Persian king, could be His Anointed One, I have no grounds for disrespecting and ridiculing those who seek different goals using different methods.

Sixth, my divinely-ordained mission is not to judge for others what is just or unjust or righteous or unrighteous, as if that authority were ever invested in me. My commission is to love God with my whole being and my fellow man as myself.

Seventh, He has called me to bring healing, freedom and encouragement even if that conviction costs me freedom and my life. It is something I must be prepared to pay. His assurance is that it will be worth it.

SHARING RESOURCES

Tape to Salvation

THERE is an easy way of sharing the gospel with those who speak in a language unknown to you - just give them cassette tapes. But these are no ordinary tapes; they are recordings of evangelistic Bible-centred messages and songs, scripted for 'holding attention' and culturally relevant to the listeners.

The tapes are available from Gospel Recordings (GR), a US-based ministry that recently recorded the contents in the 5,500th spoken language! What's more, the tapes are available free-of-charge.

Just for Malaysia alone, GR has recordings of about 1,000 spoken languages and dialects, said Rev David Lim, Director of the regional GR office in Singapore.

With the influx of foreign workers and students of various races into Malaysia, the gospel tapes are an opportune tool for churches and Christians to make the first contact.

"We have been working with some

Malaysian and Singaporean churches that had caught this vision. For example, one church in Melaka used our Mandarin tapes to help some China nationals come to know the Lord. A doctor in Nilai, Negri Sembilan, played our Bangla tape at his clinic to his Bangladeshi patients waiting for treatment.

"Another lady wrote in and requested for the Bangla tapes for distribution to some 50 Bangladeshi workers in a factory near her church," Rev Lim said.

Besides foreigners, the tapes are an effective tool to reach dialect-speaking Chinese relatives (especially the older folks), Orang Asli (indigenous people) in both West and East Malaysia, and also refugees in Malaysia.

The tapes may be reproduced and distributed freely. For tape requests or more information, write to *Gospel Recordings Singapore Ltd, Serangoon Central PO Box 512, Singapore 915501* or e-mail grsin@singnet.com.sg.

VIEWPOINT

The Place To Bond



Cell groups (or home fellowships) should centre on deepening relationships, and not made out to be a miniature Sunday Service cum bible school, says DR STEFEN TAN of FGA KL.

I know that participation in cell groups (or home fellowships) is compulsory according to the Bible (Heb. 10:25: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.")

My main complaint is that cell groups often do not accomplish the purposes they were set up for. Too often, a cell meeting becomes a miniature Sunday Service cum bible school. I believe the emphasis should be on building relationships though this is much harder to accomplish than dispensing fast food.

Besides spiritual needs, everyone has physical or material needs, namely, (1) Full Relationships, (2) Good Health, and (3) Adequate Finances. The majority may take

all this for granted but there are those who remain deprived. Even after many prayers are offered, the needed blessings may still be slow in coming. I know that God has His own timing and patience is required but could our own indifference be delaying His hand?

It would be unbiblical for me to moan and groan without offering constructive alternative suggestions, so here are some. With regard to full relationships, I am aware that many single persons (I'm one of them) are in danger of undergoing unpleasant personality changes – for example, becoming rigid in their views of people around them, the whole world – as they grow older should they remain in isolation.

Why aren't churches offering programmes to assist them to meet more

single people? It's no use asking them to enrol in bible study courses on marriage relationships when they have no prospects to work on!

As regards our health, it's good to know that some take the trouble to visit friends who suffer from serious ailments. (In my case, I don't like people to talk to me when I'm sick – for the past 20 years only the flu has confined me to bed – I'm abnormal in not wanting visits but thank God for the good health I'm blessed with.) Perhaps one could go further by offering counselling on healthy practices to those unaware.

Regarding financial sufficiency, a person who experience difficulty in meeting daily and monthly expenses is likely to be distracted and rendered less effective in whatever he does. The pastor will usually offer prayers in this regard for members affected but the more able members should offer specific advice on how to overcome financial problems, proposing solutions on an individual basis.

The New Testament church dealt with many practical problems in practical ways and not merely passing the buck back to God through prayer only. You would exhaust all practical remedies if it were your own child, wouldn't you? "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." (1 John 4:12)

Editor's Note: We welcome readers' contribution for this column. Articles should focus on observations of current issues facing churches in Malaysia, and should not exceed 800 words. E-mail to editor@necf.org.my

KNOWYOURRIGHTS

"A Christian Event"

CHURCHES and Christian organisations are not required under law to place the phrase "For non-Muslims only" in advertisements or promotional materials to publicise their events or publications, such as evangelistic meetings or Christian books.

The appropriate phrase to use is "A Christian event" or "A Christian publication".

The "For non-Muslims only" phrase has been used for some time now, and through time, it has become accepted as, or believed to be, the norm.

Today, some Christians have even gone to the extent of putting disclaimers of a similar meaning at the end of their e-mails.

Those in doubt, or are facing any difficulty over this issue, may contact the NECF office for clarification or assistance.

NEW CFM EXCO

THE Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) has announced its new executive committee following its biennial general elections in April. The committee's two-year term takes immediate effect.

Chairman	: Rev Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam (NECF)
Vice-Chairman	: Bishop Antony Selvanayagam (RCC) Bishop Datuk Voo thien Fui (CCM) Mr Kong Yeng Phooi (NECF)
Honorary Secretary	: Bishop James Chan (RCC)
Asst Hon. Secretary	: Bishop Datuk Dr Peter Chio (CCM)
Honorary Treasurer	: Bishop Tan Sri Datuk Dr C.E. Lim (CCM)
Asst Hon. Treasurer	: Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng (NECF)
Committee Members	: Bishop Dominic Su (RCC) Rev Thomas Philips (CCM) Mr Samuel Ang (NECF) Ms Lilian Liew (RCC)

- RCC - Roman Catholic Church
- CCM - Council of Churches of Malaysia
- NECF - NECF Malaysia

COMING UP

NECF 40-Day Prayer and Fast cum Charity Campaign Launch



CHURCHES are encouraged to launch this yearly nationwide initiative which begins on July 21. NECF has produced a 12-minute VCD to help churches in the launch. The prayer booklets and meal-savings boxes – at RM1 per set – will be available for collection at end-May.

During the 40-day fast, participants are to urged to use the box to keep the money saved from their fast, as part of the Charity Campaign, which was introduced last year. Over RM670,000 was then collected and distributed among 33 Christian and 26 non-Christian organisations (see next page).

Please fax in your order early as there are limited sets. For help, contact Ann Low at the NECF office or 013-3659239 (mobile) or prayer@necf.org.my (e-mail).

Missions Conference Postponed

IN view of the SARS global outbreak, NECF Malaysia has decided to postpone the Patrick Johnstone National Missions Conference, originally scheduled for June. Johnstone had originally planned to fly into Malaysia from a conference in Hong Kong. NECF will announce a new date for the conference.

Chinese Berita NECF Now Available



NECF Malaysia has introduced the Chinese version of *Berita NECF* in its effort reach out more effectively to the Chinese-speaking congregations. The 16-page maiden issue, released in April and distributed free-of-charge, is packed with information on current issues and events within the Chinese churches. Some of its contents are translated articles from the original *Berita NECF*.

The newsletter is coordinated by NECF Executive Secretary (Chinese) Ngeh Hoong Eng. NECF members who wish to be included in the mailing list may contact her at 03-77278227 (tel) or chinese@necf.org.my (e-mail).

National Prayer Conference with Cindy Jacobs and Barry Boucher

THE conference is a run-up to the annual Merdeka Prayer Rally. It will be held from Aug 27 to 29 at Wisma Eagles, FGT Subang, Petaling Jaya. Participation is by registration only. Contact Ann Low at the NECF office or 013-3649239 (mobile).

NECF Church Visits

THE NECF deputation team will be visiting churches in the following towns in July:

July 5 – 6 : Taiping
 July 7 – 9 : Kota Baru
 July 10 – 11 : Kuala Terengganu
 July 12 – 13 : Kuantan

Besides giving updates on the current issues and challenges facing the Church, NECF will also launch the 40-day Prayer and Fast at the various churches.

NECF Current Trends Seminar – Klang Valley

THE seminar is to brief pastors and church leaders on current national issues and how they affect the Church. There will be two separate sessions in Mandarin and English on June 11 and June 12 respectively, beginning 10.00am at the NECF Conference Room.

The English session is meant for representatives of Petaling Jaya churches only, whereas the Mandarin session is open to Christian leaders in the Klang Valley.

Among the topics are Rising of Islamic Fundamentalism; Religious Resurgence of Other Faith; Implications of Changing Demographic Trends; and Changing Political Landscape. For registration, please contact Patrick Cheng (English) and Hoong Eng (Chinese) at the NECF office. The seminars are held free of charge.



New Members

We welcome the following into our Fellowship as Ordinary Members:

- **League Resources Bhd, Kuala Lumpur**, represented by *Joshua Tan Hock Huat*
- **Kepong EFC, Kuala Lumpur**, pastored by *Irene Lee*
- **EI-Shaddai Revival Fellowship Centre, Ipoh**, pastored by *Karuppiah a/l Muthiah*

We also welcome six individuals as Associate Members. They are Jennifer Chan, Darius Lim Hung Yit, Cheah Phee Hock, Rev. Perez Tan Ling Ling, Tan Poh Lai and Lena Tan.

Beneficiaries of the NECF Malaysia 2002 Charity Campaign

• NON-CHRISTIAN CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS

Miriam Home; Majlis Pemulihan Negri Kelantan; Rumah Perlindungan Sosial NCWO-YWCA Klang, Persatuan Bagi Orang-Orang Istimewa Labuan; Lembaga Pengurus Rumah Tunas Harapan Semarak Kasih; Persatuan Pemulihan Gagaan & Perlindungan Sinar Suria bagi Orang-Orang Cacat Daerah Temerloh; Rumah Orang Tua Jubilee Perak; Persatuan Kebajikan Warga Tua Seri Bahagi Ipoh; Rumah Sejahtera Kaki Bukit; Sarawak Cheshire Home; PERKOBP; Kiwanis Down Syndrome Foundation (Klang Centre)l Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti, Selayang; Society of the Blind in Malaysia;

Malaysian Federation of the Deafl Malaysian Red Crescent Society; Malaysian Aids Foundation; Selangor Cheshire Home; Persatuan Pemulihan Orang-Orang Cacat Selangor & WP; Universiti Malaya Medical Centre; Dignity & Services; Ramalinga Asiramam, Alor Star; Rumah Sejahtera Taman Bahagia Bkt Payong; and Yayasan Kajian & Pembangunan Masyarakat.

• CHRISTIAN CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS

Agape Shelter, Kluang; Calvary Charismatic Centre; Trinity Baptist Church Dialysis Centre; Calvary Care Home; Pusat Rhema-Kebajikan Kanak-

Kanak; Rapha Children's Home; Pintu Harapan Bhd; Rumah Bethany; Agape Home (Drug Rehab Centre); New Horizons Society; Persatuan Daybreak untuk Kebajikan Orang-Orang Cacat; Beautiful Gate Disabled People Caring Centre; Compassion Home; St Paul's Day Training Centre; Disciple House; Desa Amal Jireh; Shelter; The Salvation Army; Rumah Damai; Charis - NKF Dialysis Centre; New Creation Home; Green Pastures Regeneration & Renewal Centre; House of Victory; Malaysian CARE; New Covenant Community; Persatuan Kristian Shuang Fu; Rumah Charis; Yayasan Sunbeams Home; Taman Sri Stella; Persatuan Untuk Orang Pekak; Salvation Army Children's Home; and Grace Manna House.

16,000 Decisions In San Diego Mission

The shy 13-year-old doesn't seem like your typical evangelist. His voice cracks when he speaks. He has yet to fill out his not-yet-adult body. And pimples dot his face. But May 9, during the second evening of Mission San Diego with Billy Graham, Joseph Bekkedahl did something that the famed 84-year-old evangelist would commend. He personally led a 14-year-old boy through a prayer to accept Christ.

"It was good, but I forgot some of the words," said the humble teenager from East Clairemont Southern Baptist Church in San Diego and a three-year veteran of the FAITH program, a Southern Baptist Sunday School evangelism program to help laypeople share their faith.

Bekkedahl was one of more than 20,000 volunteers recruited by San Diego-area churches who made the four-day mission one of the most successful evangelistic initiatives in the history of Southern California. During the mission, more than 270,000 people piled into Qualcomm Stadium, including a stadium-record 72,000 on Saturday evening. More than 16,000 people made spiritual decisions in those four days.

Mission San Diego was Graham's 413th crusade since his first in 1947. Many expect it will be one of the preacher's final public missions. Although he has scheduled crusades in Oklahoma City in

June and Kansas City in 2004, Graham's health battles have caused the evangelist himself to discuss his mortality. — *MCJ Online*

Clergy Salary Survey Reveals 'Harmful' Effects

Competitive, free-market approaches to determining pastors' pay are harming the church and distorting its mission, the directors of a new US clergy study say. Conducted by Duke University's Divinity School, it says salaries of American pastors have increased faster than inflation in the last 25 years, but many ministers still face tough economic times, the *Associated Press* (AP) reported.

A typical minister's median pay — including the value of any free housing — is now US\$40,000, similar to that of schoolteachers and social workers, the survey found. In comparison, Roman Catholic priests, with no wives and children to support, receive a median of \$25,000.

Still, about 60 percent of pastors serve small churches, with an average attendance of 100 or less. Among them, ministers in centralised denominations — those with centralised governments and recommended salary scales such as the Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian churches — receive a median \$36,000. Those in groups with congregational governments, including Pentecostals,

Baptists, United Church of Christ and other congregations that act autonomously in determining clergy compensation, only get a median of \$22,300. The survey found that only 30 percent of the small, congregational-type churches provide retirement benefits.

The survey found that only 30 percent of the small, congregational-type churches provide retirement benefits.

Becky McMillan, a Methodist minister and survey co-director, said the free-market approach forces pastors to compete for bigger, higher-paying congregations, turning the ministry from a "calling" into a mere "career". — *Ministries Today*

SARS causing panic in China

Hysteria is sweeping through China as a result of the SARS epidemic. On April 27, more than 10,000 people rioted in the rural town of Chagugang, two hours east of Beijing, ransacking a local school after word spread that it would be used as a hospital for SARS patients.

Meanwhile, Christian organisations are reeling from the impact of the virus. Some have withdrawn expatriate workers. One large mission has advised against visits to China until the end of June, when the situation will be reviewed. In this climate of fear, Christians in China have found new opportunities to share their faith, reporting a growing responsiveness to the gospel as neighbours and friends seek counsel and prayer. — *Compass*

FOREIGNNEWS

FOR YOUR PRAYERS



IRAQ

Christians were not persecuted for their faith by the regime of Saddam Hussein as they were not a political threat. As long as they lived quiet, peaceful lives they could import Bibles and Christian literature and worship freely without government harassment. Iraq is over 96% Muslim and Christians, as only a 1.5% minority, are concerned, with the Shi'ite majority now calling for an Iran-style Islamic state.

As the proposed draft Constitution is not secular but Islamic, Christians fear they may not have a voice in the new 'democratic' Iraq. Lots of Christians have fled Iraq in recent weeks, with many living in the Middle East as refugees or are imprisoned as illegal immigrants. We must bring their needs and fears before the Lord.

Pray for a spirit of calm, that the majority Muslim populace will not be caught up in radicalism, but will maintain cordial relations with their trusted Christian neighbours, and honourably protect their interests as a vulnerable minority; that those deciding on the new Iraqi Constitution will respect freedom of religion and not forget the Christian minority; that God will provide all the needs of Iraqi Christian refugees, whether in prison as illegal immigrants, or being sheltered in homes and camps through the Middle East, as well as Christians internally displaced inside Iraq; may God bless their carers.

AFGHANISTAN

Although Afghanistan is free of Taliban control, there is still no freedom for Christians to worship openly. The population is 97.89 per cent Muslim and Christians have very little opportunity for fellowship or teaching and live in constant danger. Pray for our brethren there.

The country is one of the least evangelised nations, and radio seems the most effective way of reaching spiritually hungry hearts. On the first anniversary of Sept 11, Gospel for Asia started two new daily programmes in Dari and Pashto, the languages spoken by most Afghans. Pray for Feba broadcasts to reach the Afghans.

ERITREA

Independent evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Eritrea have come under a severe government crackdown. Last May the Eritrean government closed all churches not part of the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Mekane Yesus (Evangelical Lutheran) denominations. It is now known there is severe persecution that includes harassment, imprisonment, humiliation, beatings, torture and threat of execution.

In February and March, a total of 170 Protestants, from children to elders, were imprisoned and punished for up to 15 days because they were following 'a new religion'. Also, 74 soldiers have been suffering severely in a military prison since February 2002 because they are Pentecostals.

Pray that God will turn the heart of the Eritrean government away from fear, suspicion and oppression, and towards understanding and liberty; God will use for good that which is meant for evil, so that the witness of the Eritrean believers will be far-reaching, powerful and fruitful; God to strengthen and comfort believers who are suffering or have suffered.

SINGAPORE

SARS has hit this little island hard, economically and socially. One young self-quarantined mother with a toddler described the mood "like the end of the world". Many, who have only experienced prosperity and the good life, are struggling to cope with not only job insecurity, but the reality of death itself. Many young people attend church, but materialism is an increasing threat to their zeal for the Lord, especially when their careers get underway. Pray that through this present hardship, these young people will grow in Christ and give Him the lordship over their lives.

Many believers' faith was shaken by the death of Pastor Simon Loh, who contracted the virus from a SARS-stricken church member when he visited her. Pray that from this incident, our brethren here will better understand God and what it means to take up the cross and follow Him; Pray for courage, and also wisdom, for Christians as they lovingly minister to the

SARS victims and their family members.

Meanwhile, the number of migrant workers here has increased. Churches are reaching out to Filipinos, Thais, Burmese and Japanese, but, according to sources, the biggest challenges are Indians, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans. Pray for the churches to continue persevering in their good work.

GUATEMALA

A UN survey concluded that some 1,500 families with 4,000 children, live on the Guatemala City dump. They scavenge the dump during the day, and at night, start fires for light and warmth, risking death from methane. Explosions and out-of-control fires are frequent.

The UN survey said that 48 percent of the scavengers recognised Casa del Alfarero (Potters House Christian Association) as the most effective helping agency on the dump. Everyday, agency staff go to the dump seeking to help the scavengers. Supported by UK-based WorldShare, this ministry gives education to over 100 children each afternoon, runs a daily clinic, literacy classes, Bible studies and camping expeditions which are equally popular with the parents. Pray for this ministry and for the scavengers to respond to its efforts, and for effective discipleship training.

NIGERIA

The relative peace and success of only the second civilian-run elections in 20 years amazed everyone. The elections were somewhat chaotic with violence only localised and minimal, mostly in the deep south oil-rich Delta region. Olusegun Obasanjo's party, the PDP, won the federal legislative elections and he clearly won the Presidential poll. Muhammadu Buhari and his party, the NAPP, have rejected the results, claiming fraud, rigging and even that Buhari really won but the Independent Nigerian Electoral Commission changed the results. Buhari has threatened there will be no government by end-May if there is no re-run. Please pray on for religious and political peace in Nigeria, as well as for President Obasanjo and his family. Praise God for the peace that held through the Nigerian elections.