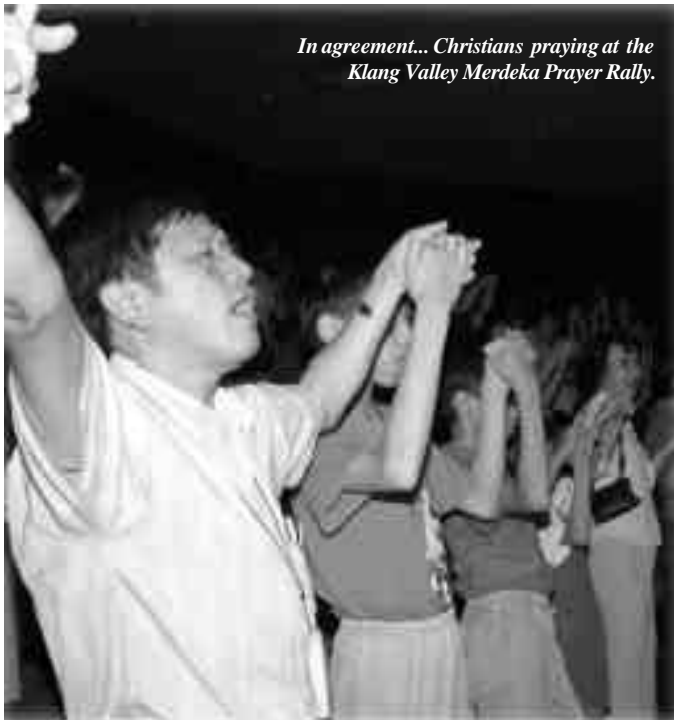


E D I T O R I A L

PRAYER Let's Agree



In agreement... Christians praying at the Klang Valley Merdeka Prayer Rally.



The recent Merdeka 40-day Prayer and Fast generated good publicity for the Christian community and increased the Malaysian Church's visibility in the nation. We hope that through the exposure, our Lord's name has been magnified by the Church's humble and sincere efforts towards nation building and community care.

This year's prayer and fast campaign attracted the participation of at least 70,000 Christians throughout the nation. As the theme *One Voice in Prayer* suggested, the campaign was a call for unity, and for Christians to commit themselves to pray in agreement with other believers according to Matt. 18: 19–20, "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

With all the troubles and challenges confronting us today, how critical it is for us to stand united and in agreement as we intercede for our nation. To repeat the list of social ills plaguing our society will seem like an overkill – we've probably heard enough of the rising culture of violence, school indiscipline, increasing immorality, *et cetera, et cetera*.

Nevertheless, we need to repeat it to emphasise the serious-

ness of the situation. Recently, the Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation released statistics comparing the incidence of various crimes between the first half of 2003 and 2002. The number of armed robberies increased by more than 30 percent, while the number of armed gang robberies increased by about 25 percent, according to the statistics quoted on an online report by *The Star/Asia News Network*. This was followed by attempted murder, up 23.53 percent. Other crimes that showed increase included rapes, house break-ins, vehicle thefts, and property-related offences.

Commenting on the figures, the Foundation Vice-Chairman, Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, said, "One of the root causes of all our social ills lies in the serious moral degradation affecting our younger generation, coupled with the lack of parenting skills and guidance to enable children to tread the right path," he said.

How apt it was then when Cindy Jacobs, during her message at the Klang Valley Merdeka prayer rally, spoke about what God was about to do with our Christian youths (see page 2).

Her message brought much excitement and hope that God would visit the Church, and through it, arrest the decaying condition of our society and finally, bring fresh winds of changes. In other words: Revival.

Before Revival Falls

Revival signals a manifestation of God's power in our midst. But for revival to come, it must be preceded by prayer. This will then lead to changed lives, changed values and ultimately, transformed communities. Some may be tempted to ask if prayer really matters. Has intercession any effect on our lives, our community, our nation? Most, if not all, Christians would reply with an unequivocal, perhaps academic 'YES'. And yet, when we consider the amount of time people spend in intercession, or look at the attendance of churches' prayer meetings, we can't help feeling that intercession ranks low in the course of our daily lives (see page 6).

Most churches struggle with low turnout at their weekly prayer meetings. But against this dismal backdrop, there are signs that increasingly, Christians are being burdened to pray like never before. Across the country, small prayer groups are springing up, Christians are forming prayer groups in their workplaces, while churches are making efforts to hold joint intercession. These are encouraging signs towards the unity that we have yearned for.

Has prayer any effect? Consider what Benjamin Franklin, one of the leading founding fathers of the U.S.A. who signed the

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Divine Gift for Nation's Birthday

More than 3,000 people packed the PGRM hall at the Klang Valley Merdeka Prayer Rally.



A generation of youths who is not ashamed of the gospel, who will take 'pray breaks' instead of play breaks – that is God's present to Malaysia on its 46th birthday, according to Cindy Jacobs. And providentially, the present comes wrapped in a Scripture verse – Malachi 4:6, "And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers..."

"This moving of young hearts will be one of the greatest missionary movements in Malaysia," Jacobs said in her message at the yearly Klang Valley Merdeka (National Day) Prayer Rally organised by NECF Malaysia.

This year's Klang Valley gathering is believed to be the largest ever with more than 3,000 Christians from various churches and denominations gathered at Dewan PGRM, Kuala Lumpur, on Aug 29 to pray for the country. The event was graced by Deputy Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah Badawi, who was unable to attend. Energy, Multimedia and Communications Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie represented him to read his speech.

Jacobs, the President and founder of US-based Generals for Intercession, called for intense intercession for the nation because it would bring God's promises to fulfilment. "The harvest is here and our prayers will ripen the harvest," she urged.

She also reminded participants of the

Bible's command to pray for the country's leaders. It is irrelevant who the leaders are and how we feel about them, she said. "The command is that we pray for them, whoever they are."

Jacobs was echoing NECF Vice-Chairman Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng who earlier said the country was in great need



Rev Eu (left) welcoming Datuk Moggie to the rally.

of our prayers during this time when it is undergoing leadership transition, and facing terrorist threat, a breakdown in social security and other troubles.

In his welcome message to the participants, Rev Eu also paid tribute to Prime Minister Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir who has led the nation for the past 22 years – nearly half the nation's existence. Rev Eu declared him the 'Father of modern Malaysia' and credited him for putting the country on steady economic growth and for his rule of religious and racial tolerance.

"We also look forward to working with Pak Lah (Dato' Badawi), our future prime

• GO TO NEXT PAGE

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

minister who is indeed a gift from God to Christians in the nation. Let us pray for a Joseph generation who will support him and help him to rule our country," he added.

Dato' Badawi said in his speech that the Government was committed to religious freedom and appealed to Malaysian Christians to "continue to be model citizens who reject and denounce those who seek to sow discord in our society" (see page 5 for the full text of his speech).

Participants also spent time praying for the country, led by NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong. Among the issues prayed over were the eradication of polarisation, economic sufficiency, terrorist threat and religious liberty.

ELSEWHERE...

KULAI Christians held its first Merdeka Prayer Rally at Kulai First Assembly on Aug 26, which was organised by the Kulai Ministers' Fellowship. Over 100 Christians from five churches in the Johor town participated in the rally that was conducted in English, Tamil and Mandarin. **Pr Tay Wah Seng**, the guest speaker, reported that God's presence was strongly felt and the participants, despite their language differences, enjoyed a wonderful time of fellowship. Prayer truly breaks language boundaries.

Pr Tay was also present at the **JOHOR BARU** rally held at The Vineyard on Aug 29. Present were more than 420 Christians from over 10 churches, including the Tamil brethren who joined in via closed circuit television and heard the message in English interpreted in Tamil. The worship team comprised members from four churches, signalling a willingness of churches to find time to work together. **Pr Tay** also noticed a better participation of the traditional churches this year. The mood was one of celebration, joy and spontaneity.

Further up in **BATU PAHAT**, the turnout at the town's first Merdeka rally at Gereja Grace on Aug 22 overwhelmed the organising committee comprising members from several churches, **Jennifer Wong** reported. The rally attended by about 500 Christians from eight churches was followed by a time of *makan* fellowship where participants mingled unreservedly. Those who spoke to Jennifer said they were impacted by the individual prayer declarations of the pastors from the eight churches. They believed their prayers were an oracle to the community. To keep up this spirit of togetherness, the committee has planned another *makan* fellowship on Sept 26 for pastors and elders.

There was a power failure halfway through the rally at **SANDAKAN**, Sabah, but electricity was restored after prayer, reported **Lucy Chua** who joined some 300 Christians there. Her husband, Rev Johnson Chua who heads Open Doors Malaysia, shared what God was doing in some countries. The congregation then separated in three language groups – English, Hakka and BM – for prayers.

The **SEREMBAN** rally on Aug 29 attracted over 550 Christians from 15 churches, said **Pr Voon Yuen Woh**. The bilingual meeting (English and Mandarin) was organised by the Seremban Pastors Fellowship and held at Agape Gospel Assembly. Rev Barry Boucher, who earlier spoke at the Merdeka Prayer Conference in Petaling Jaya, spoke from the Book of Daniel and later prayed for those pastors present and their spouses. At the



Count me in... Jacobs challenging the youths who responded to the altar call at the Klang Valley rally. Above: Youths presenting a 'Light Up Your Nation' dance. Top: Dancers from Full Gospel Tabernacle presenting a cultural dance at the opening of the Prayer Conference from Aug 27 to 29 at its premises.



gathering, the congregation was reminded of God's goodness to Malaysia and a sense of assurance flooded the congregation that God is in control of the events in their churches, their city and the nation.

In **KUANTAN**, 200 Christians from nine churches of various denominations gathered for the English-speaking rally at Triquetra Revival Centre on Aug 29, reported **Eng Cheng**. The rally was organised by the Kuantan English Pastors and Leaders Fellowship which also organised prayer drives around the Kuantan town. At the same time, about 100 Christians from seven churches attended the Chinese rally organised by the Kuantan Chinese Pastors and Leaders Fellowship at Christian Praise Centre.

Some 190 **ALOR STAR** Christians stayed up on Aug 30 to welcome the start of Malaysia's 47th year. The Merdeka rally held at Full Gospel Church was organised by the Alor Star Pastors Fellowship. The rally was a unifying event for the six churches represented and there was a spirit of unity and purpose, **Karen** reported.

Likewise in **KUALA TERENGGANU**, the Christians who turned up at the rally welcomed the dawn of a new year for the

• GO TO NEXT PAGE



“Remain humble”
...Dr Chan

Mending Ties

CHRISTIANS endowed with the gift of tongues should acknowledge that they are actually weak in prayer, and they need the Holy Spirit to help them to pray.

“They should not be proud if they have the gift (of tongues),” said Rev Dr Ernest Chan at a prayer conference attended by about 260 people from the Chinese churches throughout the country.

Coming from a strong Presbyterian background, the U.S. seminary principal recalled how his close friends avoided him when he first started exercising the gifts of the Spirit many years ago.

Lately, God has been burdening him to renew his relationship with those friends, to reconcile with them. “Whenever we get together these days, I do not talk about my

charismatic experience or the signs and wonders I have experienced unless they bring up the subject first,” he said. And he would talk about them humbly and gently. “In the end, there’s nothing to be proud of. The gifts are from the Holy Spirit anyway,” he added.

A day earlier, Dr Chan spoke at a Chinese prayer conference attended by some 260 people. Prior to that on Aug 29, he spoke at the Klang Valley combined Chinese churches Merdeka Prayer Rally at FGA, Kuala Lumpur. Around 1,000 Christians turned up to pray for the country.

Dr Chan will return in November to conduct a conference for pastors and leaders in the Chinese ministry (see *Coming Up* on page 15).

•FROMPAGE 1

Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, did when the leaders of the new nation were confronted with an impasse.

“The Constitutional Convention was on the verge of total failure over the issue of whether small states should have the same representation as large states. In this hopeless situation, 81-year-old Benjamin Franklin offered a suggestion.

He was convinced Scripture is right when it states, “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1), so he said: ‘Gentlemen, I have lived a long time and am convinced that God governs in the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? I move that prayer imploring the assistance of Heaven be held every morning before we proceed to business.’

“The motion carried. From then on prayer was offered each morning. The change after prayer was introduced was so dramatic that in a short while a compromise was reached which is still in effect today.” – Story from *The Bible Friend*.

Let us not give up meeting together and praying together in agreement. There is great power there.

•FROMPAGE 3

nation. The rally at Lifeline AOG started at 9p.m. and lasted until 6a.m. the next day. Though the number was small (about 50), the number of churches represented was significant – seven out of 10 churches in the town. Also significant was the fact that the rally was the first combined churches all-night prayer gathering, said **Pr Koshy Thomas**. Participants spent time in corporate repentance over the sin of racialism within the Christian community.

The **PENANG** rally at The DOME on Aug 31 recorded a huge turnout of 1,100 Christians from the evangelical, Catholic and mainline churches. Organised by the Christian Federation of Malaysia, the rally was upbeat, worshipful and filled with a sense of unity in prayer, observed **Rev Koe Choon Huan**, Chairman of the Penang CFM chapter. The 40 churches represented at the rally demonstrated a growing unity among the island’s churches.

At least 16 other towns nationwide also held the annual Merdeka prayer rally at various times before Aug 31.

Children Join 40-Day Fast

DEBBIE Lim is only 10 years old but she has already grasped a spiritual discipline that many Christian adults are still struggling with. Together with 27 other children from the Alor Star Trinity Baptist Church, she joined thousands of adults throughout the nation in the recent Merdeka 40-day Prayer and Fast.

Debbie skipped dinner every night for 40 days and at the end of the fasting period, with the help of her mother, estimated the money she would have saved from skipping the meals and donated it to charity. Her aunt and also Bible class teacher, Pam Sim, recalled: “During the period, we sometimes went out for dinner and she would sit and watch us eat. She was really determined to fast.”

Pam said that she decided to challenge her class of nine- to 12-year-old children to fast after NECF Malaysia staff went to the church in June to launch the Prayer and Fast. The response astounded her. In all, 28 children participated. Most of them fasted at various times, but four (including Debbie) fasted the entire period. Did Debbie understand the significance of the fast? Pam believed she did. “Her mother used the NECF prayer and fast booklet for their nightly devotion. I’m sure Debbie would have learned from there. Also, she was present when the NECF staff launched the prayer and fast in church.”

Lessons to glean from Debbie’s story: Never underestimate children’s ability to grasp spiritual matters and their tenacity to persevere; and never underrate the influence parents (or aunts) and the church have over their children.



Zero Tolerance For Extremism



Full text of speech by Deputy Prime Minister YAB Dato' Seri Abdullah Bin Haji Ahmad Badawi (read by Minister of Energy, Communications and Multimedia YB Datuk Amar Leo Moggie) at the Klang Valley Merdeka Prayer Rally on Aug 29.

I would like to express my gratitude to the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia for inviting me to officiate this august and meaningful gathering of evangelical Christians to pray for the nation during the Merdeka Day. Your initiative in organising the National Day Prayer Rally in Kuala Lumpur and other cities in Malaysia reflects your commitment and loyalty to the nation. On behalf of the Government allow me to congratulate and thank you for your efforts.

I would also like to congratulate the evangelical Christian community for your splendid efforts in raising the sum of RM700,000 for charity during your last national 40-Day Prayer and Fast last year. The funds that you raised were not only channeled to local charities but also to refugees of Afghanistan and Palestine, demonstrating the universal concern felt concerning the plight of the Afghans and Palestinians.

Christian Community Lauded

Ladies and Gentlemen, as an important segment of the Malaysian people, the Christian community has demonstrated civic mindedness, community leadership and an unflinching commitment to the ideals that this nation is founded upon. Your community has played a vital role in national development and your efforts tonight, once again, demonstrates the love and faith you have for this nation of ours.

Your commitment towards peace, prosperity, tolerance and spiritual development has helped Malaysia develop into a model nation of plurality and progress.

We are still a young nation

consolidating our unique identity. The nation-building strategy that was envisaged in the *Rukun Negara* underpins our unity today and will be an integral guiding principle of nation development as we move towards meeting the challenges of Vision 2020. In this regard, what is most important in my mind is that we continue to live together in peace. We must be an example to the world that racial and religious diversity in a country is not a recipe for conflict. Instead, in Malaysia, it is celebrated and enriches the lives of all Malaysians.

With this in mind, I commend the leaders of the Christian community in Malaysia who have always rallied to support government efforts to maintain racial and religious peace and harmony. Your contributions, particularly in

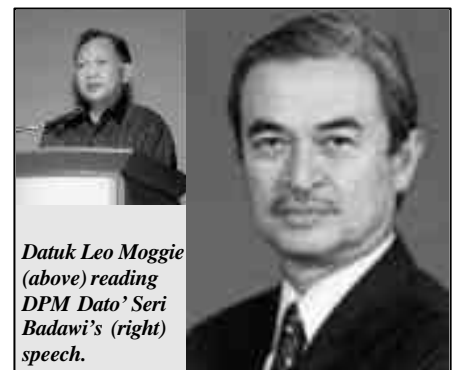
"...there is no place in Malaysia for extremism or terrorism. This is the Government's firm commitment to the Malaysian people."

providing suggestions for national unity strategies, have been significant. Your participation has also been felt at the grass roots, community level.

Bring back common ethical values

However, more need to be done by all our communities at addressing some pressing social problems faced by our nation. We are all well aware of the problems moral decay has brought to our society. Globalisation and modernisation have brought negative trends that are influencing our youth.

Moral and ethical values that are universal to all Malaysians are increasingly brushed aside by many of our youth. We must therefore join hands – Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and others



Datuk Leo Moggie (above) reading DPM Dato' Seri Badawi's (right) speech.

– to reassert the primacy of ethical values in our society, values that are common to all our faiths and tradition. If we do not take responsibility in addressing this problem, our society risks great dislocations in the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in Malaysia, religious freedom is provided for constitutionally. Although Islam is the religion of the Federation, the Malaysian Government and People are committed to the principle of Freedom of Worship. This is a crucial principle in a multi-religious country like ours. Peace and stability have been achieved because of this policy and I am firmly committed to ensuring that we remain a tolerant society.

In this regard, let me reiterate what has been a consistent message for me during my political career: We will not tolerate any form of extremism or terrorism. Whether it manifests itself in racial, religious or ideological terms, there is no place in Malaysia for extremism or terrorism. This is the Government's firm commitment to the Malaysian people.

However, in order to curb extremists and terrorists, the Government needs the continuing support of the Malaysian people. We need responsible citizenship

• GO TO PAGE 12

Rousing the Slumbering Church

Most churches, particularly those in the urban areas, record low attendance for their weekly church prayer meeting (PM). Why is this so? Do numbers matter? Should churches make it compulsory for their leaders to attend their weekly PM? *Berita NECF* raises these and other questions with pastor-doctor Philip Lyn, who works as a medical specialist and at the same time, pastors Skyline SIB Church in Kota Kinabalu. He also leads the Kota Kinabalu inter-church city prayer network.

Why are PMs so poorly attended?

I get the impression talking to most pastors that less than 10 percent of the Sunday crowd attend PM. I see three reasons for this. Firstly, many PMs are often boring, dull, unimaginative and terribly intimidating. Few new believers would dare come and older believers know too much to want to come. Secondly, people do not feel ministered to. Either the meeting is too large and impersonal or too sombre and discouraging. Thirdly, familiarity breeds contempt. Either the meeting is too predictable and passé or too pre-creational, that is without any form or void!

The former sends us to the proverbial Land of Nod; the latter invites frequent hijacks by overzealous personalities (usually the same ones) masquerading as intercessors. I feel the best advertisement for the PM is when it is led regularly by a pastor committed to prayer, or by a trusted leader in synch with the pastor.

What does the attendance of the PM say about the church's spiritual state?

Just as there is no single index that adequately measures the overall health of the economy, PM attendance alone may be misleading. Other indicators of church health include Sunday worship attendance, commitment to the vision, level of giving, and depth of the Word. PM attendance however carries a strong qualitative index.

A rapidly growing PM reflects spiritual hunger, while a low turnout reflects passivity or apathy and these are usually symptoms of potential or present spiritual problems. Without prayer, big churches become mere corporations and smaller churches become clubs because there is no awe of God and no ongoing spiritual base to purposefully unify everything we do. As the Psalmist says we will merely know His acts but not His ways.

With today's hectic lifestyle, will decentralised PMs (small prayer groups) be a better alternative to the weekly PM?

I don't think it's a case of either or. It should be BOTH AND. Centralised PM generates momentum in the prayer life of the church. However small group praying is more personal-need orientated and helps people to learn how to pray aloud, something that large group praying tends to lack. I am a strong believer in centralised praying because of the potential unique corporate anointing present. The mix of corporate faith, excitement and vision has a powerful carry-over effect into the Sunday service each week. The gifts of the Spirit are often more evident in corporate

settings as well. In Skyline, we allow frequent breaks for small group prayer to be mixed in with the flow of the corporate prayer. This way everyone gets to pray and yet we do not lose the corporate anointing.



Should churches make it compulsory for their leaders to attend the weekly PM?

Yes. Attendance of leaders is vital to the success of the church PM. They should all be asked to come, but we need to do it in such a way that leaders have a wonderful option they can't default from. If leaders do not attend they send a message that corporate prayer is optional, which is not. They also have no credibility to encourage others to attend. I run a short leaders meeting every week to review the Sunday service and to tie up loose ends. This is followed immediately by the mid-week prayer meeting. Ninety percent of leaders stay for the prayer meeting because they are already there (and also of course, because they want to, I hope). So that works out well.

Does your church have a strong emphasis on prayer?

We have a growing emphasis on prayer but would obviously like to see it much stronger. As a pastor I am initially more concerned about breadth rather than depth, that is, I would like to see every member mobilised to pray anytime anywhere for any need. This means developing a praying culture that is contagious. The church talks about it, gets excited about it, and does it outside set times like when we visit each other or meet for lunch etc. We also teach young Christians to pray early in their Christian life. However, I still find breadth is no adequate substitute for depth.

Developing depth is so vital. Overnight prayer, fasting, learning to pray with greater authority, faith and strong worship life are all so vital for breakthroughs in the church and personal lives. Every pastor longs for both breadth and depth in his life and his church. For Skyline I started going for breadth first. That's a pastoral reflex. We have only begun to grow some depth this year.

Would your church consider getting a full-time worker just for the prayer ministry?

Administrative aspects of prayer (usually in larger churches) should of course be looked after by someone, perhaps a pastor or full-time worker (who has the responsibility) for prayer AMONG other duties. But I would be reluctant to call him/her a Prayer Pastor or a full-time worker for prayer. The titles reinforce the perception that prayer is for 'professionals' only or that serious prayer is only for gifted professionals. In other words, I'm all for a functional designation but not a title.

Share some ways your church uses to promote the weekly PM.

The midweek PM should be touted as the heartbeat of the church, which it is. During the Sunday service, we share what happened at the last PM and answered prayers. PMs should be exciting times of worship, large and small group prayers, and sharing of hearts. People should come away from the PM feeling ministered, and that we have participated in something that made the difference. We must meet with God, then they will have no problems worshipping or praying for the church or the world's needs.



Saying No

By Miriam Adeney

How Do You Slice Your Time?

One tool is the word *no*. *No* is a knife word. No job. No husband. No children. No entrance. No exit. No hope. Not here. Not home. Not done. Nobody. Nothing. No where.

Yet we need it.

The ancient Chinese philosopher once said, 'Before a man can do things, there must be things he will not do.' How much more true this is for a woman.

How do we slice our priorities? When her husband took a job in agricultural research in the Philippines, Betty Mae Dyck was sure she could get by without a maid. Of course I can do all my own housework! she thought.

However, she says, "When I had lived in the Philippines

for less than two weeks during the steaming rainy season, I began to think differently about household help. My energy level sank in the debilitating heat and humidity. Perspiration pouring from our sweat glands made two complete changes of clothing a day a social necessity.

The frozen and canned fruits and vegetables, mixes and other convenience foods I had relied on so heavily in Canada were unavailable in the Filipino market. Vegetables, fruits, meats and eggs had to be bargained for – each item separately. Then one had to hurry home and wash everything carefully to prevent spoilage. It seemed one had to bargain for, wash, sort, peel and chop everything before any actual cooking took place. The process took its toll in emotional as well as physical energy.

During those early weeks, it became clear that I couldn't manage to keep my house clean, let alone attractive, and my husband fed, doing everything alone. Even if I could do it alone, I already knew I would just barely manage. Not enough time would be left to keep myself properly groomed and dressed, and no time at all

for a ministry to the people around me. That was frightening, discouraging, and disappointing.¹

Betty Mae hired maids, struggled to discover rules for relating to them successfully, and then went on to teach in local public and Christian schools, to capitalise small handicraft businesses run by needy Christians, to conduct innumerable Bible Studies, to do church work, to write books, and to counsel a continual flood of guests. Meanwhile, by hiring maids, she gave work to Filipinos and led several of them to Christ. To do

"Of course we can't do it all."

that, to have this expanded ministry, she had to let others into her privacy. She had to share the control of her home.

Professional writer Ellen Seton speaks for many when she admits, "Make no mistake – I don't have it all. No woman with a job and children can have it all – that's women's fib. What she can have is a little bit of a lot of things. What I have is a lot of time for my child and my work, only a little bit of time to be alone with my husband and almost no time for anything else."²

What's disappeared from Ellen Seton's life? Baths (replaced by showers). Crossword puzzles. Pets. Nail polishing. Sending birthday cards. Any cooking fancier than cheese sandwiches. Languorous, spontaneous love with her husband. Lunches with friends. Sometimes even Christmas cards. Weekend mornings in bed with the newspaper and coffee. Leisurely strolling arm-in-arm in the evening. Spur of the moment plans to slip away for the weekend.

Of course we can't do it all. We look at Betty Mae and Ellen. Along with saying

no to some things, they have said yes to other things, significant things.

Don't Answer the Wrong Question

Sweet Suffering is a book by a 68-year-old psychiatrist, Natalie Shainess.³ It aims to teach us women how to be more assertive. Among its recommendations: When someone asks you a question, don't feel you must answer. Don't feel limited to that topic. Follow the example of politicians. Answer briefly, then expand the topic to an area that interests you more.

Or when people have an agenda or plan, don't argue. But consider whether you should have different plans. If so, make them, and operate in terms of those.

For example, at a party someone asks you, "And what do you do?"

"I'm a homemaker," you smile. The conversation dwindles, and you feel resentful because your chosen job hasn't been given much respect.

But it's partly your fault. How does the stranger know you're committed to homemaking rather than having just gotten stuck in it? You must take the responsibility to channel the conversation in ways that will enable you to share yourself.

"And what do you do?"

"I'm a homemaker," you smile, "and I happen to be particularly interested in the development of children." Or, "and I put a lot of my energies into local school activities," or whatever distinguishes you. Give your conversational partner a break, and a direction.

How like Jesus this sounds. When people asked Him questions, he often turned the questions around and led the discussion to something quite different.

• GO TO NEXT PAGE



Book Writers' Retreat with Miriam Adeney

Miriam Adeney (back row, 2nd from right) led this two-week retreat at the OMF Bungalow in cool Cameron Highlands from Aug 10. Participants had a profitable and fruitful time.

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

People continually struggled to fit Him into their plans. Yet how often he slipped away.

In Mark 1:37–39, for example, Peter hustles up: “Your public is calling! You must come!”

Jesus shrugs, “I have another agenda.” And He walks away. Jesus knew how to say no – in order to say yes.

Women traditionally have been more adaptive than assertive. We have fit in more than we have spoken up. We have served more than we have taken charge. We have nurtured domestic cocoons more than we have confronted world powers.

Women traditionally have been more adaptive than assertive.

Adapting, fitting in, serving, and nurturing are beautiful. We don't want to give up those roles. But we need to balance between being adaptive and being assertive. Between serving others' priorities and obeying our own vision.

Fundamentally, of course, our focus is neither others' priorities nor our own, but the priorities of the kingdom of Christ. In practice we don't always agree what the priorities of the kingdom are. So we must give space to those with whom we disagree. We must treat them with respect. Nevertheless, we must return again and again to Jesus' pithy reminder that if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, all our various activities will find their rightful niche.

To be continued in the next issue of *Women to Women*. This is taken from Miriam Adeney, *A Time for Risking*, Regent College Publishing, Vancouver. Used with permission. Miriam Adeney is Associate Professor of Global and Urban Ministry at Seattle Pacific University, and Research Professor of Mission at Regent College. She is a member of University Presbyterian church in Seattle, Washington, where she lives with her husband and three sons.

Footnotes

¹ Ruth Klassen, *How Green is My Mountain* (Downers Grove Ill.: Inter varsity Press, 1979) pp. 37-39

² Ellen Seton, 'Women's Fib: You can have it All' *Redbook*, 1984, p.160

³ Natalie Shainess, *Sweet Suffering* (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1984)

Integrity and Family Relationships

By Mrs Chan Tean Yin

(PART II)

3. Trustworthiness

Another characteristic of a person of integrity is trustworthiness. A person of integrity is unimpeachable. He/she stands by the principles no matter what the consequences. A person of integrity realises there are moral absolutes even in a world of relative values.

There are principles worth standing by and worth promoting. There are values that should govern our lives. We have a responsibility to follow God's law rather than the law of the crowd. When the book of Proverbs talks of the 'integrity of the upright' it implies that we adhere to God's will and God's laws. We have a duty to obey God's absolute commands in our lives and become men and women of integrity.

Importance of Integrity in Daily Life

It's been said that we may be the only Bible some people ever read. In other words, people around us often judge the truthfulness of Christianity by its effect in our lives. If they see us as hypocrites, they may not go any further in the investigation of the gospel.

Everyday we rub shoulders with people who are watching us. Your life will demonstrate to them whether Christianity is true or false. They make value judgements about you by your attitudes and actions.

What about the effect on our children and family members? By the same token, our children watch us, the way we speak and act. They register every detail of our ethical or unethical examples and imbibe the values we subtly and unconsciously impart to them.

Everyday we rub shoulders with people who are watching us.

Conclusion

Today everyone is bemoaning the corruption and immorality that have eroded our society. The saying, 'You cannot trust anyone in this world, not the politicians, not the business people, and not even the clergyman, rings a great deal of truth. This moral and ethical erosion has eaten into the very foundation of our social system, the family. It's hard to say where the root of the problem lies, the family or the society.

It's the chicken and egg dilemma. Whichever side the debate supports, the family unit has definitely been affected by the tide of declining ethical standards that are corrupting our society. The family is the most basic of our human subsystems. Thus, what happens outside the subsystem affects it, and vice versa.

• GO TO NEXT PAGE

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Faithful to the end – one way of demonstrating integrity.



In order for the larger system, i. e. the society, to be strong and ‘whole’ and integrated, the family unit must be strengthened. The only way to bring back moral and ethical wholeness in our society is through bringing back integrity in the family relationships.

‘Charity begins at home.’ We can say that ‘ethical values are more often than not ‘caught’ in the home. As the parents model integrity and ethical values in their interactions with their spouses and family members, the children learn without being preached at.

The characteristics that are vital in family relationships include:

1. Vow-keeping
2. Honesty
3. Trustworthiness

Parents must demonstrate these qualities in relating to their children and in their everyday actions. There should be no compromise or double standards if we are to influence the future generation to be people of integrity. We must not just be “speaking the truth” but also “doing the truth”. If we do this, we leave behind a rich legacy. ‘A righteous man who walks in his integrity. How blessed are his sons after him” (Prov. 20:7).

Mrs Chan Tean Yin is a member of the NECF Malaysia Commission on Women’s Concern.

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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:

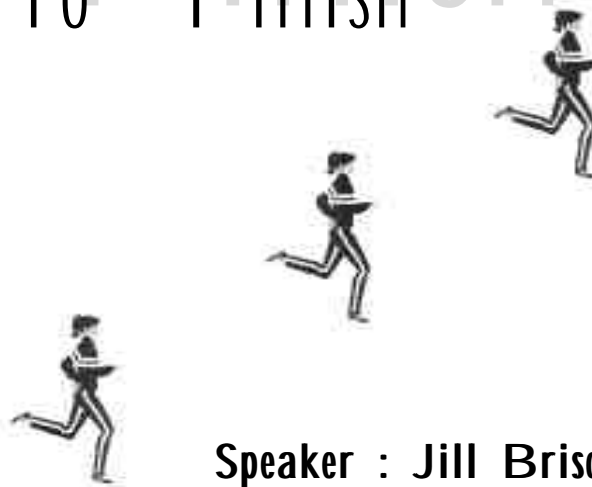
- educating and raising awareness of the social and theological issues affecting women
- stimulating efforts towards networking and dialogue amongst women
- encouraging one another in the use of our gifts and talents for the Lord’s Kingdom

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.

Faith: Enough
 To Finish



Speaker : Jill Briscoe

Date : 3 Sept. 2003

**Host: NECF Malaysia
 Commission on Women’s Concern**

The NECF Malaysia conference room was packed. Tea time meant squeezing your way through to get at the snacks and drinks.

But nobody complained. The 115 women who attended this half-day seminar enjoyed good teaching and good fellowship.

Jill taught from the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations. She reminded the women of their primary calling: we are called into a relationship with God, to love and obey Him. Our intimacy with the Lord has to grow and we are to take care of this vital relationship. The first calling then enables us to discharge our secondary calling meaningfully. The secondary calling has to do with the specific tasks we do: as mothers, teachers, etc.

Here are some of the key thoughts shared at the seminar:

- God saved Jeremiah in the pit before He saved him out of the pit.
- Always remember: His Word in my heart, His work in my hands.
- God is in control when we are out of control.
- Lay down your dreams – learn from Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe.
- The secret is to be more concerned about God’s heart and His matters than ours.
- Use your sorrows and your pain for ministry.
- You mind your mind and God will mind your heart.
- If I follow my nature and count the things that have gone wrong, I will be downcast.
- Thank God He gives strength for each new day!

Un-tagging the Intercessor

Intercessors are generally viewed as believers who engaged in wild prophetic claims and dramatic visions. If that is not enough, they are also seen as gossipers and rumour mongers, perhaps because most of them are women.

So, it was little wonder that Grace Hee shuddered when she heard God calling her into a deeper involvement in the prayer ministry in 1997. “But the Lord dealt hard with me, showing me that to be an intercessor is His call for me. In fact, it is the call of every believer,” she recalls.

Grace, who now heads the NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission, says that people are often taken aback by the emotional fervour of intercessors when they are praying.

“Intercessors weep a lot not because they have a larger reservoir of tears. It’s because when they come before God, they see what He sees and feel what He feels, and suddenly, not knowing why, we weep along with Him. That accomplishes far more I think than a thousand words at the pulpit persuading people to change. It moves the heart and hand of God,” Grace quickly adds.

She believes the unflattering perception of intercessors has not affected the ministry of intercession as much as it has weakened the Church. “As long as the perception remains that intercession is only for weirdos, old ladies and aunties, the Church cannot fully arise and shine. For how can passion and compassion for souls and the heart of God for this nation be imparted except at the feet of Jesus and at the foot of the cross.”

Like any other ministry, intercession has its share of black sheep – immature Christians with unhealed wounds, weak discipleship training or poor character development, comments Pr Peter De Run who heads Sabah-based Petros Ministries. Hence,

Grace Hee



Pr Peter De Run



it is not fair to generalise and label them. “Many intercessors are actually warm, loving and genuinely concerned for His Kingdom and the people and events they pray for,” he says.

“But strangely, intercession attracts people with unhealed wounds, perhaps because it provides an avenue to minister to them, and a safe place for them to vent their unspoken miseries,” he adds, calling for grace to be offered to such ‘flaky intercessors’.

Meanwhile, Grace yearns for more people, especially men, to take up the call to stand in the gap. It appears her desire is being fulfilled. Today, more believers are being burdened to pray like never before, perhaps driven by the dramatic events happening worldwide. Furthermore, intercessors are also gaining respect as they become more mature and wiser.

What can intercessors do to help bring integrity and credibility to the intercession ministry? Grace believes in wisdom and timing. “Mary was wise to keep in her heart the many prophetic words given to her. When the time came, she shared them and was honoured. Had she blared them earlier, she might have been stoned for heresy. Timing makes all the difference.

“So, if God has shown you (intercessors) something that is to come, it is better to hold your peace, continue to pray and ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom to share it in a way that edifies and not

• GO TO NEXT PAGE

Primers for Promoting Prayer

GAN CHIN LEONG, the pastor in charge of prayer, follow-up and counselling at DUMC, Petaling Jaya, shares some ways his church uses to promote prayer, both corporately and individually.

• **Leadership by example** Firstly, the senior pastor, or pastor responsible for the church, must take prayer seriously. To demonstrate his commitment to prayer, he should attend all corporate prayer meetings. Some churches make it compulsory for their leaders to attend their church prayer meetings. This is a good practice as again, it is leadership by example. DUMC observes this practice.

• **Organised congregational prayer** Our corporate prayer meetings are held on alternate Tuesday morning from 5.30 to 7.00, but not everybody can attend. To ensure the whole congregation prays as one, we have weekly corporate prayer time,

which is incorporated into the Sunday worship service. The prayer items are listed in the worship bulletin, and we allocate time for prayer over the items. Time is also allocated for personal prayer ministry after the service for those requiring prayer. Three times a year, the church holds three-day prayer and fast.

• **In print** Besides listing prayer items in the weekly bulletin, we also produce a monthly prayer newsletter, which is circulated to all members.

• **Mobilising Support** It is necessary to have a pastor in charge of prayer, who will ‘champion’ that cause. But to ensure adequate support for his ministry, we appoint prayer secretaries and coordinators whose duties are to help mobilise prayer in their cell groups. They see to it that intercession has a place in the weekly cell meetings. In addition, they help form prayer chains that link cell members. They also help the pastor in encouraging church members to form prayer cells in the homes (among family members); schools or study places (among schoolmates); or workplaces (with colleagues).

At every opportunity, prayer is consciously emphasised until it becomes a way of life for the individual and of the church.

'Prepare teens for NS'

CHRISTIAN teens serving the national service programme must balance courage with wisdom when sharing the gospel during their three-month stay in camp.

"Eighteen-year-olds are usually passionate about their beliefs, whatever they may be. An 18-year-old Christian may be so passionate about sharing his faith that he provokes antagonism from other campers. This may affect the image of Christianity at large," said NECF Malaysia Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong after attending a July meeting with Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on National Service.

He advised churches to teach their teens, who are potential participants, to

assess situations so that they know when to speak and when to keep silent. Above all, churches must impress on their teens the necessity to 'walk the talk' as their lives are the best advertisements, especially when they are going to live with non-believers for three months.

Rev Wong also said that NECF would be submitting to the Defence Minister the *Character First* programme which has been adopted by some schools in the US and Singapore. The programme, which was developed by Bill Gothard for the Institute of Basic Life Principles, focuses on helping individuals develop good characteristics.

In addition, NECF will also submit a proposal on how to introduce and conduct chaplaincy for Christian participants.

During the meeting, which was attended by representatives from the Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism, Datuk Najib assured that participants would be given time off to attend their weekly worship meetings, and that the committee will even provide transport to the places of worship (such as mosques, churches and temples).

He said that the final draft of the curriculum would be forwarded to the religious groups for their comments before it is officially endorsed.

Presbyterian Churches Adopt *Appreciation Day*



Elder Siew holding the NECF Appreciation Day poster. The Synod paid for 100 posters to be sent to all its churches in the country.

PRESBYTERIAN churches throughout Malaysia will hold appreciation services for their pastors and full-time workers in September. About 100 churches in the three languages are expected to participate in this event proposed by their ruling body, the Malaysian Presbyterian Synod, who in turn is responding to NECF Malaysia's *Appreciation Day* initiative.

The Synod has informed the churches to allocate one Sunday worship service within the month for the appreciation service, according to its Executive Secretary, Elder Andrew Siew.

"We have asked our congregations to collect a special offering that will go to our pastors welfare fund as a token of appreciation to their pastors," he said. The fund is used to cover expenses incurred by the pastors for emergency incidents.

The Presbyterian is the second denomination to take up the *Appreciation Day* initiative. In July, the SIB Sarawak Executive Council, at the urging of the then president, the late Rev Kalip Basar, adopted the proposal as an annual event for all its churches. The Council allocated the last Sunday of August for its churches to hold the appreciation service.

•FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

pull down," she advises. She suggests intercessors steer clear of dating events, and urges them to befriend the people they are praying for. Credibility and integrity will not be an issue when intercession is based on friendship with God and man, she says, pointing to Job 16:20-21 as her reference, "My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his

friend".

Pr Peter concurs. "First, develop strong, healthy and loving relationships with your pastor and church leaders. Only then will you have the right to speak."

As a sound understanding of the Bible will 'restrain' intercessors from side-tracking, it is therefore mandatory for intercessors to study God's Word. "But above all, let love be your reason for your prayers and all you do and say after interceding," he concludes.

Finding Good in Conflicts

THE Church should view conflicts positively as they allow personal and organisational growth, and provides opportunity for fostering better relationships. “Perceptually, we think that conflict is negative. We therefore tend to avoid talking about it and cover it up,” said Dr John Ng.

The absence of conflict was not a guarantee of relational wellness, cautioned the vice-president of Eagles Communication, Singapore. He was speaking to some 40 participants attending a consultation on conflict resolutions and mediation organised by the NECF Malaysia Research Commission. The consultation was a preliminary meeting to gather materials for developing guiding principles to help Christians in handling conflicts both within the church as well as in the marketplace.

What cause conflicts in the first place? The root cause is found in James 4:1–3, NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong pointed out. “Conflicts arise from unmet desires in our hearts,” he said.

Participants also brought up other causes of conflict, such as doctrinal disagreement, differences in visions, lack of core values or procedures within a structure, and personality differences. Personal shortcomings also contribute greatly to conflict, participants agreed, for example the inability to integrate spiritual

and pragmatic dimensions, lack of commitment to build and maintain relationship, lack of communication skills, business disputes due to greed, and personal emotional baggage.

The absence of good characters, courage and integrity, as well as the low degree of emotional and spiritual maturity in handling conflicts, might allow conflicts to degenerate into fights and quarrel, eventually causing bitter disunity.

Furthermore, whether a particular conflict would yield positive results depended on the attitudes of those involved, Rev Wong added. For example, when faced with conflicts, the normal human response is to focus passionately on the wrong committed by the other party. The Christian response would be to examine our hearts and search if and where we’ve erred.

Another speaker, Ang Ting Ting who heads the Eagles Mediation and Counselling Centre, shared the five stages of the mediation process: making opening statements – which helps to set the context; sharing perspectives; moving from positions to interests; generating and assessing options; and reaching an agreement.

From the legal perspective, lawyer Lee Min Choon’s paper advised churches to look into their constitutional structure as

Ang Ting Ting sharing her experience with participants.



this affects their legal position in disputes with their congregants. Nevertheless, he advised against seeking legal resolution as it undermines the authority of Scripture and church leadership. Furthermore, it erodes the integrity of the Church and church government.

“If there is litigation involving a church, it would mean in practical terms that the fate of the church would be decided by non-Christians, and in most cases, Muslims,” he said.

Participants later shared their experiences in resolving conflicts and identified several important elements that conflicting parties must remember in the process, such as respect for authority, establishing leadership covenant and recognising the spiritual dimension of conflict, that it is an essential part of the enemy’s strategy to cause disunity in the church.

At the end of the consultation, participants urged NECF to form a mechanism or ‘tribunal’ for Christian mediation, and also proposed that NECF introduce dispute grievances in the contracts of employees in Christian organisations. Eagles will consider training Malaysian Christians and build up a resource base in Malaysia.

• FROM PAGE 5



that ensures the spirit of tolerance enlightens our nation. We cannot afford to have groups which incite racial or religious hatred for their own gains.

I appeal to the Malaysian people and to the Christian community, in particular, to continue to be model citizens, who reject and denounce those who seek to sow discord in our society. Moderation must prevail over bigotry and dogma.

“Moderation must prevail over bigotry and dogma.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, our belief in God must illuminate our actions. It must be the basis for our development. Without faith in God shown by the Malaysian people, we would not be where we are today. Without faith in God we would not have been able to live peacefully with one

another. Without faith in God, we will not be as confident of the future of our blessed nation.

Continue your good deeds and work. Continue being model citizens of Malaysia. Continue protecting our heritage and values. Continue building a united Malaysia for all races, religions and cultures. Continue making the Vision 2020 a reality.

Thank you once again for allowing me to address the pastors, Christian leaders and members of different churches at this special occasion of the Church. May God be with you all.

Body of Variety



What do missionaries, school teachers, businessmen, lawyers, salesmen, housewives and doctors have in common? Who would have thought of putting Americans, Bataks, Indians, Chinese, Kenyahs, Lum Bawang, Semais in the same team?

Who, but God would have thought of calling such a diverse group of individuals from all over the world since the early 1930s to build His Church among the Orang Asli (OA)?

Such diversity would have preached a powerful message to the OA community. It would have been a witness that His love can break down barriers among men and make them one. This oneness would, in turn, authenticate the message of reconciliation proclaimed by His ministers of reconciliation.

Sadly, the Malaysian Church in general has failed to see this. Instead, of looking for ways to complement each other and strengthen the ministry among the OA, churches view differences with suspicion. The result: friction, duplication of ministries and disunity.

NECF Malaysia's formation of the OA Ministry Commission in 1999 was the latest attempt at bringing the different groups or factions together. While there is much cause to rejoice, much still needs to be done to strengthen the ministry and the Church's corporate witness to the OA.

Firstly, those involved in the ministry – both OA and non-OA – need to continue to build bridges. Instead of merely tolerating or avoiding one another, they need to come together and deal with their differences, bitterness and hurts.

Those who are friends and supporters of such ministers must lovingly but firmly encourage these ministers to be reconciled,

instead of taking sides. The need for forgiveness and reconciliation cannot be sidestepped if the OA Church is to move ahead, for those who cannot forgive cannot minister reconciliation.

Secondly, we need to deal with the issue of theological differences. We must acknowledge that many of our differences are not primarily theological, but are often due to our personalities and preferences.

However, what do we do in cases where Christians genuinely want to work together, but struggle with doctrinal differences? Perhaps, it is time for each denomination to take another look at its theological stance, to acknowledge that on its own, it does not have the whole picture. Or perhaps the time has come for the Church to call a 'council of elders', as in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Surely God will grant His Church wisdom to tackle this.

Thirdly, we need to understand the spiritual, political, economic and social needs of the OA. In preaching the gospel, we cannot avoid engagement with society on all these fronts. One issue the Church should no longer avoid is that of religious freedom for the OA. There are some segments within the Church that avoid

getting involved in the OA ministry for fear of the *possibility* of repercussions. In the end, it is the OA Christians, and often babes in Christ, who face the *reality* of harassment and intimidation.

Religious freedom is guaranteed for the OA in the Constitution, but the freedom erodes when the Church does not stand her ground. The few times that the Church had stood and appealed to the authorities, the authorities have responded positively and upheld the right of the OA to choose.

In the same way, the Church must continue to discharge her responsibility as 'salt and light' by speaking up for the OA or standing with them on other issues affecting them.

Finally, we – the non-OA – must change our perception towards the OA. We must understand that we are not going to a people who, like blank pieces of paper, are ready to receive whatever we teach them. Their simple mode of living does not mean they have simple minds. We need to go to them and be ready to listen and to learn from them.

Then, we will present the gospel in the words and forms that will penetrate deep enough to challenge their worldviews. But, more importantly, when we go with humility, we will find that they will help us unlock some treasures in the Word of God. They may help us make sense of the world of spirits, and what the Bible teaches about spiritual warfare.

We need to trust in the power of the gospel to transform the OA, and that they, too, can be a blessing to many nations.

(Note: The writer of the article is a non-OA who has been working among the OA for several years.)

Cartoon Series Teach Good Values

SHARING RESOURCES

Old Stories, Fresh Look

AVAILABLE now in Malaysia is an award-winning cartoon series of Bible stories and stories of famous people in history. Directed by former Walt Disney Studio Productions Director Richard Rich, the *Asia Angels Programme* is a quality production with original and fully-orchestrated music in VCD format.

The programme has 50 titles, all aiming to inspire viewers – expected to be mainly children – to absorb good values. For example, the "Joseph's Reunion" film teaches values such as faith, forgiveness, love and mercy. The half-hour films are available only in

English with Chinese subtitles. The local licences holder, Century Angels (CA) is currently working on dubbing the series into Mandarin, according to Brand and Marketing Manager Carmen Phang. She said CA will release three titles a month, beginning August.

One of CA's ministry aims is to "bless the church", hence the films can only be purchased from churches. The films come in sets of three titles at a cost of RM37 per set, of which RM10 is given back to the church. Those interested may telephone CA at 03-56318998.

Timeline: Homosexuals' Battle For The Priesthood

HOMOSEXUALS have long served in the Christian church, their sexual inclinations either ignored or unobserved. Over the past 30 years however, Christian denominations across the world have started to openly ordain gay men and women – appointments which cause as much controversy today as they did in the 1970s.

BBC News Online looks at some of the key dates in homosexuals' battle to join the priesthood.

1961 – The Vatican declares that all those "affected by the perverse inclination" towards homosexuality must be barred from taking religious vows or being ordained within the Roman Catholic Church.

June 1972 – Rev William Johnson becomes the first openly gay candidate to be ordained in a Christian institution, the United Church of Christ.

September 1972 – The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands becomes the first European Christian denomination to decide that lesbians and gays could serve as pastors. Over the next 30 years it is joined by a dozen other Protestant churches on the continent.

1988 – The United Church of Canada authorises the ordination of homosexuals, the first Christian denomination in the country to do so.

1989 – The US Anglican bishop John Spong ordains Robert Williams, a homosexual. Mr Williams later loses his job after denouncing monogamy and making untoward remarks about Mother

Theresa.

1994 – The Old Catholic Church of Austria opens the way for gay clergy along with other European Catholic churches which split with Rome in the 19th Century, including those in Germany and the Netherlands.

2000 – Norway's minister of churches upholds the appointment of Jene Torstein Olsen, the first openly gay clergyman hired to preach in the Church of Norway.

January 2003 – The Vatican's Congregation for Worship publishes an open letter stating: "The ordination to the priesthood of homosexual men, or men with homosexual tendencies, is absolutely inadvisable and imprudent, and from a pastoral point of view, very risky."

June 2003 – An acknowledged homosexual living a celibate life is appointed bishop of Reading, in England. He declines to take up the post after his appointment causes a bitter row within the international Anglican Church.

July 2003 – The Uniting Church in Australia, the country's third largest church, becomes its first mainstream denomination to accept homosexual priests. It also prompts bitter criticism from the Anglican Church.

August 2003 – The rank and file of the Anglican Church in America vote to elect an openly gay bishop, Rev Canon Gene Robinson of New Hampshire. Church leaders approve his appointment, but not before allegations of "inappropriate conduct" were made against him.

US AoG OK Divorced Marriages

THE Assemblies of God (AoG) Church General Council in the US has approved a controversial resolution giving its 33,000 ministers more authority to officiate at weddings of people who have been divorced.

"This is not a statement in favour of divorce," said Michael Jackson, a pastor from Janesville, Wisconsin, who sponsored the resolution. Instead, Jackson said, the resolution empowers pastors to make their own decisions about who should marry for the 2.7 million-member Pentecostal denomination in the US.

Under current church law, ministers can only officiate at the weddings of church members who were divorced because of adultery or abandonment. – *MCJ online*

Evangelicals excluded from official church list

A new government ministry in Sri Lanka has compiled a list of officially recognised churches. However, only the Roman Catholic Church and mainline Protestant denominations were included on the list, while independent and evangelical churches were excluded.

Evangelical Christians comprise less than one percent of the population in Sri Lanka, numbering about 120,000, according to the Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (EASL). "If a church is not included in this list, it will become a 'rebel' organisation as far as the government is concerned," said a member of the EASL.

The announcement by the ministry follows a series of violent attacks against churches in recent months. – *Compass*

National 'Anti-Conversion Rule'

INDIA'S coalition government, led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is about to introduce fresh rules to prevent religious conversion across the nation. Entitled "Change of Religion of the Members of SC/ST (Regulation and Approval) Rule," the law will come into effect once published in the official gazette. Framed by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the rule has no approval from the Indian Parliament.

The BJP is vigorously opposing conversion of backward Hindus to Christianity and Buddhism. "This will effectively deny a large section of Indians their right to religious faith ensured by India's Constitution," said Oliver D'Souza of the All India Christian Council. "This judgment and the present rule can be questioned on the grounds of fundamental rights. We will make sure that religious rights of the minorities are protected."

Mobilising Christians Against Poverty

THE World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and the Micah Network are creating a global evangelical campaign – called the Micah Challenge – to mobilise millions of evangelical Christians against poverty. The campaign's goals look both inwards, to a deepening of evangelical commitment to the poor, and outwards, to influence leaders to implement policy changes that could dramatically and sustainably reduce poverty.

Micah Challenge will target policy change at all levels needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), a universally-agreed roadmap towards the halving of key poverty indicators by 2015.

Progress towards the achievement of the MDGs is being carefully benchmarked and tracked by the United Nations Development Program, while the contribution made by evangelical Christians and Christian organisations will be indicated by a register of churches, communities, organisations and individuals who have signed the Micah Challenge Declaration and participated in advocacy activities.

The global campaign will kick off with a series of international events in late 2003 and early 2004. The launch of national campaigns will follow.

Healing War Wounds

“FOR over 50 years, my whole being was full of hate for both Japan and its people. Then things began to change after Kate and I decided to join the *Agape* pilgrimage to Japan in October 1999 organised by Keiko (Holmes). During the trip we spent one night at a Japanese home and in the morning the little daughters took us to feed the fish in the river.

“As we walked along, I felt a little hand in mine. I looked down and saw the happy face of the seven-year-old looking up at me. Then I felt a warmth go through me. I felt so at peace! Then I thought ‘I cannot go on with this hatred in my heart, these were not the people who tortured us.’ I shall never forget those little girls. They brought peace to my heart and the power to forgive.”
 – *Syd Brewis, former Thai-Burma Railway Far East Prisoner of War (FEPOW).*

Syd is just one of the many FEPOW that has found release from his dark past through *Agape*, a London-based ministry that helps bring healing and forgiveness between former FEPOW, their families and the Japanese people. Keiko is the founder of *Agape* and for her work, she was awarded the OBE by Queen Elizabeth II in 1998.

Keiko will be in Kuala Lumpur on Nov 18 to conduct a reconciliation meeting organised by the NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission. During the meeting, she will, on behalf of the Japanese people, ask for forgiveness from Malaysians for all the atrocities committed by the Japanese during the Second World War.

A separate meeting will be held in Rawang on Nov 19. For more information, contact Ann Low at the NECF office.

Biblical Illiteracy – Discovery Workshop

“WE teach children and play with adults. Jesus taught adults and played with children.” That was the insight of Rev Dr Harry Wendt, an Australian Lutheran pastor, who observed that few Christian adults had a good understanding of the Bible and how to read, study and live by it.

Their systematic biblical education ended when they left Sunday School. What they needed was a well-planned teaching programme that, in CONTENT and METHODOLOGY, presented a comprehensive overview of God’s revelation in the drama of Israel’s history and its fulfilment in Christ as recorded in Scripture.

And so he came up with a teaching programme of Biblical Theology suitable for the average church attender – with a big difference. Dr Wendt engaged an artist to prepare full-colour visuals in the form of overhead transparencies that reinforce the truths being taught. This venture back in the 1970s has grown to become a ministry, called The Crossways Foundation, that is equipping churches in many countries.

NECF Malaysia will, jointly with Crossways, conduct a two-day Discovery Workshop on Nov 5 and 6. Workshop

participants will explore and be equipped to teach seven short courses.

The workshop will be held at the NECF office and the registration fee (inclusive of lunch and materials) is RM50 per person. For more information, contact Rev Lai at the NECF office.

Mass Christmas Celebration

BM churches in the Klang Valley will come together on Dec 14 for a mass Christmas celebration in the first-ever gathering of such kind. Over 35 churches are expected to participate in this event organised by the NECF Malaysia BM Commission.

The night’s programme will be packed with musical and drama presentations, culminating in a message that will challenge participants to share the gospel.

To make the gathering more eventful, time will be allocated to honour pastors, workers and leaders in line with the NECF’s *Appreciation Day* initiative.

More details in the next Berita NECF issue.

Chinese Conference for Pastors, Full-time workers and Elders

DR Ernest Chan’s rousing messages and clear teaching at the recent Merdeka Prayer Rally for the Klang Valley Chinese churches and two conferences made a big impact on all who heard him.

The NECF Malaysia Chinese Commission has invited him back to conduct a conference for Chinese-congregation pastors and leaders from Dec 1 to 3 at Vistana Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. Dr Chan will impart his experience and knowledge on how to inspire and lead congregations to better serve God together.

Stay-in participants will pay RM320; others will pay RM160 (inclusive of lunch, two tea breaks and material). Subsidy of RM100 per person is available to stay-in participants (limited to two persons per church).

For more information, contact Hoong Eng at the NECF office.

New Members

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

- **New Life Christian Church, Masai, Johor**, pastored by *Quek Kin Song*
- **Bethany Church, Malaysia, in Melaka** pastored by *Epafras Djohan Handojo*
- **D’Gap Baptist Church, Kota Kinabalu**, pastored by *Serena Shim*
- **City Discipleship Presbyterian Church, Subang Jaya**, pastored by *Rev Wong Fong Yang*

We also welcome nine individuals as **Associate Members**: Goh Kim Moi, Rev Ronnie Teoh, Dr Ting Su Hie, Rev Jeff Padgett, Ang Soon Teng, J.S. Solomon, Cindy Chung Mui Lee, Kamala Subramaniam, and Rev Jimmy Wong Heng Liang.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

INDONESIA

POLICE have linked the Aug 5 Jakarta's JW Marriott Hotel bomb blast to the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terror network where more than a dozen people, mostly Indonesians, died and over 150 injured. Police are expecting more such attacks. Recently, they arrested nine suspected JI militants, and found a massive cache of bomb-making equipment. Sunday service schedules for two churches in Jakarta were among the documents, maps, explosives and detonators.

Although almost 200 JI operatives have been arrested, some 3000 fully-trained JI members are still at large. This now includes master bomb-maker Fathurrohman al-Ghozi, who escaped from prison in the Philippines on July 14. Police are searching for two further JI shipments of explosives they believe went to Jakarta. It is clearly JI's intention to again include crowded Christian churches in their terror targets.

Pray for God's protection on the Christians of Indonesia; that He will continue to 'frustrate the plans of the wicked' (Ps. 146:9) and protect church buildings, Christian pastors, workers and other believers from the attacks of those who would kill and destroy; expose those with wicked intentions and bring them to justice; uncover secret weapons caches and ammunitions planned for use against His children, and interfere with the delivery of weapons intended for jihad and war against Christians.

Meanwhile, praise God for uncovering the terror cell in Jakarta and the militants' bomb-making factory and weapons cache in Semarang, Central Java, and other police successes. Praise God for His mercy.

SERBIA

Decades, even centuries, of Balkans conflict (including the more recent NATO bombing) have left the Serbian nation sick. Fear, insecurity, and failure to deal with the past manifests as xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-West sentiment. This is basically an intolerance of all people and groups that are not Serb nationalist or aligned with Serb nationalist icons such as the Orthodox Church. The evangelical church is the main agent for healing and

reconciliation in Serbia at present. However, the evangelical church is under attack as Serbia nurtures, for political gain, its culture of hate, rather than confront that culture, as a way to peace. Throughout 2002 there were many attacks on religious minorities by Orthodox or fascist Serb nationalists. These attacks consisted mainly of church graffiti and vandalism, as well as abuse, intimidation and harassment of minorities. Recently, a small bomb was hurled into a Christian public music concert in August. While no one was injured, this was a more audacious attack that could have claimed lives and signalled a serious escalation in violence. Pray that Serb authorities will take measures to put an end to intolerance and persecution of minorities. Pray for strength, wisdom and unity for Serbian evangelicals; and for the Holy Spirit to move mightily and renew the Serbian Orthodox Church.

EGYPT

EGYPT is suffering from a severe economic crisis, and many Christians live in great poverty, particularly those in upper Egypt. Those with jobs are usually paid a lower wage than Muslims. But many young Christian men cannot find work at all and therefore are unable to get married, as they are not in a position to support a family.

Pray that God will provide a way for Christian young people to marry and bring up a new generation of children in Christian homes; for all believers to be spiritually strengthened and uplifted as they face the frightening prospect of a wave of systematic persecution, and especially those who have suffered injury, loss and trauma in last weekend's attacks.

CAMBODIA

THE Cambodian Church suffered severely under the Khmer Rouge in the late 1970s. However a remnant survived and the Church has grown, particularly in the past decade of peace, harmony and openness. Cambodia had elections in July and there are early signs that religious nationalism sweeping Asia is now rearing its head in Cambodia. Over the nine months preceding these elections, Buddhist nationalism has been visible with a government ban on Christian proselytising, two anti-Christian protests and one

known attack on a church. Cambodia is a nation needing much healing, deliverance and transformation.

Pray that God will bless Cambodia with continuing freedom and openness, appointing leaders who will govern fairly, protecting harmony and religious liberty; that He will protect Cambodian Christians, foreign Christian mission and aid workers, and the Vietnamese Montagnards (who have fled to Cambodia from persecution in Vietnam); and that the Holy Spirit will continue to empower Cambodian pastors, evangelists, church planters and all believers.

IRAQ

IRAQI Christians, who have become targets of attacks by Muslim extremists and bandits, are risking their lives to attend church services. They race through the streets to reach their destinations every Sunday as an increasing number of believers have been killed or wounded in Muslim violence against Christian-owned shops and Christian women refusing to wear scarves. Yet born-again believers believe Iraq is heading towards its biggest spiritual revival, with many new converts added daily. More traditional churches are also reporting a high attendance rate.

Churches are concerned that radicals within the Shiite Muslim majority will step up the pressure on Iraq's one million Christians, who make up less than five percent of the population. Praise God that Iraqi Christians are zealous about their faith. Pray for the many non-believers they come in contact with to be influenced to faith in Christ.

SRI LANKA

THE Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (EASL) has confirmed five reports of violent attacks by mobs of Buddhist monks against churches in early August. The EASL believes this violence is linked to the proposed Anti-Conversion Bill. Pray for spiritual wisdom and strong leadership in the Christian communities and in the churches, to guide believers through the storm; and for the government to govern with integrity, and insist that local authorities enforce rule of law, so that violence is not tolerated and thereby passively endorsed and encouraged.