

EDITORIAL

Can pastors be rich?

or Must they be poor?

IMAGINE walking along the road when a dazzling golden BMW wheezes to a stop right in front of you. Wow, what a shiny beauty! A man steps out of the car and you recognise him as the businessman that has been making the headlines in the newspapers. A shrewd, successful hardworking businessman and a glorious four-wheeler – they make a great pair.

Now, supposing the man is a doctor, or a lawyer, or an accountant? No problems, professionals these days are well paid. Supposing he's just a schoolteacher? It's still all right, for he may have diligently saved to buy that car. But what if that man who steps out of the luxurious car is a pastor?

If you are like the majority of Christians, you would probably cringe. How can a pastor own such a nice car? Where did he find the money to buy it?

THE CHRISTIAN MINDSET

The scenario above is somewhat dramatised but it reveals the mindset of many Christians with regard to the pastoral and other full-time ministries. The underlying belief is that being in full-time ministry is incompatible with the enjoyment of material prosperity and well being. And this attitude does not only concern wealth. Some extend it also to the matter of work and rest.

This common perception is not entirely wrong. The problem rather is that few Christians actually seek to understand why they think what they think, and are therefore unable to separate truth from its opposite. Our purpose here is to analyse this mindset from a biblical perspective with the aim of constructing a more reasonable paradigm from which to think and act.

Three major assumptions lie behind the belief that full-time ministry is incompatible with material well being.

Let's examine each one in turn.

1. Poverty is a prerequisite for spirituality

This view is still prevalent among the traditional churches. It seems that their remuneration schemes for church workers are structured along the "keep them poor, keep them humble" rule. This view is heavily influenced by the fact that wealth brings with it many temptations. American author Randy Alcorn in *Money, Possessions & Eternity* says that nine out of 10 Christians survive adversity with their faith intact while only one out of 10 survive prosperity unscathed.

At the same time, we must also acknowledge that wealth is a blessing from God. The Lord "takes pleasure in the prosperity of His servant", says Psalm 35:27b. Wealth can also be put to good and proper use in God's service. Moreover, the poor can equally be led into sin if they are tempted by envy and covetousness.

The truth is that neither poverty nor wealth is more spiritual, but a heart that is right before God. However, a life that is sufficiently provided for brings honour to the Lord as *Jehovah Jireh*, our Provider.

At the very least, those who lean toward the poverty-equals-spirituality view must themselves actively seek a simple lifestyle. It will be double standard and hypocrisy to impose their leaning on others – pastors or otherwise – if they themselves are not striving for spirituality.

2. God's servants are supposed to have relinquished all claims to material prosperity for the sake of the gospel



According to this popular view, wealth may not be evil but the servants of God are supposedly a special category of people called to make some very special sacrifices.

The statement is true as it stands. Peter, James and John pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Jesus, while Matthew got up from his tax collection booth, left everything and followed Jesus (Luke 5:11, 28). Paul and others also gave up everything to follow Jesus.

But this is only one side of the story in God's bigger plan. Why is it that the Lord does not call *all* His children to leave their jobs and venture into full-time ministry? If He does, there shall be no one left to support all of them!

Peter once said to Jesus, "See, we have left all and followed You." (Mark 10:28) To this, Jesus replied, "Assuredly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses, and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecution – and in the age to come, eternal life." (vs 29–30)

How are these servants to receive a

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• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

hundred times more *in this time*? Through His children, of course, who are to act as their new families and providers.

Unfortunately, we seldom see this part of God's plan executed. Yes, the servants of God may have left everything. But are we now to deprive them? Should we not bless them all the more for their sacrifice?

Paul's treatise on this issue in 1 Corinthians 9 is in line with this view. Paul insisted: "Don't we have the right to food and drink? ... Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? ... If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? ... The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel." (1 Cor. 9:4-14)

God's servants are entitled to the same standard of living as other Christians. Furthermore, they are entitled to rest, holidays, sabbaticals, and other privileges, just like other ordinary workers. This is by no means pampering them, because theirs is one of the most difficult vocations.

Churches must also consider the full-time workers' family responsibility. Very rarely, if ever, does God call people into full-time ministry and expect them to cease supporting their families. If churches do not take this into account, they will stand to lose many capable and qualified people who are keen to serve but have to consider the implications on their family. Incidentally, 1 Cor. 9:5 may imply that the pastor's wife is also entitled to the church's support.

Before going to the next point, let's note an interesting twist to the argument. Some Christians and lay leaders allow that pastors, full-time workers and their families should have all their material needs met, but this is to come about by faith. They are to "live by faith".

This argument is also deceptive because once again it is technically true. Yet, how often does the Lord drop supplies direct from heaven as He did for Elijah (1 Kings 17:4-6)? When His servants exercise faith, the Lord's usual way of working is to move His other servants to lend a helping hand. Thus the argument actually amounts to a challenge to extend a blessing, and is no excuse to sit back and do nothing. And when speaking about having faith, do remember that faith without works is dead.

Moreover, only those who have lived



God's servants are entitled to the same standard of living as other Christians... to rest, holidays, sabbaticals and other privileges, just like other ordinary workers.

by faith can insist that another person does the same, lest we be accused of double standard.

3. The servants of God are super-humans with no or little material needs

The view sounds ludicrous but many Christians prefer to believe it as it absolves them from further responsibility. The Bible states very clearly: "Elijah was a man just like us." (James 5:17a) James' point was that we too could do great things for God despite our frail human nature just like Elijah's. We are given a picture of Elijah's human frailties in 1 Kings 19 when he fled from Jezebel. He was tired. He needed to eat and drink. Even Jesus the Son of God was tired and had to sleep in a boat.

Sometimes, God may endow His servants with supernatural strength and endurance; however, more often, they are ordinary people with material, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and other needs.

MUTUAL SACRIFICE

In conclusion, Christians at large need a paradigm shift with regard to the way they view the relationship between God's full-time ministers and material well-being. Christians have a responsibility to provide sufficiently for the material needs of the servants of God.

Are we now advocating materialism? By no means. Rather we are advocating the opposite – that is, sacrifice. We call on all the servants of God to "leave everything" for the sake of the gospel just like all their predecessors did. We also call on all lay Christians, armed with a correct understanding of material wealth, to respond to their ministers' love and sacrifice by giving them the best.

This is *mutual sacrifice*, which is the correct biblical model for our thinking and action.

NECF Foundation Launch

THE NECF Foundation was formally launched at a dinner on April 3 at the J.W.Marriott Hotel in Kuala Lumpur. About 700 people came from all over Malaysia to attend the launch and hear compelling reasons for the necessity of such a fund to help local pastors and full-time workers, including missionaries.

In his welcome speech, Foundation board chairman Davy Woo recounted how the foundation was conceived, and introduced the board members who represent various denominations.

NECF Chairman Rev Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam then shared his encounter with a full-time worker who revealed that she and her husband had to borrow money to fund their daughter's tertiary education.

NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong ended the dinner with an impassioned plea to help full-time workers. In



Inspiring performance by Joanne Yeoh.

his message "Am I my brother's keeper?" he preached from 1 Kings 19 where God sent an angel to care for a depressed, burnt-out Elijah by giving him food and water.

After receiving the nourishment, Elijah "...arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God" (vs 8). Rev Wong challenged the diners to be like the angel who cared for Elijah's physical needs

so that God's ministers would have the strength to carry on their tasks.

Diners then dug into their pockets and contributed RM33,000 in cash and cheques to the fund. In all, the dinner raised about RM253,000.

Diners were also treated to presentations by Victor Chua whose melodious voice charmed them; violinist Joanne Yeoh whose deft fingers on the violin mesmerised them; and wives and children of full-time workers whose song and skit presentations touched their hearts.



Children of pastors and full-time workers from various churches came together in support of their parents.



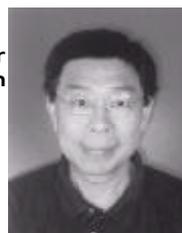
Rev Guneratnam (right) welcoming Bakri MP Datuk Chua Jui Meng to the dinner. Looking on are Kelana Jaya MP Loh Seng Kok (in batik) and Datuk Jackson Tan (in coat).

BATIK AFFAIR...standing from left: NECF Foundation Board member Daniel Ebinesan; Bukit Gasing MP Datuk Dr Lim Thuang Seng; Foundation Chairman Davy Woo; NECF Vice-Chairman Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng; and (foreground) NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong.



Meanwhile, the foundation board has a new face. Peter Chan from SIB KL replaces Lew Lee Choo, pastor of SIB KL, who has stepped down. Peter formerly worked as Property Manager with HSBC and now serves as a zone pastor in his church.

Peter Chan



Victor Chua charmed diners with his melodious voice.



PM Pledges New Building to Replace Illegally-Demolished OA Church

HALF a year after the illegal demolition of their newly-built church, the Orang Asli (OA) Christians of Kampung Pasu village have been assured of a new building by Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah Badawi.

The assurance came through the PM's political secretary who recently met NECF Malaysia Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong and other Christian leaders in the NECF office to discuss issues relating to the Christian community.

The political secretary also conveyed the PM's displeasure at the incident, which occurred last September. NECF had immediately reported the matter to the PM after officers from the Temerloh Land Office and others tore down the just-completed church built for some 40 OA Christians residing in Kampung Pasu and surrounding villages. These villages are located in the district of Temerloh, Pahang.

The church was planted by SIB Semenanjung and pastored by Ajos

Larau. According to Pr Ajos, about 30 people tore down the RM25,000 building last Sept 30, five days before its scheduled inaugural Sunday service.

He added that government officers, including the Temerloh state assemblyman, a policeman and a reporter stood by and watched while about 30 people hammered down the building.

Immediately after the incident, one of the church members, Yaman Wet – whose father owned the land where the church sat on – lodged a police report. While making the report, he was told by a policeman that the church was demolished because it sat on government land.

Yaman and his father subsequently filed a civil suit against the Temerloh Land Office and among documents submitted to the court were documents proving that the land belonged to Yaman's father and a written approval by the village headman consenting to the building of the church.



Months to build (above), minutes to flatten (below) – the Kampung Pasu OA church building.



Marks of a Respected Leader

IT used to be that if you are a leader in your church, you automatically command respect from your flock. Not today, though. Nowadays, the sheep are more discerning and will dole out respect only to leaders worthy of their deference.

And the determining factor for respect is good character. If the leader is lacking in integrity and Christlikeness, he cannot expect to have influence over his congregation.

This was the challenge posed by Rev Dr Bambang Widjaja to some 100 invited leaders of Bahasa Malaysia churches from various denominations at a recent

conference organised by the NECF Malaysia BM Commission.

Dr Bambang, who heads the Indonesia Evangelical Fellowship, gave several characteristics of a respected, successful leader.

- Firstly, he is willing to change and learn, and this willingness comes from a humble attitude.

- He must be focussed in his direction, and has a vision that compels him to move forward. With a focused direction and a compelling vision, he is able to understand what God has done and is still doing in his life, and is committed to self-improvement. Thus, a successful leader views his life and ministry as dynamic and not static.

- He is secure and is thus prepared to serve and develop others. Insecure leaders, on the other hand, feed on people's praises and flatteries for self-confidence.

- He is not afraid of hardship and does not allow hardship to deter him from attempting bigger things for God. "God allows

difficulties in our lives to help strengthen and grow our faith," Dr Bambang reminded.

- He is willing to bear responsibility, firstly for his own spiritual life, and those of his family members.

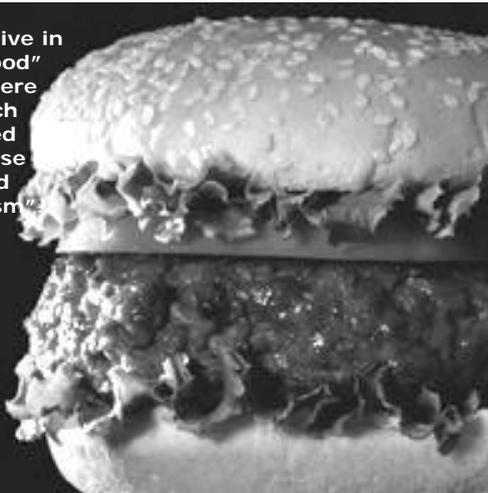
Dr Bambang also gave an overview of the current global trends. As a result, we now live in a "fast-food" world where the Church is tempted to dispense "fast-food evangelism". He cautioned against the "McDonaldisation of Christianity".

"A good leader must change what is necessary so that the congregation can grow. But he does not make changes for the sake of change," he advised.

Co-speaker NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong, in his talk "The role of Christians in nation building", emphasised the necessity to vote during the country's general elections. "It is our Christian responsibility to choose the government, and this can be done through voting and praying," he said.

It is not wrong for Christian, especially Christian leaders, to go into politics, but he cautioned them against using their political leadership to influence their church members.

We now live in "fast-food" world where the Church is tempted to dispense "fast-food evangelism".



No Need to Register with ROS

More on Burial Ground, Marriage Register and MyKad

MOST churches believe that registering with the Registrar of Society (ROS) is a legal necessity, when the structure of the ROS is not designed for governing religious bodies.

The matter was clarified at a recent NECF Malaysia Current Issues seminar for Klang pastors and church leaders.

NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong explained during the question-and-answer session that NECF's legal panel had studied both the ROS and the Federal Constitution and concluded that churches, as religious institutions, need not be registered with the ROS. This, he said, was concurred by at least two former deputy ministers of Home Affairs.

Rev Wong quoted Article 11(3) of the Constitution to support the panel's interpretation. The article states: "Every religious group has the right to: manage its own religious affairs; establish and

public places. Places of worship like mosques, temples and churches are not considered as public places. They are not places where there is unrestricted access for all members of the public. Sometimes, a religious group may meet in places not normally used for religious purposes. For example, a group of devotees may meet in a house or office to celebrate a religious festival or to perform religious acts. Again, a house or office is not a public place and a religious gathering there cannot be considered an illegal one."

Churches registered with ROS are subject to all ROS requirements. In certain situations, this may pose a disadvantage to the churches concerned. For example, they must get the ROS approval to effect any changes in their constitution, or they may get de-registered on technical grounds. Another common problem is changing address.

"No conditions are found in Article 11 (of the Federal Constitution) or in the rest of the Constitution that require a religious group to incorporate or register themselves before they can be regarded as a religious group." – LEE MIN CHON in his book *Freedom of Religion in Malaysia*

maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with the law."

Normally, churches register with the ROS for the purposes of acquiring and managing properties, and opening bank accounts.

There are other alternatives, Rev Wong pointed out. For example, with regards to property transactions, churches can appoint trustees to act on their behalf under the Trustee Act.

As for opening bank accounts, churches can, for example, join NECF as members and with that, gain access to banks that have arrangements with NECF.

Churches started to register with ROS as far back as the 1960s, perhaps thinking that doing so would legitimise their gatherings. Or perhaps the misconception arose as a result of a clause in the Police Act 1967 that states it is unlawful for three or more persons to assemble in a public place without a police permit.

Lee Min Choon, in his book *Freedom of Religion*, clarified: "Firstly, Section 27 of the Police Act refers to gatherings in

Churches, which have moved location, have been told by the ROS that they must get their town councils' approval to use the new location as a place of worship before the ROS can effect the address change.

However, para-church organisations must be registered with ROS.



"Churches must work together if they want to ensure enough burial plots for their members."

Burial grounds

On the issue of burial grounds for Christians, Rev Wong advised churches against buying parcels of lands and then attempting to convert them into burial grounds. Providing burial grounds is the responsibility of the state governments, he said.

"If burial land is lacking in your

region, the churches within the region should come together to present their need to the state government. Form a cemetery committee to negotiate with the relevant authorities," he advised.

"Churches must work together if they want to ensure enough burial plots for their members. Let the dead unite the living," he quipped. "And don't wait until the last plot of (burial) land before applying to the government."

Marriage Register

The Government has become more stringent in allowing churches to hold marriage registers. To help smoothen the marriage process for Christian couples, NECF is currently negotiating with authorities for a mobile marriage register that can be shared among several churches within their regions.

Religion in MyKad

Christians should not shy away from stating their religion (Christianity) in the application form when changing



their identity cards to MyKad. Some Christians did not state their religion, perhaps out of fear of discrimination by the government, or future persecution.

Commenting on this, Rev Wong said that firstly, Christians should not be afraid nor ashamed to state their faith. Secondly, Christians are duty bound to state the truth when filling in any official documents. Thirdly, by filling in their religion, Christians help to provide accurate statistics.

Although the religion of the card-bearer is not stated in the card itself, the information is stored in the department's database. There have been reported cases where the department filled in "Buddhist" and "Hindu" for Chinese and Indian applicants who did not fill in the religion slot.

"This affects the percentage of the total Christian community. In situations relating to the government, more accurate statistics may ensure our views are taken seriously," Rev Wong said.

Cabinet Support

BESIDES providing political leadership for the coalition in the Government, what exactly is the function of the Cabinet? And how does it affect the future of our nation?

Firstly, the Federal Constitution of Malaysia – the supreme law of the land – is structured to give effect to the doctrine of separation of powers among the country's legislative, judicial and executive authorities.

Executive authority is vested in the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and exercised by a Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister. However, the power conferred upon the King is nominal by virtue of his office as a Supreme Head of the Federation. To exercise any of his functions, the King is required by Article 40 (1) to act in accordance with the advice of the Cabinet except in three matters: the appointment of a Prime Minister, the dissolution of Parliament and the calling of a meeting of the Conference of Rulers where the sole purpose of the meeting is to discuss the privileges, position, honours and dignities of the rulers.

The Cabinet is handpicked by the Prime Minister from among the members of both Dewan Negara and Dewan Rakyat, and has to appear united as a collective government in the form of an executive committee. Each individual Cabinet member is held accountable to all joint decisions made by the Cabinet as a whole.

While it is constitutionally an advisory body, the Cabinet is the highest co-ordinating executive body of all government activities and interests. Many of the most important decisions are made here, for example the decision to increase or reduce expenditure on education. Its role is significant in the day-to-day running of the government, that is, to make and implement policies, to improve the quality of public service, and to manage a civil service to carry out the day-to-day government business.

The Cabinet is also responsible for proposing legislation of bills to meet the needs of public and current concerns. The members then organise opinion and vote to turn the bill into an Act. It is also the Cabinet's role to discuss any unforeseen major issues – such as the recent bird flu or SARs outbreaks – which then leads to setting up of commissions to research and suggest solutions to the issues.

Another important function of the Cabinet is to co-ordinate and control the work of government departments, and each Cabinet minister usually controls a department. For example, the department of health is overseen by the Ministry of Health headed by Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek.

Today, we have a national leader – Dato' Seri Abdullah Badawi – who calls for partnership in developing the country



The KL Towers (left) and the Petronas Twin Towers (right) are symbols of the "Malaysia Boleh" spirit. Pray that above all our achievements, our leaders will be filled with the fear of God.

and believes in the practice of genuine power sharing. His clarion call, "Work with me and not for me" has endeared him to the public and earned the devotion of his colleagues.

Under the new leadership of a prime minister who promotes the servant-leader style and recognises the significance of teamwork, the Cabinet may be able to perform its function more effectively for national interests.

As long as the Cabinet exists and continues to fuse the executive and legislative, it remains a very powerful aspect of the government. Therefore it is important for Christians to recognise the role and responsibilities of the Cabinet ministers, and pray for them, for we know that "the plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD" (Prov. 16:1, NASB). As they make decision on any policy or law, pray that God will direct their steps (16:9).

May we suggest that you use Proverb 16 to intercede for the Cabinet members:

- That they will have the fear of God in them.
- That they discard personal agenda, keep away from bribery and immorality.
- That there be impartiality in law making, and just and wise execution of government policies.
- For effective partnership that places national interests as priority.
- For humility and willingness to seek godly counsel.
- And lastly, for Cabinet members who are Christians to be salt and light to their colleagues.

Log on <http://www.kabinet.jpm.my/umum/anggota.htm> for a full list of Cabinet ministers and their portfolios. – **By Lim Siew Foong, NECF Research Executive**

Getting a grip of tomorrow today

CHRISTIANS should use the technology available today as their "Issachar advantage" to help them understand the times. The technology in our present age – such as global communication, the Internet, satellite and cable television – will help us "to see what's happening in the world while we await what God is saying about the event," said Dr Kameel Majdali who recently spoke at a seminar entitled "Trends: Shifts and Changes in

Turbulent Times."

Christians must consciously practise, what John Stott said, double-listening – that is, having one ear opened to God's words and one ear opened to God's world.

Over 100 participants attended the seminar jointly organised by the NECF Malaysia Missions Commission, Intercare and PJEFC. Dr Kameel was the principal of Harvest Bible College in Melbourne

before starting Teach All Nations, a ministry focussing on teaching and missions. Since 1991, he has been teaching and writing about "World Trends".

In his study on the global changes in the last two decades, Dr Kameel observed these two decades as the "Age of the Four Contrasts":

• GO TO PAGE 14



Dressing for the Bridegroom

By Mrs Chan Tean Yin



THE bride in white walks gracefully and guardedly down the aisle towards the waiting bridegroom. She is the most beautiful woman in the hall. All eyes gaze upon her radiant loveliness. The bridesmaids and the flower girls, dressed in spaghetti-striped gowns, also draw the attention of the people. The atmosphere is almost 'unreal'. There's a touch of both Disneyland and Hollywood, and the spectators at the modern church wedding are mesmerised.

As the bride continues her walk down the aisle, eyes move from her smiling face to the details of her wedding gown. Some are a little disturbed by what they see. Some may shrug it off. "This is the 21st century. We've got to go with the fashion trends." I often wonder how the officiating ministers manage to concentrate without being more than 'a little distracted' by the bride's and bridesmaids' scant attire.

A senior pastor observed that one of the most disturbing trends creeping into the Malaysian Church today has to do with women's attire in church, especially at church weddings. The wedding ceremony, one of the holiest and most solemn ceremonies, has turned into a fashion show of sorts. It is a fashion show displaying not the 'best dressed' but the 'least dressed.' The senior pastor lamented that perhaps the Malaysian Church has lost its cutting edge.

If we do not address this issue of proper attire in the holy place, we will not be able to attract our neighbours of other faiths who have a more respectful attitude towards places of

worship. The Muslims and Hindus, for example, have such reverence for their places of worship that they ensure they are properly attired and their women are covered up when they worship. In contrast, Christians tend to be lax and seem to have thrown away decorum in dressing and grooming in the name of 'liberty in the Spirit.' It is time for Christian women to bring back

"A senior pastor observed that one of the most disturbing trends creeping into the Malaysian Church today has to do with women's attire in church, especially at church weddings."

modesty in their attire.

Modest Dressing

The subject of modest dressing can be controversial among Christians today. Yet, it is an issue that every church ought to face. M. Thaxter Dickey writing on the subject says, 'Every family, every Christian woman must consider modesty not only as a philosophical, theological and doctrinal issue but as a practical daily concern.'¹

Today's Scenario

Immodesty is a serious problem today because we are living in an era that glorifies immodesty and immorality. Just

look at the commercial advertisements of today – regardless of what they are advertising (cars, food, cosmetics, etc). The focus is not on the product but on the immodestly-dressed man or woman. No wonder immodesty is now so commonly accepted and it does not disturb most people. The younger generation has no qualms about dressing like the supermodels and celebrity models.

M. Thaxter Dickey observes: "At least superficially, they seem to have no shame about this kind of dress. I suspect that they do have doubts but they are reluctant to admit them and so suppress them lest they be thought to be 'prudes' or 'religious fanatics' or 'fashion fascists.' And those who ought to be condemning this kind of behaviour, fathers, preachers, and elders, often fear to do so for the very same reason."²

What is Modesty?

Modesty is decency. It is not sexually provocative. Another writer, David Feddes, puts it very well. 'If you are modest, you have a kind of shyness about sexuality, a discomfort with crude jokes and lewd stares. This doesn't mean you are ashamed of your body or that you think it's bad. If you are modest...there's a strong sense that this passion (love life) is very precious, personal and private. Nakedness may be lovely in the marriage bed but not as a public display.'³

Large numbers of women in our immodest culture just do not get it. They choose to wear immodest

• GO TO NEXT PAGE

clothing. Pastor and author Douglas Wilson says: 'Many of the current fashions for young women appear to be apparel in standard use down at the local Hooker Training Academy.'

Some styles are so similar to prostitutes that Wilson's wife told him 'it must be difficult for men these days trying to figure out which ones they have to pay for and which ones are free.'

Unfortunately, today even many church people dress indecently to church services. Wilson puts it this way: 'Many Christian women go to worship today dressed in a manner that would have gotten them thrown out of a bar fifty years ago.'⁴

What does Scripture say about modest dress for Christian women?

God does not give us a detailed dress code in the Bible. He does not require Christian women today to hide behind thick veils or look plain and dowdy. In God's eyes, character matters more than clothing. But He is concerned about modesty and calls for it in our dressing and appearance. This message is needed today even more than when it was first written!

1. Peter 3:3-4

'Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfailing beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.'

1 Timothy 2:9-10

'I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.'

These passages are primarily a condemnation of finery and ostentation rather than sexual immorality, but they also contain the positive injunction to women to dress appropriately as befits a people who profess to be godly.

Proverbs 7:10

'Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent.' This passage is a powerful acknowledgement that some forms of dress are designed to attract unlawful sexual desire and are

thus condemned.

Why is modesty important to Christian women?

Does modesty matter in today's church? Besides the scriptural injunction in 1 Peter 3 and 1 Timothy 2 that exhort Christian women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety befitting one who confesses to godliness, there are other practical reasons for maintaining modest dress. M Thaxter Dickey gives five reasons why Christian women should not dress immodestly.

1. It is unfair to men

Men are easily aroused by 'sight'. It is therefore dangerous to their souls to see women dressed indecently, especially in church. Though the weakness may be theirs, women should not be a stumbling block to our fellow brethren.

'Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.' (Romans 14:13).

'Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak' (1 Cor. 8:9).

2. It is a dangerous threat to chastity

Clothing is an important non-verbal communication that sends signals to the receivers. Thus, indecent dressing sends signals that can lead to sexual violation. Many rape cases occur due to impropriety in dressing on the part of the victims.

Dickey advises, 'Chastity must be motivated by respect for one's body and the dignity of others. Parents, especially fathers who ought to know about such things, should be watchful so that immoral fashions and attitudes do not violate the integrity of the home, especially through the uncritical acceptance of the messages of the mass media.'⁵

3. Immodest dress is unfair to other women

Today's fashion trend is putting pressure on women to compete for the sexual attention of men. This invariably reduces the value of women to that of a sex object. Dickey again puts it succinctly: 'It is unfair to women because it forces them into a restrictive code of dress and beauty that is primarily sexual.'

Women today find themselves competing with the artificial sexy image

'Clothes maketh a man', so the saying goes. The way one dresses indicates the character and personality of the wearer."

of womanhood that Hollywood and Madison Avenue have created... that is the reason for the plethora of women's mental problem of insecurity and low self esteem as well as the actual physical health produced by excess dieting in a futile attempt to measure up.'⁶

4. It is an indicator of certain character

'Clothes maketh a man', so the saying goes. The way one dresses indicates the character and personality of the wearer. Clothing is a powerful non-verbal message. As Christian women, it is important to send the right signals through our dressing. Related to this, the Bible speaks of 'the attire of the harlot' (Proverbs 7:10) which indicates to us that there is an inappropriate way of dressing which Christian women must be careful to avoid.

Dickey says of today's fashion, 'Modern dress is nothing short of exhibitionism. Women who choose to display their breasts, thighs or buttocks, either mostly uncovered or with form fitting clothes, to public view must at best endure the public attention that it brings and at worst they must enjoy this kind of exposure.'⁷

5. Immodest dressing reflects poorly on one's vocation as a Christian woman

To put it simply, modesty in dressing is a testimony to unbelievers. While Christian women do not want to be branded as 'old fashioned', 'prudish' or 'fashion fascists', we want to project to the world that we are a people who believe in decency, chastity and



purity. We may be regarded as peculiar to the ungodly, but don't forget, we are a set-apart people, set apart from the garish, glitzy, exploiting, mindless fashion world of today.

Our outward appearance should reflect the spiritual convictions we hold so dearly. We must not contradict our faith and convictions by immodest dressing.

Conclusion

The subject of modest dressing for the Christian woman cannot be exhausted in this one article. I am aware there are many more points for discussion, for example the cultural differences in interpretation of what constitutes 'modesty.'

What might be immodest in one culture would not be so in another, for instance revealing of the hands, ankles, face, etc. What is culturally inappropriate in one culture may be totally acceptable in another. However, it is hoped that Christian women would agree that 'immodest attire' is that state of dress or (undress) which flaunts a person's body and sexuality.

Christians, note the way we dress when we go to church. How different are we from those going to discos or entertainment centres? While it is true that the Bible does not give us a detailed dress code, and passages like 1 Peter 3:3-5 and 1 Timothy 2:9-10 are more concerned with character and conduct rather than clothes or external appearance, nevertheless, Scriptures call for modesty and propriety.

The problem with today's church is that we tend to stretch our Christian liberty too far. It is time to remind ourselves, that as Christian women we have a testimony to maintain. We do this not only with our actions, words and deeds but also in the way we dress and make ourselves presentable, for we are the Bride of the Bridegroom.

Tean Yin is a member of the NECF Women's Commission.

¹ M. Thaxter Dickey, *Considering the Issue of Modest Dress for Christian Women* (online) available @file://localhost/A://modsrtj.htm

² Ibid

³ David feddes, *Back to God Hour*, (online) available @

http://www.backtogod.net/sermons/sermons_detail.cfm?ID=36304 accessed 04/15/2004

⁴ Ibid

⁵ M. Thaxter dickey, *Considering the Issue of Modern Dress for Christian Women* (online) Available @file://localhost/A://modesty.htm.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

God is Anti-Nakedness

By Pastor Susan Tang

OH, if only we knew this – that God is anti-nakedness. If every Christian woman knows this, it will change the way she dresses. Many of us fail the test when it comes to implementing the Lordship of Jesus Christ in this area of our lives.

The Scriptures are very clear about how godly women should dress. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul instructed women to dress modestly with shamefacedness (shyness) and sobriety. Put in today's language, the passage in 1 Timothy 2:9-10 simply means that there must be discretion, decency, and a degree of shyness (over too much exposure) in our dressing.

If we Christian women cannot even adhere to such a simple commandment to dress modestly or decently, then what other commandments can we keep? The Scriptures clearly forbid women to wear clothes that are indecent and that suggest wantonness in our character. Whether we like it or not, one's character is definitely seen in one's dressing!

That is why people react with hostility when we comment negatively on their dressing because they see it as an attack on their character. It behoves us to remember that the worship of God has everything to do with our outward demeanour and our dressing.

It is not true that Christian women cannot adorn themselves or be dressed fashionably, tastefully, sophisticatedly or attractively. Have you noticed the way God adorns His own creation? Just look

at the different hues and the blending of colours in the flowers, the birds, the rainbow, the sea and the clouds. It is amazing!

Creation definitely displays God's good taste and love of beauty, refinement and colours. Creation is variegated and it speaks loudly to us that God is a God of variety and design. He is artistic, innovative and resourceful. Yes, we can adorn ourselves in whatever way we want but definitely not in a manner that is distasteful or indecent.

This will not only draw untoward and negative attention to us but will also fuel men's minds with uncontrollable lust and obscenity. Hollywood is full of this stuff. It is because Jesus is not the Lord of Hollywood.

"Are we so destitute of inward beauty that we have to dress immodestly and seductively to draw attention to ourselves?"

Christian women are called to be the true guardians of virtue, but have we today degenerated so much that we have no true lustre in our character? Are we so destitute of inward beauty that we have to dress immodestly and seductively to draw attention to ourselves?

Surely not! Must we dress provocatively so that we can be special or 'singular' enough to court some notice or admiration from lustful and wanton eyes? Of course not! Have we no more Holy Ghost power to draw people to Jesus that we have to revert to indecent dressing or dressing like the world in order to draw in the crowds?

No! No! No! Must I degenerate into a prostitute in order to win the prostitute, or become a drug addict before I can preach to the drug addict? God forbid! Yet some women in some churches are advocating: 'Dress like the world so we can draw them in!' What dark



A PLEASURE TO BEHOLD: It is not true that Christian women cannot adorn themselves or be dressed fashionably, tastefully, sophisticatedly or attractively.

satanic counsel! This is so frightening.

Jesus Christ has set the value of women to be higher than the price of rubies. We are costly and precious. Let us remain so! We are to be His 'garden enclosed and fountain sealed.' We do not need this cheap publicity copied from Hollywood. We have God's nobility, beauty, standard, power and holiness inside, and more than this, we have His love. Let all these be expressed through our dressing.

Why copy from Hollywood? Hollywood women are destitute of these qualities. This is why they dress the way they do. Every form of rebellion, lust, pride, uncleanness, lack of self-restraint, perversion and selfishness has been expressed through their fashions and their dressing.

The saying, 'God looks on the inside, not on the outside, so do not judge people by their dressing' is wrong, wrong, wrong! Why? Because the inside always controls the outside. Dress is always a symbol of our character. Our choice of clothes reveals deep things about us, things that we are not even conscious of.

If a woman shows no outward restraint or shame in her scanty or improper dressing, it means she has no self-restraint on her inside. It is frightening when a woman exercises no restraint in her thoughts and feelings and does not even know what 'shamefacedness' (shyness) or embarrassment is. God's scathing rebuke to the nation of Israel revealed their terrible state of degeneration and deviation. The nation did not even know shame. They 'could not blush.' In the end God had to destroy them. Read Jeremiah 6:15.

Christian women need to be taught to dress with modesty and discretion because so many churches in the city are impacted with improperly and immodestly dressed women. Many pastors and church leaders do not dare speak out for fear of the repercussions. As we grow in our knowledge of God, we will realise that Father God loves discretion and order and hates nakedness and immodesty. This aspect of His character is seen in His commandments to the nation of Israel.

Firstly, we see Him instructing His people in the Old Testament to put fringes in their sleeves, to the hemline and to the neckline of their garments to properly cover themselves. Read Deuteronomy 22:12.

Secondly, He specifically instructed that altars in those days were to be built on lower ground. To have altars built on a

"Christian women need to be taught to dress with modesty and discretion because so many churches in the city are impacted with improperly- and immodestly-dressed women."

high place would mean that the priests had to walk up the steps to carry out their services. This would uncover their nakedness to the people below.

What a prudent and discreet God. He is so full of details, foresight and insight. His thoughts are on everything. He even safeguarded His priests from peeping toms! Yes, when it came to worshipping Him, He made sure that nothing would infringe upon that sacred and holy worship, not even improper demeanour or dressing. Read Exodus 20:26.

Know your God, ladies. Know your God. Know that He is indeed discreet and modest and He hates uncovered bodies. As we increase in our knowledge of Him, may we also improve on the way we dress ourselves. Let there be decency and modesty in our attire.

Our children must learn the right things from us. If mothers do not dress properly, their children will not. If pastors' wives do not dress moderately, the church members will not. Every godly pastor and church leader or Christian statesman should pastor his wife in the area of her dressing if she has missed the mark. I am not talking about control; I am talking about directing so that their spouses will dress properly and discreetly, with the testimony of Jesus shining through their lives. If we want our children to grow up with a sense of godliness and worth, then they must be taught the ways of God. They must be taught to value their own bodies as private property and as God's holy temple. Yes, children must be taught that their bodies are not public property. They are not to be gawked at by lustful men and lecherous eyes on the street.



GODLY INFLUENCE: If mothers do not dress properly, their children will not.

Yes, the experiential and revelational knowledge of our God must indeed raise us from the degradation of all sensuality and vulgarity, so often found in our dressing, to purity and nobility. God's standard, found in the Bible, should minister guidance for life, release true solace or security for our spirits and provide us with instruction for righteousness in our daily living...and dressing.

"O God, help us. Help us glorify You in every area of our lives. We are called to change and to influence the world but why is the world changing and influencing so many of us instead? Help us to manifest Your nobility, holiness, purity, beauty and refinement through our outward demeanour and our dressing. By Your Holy Spirit, deal with us and work obedience into us so that the testimony of Jesus will be recovered in our dressing. May the holiness, the serenity, quietness, nobility and refinement of Jesus be seen through our dressing." – This is an extract from My Life: Increasing in the Experiential and Revelational Knowledge of God.

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.

Non-Stop Nation Watch

ANN LOW, NECF Malaysia Executive Secretary (Prayer), shares the lessons learnt from the recent 24-hour watch that was set up to specifically pray for the election.

IF we were to set up a 24-hour prayer watch before the polling day, will we get any response especially for those 'graveyard' hours (when people are sleeping)? We were unsure about the response but we were certain about setting up the round-the-clock watch to pray for the election.

In March, we visited the northern places – Alor Star, Penang and Dungun – to mobilise prayer for the nation and while there, one Christian said that her pastor had advised her not to vote. Some Christians said they were not voting because they had no time or no transport to the polling centres, or it was just inconvenient. By then, NECF Malaysia had already sent out posters and letters encouraging Christians to vote and I understood the significance of these posters in light of the apathetic attitude about polling that some Christians had.

The comments spurred us to mobilise prayer for the election and confirmed the necessity of the round-the-clock intercession for the election.

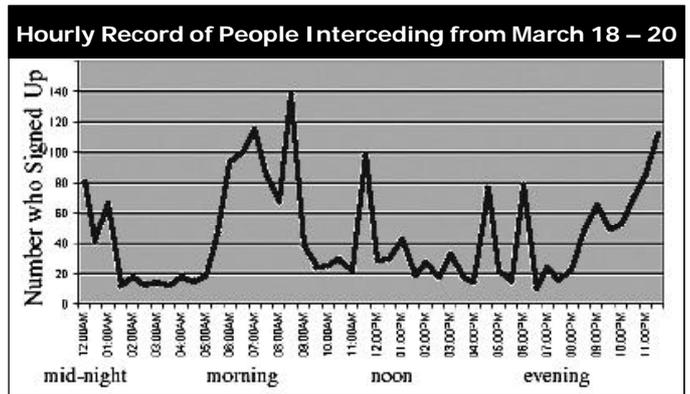
The idea to mobilise the 24-hour watch started when a lady, representing her prayer group, approached us in March one week before our visit to the northern states and shared her vision about a clock. She felt that God wanted to set up a 24-hour watch for the nation during the election period. "I asked the Lord how to go about it and He said to go and see NECF," she shared.

So while we were up north, we felt the urgency of setting up the watch and immediately started mobilising intercessors to fill in their names and time slots through their churches and our website. Within a week, over 900 people had signed up! Even the 'graveyard' hours were taken.

In my reflections after the election, Isaiah 59:16 came to mind: "He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor..."

I was very encouraged that our people had risen to the occasion to watch for the nation in its critical moment. From here, I was convinced that we have people willing to watch. We just need to provide the avenue and means for them to respond.

We were also very encouraged by the churches, particularly in Alor Star, Kangar and Sungei Petani, Seremban, Penang and Dungun, that came together to intercede for the nation during the election season. Time and again, we have seen



God moving powerfully when churches pray together as one. Like the Christians of the early church who "joined together constantly in prayer (Acts 1:14)", we are also to pray always in one voice.

Now that the election is over and the new cabinet has been appointed, we must not 'take a break' from our intercession for the nation. Let us go beyond the 24-hour watch and move on to the 365-day watch. Luke 18:1 says, "Men *always* ought to pray and not lose heart (emphasis mine)." Jesus' encouragement to us to persist in prayer was told through the parable of the persistent widow. In verse 7, "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out *day and night* to Him (emphasis mine)?" Leviticus 24 tells us that the fire on the altar "must not go out". It was a symbol of praise, worship, intercession and reconciliation offered by the priests to God. In Isaiah 62, God talks about posting watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem who will "never be silent day or night."

In 1727, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on a German congregation led to confession and repentance. As a result, 24 women and 24 men agreed to take turns, spending 4one hour a day in prayer for God's blessings on their congregation. This was the beginning of over 100 years of "hourly intercession" by the members of the Moravian church. from this prayer movement thousands of evangelists and missionaries spread into Europe, North America, Africa and Asia.

So, let us continue to pray as one at all times. It is not impossible to establish round-the-clock watches because we have many churches all over the country and if we come together, we can get all the time slots filled.

On our part, we will continue to feed information on the current events in the nation that warrant our concern and prayer, so that people know what and how to pray. This we will do through our website and regular Prayer Digest. May He continue to knit our hearts together as we pray **always** in **One Voice**.

English Push for MYFC



ONCE an active and popular organisation among the English-speaking students during the 1970s and '80s period, Malaysia Youth For Christ (MYFC) is now renewing its youth in the English ministry.

In the late 1980s, the evangelism-centred organisation shifted focus to the Chinese-speaking youths.

But, perhaps spurred by the English-language thrust in our public school education, it is now re-establishing ties with English-speaking youths, while maintaining the good work that it has

accomplished thus far with the Chinese-speaking youths.

MYFC started in Malaysia 34 years ago with a mission to give every young person the opportunity to make an informed decision to become a follower of Jesus. That includes youths in the rural and smaller communities or *kampung*.

In its ministry, MYFC recognises that its calling and main focus is evangelism. The organisation has therefore established close partnership with local churches to follow up on the new

believers.

To touch base with the young people, MYFC has always maintained a "grassroot" philosophy in that its sowing fields extend beyond the schools and campuses to where youths hang out, such as shopping malls, *mamak* stalls, bowling alleys and sport arenas.

In fact, the organisation's favourite phrase comes from Eugene Peterson who said, "God has moved into the

• GO TO PAGE 14

Till He Comes, Earth's Our Home

CHRISTIAN earth-keeping is neither new nor unknown but not much attention has been given to this subject in Malaysia compared with the western countries.

The recent 2001 NECF Survey of Churches, Pastors and Christians shows that only 2.3% of churches were involved in environmental protection activities as a social service for the community; only 1.8% of pastors say environmental issues for Christians should be a priority field of study by the NECF Research Commission; and only 3.9% of Christians participate in voluntary organisations involved in environmental conservation outside their church activities where there is interaction with non-believers.

Earth-keeping is certainly not high on the agenda of most local churches or individual Christians compared with evangelism or social action. Why is this so? I will attempt to answer this question and then see if there is anything we should and can do about the present situation.

Globalisation and the environment

As the world's population increases, consumption increases and more waste is generated. The depletion of finite natural resources and the safe disposal of man-made waste present the greatest challenges to modern man as he races against time for survival.

Before the advent of modern transport and communications, such problems were localised to a certain extent affecting only some people in some spot on the globe at any one time. Even devastating plagues, such as the Black Death, were not worldwide in its effect. With increased travel and trade, it has become increasingly more difficult to stop the transmission of disease vectors although we have developed an array of modern scientific measures to fight them.

The main force that drives globalisation – unbridled consumption driven by greed – shall destroy us by destroying the environment that sustains us if left unchecked. Whatever happens across the globe has implications for each of us whether we are aware of it or not, for we live in a much interconnected world.

De Witt (2000) has observed that many people are getting increasingly alienated from creation and its testimony to God's glory as they become



By Dr Living Lee

increasingly separated from the natural world due to rural-urban migration when they move to expanding cities whose growing inner cores often displace and destroy nature. It also comes, he says, from the disconnection of human causes from environmental effects, as happens when people come to believe that food comes from a shop and petrol from a pump. This was forcefully brought home to me when I heard how some children, when asked "Where do eggs come from?" answered, "The supermarket".

This alienation from nature is further aggravated in an ever-downward spiral through environmental degradation as when once-inspiring rivers supporting diverse life are transformed into open sewers, or when formerly clear skies are obscured by air pollutants.

Theological dilemmas – stumbling blocks to Christian earth-keeping

1. A wrong interpretation of dominion in Genesis 1:28.

Many, particularly critics of Christianity, have pointed to Genesis 1:28 to show that the Bible is the root cause of environmental problems.

Dominion has unfortunately been interpreted by some earlier Christians to be the same as destructive domination and a licence to plunder the environment instead of responsible stewardship. This is of course unacceptable for surely God did not create the earth and then hand it over to man to destroy it. Man was created in His image, which involves trustworthiness and responsibility (Moule, 1964).

It is also important to

remember that the creation mandate was given before the Fall when greed and exploitation were not part and parcel of exercising dominion over the earth.

2. Why bother to care for the environment if the old world is going to be destroyed and replaced by a new one anyway?

De Witt (2000) has called this the "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through" stumbling block. The reason behind this excuse for not caring for the environment is: "Since we

are headed for heaven anyway, why take care of this temporal Earth?" He argues against it by pointing out that the everlasting life we received when we believe in Jesus includes the here and now.

He went on to suggest that perhaps our learning how to take care of things in this moment of eternity is important for the care of things with which we will be entrusted later.

This view would of course lead to the other common excuse for neglecting earth-keeping, which is "Christ is coming back soon so and we have to concentrate our efforts on saving souls instead of taking care of the environment". Can you imagine living in totally filthy conditions just because everyone thinks that rubbish disposal should be low in the Christians' agenda because Christ is coming soon and saving souls is more important? We need to care for God's

The depletion of finite natural resources and the safe disposal of man-made waste present the greatest challenges to modern man as he races against time for survival.



• GO TO NEXT PAGE

creation in a sustainable way until Christ returns, whether it is tomorrow or 20 years from now.

What can we do for the environment?

An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation was issued in 1994 by the Evangelical Environmental Network (a joint initiative between the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Au Sable Forum) to assert and emphasise that this Earth belongs to God (Psalm 24:1) and that we are responsible to Him for it.

This belief underlines the historical Christian doctrine that we are stewards of creation, responsible to the Creator for our treatment of the environment.

The full text of the declaration and subsequent papers that commented on it were published in "The care of creation-focusing concern and action".

John Stott in his foreword in the book stated three important truths we should keep in mind in relating to the Earth. **First**, we will avoid the deification of nature. We respect nature because God made it but we do not reverence nature as if it were God and inviolable.

Second, we must avoid the opposite extreme, which is the exploitation of nature. The dominion God has given us is in responsible stewardship, not destructive domination.

The **third** and correct relationship between human beings and nature is that of cooperation with God. God has given us nature and what we do with it is culture. We are urged not only to conserve the environment, but also to develop its resources for the common good. When we cooperate with God to transform the created order for the pleasure and profit of all, our work becomes an expression of our worship, since our care of the creation will reflect our love for the Creator.

In Stott's chapter on "Our Human Environment" in his book "Issues Facing Christians Today", he rightly points out that at the root of the ecological crisis is human greed, what has been called "economic gain by environmental loss".

We must be prepared to pay the additional cost of production without pollution, whether in increased prices or in increased taxes.

The other area that he says we must address as responsible Christian stewards of the environment is to recognise that the earth's resources are not infinite so we have to strenuously avoid all wastefulness, not only out of solidarity with the poor but also out of respect for the living environment. In other words "live simply that others may simply live".

This will be reflected in our lifestyles or how we spend our money and also our investments or how we earn our money.

Three practical steps: Awareness, Appreciation and Action



Teach the children to love and respect God's creation and they will not so wantonly destroy it...

De Witt (2000) mentions that as most people have been alienated from the Creator and His creation, it is difficult to love, uphold and make right a world that we do not really know. Thus many will first have to become aware of creation and its God-declared goodness before we can move to appreciation and from there move on to stewardship by action.

Awareness involves seeing, naming, identifying, locating and knowing about God's creatures. Appreciation takes us one step further in learning not just to tolerate but respect, value, esteem and cherish the role that God has assigned to each creature both great and small in His fascinating creation.

Action involves making the right use of creation, restoring what has been abused in the past, serving by keeping lovingly and caringly that which we hold in trust and entrusting to others what we have served, kept and restored.

In other words, environmental education is to be followed by environmental action. We can reduce the amount of rubbish we generate by recycling our waste and encouraging others to do so. We can cut down on our consumption of fossil fuels and contribution to the greenhouse gases by becoming economical in our choice of transport (one of the reasons why I ride

a motorbike to work) and switching off the lights when not in use. We can save water by cutting down unnecessary wastage when we do our washing and recycle the water from the rinse cycle of our washing machines. We can support eco-friendly industries by purchasing their products in preference to others when available. We can start or join others to clean up the neighbourhood or some public facility such as a popular beach or picnic site. It is always good to teach by example to our children that we must not only clean up our own rubbish but that of others so that we leave a recreational site in a better state than when we found it.

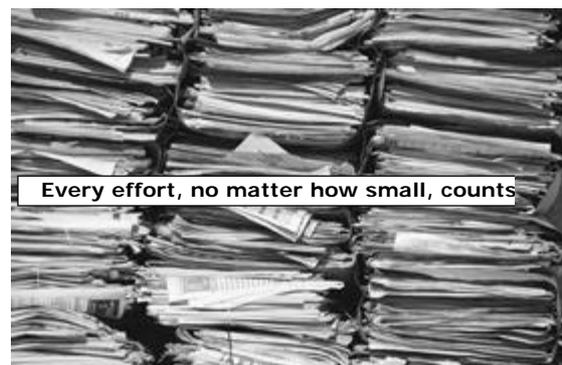
Instead of spending time and money only at man-made theme parks and shopping malls, we can take our families for holidays and trips to waterfalls, nature parks, hikes in the mountains, snorkelling in the sea, fishing, camping, watching fireflies, bird-watching, caving and a host of back-to nature fun activities organised by nature groups or on our own. Grow some of your own vegetables and fruits.

Teach the children to love and respect God's creation and they will not so wantonly destroy it as those who have been detached from it by the artificiality of modern living.

The idea is that every effort, no matter how small, counts. It is the cumulative effects of careless living, such as indiscriminate littering, that contribute to the unhygienic piles of rubbish in many of our neighbourhoods in a developing country like ours. Likewise clean rivers and towns such as is found in many developed countries, even those with high population densities like Japan, are the results of the combined efforts of everyone in that society.

Poverty eradication plays a very important role, as human poverty is both a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation. Poor people are forced to degrade the environment just to survive, for example over-harvesting of trees for firewood leading to soil erosion and desertification

• GO TO PAGE 15



Every effort, no matter how small, counts

Getting NS trainees to Church

NECF Malaysia is intensifying efforts to help National Service (NS) Christian trainees to attend church services on Sunday. Several pastors and trainees' parents have complained to NECF that some camp commandants had denied permission to trainees to attend Sunday services.

At the start of the NS programme, NECF Malaysia had sent a letter to Deputy Prime Minister Dato' Najib Abdul Razak, who heads the NS programme, urging him to ensure that trainees be allowed to carry on their religious routines, including attending church meetings on Sunday.

The letter said that spiritual practices would contribute to the inculcation of noble values, which is one of the three major objectives of the NS programme. NECF also informed the DPM that its



member-churches were willing to help the trainees in providing spiritual support and providing transportation to church.

Following the complaints from pastors and parents, NECF sent a follow-up letter to the DPM reminding him of his pledge to leaders of various religious organisations that trainees would have the freedom to practise their religious beliefs. The pledge was made when the DPM, who was then the Defence Minister, met with representatives from the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism.

On a positive note, two churches are joining hands to help Christian trainees at Kem Sri Impian, Penang, and they are

receiving full cooperation from the camp's commandant. The Nibong Tebal Gospel Hall (NTGH) and Parit Buntar Baptist Centre (PBBC) are jointly holding a special Sunday service, held at 4pm, that is geared to meet the trainees' needs.

According to PBBC pastor, Choo Kien Wai, the joint ministry started when somebody handed the NTGH pastor's telephone number to the camp commandant.

"We then visited the camp to make arrangement. At first we were supposed to have the worship service at the camp's community hall at the Sri Impian Camp but the commandant decided to transport the Christian trainees to NTGH for the weekly service," said Pr Choo.

The camp commandant was very responsive to the churches' initiative, and has even promised to send the next batch of trainees to NTGH for the service every Sunday, Pr Choo enthused.

• FROM PAGE 6: GETTING A GRIP OF TOMORROW

- Age of Contradiction – for example, the Church is now undergoing unprecedented pressure and yet experiencing unprecedented revivals; we have time-saving devices and yet, we have no time;

- Age of Contraption – high technology such as computers and satellite television that are advantageous to the spread of the gospel;

- Age of Contravention – that is, the act of contravening and violation, evident in increased lawlessness and sin everywhere; and

- Age of Contrasts – between light and darkness, love and hatred, courage and cowardice, and where the pure becomes purer and the vile become more vile.

Dr Kameel believed that all the events are signs of the fullness of time. He also pointed out the eight hot spots in the world, countries with serious problems that destabilise their surrounding regions. The countries include Iraq, North Korea, Israel, the Balkans, and Indonesia.

"What will Christians do about these hot spots? Will we fast and pray? Will we do whatever God tells us to do as a result of our fasting and praying?" he challenged. Encouraging the participants not to lose heart, he said: "In the eyes of the world, we may seem small, but when we team up with God, we are the mightiest of all."

• FROM PAGE 11: ENGLISH PUSH FOR MYFC

neighbourhood". As Jesus Himself moved among the people in the streets and market places – eating and being with the people who need Him – so MYFC believes its ministry and purpose is "Being There".

Staff are therefore trained to follow the organisation's motto, to be "Geared to the Times" (to be in touch with the youths) but to remain "Anchored to the Rock" (who is Christ Jesus).

This year, MYFC is targeting to bring the gospel to 2,500 non-Christian youths through several creative evangelistic events, such as sports and games competition that will include an SMS treasure hunt, sports and games competitions such as Human Monopoly, Counter Strik Games, Earth Ball Challenges and Thunder Ball. The organisation is also planning to bring in some NBA players to run a youth basketball clinic.

To attract the youths, all events planned are geared towards their most current interests.

NECF FOUNDATION

NECF Malaysia wish to thank all donors who have contributed generously to the NECF Foundation.

Kindly note that all donation cheques and bank drafts are to be made payable to:

NECF FOUNDATION

New Members

NECF Malaysia welcome the following into the fellowship as **Ordinary Members**:

- **Liman Kati Church, Kuala Lumpur**, represented by *Tang Kong Yik*
- **Bethany Youth Christian Centre, Kuching**, pastored by *Cheli Tamilselvam*
- **Living Word Centre, Gelugor, Penang**, pastored by *Looi Eng Seng*
- **CREST, Petaling Jaya**, represented by *Mrs Lana Wong*
- **Bethany Assembly of God, Prai**, pastored by *Arthur Bani*
- **Emmanuel Christian Assembly, Kulim**, pastored by *Clement a/ Michael Joseph*
- **Emmanuel Christian Assembly, Nibong Tebal**, pastored by *Paul Santiyahgu*
- **Emmanuel Christian Assembly, Sg Petani**, pastored by *S. Amos*

We also welcome 10 individuals as **Associate Members**: Jeremiah Loo Thian Sze; Pr Chin Sin Sui; Rev Alex Sanders; Ong Tuan Soon; Ahin@Annie Binti Tuah; Losius Bin Tanggunan; Julia Binti Sandalun; George Mikil; Datuk Albert Lim Chor Hen; and Karrin Rawing.

National Prayer Conferences – English and Chinese



NECF Malaysia will hold two separate prayer conferences as part of this year's NECF Merdeka prayer programme, which includes the nationwide 40-day Prayer and Fast and Charity Campaign.

The **Chinese prayer conference** will be held from Aug 25 to 27 at Full Gospel Assembly, Kuala Lumpur. The organising committee (NECF Chinese Commission) has invited Rev Nathaniel Chow to share on the theme "My house shall be called a house of prayer." Rev Nathaniel is senior pastor of the largest

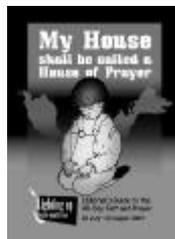
church in Taiwan – Taiwan Bread of Life – which has some 9,000 members.

Those who register before Aug 1 need only pay RM 100. After Aug 1, the fee is RM 120. Rev Nathaniel will also speak at the Chinese Merdeka prayer rally on Aug 27 night at FGA, KL.

Meanwhile the **English Prayer Conference** will be held at Glad Tidings, Petaling Jaya, from Aug 26 to 29. Speakers are Dr David Demian and Dr Iman Santoso.

The speakers will share the vision of prayer as a mandate for all Christians, and not just a ministry of a few elite intercessors.

Merdeka Fast and Pray booklets



THIS annual nationwide event begins July 22. Be sure to get the 40-day prayer guides from NECF Malaysia. They are available in English, Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese and Tamil. The guides come with the charity campaign savings boxes at RM1 per set. For the first time, a children's edition, suitable for children 12 and below, is also available. Call the NECF office for more information.

Around the clock for 40 days



THE NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission is setting out on an ambitious plan to mobilise round-the-clock prayer for the nation for the whole Merdeka 40-day Fast and Prayer period beginning July 22.

The NECF website (www.necf.org.my) will keep a time schedule that has half-hour daily slots for the 40 days. Those interested may

sign up at the website or e-mail their time commitment to prayer@necf.org.my

Participants will then be assigned the states and towns to pray for.

The prayer items are the same – Jeremiah 29:7 (for the states and towns); 1 Timothy 2:1–3 (for the Agong and Sultans, PM, DPM, the cabinet, the state governments and civil servants); Proverbs 11:10–11 and Proverbs 28:12 (for the Church to be a blessing to the community); 1 John 2:15–17 and Matthew 5:16 (for the Church to be set apart and holy); and Genesis 18:16–33 and Isaiah 62:6–7 (for the churches to be watchmen). The website schedule will list all the participants and their time slots.

May the Lord help us to start doing something today, no matter how small and insignificant it may seem to back up what we confess with our lips – that we love You Lord and want to glorify Your name by loving and caring for the earth and its inhabitants that you have entrusted to us and to our children. – *Contributed by the NECF Research Commission. To read the full article, go to the NECF website, "Signs of the Times" section.*

Worship and Creative Arts Conference

FGA KL is organising a worship, creative arts, and multimedia conference at its premises from June 1 to 4. It will cover individual music instrument workshops to band dynamics and creative arts workshops.

The key speaker is Ross Parsley, Worship Pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs. Ross is also the worship leader on Integrity Music's albums, "Lord of the Harvest" and "Around Your Throne", as well as several New Life worship recordings.

The other speakers are Malaysian-born Pr Glenn Packiam, an associate worship pastor and a gifted songwriter; and Singapore-based Eileen O'Connor who teaches dance and choreography.

For more information, contact Mark Tan at 012-2017018; or e-mail mtan@secure-ip.com. Or call Scott Lim at 03-79814755 or e-mail limscott@yahoo.com.

Fast And Give Campaign

FOR the past two years, NECF Malaysia has been running the *NECF Merdeka Charity Campaign* in conjunction with its yearly *Merdeka 40-day Fast and Prayer*. Over RM 1 million has since been collected from Christians who have contributed the money they saved from the meals they fasted.

The collection has been distributed to worthy welfare projects – both Christian- and non-Christian-run – here and abroad.

The campaign, made possible only by the sacrifices of those who participated, has been a visible demonstration of God's special love and concern for the deprived.

For this year's campaign, the NECF Council has decided that the proceeds will be extended to projects relating to:

1. Emergency relief crisis
2. Relief and Development
3. Education (to help schools in relation to amenities, facilities and education)

We encourage all Malaysian Christians to consider participating in this year's fast and prayer cum charity campaign beginning July 22. It may be hard to go it alone, so pray, fast and donate as a group.

But whether you participate as an individual or a group, we know that your prayers and sacrifices will ascend like incense to God.

• FROM PAGE 13

or indiscriminate dumping of rubbish and sewage into rivers in slums.

Conclusions

Having been informed, we become aware, which leads us to understand and appreciate God's wonderful creation. But all that will go to waste if we do not put into practise what we have learnt about caring for His earth.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS



MEXICO

RECENTLY, the spokesman for an evangelical association – formed specifically to voice the abuses against evangelicals in the country – was found dead. The cause of death was due to severe intoxication with alcohol and cocaine, which in the opinion of other leaders who knew him, makes his death highly suspicious. They are holding the Caciques (religious zealots and corrupt local authorities) responsible for the death. Meanwhile, several pastors and leaders in the state of Chiapas are in danger because of their active involvement in defending evangelical Christians from abuses committed by Caciques and their associates. Pray for these dear brethren that they will continue to serve courageously and compassionately, trusting God for their lives. Pray that righteousness will triumph and that the authorities will act fairly to bring the murderers to justice.

NEPAL

NEPAL is the only officially declared Hindu kingdom in the world with a population of 26.5 million. There are more than 80 ethnic groups and about 120 languages. About 90 percent are Hindus.

Although Nepal is considered one of the most peaceful countries in the world, it has been facing an internal war between the Maoist rebels and the government since 1996. Until now, approximately over 10,000 people have died, and between 150,000 and 200,000 people internally displaced.

In over 50 years of Nepali Church history, despite the persecutions and many other legal and social barriers, it has been estimated that the churches have grown from zero to 3,000 and there are approximately half a million Christians in the country at present.

More than a million Nepalis have now scattered around the world in different countries. Nepali churches have been growing also outside Nepal among diaspora Nepalis.

Praise God for the many who have come to know Christ out of the instability in the country. Pray for churches to faithfully nurture their newborn so that they will mature in knowledge of Him and love for Him; to be a source of love, peace

and comfort to the people who are traumatised by the current situation. Pray for help to reach the internally displaced people, many of whom have lost their loved ones in the battle. And pray for the many Nepalis working overseas that they will meet Christ through the love of the Christians. For example, in the Klang Valley, some churches have come together to organise gatherings and meetings for the Nepalese working in their areas. Praise God for them.

IVORY COAST

A failed coup by Muslim rebels last September left Ivory Coast polarised along ethnic, political and religious lines. Ivory Coast's local population is presently 38% Muslim and 31% Christian, with full religious freedom. Currently the Prime Minister is a northern Muslim and the President is a southern Christian, and they are working together to implement peace accords. However, the rebels don't want peace – they want to control the whole country and to replace the president. They are also provoking conflict with IC security forces, with the danger it will escalate. A return to war is a great fear but the greater fear is that IC will fall to Muslim extremists.

Pray that through the troubles, the churches will draw closer together; for their anxiety and suffering to produce endurance, character, hope (Rom 5: 3,4) and a renewed, strengthened relationship with their Saviour; for God to end the rebellion, securing justice, preserving religious freedom, safeguarding mission, and making way for salvation to spring up and righteousness to grow (Isaiah 45:8).

ALBANIA

UNEMPLOYMENT, drugs, prostitution and alcohol are becoming an inseparable part of Albanian society, according to Mission Possible Albania (MPA) Director Besa Shapplo. Among its multiple ministries, MPA has sought to reach Albanian children since it started partnering with local churches in 1991. *Mrekullia* (or miracle), its children's magazine, aims to teach Christian morals and ethics to children across society. Distributed freely in public schools, the magazine does not

speak openly about God, but has proven to be a tool for pre-evangelistic work. "Children are taught through the stories how to distinguish between good and evil, to love one another, to help their parents or friends," said Shapplo.

In tandem with the magazine, MPA organises Mrekullia Clubs for teaching the Bible to children ages seven to 12 in several Albanian churches. The clubs serve as evangelistic outreach for unchurched kids and help nurture Christian children's faith. Clubs hold the children's interest through kid-friendly Bible lessons and games. In addition, "homework indirectly makes them speak to their family about what they learn in the Club," she said. The Bible summer camps engage children from various clubs in five days of Bible study and discipling, with lessons for everyday living.

Pray for this ministry that the children and their parents will come to know the living Saviour. Pray also for the workers to continue their work with passion, compassion and love for the children.

CHINA

PASTOR Gong Shengliang, 53, is the founder and leader of the South China Church, an evangelical house-church fellowship with some 50,000 members across several provinces. In Dec 2001 he was sentenced to death under China's anti-cult laws. Intense international pressure led to an overturn of that charge and sentence. Pr Gong was falsely convicted of multiple counts of rape and given a life sentence in early 2002. The China Aid Association (CAA) reports that on April 12, Gong's three sisters were permitted to have a 10-minute visit with him. He had to be carried to the visiting hall as he could not walk. The CAA believes Pr Gong may not survive much longer under these conditions.

Pray for God to intervene so that Pr Gong will be moved to safety (or have his safety guaranteed); be treated for injuries; receive justice; and be filled with divine strength from the Holy Spirit. Pray for God to continue to bless the Chinese Church with spiritual power so that the Chinese Church may be a source of righteousness and justice and God's rich blessings to China (Isaiah 55: 10–13).