

Berita NECF

Editorial

Wise as serpents, gentle as doves

WHEN Jesus confounded the Pharisees by telling them to give to Caesar what belonged to Caesar and to God what belonged to God, he paved the way for generations of Christians to debate the scope of Christian involvement in public engagement.

Just what do we mean by “public engagement”? Malaysian Christians have long been faithful in serving other communities through charitable works. These forms of service are indeed ways Christians bring the love of God to others. But broach the subject of socio-political

witness, and many shy away.

As an area of discipleship, many of us struggle when it comes to the issue of Church and State. We recognize in the Lord’s response to the Pharisees’ famous but feeble attempt to entrap him, that on one hand, Jesus divided the sacred from the secular. But in another sense, he united both by illustrating Christian obedience to higher authority, whether earthly or divine.

This raises questions for us: Where do our responsibilities to the state end and our obligations to the divine begin? We are, according to

Jesus, obligated to obey both God and the state. But how should we navigate our relationship between two authorities? What happens when actions by the state are in conflict with what we believe as Christians? How should Christians deal with subtle oppression by the state of their rights as citizens? These require wise and biblical public engagement.

It is time for Malaysian Christians to understand the social and political implications of following Christ. We need a holistic

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NECF Malaysia

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By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

Movement of the Moderates

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MALAYSIA continues to face some of her darkest moments as a nation. Over the past months, the lack of political will to mitigate racial and religious intolerance has naturally given rise to ideologues, extremists, and radicals. All these are no different in essence from the keris-wavers and cow-head trampling demonstrators we saw a few years ago.

How one can rant and rave and threaten bloodshed and yet walk the streets a free man, whilst those who merely wear yellow T-shirts can be arrested, is most incomprehensible and unfortunate.

The 9 July 2011 Bersih 2.0 rally is a culmination of frustrations of the nation's citizenry, and I suspect this marks the beginning of a movement of the moderates.

There is some truth in the government's reasoning that rallying "is not our culture." But when tens of thousands of ordinary peace-loving people persist to take to the streets, besides the many thousands more who could not go due to the blockades and gridlock in the capital city, then it is incumbent on all of us to do some soul-searching.

The arguments for the legitimacy or otherwise of the Bersih 2.0 rally reminds me of the famous "Lady Justice." This iconic figure wears a blindfold over her eyes while lifting a sword in one hand and carrying a pair of scales on the other. Symbolically, she represents fair and equal administration of the law - without prejudice, avarice, corruption, fear or favor.

If our leaders had likewise worn a blindfold and were asked to objectively judge the calls of concerned citizens and assess their conduct at the rally,

their response would not have been so immature.

In many parts of the world, any group or government espousing to "clean the electoral roll," "stop corruption," "use indelible ink" - would have been praised as being proactive, decent, fair-minded, honest, rational. Strangely in Malaysia, when some people ask for these very same practices, they are "demonized", simply because they are "not government". What we witnessed on 9 July 2011 was the epitome of crude partisan politics.

Personally, I think the demands of Bersih 2.0 - for electoral reforms and the right to have a peaceful march - were not only reasonable, but impartial as well. Bersih 2.0 was not pro-opposition but pro-democracy.

The people of Malaysia are maturing in democracy and we can no longer tolerate unfair practices, corruption, vote-buying and otherwise. Being "blindfolded" like Lady Justice also means we are color blind, i.e. it does not matter if you wear red T-shirts or have green banners, nor does it matter if you are yellow, black or brown-skinned.

A right is a right. A wrong is a wrong regardless of whether it is committed by the government or the opposition or whomsoever.

I know the Church in this nation to be a peace-loving people. But more importantly, we are a people of the Book and our Book teaches us principles and values, rights and wrongs.

We remember Christ's mandate to love our neighbors as ourselves and not conduct ourselves in an un-Christian

Continued next page...

manner. At all times, we want to be conciliatory and be agents of peace to ensure harmony.

We must resist the temptation to say and do things that are escalatory and antagonistic. When highly confrontational tactics begin to replace more co-operative approaches, conflicts escalate and more extreme personalities maneuver to become leaders of the conflict groups.

And when this polarization degenerates till so much that is said and done makes no sense, we then need to

remind ourselves that Lady Justice, though blindfolded, is “not gagged.” This is where the silent majority and the Church must speak up. Scriptures mandate us to open our mouth.²

Moderates must speak up to check the damage intended by hard-liners and ensure that democracy is not hijacked.

We do not subscribe to “political subversion” but the Church has the responsibility to stand up against the fanatics and hypocrites bent on corrupting the moral fiber of our people and destroying our democratic nation.

There is nobody to save Malaysia except Malaysians. It is time for the moderates to speak up, be heard and play their role in this nation.

(This article was first published on the NECF website on 13 July.)

¹ Remember, the blindfold on Lady Justice represents objectivity, not blindness i.e. she is blindfolded, not blind.

² Proverbs 31:8 - Open your mouth for the speechless, 9 Open your mouth, judge righteously, And plead the cause of the poor and needy. NKJV

...continued from front cover: Wise As Serpents, Gentle As Doves.

biblical view of the relationship between church and state, and between both entities and God.

Church, state and citizens

According to the Bible, both church and state are servants of God. Both answer to the authority of God and both exist for the good of the world for which Christ died. However, government operates on natural law. The church is entrusted with the Gospel and the law of Christ.

The Bible teaches that God is the ultimate source of all governmental authority – all governing authorities which exist have been established by God acting through people. It is also God’s will for citizens and governments to do justice.

If we accept that political authority stems from both the will of the people and from God, it thus follows that governments do not have the absolute right to do what they want. It also follows that citizens must play their role in keeping governments accountable so that justice is served.

As such, both church and state have distinct God-given roles in society, and history shows that both best serve the public interest when each respects the role and purpose of the other. From the Bible, we see that Jesus did not intend for Christians to withdraw from the public square. In fact, Jesus’ own life shows that he was constantly a thorn in the side of the Pharisees, challenging their hypocrisy and status quo.

We are clear that the church as an institution must not be partisan. But how should individual Christians exercise their socio-political witness? As individuals, we first need to submit our politics to the lordship of Christ. Then, we need to be uncompromisingly biblical. Additionally, we should be grounded in the facts – in a comprehensive and accurate reading of history and of current affairs.

Using all these, we can build a framework to help us make consistent, faithful and effective decisions about concrete questions: What laws, policies or actions should we support? When should we speak up?

To engage is to bear witness

Sometimes, Evangelicals are nervous about socio-political involvement, seeing it as a diversion from evangelism. But public square engagement is part of the sharing of the Good News. When we wisely demonstrate Kingdom values in the socio-political sphere, we bear witness to God’s mission of restoring this fallen world and of reconciliation with humankind. We can open doors for others to come to know the King of Kings.

On the other hand, unwise engagement in socio-politics can damage the advance of Kingdom values or of the Gospel. Discernment is needed in the way churches or church leaders conduct themselves with politicians or political parties. Our interests and actions should not be partisan but be based on principles and values that are in line with biblical convictions.

Let us remember that Romans 13 places divine limitations on state power. Elsewhere in the bible, God insists that all state actions conform to His standards of justice. Thus, what we should seek and support are state decisions that uphold the higher law of divine justice. Biblical principles can help us evaluate the laws, policies and actions that we should support.

If we have placed our trust in Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords, then we are first of all, citizens of a spiritual kingdom. While Caesar may have been a earthly king, Jesus is the King. He is the One who died for us and rose from the dead, and who deserves first place in our hearts and minds. When we make a stand for godly standards in this world, we bear witness for Him.

(Resource: Church & State – RBC Discovery Series)

Code of Conduct for Missions and Evangelism

GLOBAL guidelines for ethical conduct in Christian mission and evangelism were launched on 28 June 2011. The document - Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct – was developed in response to increasing global inter-religious tension.

It was also developed to respond to criticisms that some Christians were using unethical methods in conversions, a press statement from the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) said. The document is the first of its kind in the history of the Church, and is not a theological statement on missions but is meant to address practical issues of Christian witness in a multi-religious world.

The guidelines were the result of five years of collaboration between the mainline Protestant, Evangelical and Roman Catholic churches. These groups were represented through the World Council of Churches (WCC), the (WEA), and the Vatican's Pontifical Council on Inter-religious Dialogue (PCID). Collectively, the three represent over 90% of the world's total Christian population.

The recommendations cover three parts. The first, "The Basis for Christian Mission", lays out biblical foundations for mission. Jesus Christ is the example to follow when witnessing to others. Christians who use deceptive and coercive means "betray the gospel and may cause suffering to others", the guidelines state. Conversion is acknowledged as ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit.

The second section deals with "Principles" of ethical conduct in missions. This includes refraining from exploiting poverty situations and using incentives in conversions. The freedom of religion and belief – including the right to profess, practice, propagate and change one's religion – are recognized as part of being created in the likeness and image of God. Christians are thus to denounce religious persecution and the use of religion for political ends.

Inter-religious cooperation is another key principle. This includes mutual respect and solidarity in working with other faiths to promote justice, peace and the common good.

The third and final part contains recommendations to all Christians, church bodies, mission organizations and agencies. Christians are urged to formulate guidelines for ethical conduct based on the principles for their respective mission contexts.

The document was launched by representatives of the WEA, WCC and the PCID, at the WCC headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

WEA Secretary-General Dr Geoff Tunnicliffe has endorsed the recommendations for all evangelicals, saying, "In some places, dynamic public witness to Jesus Christ has been accompanied by misunderstanding and tension. This document is a valuable resource for church and ministry leaders for reflection and practice on how to best witness in ways faithful to the call of Christ and in line with the life and spirit of Jesus."

The full document can be viewed at <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/>

Christian Counsellors Form National Association

CHRISTIAN counselling is distinctively different from secular or professional counseling which strives to be religiously neutral. Professional counselling bodies are increasingly influenced by values that are shaped by political correctness. Professional ethics also demands that counsellors do not impose their personal beliefs and values upon counselees.

In contrast, the aim of Christian counselling is personal transformation by encountering a personal God. Recognising this, Christian counselling is growing as a practice in more affluent countries. Many pastors are trained in both theology and Christian counselling. In these places, there is a national association to represent Christian counsellors.

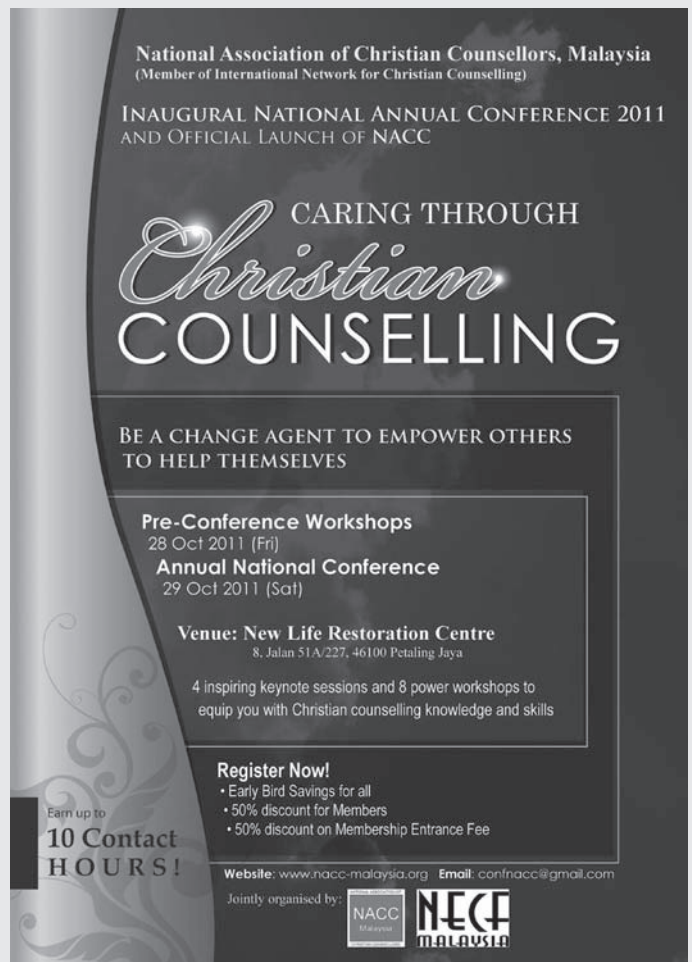
In Malaysia, the National Association of Christian Counsellors (NACC) was recently formed by a group of local counsellors and therapists with endorsement from the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia. NACC was registered as an independent body by the Registrar of Societies Malaysia on 9 May 2011. NACC is a member of the International Network for Christian Counselling (INCC), a world body sponsored by the American Association of Christian Counsellors.

Professionally, secularly-qualified counsellors here are registered under the Board of Counsellors Malaysia, which does not recognise Christian counselling. It must be noted that being a member of the NACC does not certify a Christian to set up a professional counselling practice. However, NACC hopes to impart basic counselling knowledge and skills to all Christians, and in doing so, many more will be motivated to pursue academic qualifications to be professional counsellors. To this end, NACC intends to organise annual national conference and workshops.

NACC membership is open to all Christians interested in learning about and practising Christian counselling. Members are eligible for registration discounts to annual national conferences and pre-conference workshops. They will also have access to forums and meetings for fellowship and networking.

There are three categories of membership:

- 1 Professional Members:** Comprising qualified counsellors, therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists and other related professional mental health practitioners;
- 2 Probationary Members:** Open to all Malaysian Christians; and,



National Association of Christian Counsellors, Malaysia
(Member of International Network for Christian Counselling)

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- 3 Ordinary Members:** Probationary Members who have successfully accumulated the required number of contact hours to qualify as Ordinary Members of the NACC.

Contact hours are awarded to those who attend NACC workshops and main conference plenary sessions.

At annual general meetings, only Professional and Ordinary Members are eligible to vote and be office bearers. Professional and Ordinary Members will also be listed in the NACC website.

The official launch of NACC and the first national counseling conference will be held on 29 Oct 2011. Email nacc.malaysia@gmail.com for enquiries.

(Article source: National Association of Christian Counsellors' statement)

Global Day of Prayer 2011: An Urgent Cry for Malaysia

By Debbie Loh



THE Global Day of Prayer (GDOP) 2011 in Malaysia was a quieter and more localised affair compared to the mass gathering at a Klang Valley stadium the previous year.

On 12 June 2011, the worldwide date for the GDOP, main prayer rallies were held at three locations in the Klang Valley while one was held in Penang. Smaller prayer meetings took place in over 40 cities and towns throughout Malaysia that week. Though more subdued overall, many who attended GDOP 2011 felt the urgency in crying out to God for the state of the nation's affairs and to take seriously the call to repentance and prayer in 2 Chronicles 7:14.

For Malaysia, people prayed for repentance, restoration of moral values and healing for society. Among the items highlighted were the high number of child prostitutes between the ages of nine and 18, estimated at over 4,000.

Other concerns included the crime rate, in particular rape, where statistics show that one rape occurs ever 2.5 hours. Child abandonment was another concern, whereby one baby is said to be dumped every 10 days. The high incidence of abortion at one for every five pregnancies, and growth in the HIV/AIDS rate.

The political climate was covered in a unique way at the prayer rally led by youths in Kampar at the Grand Kampar Hotel. The meeting here prayed for forgiveness and restoration of Malaysia using the five principles of the Rukun Negara: Kepercayaan kepada Tuhan (Belief in God), Kesetiaan kepada Raja dan Negara (Loyalty to King and Country), Keluhuran Perlembagaan (Supremacy of the Constitution), Kedaulatan Undang-Undang (Sovereignty of the Law), Kesopanan dan Kesusilaan (Good behaviour and morals).

Restoration of godliness in society was the prayer focus for the Chinese GDOP rally held at the Taman Midah Lutheran Church in Cheras on 16 June. The gathering broke into small groups to pray for the seven mountains

or sectors of society: business, government, media, arts and entertainment, education, the family and religion. Rev Kok Chin Ming from the Mudun Chinese Methodist Church spoke on the need for personal holiness and urged Christians to live holy lives in order to affect change in these sectors.

For the Malaysian Church, people prayed for unity among Christians across denominations and generations, and boldness in standing for justice, integrity and in preaching the Word.

For the Middle East, prayers were said for mercy and peace to be restored to countries facing political turmoil, for genuine freedom and improved livelihoods for citizens.

Standing firm

Given the state of affairs in Malaysia and the Middle East, GDOP 2011 Malaysia Chairman Rev Looi Kok Kim aptly summed up the mood of the times in his message at the Petaling Jaya Evangelical Free Church (PJEFC) rally on 12 June.

"2011 is turning out to be a year of making choices, whether on a personal level, nationally or globally," he said. He referred to choices facing Malaysians, for example, whether to remain in the country because of the current situation. He also referred to choices facing Middle East citizens in recent and on-going protests for a change of government. Rev Looi noted that the choices people made now would shape events in the coming years.

"Things may happen for better or for worse, but the important thing is for God's people to stand firm in faith. Faith is required in order to do the unthinkable, such as the crossing of the Red Sea," he said.

He quoted from Moses moments before leading the Israelites across the Red Sea in Exodus 14:13-14. "Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. ... The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."



Logos Hope's Maiden Visit to Port Klang

THE MV Logos Hope is the newest ship of Operation Mobilisation (OM) and will visit Port Klang from 29 Sept to 23 Oct 2011. This is the vessel's first call in Malaysia. Logos Hope replaces the MV Doulos which last visited Port Klang in 2006.

Known as the world's largest floating book fair, the ship carries over 5,000 titles on a wide range of subjects for sale at discounted prices. Through this, the ship has met the educational needs of communities around the world. The book fair will open daily for the general public.

Logos Hope is also here to bless the community through conferences and seminars on board, through ministry teams sent on outreach, and through a two-week volunteer programme for Malaysians to experience work and service on the ship.

Those interested in the volunteer or "DEEP Discipleship" programme (Discipleship, Exposure to Missions, Express His Love, Practical Work) can choose from two phases in Port Klang from 29 Sept to 11 Oct, and 12 to 23 Oct. Volunteers work in one of the ship's departments, and are discipled through evangelism, Bible studies and ministry. The programme is free and inclusive of lunch and dinner, but transport to and from the ship and accommodation are not provided. Applications to join this programme must be submitted by 31 Aug.

Christian leaders looking to partner with Logos Hope for ministry opportunities can contact Jessica Kiely (email jessica.kiely@gbaships.org or mobile 012-281 9054) for onboard conferences and seminars, and Jongmin Lee (email jongmin.lee@gbaships.org or mobile 012-281 9043), for ministry and outreach teams.

Applications for the DEEP Discipleship programme should also be sent to the same contact persons.

Paid tours of the ship for church groups can also be arranged daily except on Mondays. Tour bookings will be on a first-come, first-serve basis. Make bookings by contacting Elina Choo at elina.choo@gbaships.org or 012-283 3231.

A global ministry such as Logos Hope's requires funding, and gifts from local churches will be welcomed. Those who would like to support Logos Hope's ministry in Malaysia can contact Barnard Modimakwane at modimakwane@gbaships.org or 012-281 8794.

Note: Besides Port Klang, Logos Hope will also visit other Malaysian ports including Penang (30 Aug – 26 Sept), Kuching (28 Oct – 14 Nov) & Kota Kinabalu (18 Nov – 4 Dec).

Youth participation

Some pastors were heartened by stronger youth leadership in GDOP events this year. At the rally at SIB Brickfields, Rev Danil Raut, president of SIB Semenanjung, said he was moved by a strong turnout from the youth. "I was very encouraged to see more young people, unlike before."

The youth-led meeting in Kampar was spearheaded by students of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). Daniel Chi of the GDOP Kampar Committee said more students had been inspired to pray for the nation. The event drew about 100 people, mostly UTAR students and Orang Asli Christians from around Kampar.

In Penang, churches united together to form dance, worship teams and choirs for the event which was anchored by the Excel Point Community Church (EPCC). Pastor Sam Surendran of EPCC said the prayer rally was the culmination of the 168-hours non-stop prayer chain held from June 4 – 11, and the Run Penang event.

The call in 2 Chronicles 7: 14 remains true even after GDOP 2011 has passed. The challenge for all Malaysian Christians is to continue preserving in repentance, prayer and ethical living, before God can heal our land.



Democracy and Human Dignity

Eugene Yapp, NECF Research Commission Executive Secretary

BERSIH 2.0's march on 9 July 2011 is now touted as a defining moment in Malaysian history when citizens realized they were truly 1Malaysia and shed their fear of speaking out. Who can forget the now-famous photo of an elderly lady holding flowers and wearing the banned yellow T-shirt? Who hasn't been moved by stories of citizens of different races helping one another cope with the effects of tear gas?

Yet, Bersih has also been demonised as an illegal movement out to create havoc and bring disruption to the lives of citizens. Critics suggest that Bersih cannot be for the good of the nation because it has deprived ordinary citizens like you and I of the right to our peaceful, comfortable lives.

The debate shows that society is more entrenched and polarized. People tend to see Bersih and its demands in either emotional or black-or-white terms.

Democracy isn't in the Bibleor is it?

How should Christians understand democracy? Is there a biblical foundation for democracy, given that it is not even mentioned in the Bible? That being the case, should Christians be engaged in a fight for greater democratic rights?

In Malaysia, democracy is more often defined from a paternalistic standpoint. This "big brother knows best" attitude simply means that the State, while looking after your welfare, will also decide what's best for you. There is little room for people to form opinions, explore their options and together make collective choices for the common good.

In contrast, the definition by political philosophers is that democracy is a system by which people make collective decisions and then actualise them for the good of society and the nation. This includes: (1) electing officials or representatives through fairly-conducted elections; (2) giving citizens the right to express themselves, including to hold dissenting views without fear of punishment; (3) the right for citizens to obtain information; and, (4) the right of citizens to form independent associations or groups to protect their interests.

Such a definition of democracy is consistent with the Biblical mandate which calls us to be stewards of creation for the good of the cosmos. Scripture is unequivocal that man was created in the image of God (Gen.1:26-27). As persons created in the image of God, we possess dignity and are worthy of respect. Just as God is a free-willed and moral being, we who are created in his image must also have the freedom to choose and to act.

In acting out our freedom, we are bearers of God's image in the "network of life-giving relationships" between ourselves, God and others. In Christian teaching on politics, these relationships are meant to seek the enjoyment of universal goods and rights.

"In acting out our freedom, we are bearers of God's image in the "network of life-giving relationships" between ourselves, God and others."

These goods and rights, as defined in Christian tradition, are our stewardship of creation, admiration of the aesthetic beauty of the created earth, the exclusive sexual communion in marriage and of procreation, and the rest we have from our labour in order to render worship and communion with God. These goods and rights therefore pertain to our living and our well-being before God and society.

Thus, Christian responsibility within a democratic society should be to strive for this quality of living in the context of these life-giving relationships. Such quality of life is premised upon integrity, liberty, self-rule, progress, responsibility and communal prosperity.

It follows then, that government, as elected representatives of the people, must allow space for these virtues and actively promote them so that the common good for society can be realised. Pragmatic and arbitrary politics must never be allowed to trump over the divinely ordained good of creation.

Democracy as understood within this framework is then participatory because its end goal is what is good for all. The Christian today is therefore obliged to be involved in participatory democracy, for in doing so, Christians as citizens of a nation will be exercising stewardship to determine what is good and meaningful for themselves, their children and the society to which they belong.

What good can the Church bring?

Contrary to perception that religious institutions are narrow-minded or ill-equipped to contribute to the larger good, history has demonstrated that it is such institutions which have stood as beacons of light in times of crisis. Thus, in the Bersih episode and to the encouragement of many, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) called on the government to uphold the constitutional right of Malaysians to freely assemble in peace and to engage with understanding, compassion, honesty and respect for all people.

Making this call to respect constitutional rights is what the church, as an institution, can do. This is what the late American theologian, Carl Henry, meant when he said the church was “obliged to declare the criteria by which the nation will ultimately be judged and [the] divine standards to which man and society must conform if civilization is to endure”.

To do so, the church must first and foremost, seek the Lord in earnest prayer to make sense of all that is happening to the nation. In this season where the church prepares herself for the NECF 40-Day Fast and Prayer (7 Aug – 15 Sept), Christians must humble themselves and pray, and seek and turn from our wicked ways so that the Lord will hear from heaven and forgive our sins and heal our land. Prayer in this accord is a form of engagement and not merely petition.

Secondly, the church must determine the criteria and right theological and moral principles to bear on public life. These principles will then serve as parameters for Christians, working with other civil society groups, to engage the public square with the right strategies.

Is silence therefore an option?

In the run up to the march, many Christians pondered this question. Now that 9 July has come and gone, what then? Have more marches, demonstrations or even “yellow Saturdays”?

Malaysians are coming to terms with what a truthful democracy means. The quest for democratic reforms based on the dignity of individuals and communities has begun. We ought to ask ourselves, what sort of nation do we want Malaysia to be? One where peace and freedom are defined as only the right to shop and make money with no other concern? Or one that brings the best out of our common life by upholding the God-given human ideals of civility, equality, freedom, order, prosperity and welfare for all?

The current climate suggests that this national journey will likely be cast in either-or terms, given the polarisation between those who want greater freedom and those with entrenched interests. Christians need wisdom to discern the “spin” and to perceive the heart of the debates that rage around us.

Is God moving in answer to the many prayers over the years for national transformation? If, as hopeful Christians we believe that change and transformation is imminent, we must shed our complacency and begin claiming our place as God’s agents of change and participate in civil society to collectively shape the ongoing destiny of this great nation.

God bless Malaysia!

Part of the crowd at the 9 July march - Photo by Yam Phui Yee.



40-Day Fast & Prayer To Fund Vocational School

Rev Andy Chi, NECF Prayer Executive Secretary

GIVE

IN conjunction with the 40-Day Fast and Prayer this year, NECF is collecting funds saved from meals for a Vocational School Project.

NECF has been given two plots of land, in Kota Kinabalu and in Selangor, for the purpose of building vocational schools that will provide alternative education for students unable to fit into the current education system.

This is a practical project reflecting the theme of the 2011 40-Day Fast and Prayer – “Be Agents of Change”. Collections from the Fast and Pray charity will be channelled to the building of these schools.

PRAY

In line with the theme, all of us are urged to prayerfully consider our role in transforming society within our spheres of influence. Many of us are concerned about the worrying state of affairs in the pillars of society – the family, religion, education, marketplace, government, arts and entertainment, and the media. Certainly, there is much we need to seek the Lord for on behalf of Malaysia.

Malaysia will also be facing the 13th general election in the near future. We need to intercede for God’s sovereign will to be done through these elections, and for Christians to continue fulfilling their role as agents of change, whichever regime comes to power.

The 40 days will culminate in the Malaysia Day Prayer Rally on 15 Sept at the GA611 Bread Of Life Prayer Tabernacle, Petaling Jaya.

Fast

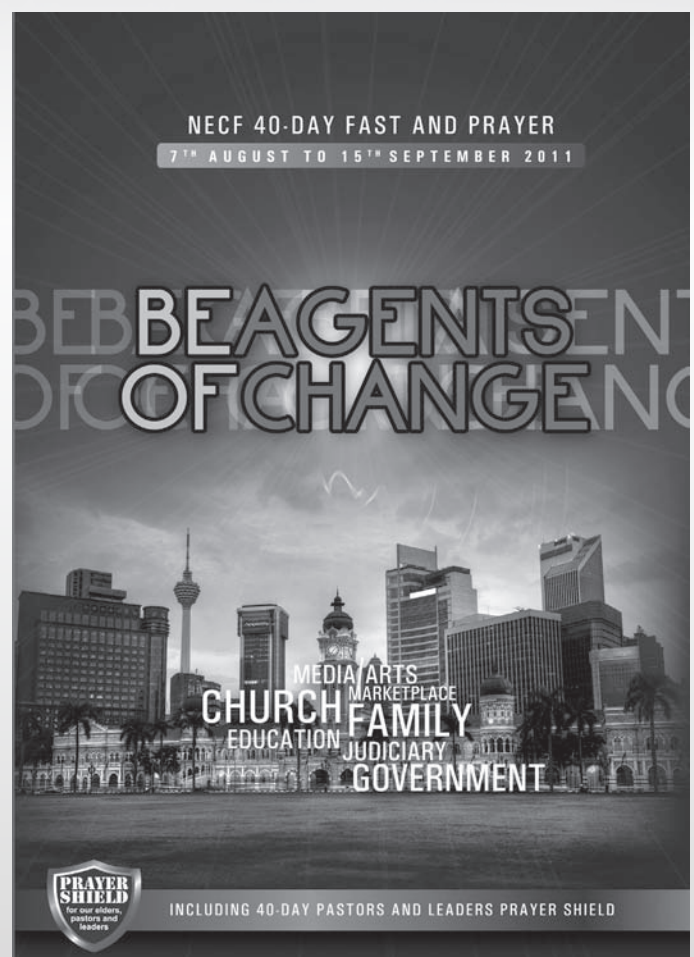
Fasting may appear intimidating and difficult at first, but it is not impossible.

The act of fasting is found in the Old Testament, the Gospels and in the New Testament Church. In the Old Testament, fasting and prayer were prescribed as a remedy for national calamity and disaster. The Gospels record Jesus going into an extended period of fasting as preparation for ministry. The early church carried on with this practice.

Fasting is closely tied to appeals for divine intervention, forgiveness, deliverance or healing caused by great distress, sorrow or guilt. This can be either on a personal or national scale. Fasting is also practised as a spiritual discipline for spiritual intimacy, growth, ministry and temperance.

One should enter into fasting purposefully. There are different types of fasting for prayer, such as abstaining from food and only consuming water, or avoiding meat completely during the fast period. Type, duration, objective and approach of the fast should be decided before commencing, taking into account individual health conditions.

With persistence, the benefits and value of fasting will become apparent. It may even become a regular practice in our lives that enriches us spiritually and physically.



THE 2011 40-Day Fast & Pray campaign was launched in four cities in Sabah from 14-18 July. NECF Prayer Executive Secretary Rev Andy Chi and Bahasa Malaysia Commission Executive Secretary Alfred Tais officiated the launches in Tawau, Lahad Datu, Sandakan and Keningau. It was a multi-lingual affair, with services held in English, Chinese and Bahasa Malaysia to accommodate all groups.



Photos (top to bottom): Worship at the English/ Chinese launch at St Patrick's Anglican Church, Tawau; deep in prayer at the launch at Church of the Good Shepherd, Sandakan; and joyful faces in worship at the BM launch at Gereja Baptis Keningau.

Unity in the Church

HOW did the early Church survive and grow? No doubt through the Holy Spirit's work, but the unity and love among the early Christians was just as important.

Unity is crucial in missions and in advancing the church, Bishop Dr Hwa Yung told participants of the NECF Chinese Prayer Camp in July.

Unity means loving one another within and across denominations, and having a genuine willingness to work together. More often than not, churches each have their own outreach and evangelism agendas instead of a united plan to engage society.

"If we indeed want the world to see the reality of Christ, the world must first see His love at work in our midst," Dr Hwa, the main speaker, said in one of his sessions at the two-day camp, which was attended by more than 300 people from 34 churches.

He spoke on the early church model in Acts, which identified priorities and assigned people to tasks. In this way, unity within the church was maintained because needs were met and the task of preaching was not neglected.



Unity among church leaders also meant valuing and complementing one another's talents and contributions. Leaders ought not to be territorial or feel threatened by other leaders. Barnabas, who helped in Paul's ministry, was an example of one who was not intimidated by a well-known leader like Paul, but saw him as a partner in ministry.

The wisdom of the Council of Jerusalem can also teach us about preserving unity when there are disagreements. In Acts 15, the council decided not to burden the new Gentile believers unnecessarily over the rite of circumcision, and instead prioritised "pure and holy living".

Dr Hwa noted that when there is unity, the Holy Spirit can work. That is how the church in Acts grew steadily through a sustained revival. He urged Malaysian Christians to reflect on the state of unity in the local church.

Other speakers at the camp were NECF Chairman Rev Eu Hong Seng who addressed the current state of affairs in Malaysia, Rev Dr John Ong from the Malaysian Baptist Theological Seminary who spoke on the importance of intercession in church unity, and Pastor Jonathan Loh, Youth Pastor of FGA KL on youth ministry.

Several local Chinese Christian pop artistes were also invited to the camp to share their testimonies and how they used their influence in pop culture to impact people.

Parenting: Raising Citizens

By Chee Siew Hoong

MY children and I talk about a lot of things together. We talk about how scruffy our dog has been looking lately, what their teachers said during lessons, what their friends said, books they've just read, food. We also talk a lot about the real stories around us. We also talked about Bersih 2.0.

"Are you going to march, Mum?" my ten-year-old asked me on the eve of that momentous event.

"We will definitely pray," I said. "That's marching too, for those who can't go, if you believe that prayer is work, and it is."

"What's Bersih?" asked my six-year-old.

"It means 'clean' in Bahasa Malaysia," quipped her elder sister.

Two to three days before that, we'd talked about what the movement stood for. I'd given a simplified explanation on the election process, and how it can be abused. My ten-year-old had read about democracy when studying about Greece, and how it had been started in order to get rid of "tyrants" - usurpers in ancient Greece who seized power unconstitutionally. It wasn't hard for her to understand what Bersih, the movement, was about.

It was harder to explain to my six-year-old, for whom most things are still concrete and immediate. So, I used the example of a classroom situation where each child has the opportunity to vote for change, e.g. to have park time each day of the week, instead of just on Fridays. Now, active six-year-olds really value park-time. It is their "thank God it's Friday!" moment after hours of being at their kindy-sized desks. But, what if bigger kids came along and squished up the voting papers, or wrote stuff on the voting papers and decided that you couldn't have extra park time because they wanted to have the park all to themselves? It was a simplistic parallel, but it made a point. My six-year-old turned bright-red livid.

"It's not fair!"

I was pleased to hear that. I'd heard it countless times from my girls when we had talked about the Sarawak elections, the plight of Burmese refugees, human trafficking along our borders and the displacement of the Orang Asli from their ancestral lands.

At ten and six, they can't grasp these issues in their entirety. But that's okay. They're not expected to at this point. But, they're old enough to respond thoughtfully about their country. How can authorities that are supposed to protect the helpless, abuse them for profit?

Why don't they share the wealth? How can they just take away people's land just like that? It's not fair.

Just saying "It's not fair", however, is not enough. And so, my husband and I tell them that though they are little, they can do what mighty women and men do. They can pray. As a family, we've prayed over the floods in the north. For about a year plus, we prayed weekly for Burmese refugees in Malaysia and that God would protect them from cruel people. When we first began sponsoring needy children, we prayed for them nightly that they would be healthy, stay in school and study hard, and obey their parents. We haven't been as consistent in praying for those children this year, and we've got to begin again. During the Sarawak elections, we prayed against corruption, against the powers of witchcraft and for God-fearing leaders on both sides of the political divide. Last Saturday, as our brave friends were in the throng of marchers in KL, we were praying at home for protection and for justice. I showed my girls photos and live streams of the march on the computer. They saw me weeping and praying, and they were not upset at the sight because they'd seen me weep before in prayer.

But, it would be untruthful to say that they have not heard me rant against certain ethnic groups, or reinforce racial stereotyping. Like everyone else, history runs deep in our veins in the form of emotions, entrenched attitudes and thoughts. I tell my children that I have sinned in holding on to a communal history of resentment, and they have heard me repent before the Lord. And this has led us to talk about how mercy and grace must accompany calls for "justice" and "fairness". God's idea of righteousness was after all, a towel for foot-washing and a cross.

Pretty soon, they will be asking questions like: "If there's so much unfairness, what's God doing about it?", or "Where's the church in this?"

I'm getting myself ready for those questions. My preparation involves studying the scriptures and being prayerful throughout the day when I do my chores. And when those questions come, I want to move them to asking: "What have you made me for, Lord, in such a time as this?"

(Siew Hoong is thankful for her parents who continue to show her what prayer means in the walk of faith.)

Discipling Our Children: Will Our Kids Keep The Faith?

By Wrutheran Sinnadurai

REFERRING to the Christian community, someone once quipped that the first generation knows God, the second generation knows about God and the third generation knows not God. Over the years, I have seen the truth of that statement many times.

It is rather tragic that there are thousands of parents who profess belief in Christ and are regular and active in church, but whose children seem untouched by their faith. The same also holds true for some pastors and leaders who labour hard to disciple others but whose own children seem to have drifted away from the faith.

There is no guarantee that children will follow the faith of their parents. But there are at least eight practices the family and church can apply to facilitate the discovery of meaningful faith in Christ amongst the younger generation.

1. Constant and intentional teaching of God's Word

Parents must take seriously the valuable instruction found in Deuteronomy that has been a central practice in the Jewish community for about 4000 years:

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them

when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ... so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land ... (Deuteronomy 11:18-21, TNIV).

God and His ways are to be constantly taught and discussed in the home. Children have to be made familiar with God's Word and His ways from a very young age. This means that parents should have lots of interaction with their children and impart biblical teachings and values during these times. Most parents constantly remind their children of the importance of studying hard and earning good grades in preparation for a prestigious career. But there appears to be a lack of similar fervour in emphasizing the importance of God's Word and faith in Him.

2. The family altar

The family altar is a crucial avenue for imparting faith to our children. It is the place to nurture faith in their hearts and minds, besides being a spiritual adventure for the whole family. It offers the setting and atmosphere for nurturing a love for God and his Word, and provides the opportunity for the family to worship God, interact on spiritual matters, and pray together. The frequency of observing the altar may vary depending on factors such as the age of the children and schedules of the parents and children, but it needs to be regular.

Unfortunately, this is probably the most neglected family practice. Churches seem pre-occupied with ambitious and visible projects and activities but have generally failed to teach, emphasize, and encourage this spiritual discipline for the family. For many believers, church activities are an end in themselves, and are seen as fulfillment of spiritual obligations while spiritual responsibilities in the home are ignored or neglected. There may be many who are aware of the importance of the family altar but it is not a priority in their busy routine.

3. Parents lead by example

Like it or not, our words, actions and attitudes always rub off on our children, even if by varying degrees. A genuine and dynamic faith often rubs off in a positive way. But an insincere, "put on" and "image-preserving" or "image-enhancing" faith can cause children to be cynical and turn

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away from a religion that they have perceived over the years to be hypocritical.

Richard Stearns, President of World Vision U.S., in his book *The Hole in our Gospel*, cites a study done in the U.S.:

Based on a study released in 2007, we found that most of the lifestyle activities of born-again Christians were statistically equivalent to those of non-born-again ... Born-again believers were just as likely to bet or gamble, to visit a pornographic website, to take something that did not belong to them, to consult a medium or psychic, to physically fight or abuse someone, to have consumed enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to have used an illegal, non-prescription drug, to have said something to someone that was not true, to have gotten back at someone for something he or she did, and to have said mean things behind another person's back. No difference. (p. 229)

While the above study was on American Christians, could it also be true for Malaysian Christians? A sincere and genuine faith must be reflected in the lives and lifestyles of parents. Parents can easily put on a show of faith to people outside the family. But children are quick to spot incongruities in their parents. If a parent's faith is not seen to be genuine, children may grow up perceiving religion as merely a "game" that people (especially adults) play.

4. Good communication

Communication habits need to be cultivated from the time children are born. Good communication enriches the parent-child relationship. The fruits of good communication are only realized when children reach adulthood, when parents can continue to be friends and confidantes to their children. In such a relationship, issues regarding faith can readily be discussed and with ease. My three children are in their twenties and are able to discuss many "adult" issues with my wife and I. I find great pleasure discussing doctrinal, theological and philosophical issues with them.

5. Faith in a community setting

Parents must ensure and encourage their children's participation in Sunday School where the Word of God is taught, discussed and applied in a community of other children. These are valuable opportunities for young minds to be nurtured in the ways of God. Older children should be required to attend Youth activities and camps where they not only engage in healthy activities but also where their faith can be clarified and strengthened through bible studies and teaching sessions. Children who are shuttled from one tuition class to another to the neglect of such activities cannot be expected to suddenly embrace the faith of their parents when they reach adulthood.

6. Service

An often neglected practice is ensuring that our children

serve in ministries. Service is at the core of Jesus' ministry and it is frivolous to speak of God's love without showing it through works. Children can be taught to serve at an early age, beginning with the simplest of tasks that are age-appropriate. Failure to learn service can lead children to become self-centered, selfish, greedy and demanding. Through service they not only learn practical ways of showing love and concern for others, but also gain a holistic view of the gospel and a deeper understanding of faith.

7. Interacting with other adults

Encourage children to talk to other adults in the church. This is especially true for teenagers who are in transition to adulthood and are keen to have a peek at the adult world. They have an innate curiosity that drives them to communicate with adults other than their own parents, and they are very pleased when adults speak to them. Our teenage children should be encouraged to discuss issues, including faith, with adults whom we know will be a positive influence. Likewise, we should also take the initiative to engage other teenagers in discussing life and faith issues.

8. Praying for your children

Parents must be fervent and unceasing in praying for the spiritual well-being of their children. All human efforts at imparting faith to the younger generation are limited. It takes the Spirit of God to do the actual work of convincing, convicting and converting. God works with individuals in his own ways and on his own time. We must trust Him to do that with our children.

Finally, we need to bear in mind that every child, being created in God's image, has his/her own rights, including the right to make decisions regarding faith. Parents cannot impose, coerce or force their faith upon their children; they can only nurture it while the children are still in their care. On the other hand, children cannot live on a faith borrowed from their parents. They need a personal encounter with God and to make a personal commitment to follow Christ. As the old adage goes, God has only children, no grandchildren.

Some children take longer than others to fully comprehend the meaning of a personal commitment to Christ. Some others may seem to have found their faith at a young age, only to be plagued by doubts and confusion on reaching adulthood. Whatever the case, all children will have to grapple with this issue and make their own decisions. However, the responsibility lies heavily upon parents as well as the church to nurture faith in children while they are young and impressionable so that they are set on a firm footing to begin their own spiritual journey.

(The writer, a retired teacher, is Elder of the Kuala Terengganu Baptist Church and author of the book Families Matter: Concepts and Principles for Enriching your Family.)

Survey: Youths Want An Authentic Faith

WILL our kids keep the faith? To a large extent, that depends on parents and the church. A 2010 survey on the spiritual state of Malaysian Christian youths revealed some areas for improvement.

The survey found a lack of interest towards traditional religion among youths, but a desire for spirituality. Pastors interviewed for the survey felt that while youths were less inclined towards formal religion, they wanted a more “experiential” encounter with God.

Additionally, youth were hungry for authenticity. Some felt that Christian leaders were impersonal, non-relational or too busy. In some cases, parents who themselves are not spiritually disciplined were viewed as a hindrance to youths being drawn to the church. Parents had to emphasise the importance of God’s Word at home and to show their faith to their children by example.

These were among the findings of a qualitative survey on the “Spiritual state of the World’s Children” conducted by NECF Malaysia and One Hope, a US-based international ministry to children. The survey among English-speaking Malaysian youths was done between May and June 2010, and released in August 2010. Nine focus groups of students, two groups of youth pastors, one group of evangelical leaders, one group of English-speaking pastors, one group of parents and one group of teachers, were interviewed.

Pastors described youths today as being “very creative”. Pastors thus recognized that churches needed to provide a “fun” environment for youths which at the same time allowed them to have a genuine encounter with God.

Church leaders also recognized several weaknesses in youth discipleship. One, was the lack of resources allocated to youth ministries, and especially for youth mentoring. Since youths only spent a few hours a week in church, youth pastors did not have adequate time to mentor them.

Of concern was that the overall cultural emphasis on materialism was not being adequately addressed among youths. This, and the stress parents placed on academic and financial success, were cited as reasons for the decline in youth interest in traditional religion.

Church leaders described this declining interest as a situation in which they were finding it hard to “pass the baton” on to the next generation of emerging leaders.

In developing outreach strategies for youths, the survey revealed two significant areas that need to be dealt with: the influence of the Internet and the call of materialism. Pastors also believed that strengthening the Christian family should be a priority for churches.

(Source: Extracted and adapted from Spiritual State of the World’s Children – A Qualitative Study: English-speaking Youth Report, Malaysia, August 2010)

NECF MALAYSIA Welcomes New Members...

Ordinary Members

1. GJC Fellowship, pastored by Foo Chee Hing
2. Church of Antioch, pastored by Chaw Suik Moy
3. Setia Christian Alliance Centre, pastored by Rev. Lau Teck Yu
4. Life Changing Centre, pastored by Samuel Elegant
5. Gereja Christian Grace Kepong, pastored by Goh Chun Yong
6. SIB Cheras Awana, pastured by Miun Amat
7. The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Cheras, under the eldership of Ephraim Andrew Aaron
8. Alpha Colors, pastored by Justin F. Segar
9. Covenant of Grace Centre, under the eldership of Dr. Frank Ewald Kubik
10. New Life Gospel Centre, pastored by Rachel Veny

Associate Member
Mr. David Kuan

SOMALIA

The United Nations in late July declared famine in Somalia. An estimated 10 million people are affected. The region's worst drought in 60 years and a dysfunctional government have worsened food shortages. Humanitarian and relief aid are blocked by militants, who accuse aid groups of being "political".

PRAY Pray for protection over aid agencies and workers attempting to bring food in and for the restoration of institutions and government in Somalia so that the country can function again. Pray for the underground believers and those ministering to them as they live out their faith in very difficult circumstances. -OD

SUDAN

Following South Sudan's recent independence on 9 July, Christians in the north, Sudan, are in fear of greater suppression because of an earlier presidential decree that full Shariah law will be imposed across Sudan once the south (where the majority of Christians are) secedes. Church leaders in Sudan have asked Christians in the south "not to forget them" as they start to feel the effects of the decree. Meanwhile, genocide in central Sudan continues against the Nuba people who sided with the Christian south against the government of President Omar al-Bashir. South Sudan's independence has not benefitted the Nuba who are located within the northern border.

PRAY Pray for justice for the victims of genocide in Sudan. Al-Bashir is wanted by the International Criminal Court for the Darfur genocide but remains free. Pray that international

efforts to end the violence in Sudan will bear fruit. Pray for the Church which intends to remain as one body across the two nations of Sudan and South Sudan, and that the faith of believers will be strengthened. For the new nation of South Sudan, pray for a righteous government and for peace with all its neighbours. -WEA/CMS

MIDDLE EAST

More than six months after people's uprisings in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria, citizens in these countries face an uncertain future. **Syria's** 1.5 million Christians are caught in a geo-political fight between Iran and Saudi Arabia, a priest said. "Iran is backing the current regime which allows for limited freedom of the church; Saudi Arabia is supporting radical Sunni movements which may destroy all the freedoms we still have".

In **Tunisia**, native Christians who number less than 2,000 were shaken by the murder of a Polish Catholic priest by extremists in February. Christians are feeling pressured and uncertain about what lies in store when a new government is formed. Elections have been delayed from July to October. In **Libya**, expatriate Christians have left the country and the church in Libya is fast losing attendance and support. All Libyans also struggle with a 200% to 400% rise in the prices of food, water and other essentials.

In **Egypt**, the departure of Hosni Mubarak has seen greater activity by members of a radical group, the Salafists. This group has been vocal in antagonising the locals against the Christian minority. At the same time, Salafists are mobilising people

to oppose the interim government's attempt to return to Christians church buildings that were unlawfully confiscated under Mubarak's rule.

PRAY Pray that extremists will not take advantage of the void in some of these countries in transition. As plans are made by interim authorities to pave the way for new governments, pray against corruption and selfish agendas, and for God-fearing leaders who will serve the people and uphold the rights of minority groups. Pray that the church in these countries, though small, will continue being a powerful witness. Pray for new believers who come under pressure for having converted. - OD

PAKISTAN

A political party, the Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islami (JUI) in June petitioned the Supreme Court to ban certain parts of the Bible on the grounds of blasphemy. JUI holds that these parts depict certain characters, whom Muslims revere as prophets, as flawed. JUI has said it will apply to have the entire Bible officially banned if the court rejects its original petition.

PRAY PRAY for the Supreme Court to rule justly. Pray for Pakistan's journey as a nation trying to strengthen its democracy while addressing extremists in its midst. For Pakistani Christians, pray that they will remain steadfast in faith and knowledge of the Word. Praise God that His Word stands forever. - CT/ Frontpage