

E D I T O R I A L

the Crime Beyond

One of the hottest issues in our nation these days is snatch theft. A seemingly petty menace to the public for a long time now, it finally became major news with the shocking death of *Nanyang Siang Pau* clerk Chong Fee Cheng, 37, who died as a result of such an attack, leaving behind a husband and two young children.

But as we condemn the perpetrators and clutch our bags more tightly, has it crossed our minds to empathise with the snatch thieves? We may have given a casual thought that some of them may have been driven to the crime out of desperation, but we believe the issue is far deeper and more complex.

Field Not Fair

Think of the system by which a large section of our world is run. *Laissez faire* capitalism promises a level playing field for all. But all is not fair or level. A manager of a large corporation earns perhaps 100 times more than a manual labourer. The children of the rich have access to better education and hence better jobs, further aggravating the already uneven distribution of income. A misfortune that hits one generation of a family may subject many subsequent generations to hardship. In the international arena, “free trade” favours the wealthy, developed nations. And so on.

Compare this with the biblical standard: “And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered

little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed.” (Ex. 16:18) It is a well-known fact that the world has enough food and resources for all its inhabitants, if only the resources were evenly distributed.

It is not too much to argue that *some* of the snatch thieves (and other criminals) are victims of the system in *some* ways. We are NOT here condoning the actions of these thieves; neither are we calling for a socialist revolution. But the point is that sin is not just personal; it is structural or institutional. By focusing on personal sin alone, we miss the big picture. Many of those who commit personal sins (the perpetrators) against others (the victims) are themselves sinned against by their victims, albeit in a less direct manner by the victims’s participation in and silent acquiescence to a system that “pushes” the perpetrators to sin.

While we cannot totally extricate ourselves from evil systems as long as we live in this world, we need to ask ourselves: What are we as Christians doing about it?

The Difference Two Men Made

Some Christians hold the belief that the Bible does not endorse attempts to overhaul the world systems. A case often quoted is that of the Apostle Paul. It is argued that Paul did not oppose slavery, a social evil. He accepted it as part and parcel of his world. Paul commanded slaves to be obedient to their masters in everything (Col. 3:22, Tit. 2:9), to respect and fear them (Eph. 6:5), and to try to please them and not talk back to them



SNATCH ALERT

One residents’ committee in Subang Jaya responded to the snatch theft menace by placing this signboard at a “hotspot” within its area. The committee plans to place 10 more similar signboards in other “hotspots” in its residence.

(Tit. 2:9) even if their masters were harsh (1 Pet. 2:18).

But even though Paul did not openly challenge the system, he did so subversively. He commanded slave owners to be compassionate towards their slaves. “And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.” (Eph. 6:9) “Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.” (Col. 4:1) Paul was hammering home the point that in Christ, the “relationship equation” had changed.

No longer were slaves to be treated as mere property; they had value and dignity as human beings. In his epistle to Philemon, Paul asked the latter to welcome back his recently converted runaway slave, Onesimus, but “no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother” (verse 16a). This seems like a small matter to us, but not so in those days when the punishment for runaway slaves was crucifixion! In his own quiet ways, Paul pulled off a major *coup d’état* on society’s prevailing structure. And it

“Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing”.
– 2 Tim. 4:8



To Love His Appearing

I believe the right attitude to have towards the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is to “love His appearing”. What does it mean to love Jesus’ appearing? Three things are involved.

Obedience

To love Jesus’ appearing is more than just to love Jesus. Suppose a mother tells her little daughter to behave herself while she (mother) is out, and specifically tells the little girl to stay away from the cookie jar. However, the child thinks she can get away with “pinching” one cookie. While she is at it, her mother unexpectedly returns. If at this point we ask the little girl “Do you love mother?” she would surely say, “Yes! I love my mother very much.” But if we ask, “Do you love your mother’s return?” well, with her hand in the cookie jar, probably not! Similarly, we cannot love Jesus’ appearing unless we are obeying His commands.

Precedence

However, obedience is not the only way to “love His appearing”. Some people, when asked, “Are you ready for Jesus’ return?” say, “No, someone I love is not saved yet.” Of course we desire all our loved ones to be saved, but we are to love Jesus so much that seeing Him and being with Him takes precedence over everything else.

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with

these words.” (1 Thess. 4:17-18). While we must make every effort to win the lost, unfinished tasks should not mar our joy if we truly love His appearing.

Anticipation

Ask those who are in love, whose loved ones are away indefinitely, whether they look forward to their loved ones’ return each day, and their answer will always be “Yes”. We do not find them trying to “predict” the time of return. Similarly, we are to “love His appearing” and not “calculate the time of His appearing”. While we are to be watchful of the signs of the times, it is even more important to be watchful in the way we live our lives at all times. Jesus clearly says we do not know the day or hour of His return. “For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.” (Mark 13:34) We are to watch so that when the owner of the house returns, we may open the door to Him immediately and with great joy.

This does not mean we rationally think that Jesus will actually return today. That would kill all long-term planning. Many wonderful works throughout the Christian centuries would never have got off the ground. It remains that we do not know when Jesus will return. “Plan as if you have a thousand years; live as if this is your last day”. Anticipation is a state of mind.

We shall miss the whole point of end-time studies until we get our attitude right. Is your attitude right? Will you be happy if Jesus returns TODAY?

Chairman

Rev Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam

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Elder Kong Yeng Phooi

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Committee Members

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Dr Khoo Kay Hup

Mrs Grace Hee

Mr Chua Keng Seng

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Rev Lai Moo Him (*Special Projects & Church Relations – North*)

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Adeline Koh

Maggie Teoh

Sangan Mutang

Administrative Assistants

Yvonne Chin

Jously Buaya

EDITORIAL

Editor

Rev Wong Kim Kong

Assistant Editor & Writer

Ong Juat Heng

ADDRESS

32, Jalan SS2/103,

47300 Petaling Jaya

Selangor, Malaysia

Tel: 603-7727 8227

Fax: 603-7729 1139

E-mail: editor@necf.org.my

“Passion” To Light Up Our Screen

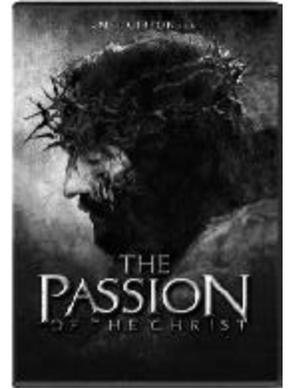
THE heart-wrenching blockbuster *The Passion of the Christ* has been approved for private screening in cinemas. The Home Ministry has granted NECF Malaysia's application to show the story of Jesus' last 12 hours before His crucifixion.

NECF is now discussing with the film's local distributor, Twentieth Century Fox Film (Malaya), on the choice of cinemas nationwide, time slots to air the film and ticketing arrangements. Part of the ticket sales will be channelled to the NECF Foundation, which was recently set up to help needy pastors and full-time workers, according to NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong.

The film will be screened in its entirety in accordance to one

of the two conditions set by its producer, Mel Gibson. His other requirement is that the film must be screened only in cinemas with a high quality sound system.

Churches are encouraged to block-buy the tickets and use this film as an evangelistic opportunity. For more information, contact the NECF office. The film has gone around the world, including to countries such as Iran and Qatar.



NECF Foundation Helps Ailing Pastor Gives Study Loan to Pastor's Daughter

KEVIN Tan (not his real name), a 57-year-old pastor of a church in Penang, has been suffering poor health lately and this has affected his service to the congregation. Finally, with great reluctance, the church relieved him from his duties but agreed to give him an allowance of RM200 a month. This is hardly enough to pay for his monthly expenses including medicines for his condition.

Kevin now works as an itinerant pastor but without a stable income, the single man has difficulty making ends meet. Keen to help him but unable to fully support him, Kevin's church turned to the Foundation for assistance. After a

thorough background check and a personal interview with Kevin, the Foundation recently granted the church's appeal to help Kevin.

Kevin became the first beneficiary of the Foundation, even though his church is not a member of NECF. He gets a monthly aid of RM500, and this will be reviewed in a year's time. The Foundation is also looking into getting free or reduced-cost medication for him.

Another pastor to benefit from the Foundation serves in a BM church in Petaling Jaya. He will be able to give his daughter a college education with a RM20,000 interest-free loan, repayable

when she graduates and starts earning an income. (The repayment period is decided on a case-to-case basis.)

The Foundation also approved the application from another pastor for a loan for his daughter to complete the final year of her degree course. However, the offer had to be withdrawn because the applicant decided to finish the course overseas. (The Foundation has set a policy of granting study loans only to those who are studying in local institutions.)

The NECF Foundation was formally launched in April to provide financial assistance to needy local pastors and full-time workers and their families.

Another Demolition Threat

ANOTHER Orang Asli (OA) church in Pahang has been issued a demolition notice by its local authority for allegedly building its church on government land without approval.

The Rompin Land Office made the charge against the Kampung Ganoh OA Church under Section 425 of the National Land Code Act 56/65, which carries a penalty not exceeding RM10,000 or imprisonment of not more than one year or both.

In its May 19 notice to the church, the Land Office advised the church to demolish its building within 14 days of the letter date, failing which the office would then proceed to bring it down without further warning.

However to date, the building is still standing. NECF Malaysia has written to

and sought help from the Prime Minister's Office to resolve the matter.

Besides being used as a worship place for some 40 OA congregants, the Kg Ganoh Church also houses two full-time OA church workers. Started in 1999 by a group of Christians, the church is now fully supported by the Mega Chinese Methodist Church (MCMC) in Petaling Jaya. MCMC immediately contacted NECF for help upon receiving the demolition notice.

In its letter to the Prime Minister's political secretary, Dr Vincent Lim, NECF recalled a remark the Prime Minister recently made that an overall policy on land for worship for the OA needed to be implemented to prevent further similar threats of demolition by local governments.

Survey on Pastors

PASTORS, have you responded to the NECF Malaysia Emotional Connection between Pastors and Congregation survey? If you have filled in the form, have you posted it back to NECF Malaysia?

If the form is still sitting on the tray, please do not allow busyness or complacency to rob you of an exercise that will ultimately enrich you and all those in the ministry of shepherding.

The survey seeks to uncover the dynamics of the pastor-congregation emotional relationship and NECF will use the information compiled from the survey to organise programmes that will help pastors.

If you wish to have a copy of the survey questionnaire, contact the NECF office at 03-7727 8227 or e-mail research@necf.org.my

Fresh Faces at NECF Council

FIVE new members were elected into the NECF Malaysia Council at NECF's 9th biennial general meeting held in May. The number represents over a third of the 13-member council which includes the four Exco positions – Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer. Altogether 12 people stood for election, out of which nine were elected.

Of the former council members, four (Exco positions) were re-elected without contest; another four were re-elected while one was not. Two former members – Rev Eddy Ho and Miss Goh Poh Gaik – declined re-nomination, and have thus stepped down.

Rev Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam and Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng remain Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively. Elder Kong Yeng Phooi and Samuel Ang continue to hold the Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer positions respectively.

The newly-elected council members are Jubilee Initiative Malaysia Dean Rev Foo Moy Peng; The Vineyard Senior Pastor Rev Tay Wah Seng; SIB Sarawak Acting Chairman Rev Justin Wan; Bible College Malaysia President Rev Ng Kok Kee; and Grace Hee, who is currently the NECF Prayer Commission



Rev Foo

Rev Ng

Rev Justin

Rev Tay

Grace Hee

Chairperson.

The other members are incumbents FGA KL Administrator Dr Khoo Kay Hup, Georgetown Baptist Church Senior Pastor Rev Lim Soon Hock, Logos Presbyterian Church Elder Chua Keng Seng, and Latter Rain Church of Malaysia Senior Pastor Rev Dr Dexter Low.

At the start of the meeting, Rev Guneratnam underscored the need for the Malaysian Church to speak with one voice and with authority. He thanked everyone for making the special effort to come together as our strength lay in our unity.

In his report to the delegates, NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong said NECF had been active in raising issues affecting the churches to the federal, state and local governments. The issues included eviction, conversion and marriage.

Reporting on the NECF Foundation

– set up to provide financial assistance to pastors, full-time workers and their families – he stressed that its role was only complementary as an avenue of last resort, and it would never seek to take over the responsibilities of churches and denominations to care for their own workers.

Rev Wong urged members to consider what they could contribute to the larger body of Christ through NECF, and not only to ask what they could gain from NECF. In the long run, both parties would need each other. Nevertheless, he reiterated that NECF existed to serve the churches and hence there should be no hesitation in calling upon NECF for help.

Just before the delegates voted, Rev Guneratnam shared that he was beginning to feel the stirring in his heart

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took time before the full implication of the gospel was realised.

In 1788, William Wilberforce, a British Member of Parliament, introduced his first anti-slavery motion in the House of Commons. The motion was defeated. Wilberforce brought it up again every year for the next 18 years until the slave trade was finally abolished in 1806. Wilberforce continued the campaign against slavery itself, and the bill for the abolition of all slavery in British territories passed its crucial vote just four days before his death on July 29, 1833. As a result, 800,000 slaves, chiefly in the British West Indies, were set free.

It is universally acknowledged that Christians first espoused the concepts of human rights, democracy and others. When God created human beings, He gave us dominion over the whole earth. We are His stewards. We cannot claim that structural evil is outside the locus of our responsibility.

Another cause for inaction is the idea that until Jesus returns, the world system will necessarily be evil. Instead of fighting the inevitable, it is felt that we should just wait for Christ to establish His Kingdom on earth.

It is true that not all evil is meant to be overcome until the last day. But this is no excuse not to do what we can. And considering all that Christians have achieved in the past, we ought to be encouraged to keep up our efforts. This is especially true in an age of democracy and universal suffrage, as compared to New Testament times.

Today, even ordinary people can create waves in the social and political arena. Being in a minority is no hindrance. It has been said: "God and I; we are the majority." Moreover, history has attested that any interest group is often more effective as underdogs. Remember that Christendom began to decline only after it became the established religion of Europe.

Still others insist that we should not get involved in politics at all. Indeed politics is a dirty word. But Christians can clean up politics and use it as a vehicle for God's glory.

There is also the misconception that we should avoid interfering with matters in the public realm because it is not



that it was time to step down from his position as the NECF Chairman and added the Council members needed to prepare themselves for this change.

While the votes were being counted, the floor was opened to questions from the delegates. When a delegate requested more details of the NECF Foundation, Rev Wong took the opportunity to clarify that the Foundation launch was held at the “expensive” J.W. Marriott Hotel in Kuala Lumpur because the event was fully sponsored by the owner of the hotel.

Another delegate congratulated NECF for organising that morning’s seminar with Dr Tony Campolo. He said Dr Campolo’s message on social engagement (see page 6) had introduced a large avenue of witness unfamiliar to many churches and asked if NECF could also offer guidance to churches with regard to some suitable social initiatives.

Rev Wong replied that NECF’s annual 40-day Merdeka Prayer & Fast & Charity Campaign was a good example of a united evangelical witness. The Malaysian Church could also adopt *The Micah Challenge*, a global campaign mobilising evangelicals against poverty.

The campaign, a joint project by World Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Network, will be launched in New York this October by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. He emphasised that local

churches must be the ultimate locus of action. NECF was only there to facilitate and coordinate joint action, and not to do the work of churches. He also urged pastors to appoint lay leaders to take charge of social initiatives if they themselves were too busy to play an active role.

Another delegate asked if NECF could help churches work with the government to promote racial integration in our nation. He said his son’s eye-opening experience in the National Service Programme had highlighted for his family the importance of this initiative. He wondered if Christians could make a united representation to the government in order to gain access to the young people in the programme.

Rev Wong informed members that NECF was the first non-governmental body to present a blueprint to the government highlighting some potential concerns of the NS Programme. He reported that NECF had also sent letters to churches to encourage Christians to volunteer as trainers but the response was poor.. Finally, a delegate expressed his desire to see the Tamil work revived. Rev Wong replied the many unresolved issues among the Tamil churches were an impediment to the work and called for patience. Besides, he personally lacked the time or energy to tackle the ongoing problems at this point. – **Reported by Sandy Tan**

Youth Network Awakened

THE long-dormant NECF Malaysia Youth Commission (YC) is being roused from its slumber by the noisy din of social ills plaguing our society, particularly the youths.

In June, NECF met seven representatives from youth organisations and churches to discuss the resuscitation of the YC and its role in the ministry to Malaysian youths. (The YC last met five years ago in April 1999.)

NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong recommended that the YC be re-named a network instead of a commission since it is actually a gathering of youth organisations and church youth leaders. The new name will also give focus to the group to facilitate networking of its members. He added that one of YC’s major tasks is to emphasise to churches the need to engage full-time youth workers to strengthen their youth ministry.

NECF Executive Secretary Patrick Cheng gave a brief report on the Asian Youth Leaders consultation he attended in April, citing the National Network of Youth Ministries as a model for networking and partnership. In their discussion on the objectives and role of

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right to impose our views on others. Isn’t this the essence of “the separation of Church and State”? Actually, no.

In the beginning, the concept was designed to ensure free participation in politics by all parties. It was stipulated that there should be no established state religion to interfere with this process. Each individual has a right to hold his views and to “lobby” for their acceptance. As Christians, we too have at least an equal voice before the law and the electorate. Besides, it is not always possible to separate private and public matters. The two go together.

Get to the Root

Following a spate of recent snatch cases, the authorities have, among others, proposed an increased presence of police personnel and heavier punishments for the perpetrators, and also asked the public for more suggestions. All these preventive measures have their value, but do they address the root cause of the problem? Aren’t we just replacing one crime with another? Crack down on illegal VCD vendors and many of the now jobless traders turn to other unsavoury ways to fill their rice bowls.

Albert Einstein once said: “Insanity is doing the same thing

over and over and expecting a different outcome.” The truth is that Jesus Christ alone is the answer to all of society’s ills. He is the answer to personal sin. Only biblical ethics can produce a truly moral society.

But Christ is also the answer to structural sin. Only biblical justice can produce a genuinely equitable society, economically and in other ways. Christians must not relinquish the solemn responsibility of societal transformation to other people. Communism has failed, and so have many other ideologies. The Church holds the key to a renewed society.

It is probable that many readers of this editorial are the overall “beneficiaries” of a system that is in some or many ways unjust. So the next time you clutch your handbag containing your valuables, think about this: Are you merely holding on to your bag, or are you also holding on to a system that enables you and your children to enjoy a prosperous life (and possess all those items in that bag) but deprives the same to your potential bag snatcher and his children?

Don’t we live in a great country? We know that we do. Be thankful, and let’s make it even better. Let’s make it a country where every person has a secure place under the sun. If you have a relevant suggestion, please share it with us.



Real Gospel Preaches Social Change

CHRISTIANS cannot pray *The Lord's Prayer* without being committed to social change. In teaching His disciples to pray "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10), Jesus was telling them to pray and work towards transforming this world into one where people live out God's will in every sector – politics, economics, the arts, technology, education, entertainment, and science among others.

"Salvation is not only for personal change, but for world transformation," declared Dr Tony Campolo at a recent seminar for pastors and leaders organised jointly by NECF Malaysia and Malaysia Youth for Christ.

"The Greek word for *world* in John 3:16 means the earth and everything in it. That means the company that you work in. We are the agents of social change," he said to nearly 500 participants – mainly pastors and leaders – from over 110 churches in his message entitled "Answering God's Radical Call While Living in a Real World."

In evangelising the unbelievers, Christians must preach a wholistic gospel. "This means we need to shift the emphasis of being saved to go to heaven

to transforming the world to become the kingdom of God," he reiterated.

Dr Campolo highlighted the danger of the escapist theology promoted by books such as the popular "Left Behind" series which has a great following in the US. "The books tell Christians 'don't worry about changing the world, don't worry about stopping war and poverty because the world is going to burn anyway'. They discourage Christians from engaging in social action.

"Anybody who discourages the Church from changing the world, for working for social justice, is preaching against God's word," he thundered.

Using the Israel-Palestine issue as an example where social justice is needed, Dr Campolo said that the Palestinians have the same entitlement as the Jews to a homeland with secure borders. "We can't live in peace with our Muslim brothers unless we stand for justice."

Another area requiring social justice is Third World debt, and for this, Malaysian Christians have the prophetic mission to challenge the US to act justly. "Poor countries can never escape poverty unless their debts are cancelled. Christian organisations are doing their bit by

rescuing people on the micro level but Christians must also act on a macro level by getting their debts cancelled," he said.

A fine example is Uganda. "When the US cancel the country's debt, it was with the condition that all the money owed in interest and principle be put on a special fund that addressed the AIDS crisis in the country. The country spent millions of dollars on educating the people on AIDS, setting up clinics and testing. Within five years, the incidence of new cases dropped by 40 percent and deaths dropped 25 percent while all over Africa, the figures were going up.

"This is the gospel – to declare good news to the poor," he said.

He called on the Church to give youths a worthy cause to live for; otherwise they would join another cause. "I don't say (to them) 'get saved so you can go to heaven'. I tell them 'do you want to change the world, to be part of the only movement that can change the world?' The Christian movement is the only movement destined to create justice in this world, eliminate poverty, look after the old. Don't promise them health and wealth. They want to commit themselves to something more worthy," he urged.

The Passion of Campolo

TONY Campolo is a consummate speaker, capable of tackling many subjects. However, one issue lies at the core of his heart, and he seems never to finish a message without raising it – the issue of poverty. During the question-and-answer session at the recent NECF-MYFC seminar, the tough-talking speaker challenged the participants, seated comfortably in the plush Wisma Eagles sanctuary, to do more for the poor. And the participants appeared persuaded by his clarion call. Following are some of the questions raised during the session.

How has the Church of America

dealt with Third World debt? How strongly has it challenged the government on this issue?

In the US, evangelical churches have become self-centred. Evangelical Christians are unconcerned about Third World debt and they need to do a lot of repentance because they could be decisive in the cancellation of debt. Of the 55 million American evangelicals, about 80 percent vote (President George) Bush (Jr). They are in a position to use their political power to demand the President and Congress to make the change. Jesus said over and over again to respond to the needs of the poor. When you deal with the poor, you're preaching the Bible.



Campolo (right) keeps his audience riveted with his witty but thought-provoking replies. With him is NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong.

American Christians are big on calling people to repent of their sexual sins but not on materialistic sins.

What are rich Malaysian Christians doing (about their wealth)?



Mongolia Beckons

by *Grace Ong* as told to *Goh Poh Gaik*

GRACE Ong is far away from home. This Penang nurse is now in Mongolia where she works among the poor in community projects. So how did the call come? Grace Ong tells her story...

Greetings from Mongolia! If you were here I would invite you to have a cup of tea, made Mongolian style. We use tea leaves, milk, salt and margarine. It is different from the *teh tarik* back home. If you are adventurous, you could also try eating some horse meat. And I would show you the Mongolian *ger* (tent).

Mongolia was under Soviet rule for 70 years, until 1990. Life was hard and it showed on the faces of the people. In my early days in Mongolia, I smiled a lot. I would smile at the vegetable seller, the shopkeeper – and they would smile back. I think my ‘smiling’ face made them curious. One of the women from the community once commented that I was ‘child-like.’ She probably meant that I always seemed to be smiling and happy.

My years in Mongolia have not been a bed of roses. I have faced hardship but the joy of the Lord is my strength.

I have often been asked how I was led to go to Mongolia. Years ago, the Lord had given me a vision that I would be leaving for a faraway land. I took up nursing because I wanted to use my training to serve the Lord, people and my family.

Through the years, the vision dimmed. I went to work in Saudi Arabia from 1992–1997. As a midwife I earned very good pay and I led a comfortable and cosy life. Then one day the Holy Spirit ‘told me off.’ I had just come back from the bank and then in my spirit I heard these words: ‘You are a fool if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul!’

My Calling

This rebuke shook me up. I really was getting very comfortable where I was with the good money I was making. I repented before the Lord. And I asked Him what I was to do next.

He said, ‘What about your calling?’

So I came back to Malaysia but I still wasn’t sure where to go. I worked for three and a half years as the head nurse in one of the private hospitals and was settled in my job. I had friendly colleagues and life was smooth. But deep inside I felt an emptiness.

In the course of my work, I would make regular rounds in the wards to talk to the patients and to reassure them. One day I stopped to speak to an old lady who was being prepared for a simple gynecological operation. I reassured her that the procedure would be completed successfully.

The next day I went to see her again. I saw a Bible next to her and I asked her about it. She told me that she knew I was a Christian by the way I spoke and the way I treated the patients. Then she asked me a question I did not expect to come from her.

‘How many souls have you led to the Lord?’ she asked me.

I received this as a reminder from the Lord that I hadn’t returned to Malaysia to lead a comfortable and cosy life.

I asked the Lord, ‘What do You want me to do?’

‘I wish I Could Help’

That was the year 1999. One day I saw the news report on TV about the punishing winter Mongolia was facing.

Herds of animals had perished. I saw the despair and the destitution. I said, ‘I wish I could help.’

God takes us seriously, although at that moment I was not thinking of going to Mongolia. I was beginning, however, to sense that it was time to leave home. At Chinese New Year that year, my aunt turned to me and said, ‘You don’t have to keep working so hard, you know. It is time for you to go and do what you want to do.’

My family was ready. I took that as confirmation that it was time to go. I asked the Lord to show me where. I called Doreen at Intercare and told her what was in my heart.

She asked me, ‘Which country would you like to go to?’

‘Mongolia,’ I replied. I surprised myself!

When I told my church, they asked, ‘Why Mongolia?’

I wasn’t sure myself so I prayed for confirmation. Doreen had given me a videotape about Mongolia’s open doors. Before I watched it, I prayed and sensed the Lord saying that He would lead me to ‘a sun scorched land.’ Then I watched the video. One day during my Quiet Time, the Lord spoke to me from Revelation 3:8: ‘See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.’

That was the confirmation I needed. God had confirmed to me that He was leading me to ‘a sun-scorched land’. Even when it’s snowing, Mongolia is bathed in bright sunshine for 260 days a year.

My mother did not object to my decision and my family gave me their blessings. My aunty assured me that the family would take good care of my mother.

I left for Mongolia in March 2002.

Overcoming Discouragement

By MARY AUDREY RAYCROFT

Discouragement is one of the most crippling enemies we face in life. Not one of us is safe from it. It springs up in the most unlikely places at the most unexpected times and knocks us flat on our backs. It beats us down, robs us of joy and confidence, and leaves us bruised and hurting. The walking wounded are all around us – people who are battered and scarred, their hopes and dreams dashed to pieces on the cruel rocks of discouragement.

Unfortunately, the same condition exists for many of us in the Church. Whenever we begin walking in the Spirit and seeking the way of the Lord, whether as a body of believers or as individuals, we become targets of Satan's special attention. The enemy knows that if he can discourage us to the point of giving up, he will have won a victory almost as great as if we had never been saved. When the rest of the world looks at Christians and sees us stumbling along in defeat, fear, strife, intimidations, and self-consciousness, what in us would they want? They would say, "Why, they are no different from us."

Releasing life into the Body of the Christ and the world involves learning to overcome discouragement. That means understanding where it comes from and knowing how to deal with it.

Three Sources of Discouragement

One major source of discouragement is **outward circumstances**. When things get tough and negative situations grab our attention, if we're not careful, we'll begin to dwell on them and be consumed by them. When all hell is breaking loose and it seems there is no way out, that's when discouragement comes roaring in.

A classic example is of the nation of Israel soon after the exodus. Many of those folks were walking, breathing bags of discouragement. They could not take their eyes off their

lousy circumstances: wilderness, scarcity of food, lack of water, and the daily hardships of nomadic life. They quickly and repeatedly forgot the mercies and power and deliverance of God on their behalf. There they were at the Red Sea, with the water before them, the Egyptians behind them, and nowhere to go. They griped and complained to Moses, beginning a pattern that repeated itself time and again despite God's deliverance and continual provision for their needs.

At the very border of Canaan not long after the parting of the sea, a final act of rebellion deprived that generation of the opportunity to enter and occupy the land God had promised. He had spoken His word. All they had to do was go in and possess what was already theirs. Twelve chosen men went in to check things out. They literally saw the promise and touched it, but 10 of them had no room in their hearts to really believe. Based on outward circumstances, they returned with a bad report that infected the faith of the whole community: "Too many powerful people... too many walled cities... to many giants... too strong for us... they'll eat us alive... we'll be killed, our wives and children captured... we see ourselves as grasshoppers... we are not able." Only two returned with reports of faith, and almost got murdered because of it. As result, the Israelites wandered around outside the land for 40 years, all because discouragement over their outward circumstances overwhelmed their faith and confidence in God.

Outward circumstances can be very deceptive. In Second Kings chapter 6, a foreign army under the king of Aram surrounded the city of Dothan in order to capture the prophet Elisha. When Elisha's servant saw the massive forces, he was frightened. The situation looked very bad. Elisha saw beyond the circumstances. He knew that God was on his side, protecting them. He said to his servant, "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16b). Elisha prayed, and the servant's eyes were opened to see the angelic hosts that had been there all along surrounding and protecting them. When we focus on outward circumstances, we cannot see the resources that God has made available to us. Seeing things as they really are, through spiritual eyes, puts

Looking at the wrong things, listening to wrong things open the door for discouragement.



• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: MONGOLIA BECKONS

A Mongolian ger (tent).



They Have Very Little

God has given me a love for the Mongolian people. My colleagues and Mongolian friends have very little and I have the privilege, on some days, to share my lunch with my colleagues. They are simple and friendly people. My work includes giving health talks, teaching English and community work.

Challenges Facing a Single Worker

1. Loneliness. It's there but because I make friends easily, God enables me to be joyful in Him.

2. Maintenance problems in my apartment, like when plumbing work needs to be done, etc.

Biggest Lesson

The biggest enduring lesson I have learnt is that the Lord has taught me to trust Him and to be faithful to Him. His promises never fail and I have no regrets that I heeded His voice and His call on my life.

Grace Ong, a nurse and midwife, is a partner with Malaysian Intercare.

In Merdeka Mood

PRAYER RALLY LOCATIONS AND CONTACTS

PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

•**NORTH:** Kangar (Pr Heng at 04-976 7853); Alor Star (Pr Kuilan at 04-734 1636); Penang (Pr Lim Soon Hock at 04-228 7110); Seberang Prai (Pr Raj at 04-582 0136); and Taiping (Dr Dhoss at 019-550 8987).

•**CENTRAL:** Ipoh (Pr David at 05-547 2994); Sitiawan (Pr Ling at 012-528 4281); Teluk Intan (Pr Rachel at 05-621 1392); Simpang Empat (Pr Timothy / Pr Joseph at 012-277 1530); Cameron Highlands (Rev Vijendra at 05-491 3249); Rawang (Pr Sim at 03-6091 8150); Kajang (Pr Kala at 03-8736 1890); Banting (Rev Devadass at 016-378 4025); and Klang Valley (NECF office at 03-7727 8227).

•**SOUTH:** Seremban (Pr Voon at 06-765 3777); Melaka (Pr James at 06-231 0371); Kluang (Pr Sunther at 019-726 7634); Batu Pahat (Richard Tok at 012-7236 660); and Johor Baru (Pr Tay Wah Seng at 016-733 6622).

•**EAST COAST:** Kuantan (Pr Richard at 09-517 7127); Kuala Terengganu (Pr Koshy at 09-617 0830); and Kota Baru (Rev Johnny at 09-748 2331).

EAST MALAYSIA

Miri (Pr Peter Quick at 019-805 4521); Labuan (Rev John at 087-412 948); Kota Kinabalu (Pr Chin at 088-422 938); and Lahad Datu (Pr Daniel at 089-881 891).

ONCE again, Christians throughout Malaysia are in the midst of fasting and praying for the welfare of the country.

This year, some 90,000 Christians are participating in the annual 40-day Merdeka Prayer and Fast organised by the NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission. The estimate is based on the sales of prayer booklets in English, BM, Chinese and Tamil. The figure includes the sales of over 16,000 copies of children's prayer booklets. Many churches have expressed their appreciation for the children's edition to encourage the children to participate more meaningfully in the event.

NECF Prayer Executive Ann Low believed Malaysian Christians are increasingly more concerned about the nation. "They just need an outlet to express their concern and one of the best ways is to be part of a national prayer and fasting movement. It's a demonstration of their seriousness in caring for the country, she said. Meanwhile, the Prayer Commission has provided another avenue for Christians to join the prayer and fast – by logging into the NECF website. "Praying Round the Clock for Malaysia" allows people to sign up for non-stop prayer for the full 40 days.

• GO TO NEXT PAGE

• FROM PAGE 6: THE PASSION OF CAMPOLO

Some Christians start with a house and a BMW. When God has blessed them, they buy a bigger house and two BMWs. They get sucked into a lifestyle of higher and higher spending. Early on, we must decide what's a reasonable standard of living and stay at that level. Malaysian Christians who are now prospering must practise the kind of stewardship that Jesus expects by sacrificially giving to the poor. And you must challenge our evangelical brethren in other countries to do the same.

How do you balance evangelism and social work? Should evangelism take primacy over social engagement?

We must re-define evangelism. It isn't getting people saved for heaven. It's declaring that the Kingdom of God is at hand as Jesus said. The Kingdom of God is about transforming people and society. There's no evangelism gospel or social gospel. Evangelism is recruiting people for a movement of God in this world. Jesus wants to cleanse, transform, fill you so that you can use your gifts to transform this world. There's currently a re-birth of evangelism with Christians moving away from the wholistic gospel. More and

more fundamentalist Christians are saying, 'Concentrate on getting people saved.' Rich Christians are taking over churches. They want a gospel that will tell them how to be successful. When Jesus called followers, He didn't say 'Get rich', but 'Pick up your cross'.

What is your view on the reconstructionist theology?

This theology says Christians should take control of state powers and impose the concept of righteousness on the rest of the state. We are not to impose what we believe on other people. We are to persuade them and convince them to do what's right.

Jesus had the power to force the whole world to righteousness. He has infinite power. (But) He changed the world through communication of love, not force. His lordship is not built on armies but on the cross. He did not use power but authority. With power, you can force people to do your will; with authority, you don't have to force. They'll do what you ask because they believe in the rightness of your cause. People get authority by sacrificially living for someone else. The Church of Jesus Christ earns the right to be heard, to speak with authority, by living sacrificially for the community.

What can the Church of Asia do to help bridge the conflicts between the US and Third World countries as a result of the doubts and uncertainties caused by US foreign policies?

We have had very prominent American evangelical leaders made very irresponsible statements about Islam, who have antagonised the Muslim community. Their assumption was that all Muslims are terrorists and you know this is not true.

It's therefore important for Christians in countries like Malaysia, which are pre-dominantly Muslims, to politely tell American Christians, "Shut up! You are ruining our testimony. Don't pick out verses from the Koran and say, 'See they're (Muslims) violent. They call for the death of infidels.'" I can easily point to passages in the Bible, in Judges where God said to go and kill every person in sight. I won't want them (Muslims) to do that to us.

You must tell them (American Christians), "You have made Christianity into an American religion when it is a universal religion. You have failed to interpret Scripture with any kind of consistency in the interpretation of justice."

Each day is divided into 48 half-hour time slots. With several clicks of the mouse, participants choose the slot, date and the location within the country they desire to pray for.

The 40-day programme will culminate in the Merdeka Prayer Rally that will see a coming together of churches in their localities all over the country.

The combined-church nationwide rallies have always been occasions of intense intercession for the needs of the nation, punctuated with unabashed expressions of gratitude to God for His providence and protection, and ending in joyous

celebration of His goodness to our land.

This year, the rally in the Klang Valley at Wisma MCA will be held with a difference; there will be no countdown to Merdeka Day. Instead, the rally will be held on Aug 29, beginning 4pm and ending 7pm, in time for participants to have a leisurely Sunday dinner. Egyptian-born Dr David Damien, now a Canadian citizen, will be challenging participants to make a greater commitment to intercede for the nation.

For the rest of the country, NECF has confirmed the rally will be held in 27 locations countrywide – 22 and five in Peninsular and East Malaysia respectively. Churches are encouraged to come together to pray and celebrate.

Knowing More Important than Serving

OUR service to God is not as vital as our relationship and obedience to Him. Like Samuel who ministered to the Lord when he did not yet know Him personally (1 Samuel 2:11, 18 and 3:7), we too can be serving Him without a personal relationship with Him, cautioned Dr Bradley Stuart at a recent prayer conference in early May organised by the NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission.

Jesus showed, according to Matthew 7:21-23, that our works for Him are not as important as our relationship with Him. In His sermon on the mount, He warned that not everyone who called Him 'Lord' would enter the kingdom of heaven.

"We can be so busy with the work of the Lord that we lose contact with the Lord of the work," said the founding director of Yada International, which began as a school of intercession but has grown into a ministry that helps believers develop intimacy with God.

"We must know our purpose and appointed work and the clear boundaries, and be concerned about doing God's thing rather than doing a good thing," he said. And to achieve this, the believer must know God intimately. There can be no true intimacy apart from covenant and covenant can only be experienced with



Three participants tightly knitted in prayer.

true commitment, which takes time.

Prior to the conference, the 70-plus participants attended a three-day national prayer consultation, which was a follow-up gathering to last year's NECF National Prayer Conference. This was the first time that prayer leaders and representatives from all states in Malaysia, except Kelantan, met for discussion and intercession.

The participants concurred that the consultation was an eye-opener as it gave them a bigger picture of the nation's needs. It also forged the feeling of belonging and unity, as expressed by participant **Lucy Chua**, Prayer Coordinator for the English-speaking Presbyterian Churches. "We agreed that to fulfil our Great Commission in

Malaysia, we need to take seriously our responsibility to the greater majority. Our prayer must rise up day and night to break strongholds that take our people captive," she said.

Judith, from Sabah, found it a privilege to join intercessors from all over Malaysia to pray for specific church, government and people issues, while **Melinda Lo** was moved by the transparent sharing of the participants and said she was looking forward to the next consultation. On the other hand, **Pr Patsy Lim** from Dungun, Kuala Terengganu, was especially glad to be able to share and network with those from the same region.

Edward Lim, a 24-year-old graduate engineer, hoped that the consultation would trigger the Prayer Commission to organise youth prayer camps to provide training and discipleship in intercession. "Among my peers, we are just hungry for mentors who will disciple us in this area. Through prayer, this generation will no longer be lost (hence the name Gen X) but will find its identity by fulfilling God's purpose for this generation," he said.

At the end of the consultation, the participants approved a seven-point resolution to boost the prayer movement in the country.

Cash Aid for Homes

FIFTY-one welfare organisations, including 15 which are run by non-Christians, will receive cash aid from funds raised from the 2003 NECF Merdeka Charity Campaign.

The campaign raised over RM515,000 from Christians who donated the money they saved from the meals they fasted during last year's 40-day Merdeka Prayer and Fast.

Berita NECF will release the names of the organisation in the next issue.

the YC, most of the attendees felt that it should not be involved in grassroots activities; rather, its programme should target the youth workers. Some attendees felt that the YC should focus on research, resource and representation.

Towards the end of the meeting, the attendees were requested to consider the YC objectives, its mission statement, a suitable candidate to take up the position of NECF Executive Secretary (Youth) and a new name for YC. Their decision will be discussed and endorsed at the next meeting in August.

Alone But Not Lonely

GOOD spiritual and emotional support from groups and friends are a vital source of emotional well-being for single women missionaries. But without a proper knowledge of and relationship with God, the anchor of their emotional security will not hit ground, as NECF Malaysia Research Executive LIM SIEW FOONG found out from her interviews with 20 single Malaysian woman missionaries (SWM) from four local sending agencies.

Indispensable to them are good group spiritual and emotional support, as well as trusty friends they can confide in and be held accountable for. Friendship is a vital source of emotional well-being, a foremost external support to help overcome any challenge they may face. Willingness to establish good rapport with others and the ability to make and maintain friendship are excellent ministry skills for missionaries.

Nonetheless, the individual's attitude towards God and one's own identity in Christ – an internal component – has the most significant impact on how one handles trials in life. The majority of the interviewees concurred that confidence in God and in His sovereignty and provision would guide them through the troubled times of frustration and hardship.

They believe wholeheartedly in God's goodness even in the midst of working through difficult emotional issues. "Contentment may be a struggling issue from time to time, but building confidence in God, constantly reflecting on His goodness in my life, and fixing my eyes on Jesus, lead me to accept and be comfortable with my single status," expressed one interviewee.

The women acknowledged that healthy self-acceptance and adequate self-confidence come from their personal and intimate relationship with God.

As they accept their status, they find it easier to co-operate with married people to remove any barrier or prejudice that may hinder acceptance. Such attitude allows them to experience freedom in serving as they expand their visions and creativity, maximise their gifts and talents, and develop the ability to be useful to others and to make the best out of bad situations.

Like the noted single full-time worker Goh Poh Gaik once said, "God is not concerned with what you are building for Him, but that you let him build into you Christ-likeness. Singleness is not an interval, a temporary life. Single women should not put their lives on hold until they get married. Take responsibility in life, initiate friendships, make yourself available and care for others, and look for opportunity to be hospitable."

Is loneliness – the most common mental health problem of people regardless of race, gender and social status as documented by numerous studies – no longer an issue then?

"I had to handle loneliness head on and learn to be alone but not lonely. Lots of prayer, friends, and other interests help. Sometimes I had to face it (loneliness) as a reality and just allow those feelings to come and go," shared a veteran SWM, who was completing her doctoral studies at the time of the interview.

Loneliness can be painful and draining. It cleaves to us despite our best effort to remove it. Psychologist Dr. Gary Collins defines loneliness as "painful awareness that we lack close and meaningful contact with others."

In other words, a single person who takes cognisance of this can conceivably blossom through the intimacy of friendship with others. Most of the interviewees admit the problem and appear determined to deal with it. Surely God does not intend singleness to involve loneliness.

Self-acceptance includes acknowledge-ledge of biological longing, that is the basic human longing for touch and closeness, and the ability to live with it and handle whatever emotional outbreak there may be. It also includes being able to talk honestly to God and realise that something in life will never come to pass but can be trusted to God for His sovereign solution.

"Allow yourself to live with some longings that are not fulfilled and know that's okay, that you are not any less worthy," said another interviewee who is committed to language work for the Orang Asli. Emotional and verbal affirmation from support group or friends can be an immense encouragement.

Perhaps, if the psychological need for intimacy is satisfied, the need for physiological sexual experience may diminish.

Having the opportunity to work with and experience God, the capacity to love and have friends and the ability to enjoy fieldwork as a vocation, appears to be the greatest fulfilment for these SWM. No longer concerned about meeting external

expectations and having achieved solitude refinement, the women have developed greater confidence, involvement, security, and depth of personality. Relationships with others are more important – perhaps in a different way than earlier in life.

It is also apparent that, no matter how busy they are on the field, many SWM look at their respective trajectories, re-evaluate goals and aspirations and even making decision on how best to use the remaining part of their life-span. The common trait is they tend to believe that change is possible and that one is free to choose to do what is right and pleasing in the sight of God. They often point to Jesus, the source of internal strength and aspiration, and found in Him the ray of hope and courage.

Most importantly, they realise that God's grace is absolute and all-encompassing. In times of discouragement, weariness and pain, such comprehension helps them to persevere in the face of defeat. What seems like overwhelming odds becomes an opportunity for growth. As they continue to face peculiar challenges, their ability to bridge the divine and physical world is strengthened through each experience of overcoming.

The sending agencies have been making effort to gradually improve member care services, such as furnishing their mission partners with medical and life insurance. Malaysian churches too can play a significant role by encouraging their members to come alongside the SWM.

"Allow yourself to live with some longings that are not fulfilled and know that's okay, that you are not any less worthy."

Courts Causing Confusion

One conversion, two courts, two custody orders, and a load of confusion. Can our country's dual-legal system work?

When it comes to family matters in Malaysia, Muslims come under the Syariah judicial system while non-Muslims go to the civil courts to resolve their disputes. The application of these two legal systems is mutually exclusive according to Federal Constitution Article 121. This has however raised some questions:

1) When one party in a marriage converts to Islam, which system has the overriding jurisdiction in matters relating to their marriage?

2) Will the non-converting spouse be granted equal justice?

3) What happens to the children?

It has been reported that many non-Muslim women "whose husbands have converted to Islam have had their rights violated in areas like custody, maintenance and equal access to law" (*NST*, Sept 15, 03).

The most recent report (*NST*, Apr 13, 04) on a High Court's dismissal of the application of Shamala Sathiyaseelan, a Hindu mother, to nullify her children's conversion to Islam has demonstrated the impediment of our civil judicial in protecting the rights of non-Muslims.

(Shamala's husband had converted to Islam to marry a Muslim woman and then converted the children's religion to Islam without Shamala's consent.) Shamala was told by the High Court judge that the "Syariah Court was the qualified forum to determine the status of her two children".

The civil court declined to make a decision; however the fact is the Syariah Court has no jurisdiction to hear the case of non-Muslims.

What is the legal status of the marriage between Shamala and her husband? Technically, the marriage remains civil and is still valid. Lawyer Haris Ibrahim once expressed that one could not take civil marriage into the jurisdiction of the Syariah Court even if one of the spouses converted to Islam (*NST*, Sept 15 03). The fact that the husband has converted to Islam does not change the status of their civil marriage contracted on Nov 5, 1998.

What You Can Do

• **Pray:** (See Prayer Digest for prayer points.)

• **Act:** Write, e-mail, contact your member of Parliament about your concern over this issue. Help to raise public awareness and consciousness of the problems faced by many people as a result of this dual-legal system.

Bar Council Chairman HJ Kuthubul Zaman Bukhari has commented that the right to decide a minor's religion is "an issue of parental right, rather than an issue of religion" (*Aliran Monthly*, 2004: Vol. 24 No. 4).

There is also the problem of the issuance of contradictory orders. Shamala was given guardianship of their two children by the High Court on April 17 2003, but within three weeks, the Selangor Syariah Court issued a separate custody order to the husband. Which court order is superior?

Without the civil court's intervention, Shamala is facing or may face disadvantages as highlighted by the *NST*, Sept 15 2003:

• Despite being an equal guardian by law, she is deprived of the right to decide the religion of her children as her husband had converted them without her consultation and agreement.

• She is/may be deprived of the right to have a say in the custody of her children as the Syariah Court has given custody to the converted husband without taking into consideration the mother's rights.

• She is/may be deprived of the right to have a say in the dissolution of her marriage as divorce proceedings can be initiated in the Syariah Court without her attendance or participation.

In other words, Shamala is subject to the jurisdiction of a judicial system – Syariah – that has no jurisdiction on non-Muslims. Shamala's case not only illustrates the dilemma of a dual-legal system and infringement upon the rights

of non-Muslims when their spouses embrace Islam, it also raises the imminent issues on the question of public confidence on the law of the land and the judiciary.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has reiterated that the government will defend the Constitution and laws of the country and safeguard the interests of ALL citizens regardless of age, gender, ethnic background and religion (*Barisan Manifesto March 2004*). However, if there is confusion within our judiciary system, and if judges are not able to administer justice without fear or favour, or decline to exercise the jurisdiction, where is our hope in defending the Constitution?

The Bar Council Chairman has rightly pointed out that "by declining to assume jurisdiction to hear Shamala's application to nullify her children's conversion, the practical effect of that decision is the same as allowing an injustice to take place" (*Aliran Monthly*, 2004: Vol. 24 No. 4).

On May 7, 11 non-governmental organisations met in response to the decision of the High Court in granting leave to Shamala's husband to file an application of contempt against Shamala. They included the MCCBCHS (Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism), Catholic Lawyers Society, INSAF, Bar Council, Catholic Bishop Conference, Council of Churches, Pure life Society, Sisters in Islam (SIS), and Women's Action Organisation (WAO). The groups are advocating the principles as guaranteed in the Federal Constitution and Human Rights Conventions and are seeking to meet with the Prime Minister.

All Women's Action Society (AWAM) has also urged the Parliament to provide a remedy for the protection of the parental rights of non-Muslim mothers. Likewise, Wanita MIC and MIC Youth have called for legislative reforms to existing Federal laws for secular courts to protect the parental rights of non-Muslim parents if their spouses convert to Islam. – BY LIM SIEW FOONG

Holy Calling to Serve the Rakyat

LOH Seng Kok believed it was God who opened the door for him to contest the Kelana Jaya parliamentary seat in the recent general election. When he won, he was convinced that God had called him to serve the *rakyat* “with a holy purpose”.

The first-time MP confessed his calling at a commissioning service in his church, Cornerstone Doulos, Subang, in May before stepping into the Parliament for its first sitting.

“In politics, one needs a lot of wisdom, strength and support. As a servant of Christ, if I do not seek His wisdom and support from fellow brothers and sisters at this time, who and when shall I seek? As the Lord has helped me to recognise my many weaknesses, I sincerely ask for prayer and support for me, particularly for wisdom and strength, to handle many issues and overcome many temptations, and protection for me and my family,” he said.

Loh quoted Psalm 127:1–2 as the basis for his career in politics: “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.”

Malaysia Bible Seminari Principal Rev Dr Tan Kim Sai had the privilege of commissioning Loh and his service centre to



Loh Seng Kok (centre), flanked by his wife and Cornerstone Doulos elder Micky Kua, accepting his calling to serve the rakyat.

God. In his message, Dr Tan commended Loh for asking for God’s wisdom to not only fulfil his task as a public servant, but also “rule over himself”.

Rev Dr Tan quipped that by making the request, Loh was wiser than Solomon because Solomon had only asked for wisdom to rule over the people. “The YB (Loh)

said that he realised in his position he would face a lot of temptations, and he needs and wishes for God’s wisdom and deliverance in these respects... Unfortunately, Solomon... was himself a victim of these traps, especially when he yielded to the lust for pagan women who led him into idolatry and apostasy,” he said.

He ended his message with a reminder to Loh to “Commence well, persevere well and finish well.”

Loh has served as political secretary to two government ministries and is currently the MCA National Youth Secretary-General.

Kids Learn Serious Business of Intercession

CHILDREN are learning the serious business of intercession. During the recent June school break, 15 children aged nine to 12 from five churches in Kuala Lumpur spent three days and two nights at a prayer camp learning the art of hearing God’s voice and battling spirits – not with the mouse or joystick but with worship and prayer.

The camp was organised by the Wall, an interdenominational ministry aimed at stirring revival in Malaysia through worship and prayer. The little ones learned lessons such as waiting on God, and understanding His Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. At the camp, the children were also exposed to CAR (children at risk) – children living in situations which may include bonded child labour, war, sexual abuse and extreme poverty.

One boy commented, “I like the teaching on prayer and I have learned to be more confident in prayer”. Asked if they would return for another prayer camp, the reply was a unanimous resounding “yes”.

Meanwhile, over 16,000 copies of the NECF 40-day Prayer and Fast prayer guides for children have been snapped up by churches, Christian kindergartens and schools, signifying a mounting interest to expose our young ones to intercession and the spiritual discipline of fasting.



No, we're not in snooze land. We're waiting on God and hopefully, hear His voice.

New Members

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

- **Patani Baptist Church**, Sg Patani, pastored by *Reuben Soo Yin Wah*;
- **Persatuan Penganut Kristian Charis**, Kuala Lumpur, pastored by *Rev Chok Pui Fong*;
- **Subang Jaya Gospel Centre**, Subang Jaya, represented by *Tan Kong Beng*;
- **El-Shaddai Revival Fellowship JB**, Johor Baru, pastored by *Karuppiah a/l Muthiah*;
- **Pusat Baptist Permata**, Penang; pastored by *Rev Caleb Chang Kin Seng*;
- **Pusat Baptist Sungai Ara Community Centre**, Penang, pastored by *Rev Caleb Chang Kin Seng*;
- **Malaysian International Christian Chamber of Commerce**, Kajang, represented by *Stanley Kee Ah Teck*;
- **Harvest Time Sanctuary, Ipoh**, pastored by *Henry Ng Heng Lee*;
- **Kenosis Home**, Kuala Lumpur, represented by *Richard Lee Teik Hin*; and
- **Blessed Hope Fellowship**, Klang, pastored by *Lawrence Piri Agong*.

We also welcome 11 **Associate Members**: Gerry Doh Cheong Hwa; Rev Lee Kon Yim; Mrs Ng Soke Lee; Pr Pakiam a/p Gopal, Nancy Quay Kim Giek; Rev Tan Ming Ming; Mary Woon Siew Leng; Mdm Leong Chooi Wan; Ms Balasaraswathy d/o Mathurai; Pr Wong Yat Kiong, Peter; and Mr Gangatharan a/l Subramaniam aka Pr Abel Jeremiah.

Does your magazine need a facelift?

A magazine brimming with good articles but trapped within dull covers, uninspiring layout and lifeless images. Readers therefore skim through the pages and miss the gems. What a pity.

Designs *do* make a difference. An attractively-looking magazine captivates the readers and draws their attention to the contents. To encourage Christian ministries to uplift the standard of design of their newsletters and publication, and ultimately increase readership, one company is offering a design course at a special fee.

The company, Word-Design Communications, has been successfully conducting design courses for corporate companies. As its way of contributing to the Christian community, it is offering the course to churches and Christian organisations at a special fee so as to enable more Christians to benefit.

A one-day course cost RM150, which is less than a quarter of what it charges its corporate clients. The course is targeted at non-designers who are involved in getting out their church's or organisation's publications. Participants learn design elements – such as effective use of fonts, colours and images – and basic layout principles, among others.

So, if you think your magazine needs a facelift, call Kevin at 03-7727 0608 or e-mail word_design@hotmail.com to find out more about the course.

Chinese

THIS year's prayer conference for Chinese-speaking churches will focus on revival. *Rev Nathaniel Chow* and *Rev Zhu Tai Shen* (both from Taiwan) will teach on reviving the individual spiritual life as the starting point to reviving the Church.

The third speaker, NECF Malaysia Secretary-General *Rev Wong Kim Kong*, will share about the issues and challenges facing the Malaysian Church at the conclusion of the three-day conference at FGA Kuala Lumpur.

The conference, from Aug 25 to 27, is an annual event held in conjunction with the nationwide 40-Day Merdeka Prayer and Fast organised by NECF

Malaysia.

It will culminate at the Merdeka Prayer Rally (Klang Valley Chinese churches) on Aug 27 night, also held at FGA KL. In addition, there will be night meetings open to the public on Aug 25 and 26. Admission to these night meetings is free. Rev Chow will speak on all night meetings.

Registration fee is RM80 for those who register before Aug 11 and RM100 thereafter. The fee covers lunch, tea and conference materials.

For more information, contact Ngeh Hoong Eng at 012-320 2324 or call the NECF office at 03-7727 8227.

English

MEANWHILE, the conference for English-speaking churches will be held at Glad Tidings Petaling Jaya from Aug 27 to 28, and culminating at the prayer rally at Wisma MCA on Aug 29 afternoon (see page 10).

Dr Iman Santoso will kick off the conference by sharing how to set up and develop prayer networks. The General Coordinator of National Prayer Network in Indonesia has to date helped to establish prayer networks in 374 cities throughout Indonesia. In addition, he has helped to form prayer networks for women in 118 cities and for students in 55 cities.

Dr David Damien will challenge

participants to have a deeper commitment in praying for the nation in his topics "Contending for the Soul of a nation" and "Extending the Sceptre". The Egyptian-born medical doctor, who is now a full-time minister residing in Canada, will also challenge our youths at the Aug 28 night meeting in his message *Walking Backward, Running Forward: A Prophetic Call to Gen X*. Admission to the night meeting is free.

Registration fee for the conference is RM60 for those who sign up before July 31 and RM70 thereafter. Closing date for registration is Aug 20. For more information, contact Ann Low at 016-334 9239 or call the NECF office.

Chinese Analytical Layout Bible

Arranged by: Dr Patrick Y. Tang

Published by: Bible Exposition Society, Hong Kong

THIS information-packed Bible is highly recommended for the Chinese-reading readers who are looking for an easier understanding of God's Word. The verses in each of the 66 books are grouped according to subject and at times, in point form, thus enabling the readers to grasp the message easily.

For example, Ephesians 6:1-4 is so arranged that readers will clearly see that Paul was listing the separate responsibilities of parents and children. Dr Tang has also sub-titled each group of verses; in this case, the sub-title is: How parents and children may live harmoniously.

Cross references are provided to help those doing research.

At the beginning of each book, he provides an overview of

the book, the background, information of the author, theme, purpose and outline of the book. In addition, every book comes with a chart and the Bible ends with plentiful information and charts on important subjects such as end-times, Jesus' parables and miracles, Jesus' biography, Paul's missionary journey, the timeline of the Israelite kings, and feasts of Israel. The Bible is available from NECF Malaysia office at RM140 each but pastors and full-time workers may get it at RM110 each.



FOR YOUR PRAYERS

INDIA

IN February 1998, the BJP rode to power in India on a platform of hard-line Hindu nationalism. The BJP became synonymous with anti-conversion laws, 're-conversion' ceremonies, 'saffronising' (rewriting) Indian history textbooks, the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat, and systematically persecuting Christians nationwide. To the great surprise of all observers, the BJP has now been voted out of power, thanks to the prayers of millions of Christians worldwide who care for India, and millions of Indian Christians whose leaders gathered in their thousands around the nation to fast and pray. In Tamil Nadu, the responses of Chief Minister Jayalalitha, a Hindu hardliner and BJP ally, included increased aid for the poor and the immediate axing of the Tamil Nadu anti-conversion law.

The world's second most-populated nation has a new PM in Manmohan Singh, who is known to be the architect of India's economic reforms and a respected consensus builder. Continue to pray for India, for its new PM and for the new government, thanking God for his marvellous intervention and mercy.

IRAQ

CHRISTIANS are increasingly threatened in Iraq. Fallujah, now fully under Iraqi control, has turned into an Islamic mini-state. Taliban-style religious police monitor the streets, ensuring that women are correctly veiled and men keep their hair according to Islamic regulations, and punishing un-Islamic practices with lashings and humiliation. Foreign militants from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Syria and Tunisia have infiltrated Fallujah and continue to fight. They are committed to jihad and are suspected of having links to Al-Qaeda. In Baghdad meanwhile, Christians and Mandaean (who follow the teachings of John the Baptist) have had letters threatening them with torture, kidnapping and death if they don't support the Mujahideen and follow Islamic rules.

Pray that Christians in Iraq will draw close to God and depend on Him for

everything; for unity among Iraq's Christians, overlooking ethnicity (Assyrian, Turkman, Kurd, Arab) and denomination (Protestant, Catholic, evangelical (ancient or new)); God will watch over Iraq, to comfort and preserve his people, and empower the spread of His saving, transforming gospel.

PAKISTAN

ON May 29, Sharee Komal, a seven-year-old Christian girl who lives with her mother in a hut near a Christian graveyard, was brutally raped by a Muslim neighbour. She told her mother that Abid Ali, who lives nearby, had kidnapped her, luring her away with a promise of buying her toys. He then tortured and raped her, threatening to kill her if she revealed his identity. The rape of Christian women by Muslim men is an ongoing travesty. Perpetrators are rarely arrested and almost never convicted.

Pray for God's comfort on Sharee and other victims like her, for physical and emotional healing. Pray also for agencies that are involved in helping such victims. One agency is Centre for Legal Aid and Assistance (CLASS) which provides shelter and legal aid to Christian women kidnapped or forced into marriage with men of other religions and who are abused after marriage. Pray for men like Abid Ali to be arrested, tried and convicted. Pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to move the hearts of such men to honour and respect all women.

NIGERIA

RELIGIOUS violence has continued to plague the country despite the declaration of a state of emergency. Police authorities say the situation has become difficult to contain because Muslim militants employ guerrilla tactics to attack Christian towns and villages. Religious conflict between Muslims and Christians has become endemic in Nigeria in recent years, following the implementation of Islamic laws in 12 northern states.

In the past three years, 17 local government areas of the state have been engulfed in religious violence. Rev Yakubu Pam, chairman of the Plateau

state chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria, said over 30,000 Christians have been displaced as a result of incessant attacks. Meanwhile, hundreds of Christians and Muslims in Nigeria are dying and losing loved ones. The National Emergency Management Agency recently reported that a total of 69,000 people in the states of Bauchi, Taraba, Nasarawa and Plateau are living as displaced refugees. In the northern Zamfara state the governor has just ordered the demolition of all churches as part of his 'Syariah Phase 2' programme.

Pray for wisdom and strength for the Nigerian government to make just decisions on issues concerning religious liberty and security; protection of the churches and other religious sites from violence, and for Spirit-empowered evangelism to transform the lives of nominal, ethnic Christians and break the cycle of violence.

Pray for Christians now facing the escalation of Islamic oppression and persecution; for spiritual wisdom and faithfulness, courage and the knowledge of God's abiding love.

ALBANIA

ETHNIC Albanian Muslims in Kosovo have been pursuing what a NATO commander recently called "orchestrated and well-planned ethnic cleansing" against minority Christian Serbs. In mid-March, Kosovo Albanian mobs destroyed 30 churches in two days. Some of these churches had been places of Christian worship since the 14th century, jewels of medieval architecture treasured by art historians worldwide. Thousands of their former parishioners are now refugees; some are dead. The anti-Serb, anti-Christian pogroms (organised massacres) have taken place on the watch of 20,000 NATO "peacekeepers" who've proved unable or unwilling to protect the shrinking Serb minority.

Pray that the Serbian Christians will see themselves as more than a persecuted minority but as witnesses of Jesus Christ. Pray that God will strengthen them to witness His love to their Muslim neighbours.