

beritaNECF

EDITORIAL

Beyond the 30-year mark

NECF marks its 30th anniversary this year. When it was formed in May 1983, leaders of the Malaysian Church were struggling with divisions, meagre resources and the lack of a credible, united evangelical voice. However, what really pushed NECF into being were external factors imposed upon the Church. These included the partial banning of the Alkitab and unavailability of religious land which affected the number of churches that could be built. In 1987, Christians were among those arrested under Operasi Lalang and many churches scaled down their outreach activities, fearing reprisal.

Today, securing the right in accordance with the freedom of religion to import and distribute the Alkitab among Malay-speaking Christians has not come without difficulty. There may be a '10-point solution' by the government, but the root cause of the controversy – the use of the word "Allah" by non-Muslims – remains unresolved. The Federal Government is pursuing its appeal against the High Court's decision to allow a Catholic publication, *The Herald*, to use the word in its Bahasa Malaysia edition. The court's decision on 31 Dec 2009 was followed by arson attacks on churches. In 2010, 35,000 copies of the Alkitab were impounded at Malaysian ports, stamped and serialised, which led to the 10-point solution. In 2011, Christians had to deal with allegations of conspiracy to set up a Christian state and of proselytising.

What's different now is the strength and unity with which the Church is able to respond. In all the above situations, evangelical churches could not have faced the challenges alone. The "Allah" case, which affects both the Catholic and Sidang Injil Borneo churches, is one example.

More Christians have realised the need for different denominations to unite if national transformation is to happen. To that end, Christians must also engage with other religions. NECF, as a member of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) lends its voice to this collective of non-Muslim religions to push for religious liberty. Less widespread, but catching on, is the awareness that Christians should also use non-religious platforms, such as civil society initiatives, to bring about reforms.

As the national body representing evangelical, charismatic and independent churches, NECF is one of three component groups under the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM). The other two are the Council of Churches

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Malaysia (representing mainline denominations) and the Roman Catholic Church.

In our view, the challenges mentioned have strengthened the Malaysian Church in the following ways: greater unity among the CFM component groups; greater bonding and understanding between East and West Malaysian Christians; and, closer working relationships with other faiths for justice and religious liberty.

Through all this, we are assured that God has a destiny for Malaysia. The unity experienced because of the difficulties is part of the larger picture of "Malaysia's Jubilee" which our country enters on 16 Sept 2012, also the day of our nation's birth. NECF is promoting Malaysia's Jubilee as a time for all Christians to pray for renewal, restoration and rest for the country, so that Malaysia's destiny is aligned with God's purposes.

"... promoting Malaysia's Jubilee as a time for all Christians to pray for renewal, restoration and rest for the country, so that Malaysia's destiny is aligned with God's purposes."

What the journey of the last 30 years has shown is that the Church first had to deal with its internal divisions and issues. While not all of these are fully resolved, and may never be on this side of Eternity, we are aware that the next phase of the journey is one where the Church, strengthened and united, must engage and exercise Kingdom leadership in the public arena.

To that end, we are beginning to see a paradigm shift in leadership from the lone ranger model to team leadership. The tasks and demands of future ministry will require greater collaboration. In team leadership, leaders will be able to complement each other and provide accountability in an age where more people demand transparency.

We also notice the rise of younger generation Christians to stand up for justice, truth and righteousness. There is growing interest among them to grapple with issues like corruption and integrity in national issues. There seems to be a newfound passion to take on social issues, feed the poor, show compassion and share Jesus' love. They want to participate and be involved in national transformation, though not necessarily on a church platform. How can church leaders engage but also empower and release them to serve society?

In NECF we are glad that there is a younger team in place to take the organisation to the next level. The people God has brought together in the last three years have been able to sharpen each other and share resources so that churches of all language groups are kept on the same page. We have yet to achieve all we desire to do, but we hope that what we have started will open avenues for others who are passionate about serving the nation to partner with us.

Note: This editorial is the last one written by outgoing Secretary-General Samuel Ang.

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By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

Strike me, please: Becoming a prophetic people

On NECF's 30th anniversary, it behooves us to reflect on our role as Christians in our maturing nation.

IN its monthly Leadership Institute e-newsletter¹, the World Evangelical Alliance described its core activities as: uniting evangelicals worldwide; serving and equipping members; representing by speaking to secular society and governments; and engaging in intra-faith and interfaith dialogue over issues of common concern.

It adds that we speak for the voiceless and promote peace and justice in a manner that is respectful, yet clear and uncompromising in matters of faith and conscience.

Simply put, we are to be a prophetic voice. This should be one of our predominant roles. The Bible records in 1 Kings 20, circa BC 901, the oft-forgotten role that present-day prophets should play today.

King Ahab, a capable but wicked leader, had reintroduced the cult of Baal into Israel and the royal family led the nation into moral and spiritual decline². Earlier, in

the same chapter, Ahab was saved from the unreasonable demands of the Syrian king, Ben-Hadad (v7). Through prophetic input, Ben-Hadad along with his thirty-two allies were called to account.

The mystery of this episode lies in the fact that prophetic input was intended to save the wicked King Ahab (1 Kings 20: 13-28.) What lesson can this story hold for us?

One, is that God moves and removes the wicked in His time. Till He acts, we are to speak prophetically, saying what He wants said. Prophetic speaking goes beyond promulgating standard refrains like "justice is right, corruption is wrong".

Speaking like this is not compromise. Today, many may not realise that prophetic input does not necessarily correlate with the common expectation that wickedness must be removed immediately.

Having defeated Ben-Hadad, Ahab without consulting God, foolishly made a treaty with Ben-Hadad and spared his life (v34). It suited Ahab to make this alliance. Both needed the other to stem the rising power of Assyria. From Assyrian records, we learn that Israel and the Arameans joined forces to fight Assyria in the battle of Qarqar in 853 BC - the year before Ahab's death³. Inevitably, wickedness intensified in Israel. Today, this development could easily be interpreted as prophetic failure.

Following the treaty, the Lord sent another unnamed prophet to condemn Ahab. In wanting to act out the prophetic word, the prophet said to his fellow companion, "Strike me, please" (v 35).

His companion refused. In refusing to act out the prophetic word, this man of God met his fate with a lion (v36). Donning the prophetic mantle has its perils. Herein is another mystery - godly men who fall away before the wicked are dealt with. In the New Testament, the Bible reminds us that judgment begins with the house of God.⁴

Subsequently, the prophet found another man to strike him. Playing the part of a wounded soldier, the prophet then waited by the roadside for King Ahab to pass him by on the return to Samaria. In disguise, the prophet feigned to have made the mistake of allowing an enemy to escape, to which the king pronounced a judgment on him. Thereafter, the prophet revealed himself and pronounced a similar

NECF Malaysia welcomes new members:

Ordinary Members

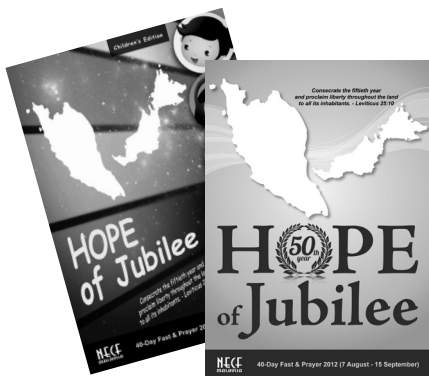
1. Open Heaven Tabernacle 611 Bread of Life, Miri (Rev Chieng Lik Ngiong)
2. Tree of Life 611 Bread of Life, Bintulu (Pastor Wong Siew Kuong)
3. Cross Mission Bhd, Pasir Gudang, Johor (Pastor Tan Chee Seng)
4. The Rock, Seri Kembangan (Rev Roger Woon Khoo Ming)
5. Avanti Outreach Bhd, Klang (Robert Quay, Director)
6. Hope Kota Samarahan, Kota Samarahan (Pastor Chong Kok Hing)
7. Joyous Glorious Community Church, Sitiawan (Pastor Woong Chai Hoe)
8. First Baptist Church (CH), Subang Jaya (Pastor Lee Seng Chiu)
9. Tabernacle of Christ, Ayer Keroh, Malacca (Pastor Vincent John Selliah)
10. Bangsar Gospel Centre, Kuala Lumpur, (Elder Michael Choo)

Associate Members

1. Pastor Victor Anantharaj Andrew
2. Rev Robinson Simunyi

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Announcements



40-Day Fast & Prayer booklets

NECF's annual flagship event begins on 7 August 2010. Have you ordered your prayer guide booklets yet? Available in English, Bahasa Malaysia and Mandarin, in adult and children's versions. The Tamil version is only available for adults. Place your orders by calling the NECF office or emailing prayer@necf.org.my.

Full-time Single Women Ministers' Retreat 2012

"Be Steadfast, Ye Daughters of Destiny"

Date : 21 – 23 June 2012

Venue : Bayu Beach Resort, Port Dickson

The event is fully sponsored for a limited number of participants on a first-come, first-served basis.

Be encouraged by Nesam Ebenezer, a lay pastor at St Paul's Church, Petaling Jaya. She will share from her experience with Malaysian Care in Children and Family Services and in the Prison, Drugs and HIV/AIDS ministry. Another speaker is Yeo Pei Li, a licensed counsellor with a breadth of experiences as a practicing counsellor, clinical supervisor, lecturer and trainer. Look out for registration information sent via email to member churches or email enquiries@necf.org.my.

Leadership Workshop for young women

"Be The Best That You Can Be!"

Date : 27 – 28 July 2012

Venue : Bayu Beach Resort, Port Dickson

Cost : RM180

Women today are leaders in the various spheres of influence, be it politics, business, medicine, church and ministry. This workshop will help women discover their leadership skills and be part of a leadership development programme. Workshop facilitators include Rev Lim Siew Pik, Susan Chan, Grace Hee and other NECF Women Commission members. Transport is self-arranged. Closing date for registration is 20 June 2012. Limited to 30 participants only. For enquiries, contact enquiries@necf.org.my

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judgment on Ahab: "Therefore, your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people" (v 42).

We should note that the prophetic message was birthed out of woundedness. The "Allah", Alkitab and apostasy issues have undoubtedly hurt the Malaysian Church. But these situations can turn out to be a prophetic message to our nation that bears the fragrance of a trampled rose. Hence, let us be careful not to let this message of the cross be sullied through immature and caustic reactions from any of us in the Church.

Another mystery of the prophetic role follows suit in 1 Kings 21. The wicked Ahab murders Naboth for his vineyard, despite the earlier prophetic assertion pronounced on the king's life⁵. Alas, to be prophetic also does not mean we will be able to put an end to the continuing ills of the nation.

In her impatience to be prophetic and relevant, the local Church is at risk of misunderstanding God's timetable and His ways, and ends up seduced into becoming a mere voting bloc.

The Church must fully grasp the balance between God's severity towards those who have been enlightened (e.g. the prophet who refused to cooperate with His plan) and His mercy towards wicked rulers.

Not every word will come to pass immediately. James alluded to this "patience of the prophets"⁶. Unfortunately, the Church is not known for her patience as many want to see all injustices dealt with in our lifetime.

Let's not be guilty of propagating a McChurch with a McGod whom we expect to provide fast McSolutions. While we may be eager to see the acts of God play out in our nation quickly, we must first understand the ways of God⁷.

May God help us mature in our walk to becoming a prophetic people.

¹ April 2012 issue

² Richards, L., & Richards, L. O. (1987), *The teacher's commentary* (259). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

³ Knowles, A. (2001), *The Bible guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.) (157). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

⁴ 1 Peter 4:17

⁵ 1 Kings 20:41-42 *And he hastened to take the bandage away from his eyes; and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. Then he said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Because you have let slip out of your hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.'" (NKJV)*

⁶ James 5:10 *My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.*

⁷ Psalm 103:7 *He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.*

New NECF Secretary-General



Rev Chan with wife Lye Hoon and their children.

REV Chan Theam Lai was announced as the new NECF Malaysia Secretary-General at the 13th Bi-ennial General Meeting on 12 May 2012. Chan has been an NECF Council member since 2009. He takes over from Samuel Ang who became secretary-general in November 2008 until recently.

Chan was Senior Pastor of Canning Garden Baptist Church, Ipoh from 2005 to 2011.

He planted four churches in Taiping, Kampar, Tronoh and Subang. These churches released ministry teams to serve unreached communities and in Christian organisations. He is married to Lye Hoon and they have a son in college and a daughter in secondary school. Chan has been at work in NECF since January 2012 to prepare for his new role.

With a vision to see churches as agents of national transformation, Chan believes now is a kairos moment for Malaysia and hopes that NECF will be a platform to network and unite churches, pastors, businessmen, Christian organisations and Christians across Peninsular Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah to serve God.

"It is always a privilege to serve our almighty God as we are all 'workmen for Him' (Ephesians 2:10) called unto His purpose," Chan said.

Chan was trained as a pharmacist and subsequently obtained a Bachelor's and Master's in Theology. He is currently Chairman of the Ipoh Pastors' Fellowship and Dean of the School of Ministry in Tung Ling Seminary, Ipoh, where he has taught courses on Discovering God's Call and Purposes, Spiritual Warfare and Breaking Bondages, and Overview of the Old Testament.

Ang commended Chan for his vast experience as a leader and senior pastor. "He will take NECF to the next level. With Rev Chan's energy and strong people skills, there will be many areas he can build, especially the Chinese and Bahasa-speaking churches.

"He also has with him a strong secretariat support team [in NECF] that has run the Nation Building Agenda for the last three years, travelling extensively and networking closely with the various Pastors' Fellowship," Ang said.

Highlights of the NECF 13th Bi-ennial General Meeting

THE NECF executive council was elected for the 2012-2013 term at the 13th Bi-ennial General Meeting (BGM) on 12 May. There were no contests and voting was done en bloc by the 57 voting delegates in attendance.

The executive council for 2012/2013 is:

Chairman: Rev Eu Hong Seng
Vice-Chairman: Elder Kong Yeng Pooi
Honorary Secretary: Rev Elisha Satvinder
Honorary Treasurer: Dr Khoo Kay Hup
Hon. Assistant Treasurer: Pastor Tay Wah Seng

Council Members:

Rev Dexter Low
Rev Ng Kok Kee
Rev Simon Chandran
Ms Ee Joo Lian
Pastor Samuel Surendren Krishnan
Elder Thomas Lim
Rev Jerry Dusing
Rev Peter Mutang
Rev Chin Lee Yean
Pastor Chomy Ching Choon Mee

Pastor Tay Wah Seng was also voted in as Vice Chairman II, a post created through a constitutional amendment that will take effect once approved by the Registrar of Societies.

The BGM also marked the passing of the baton from outgoing Secretary-General Samuel Ang to Rev Chan Theam Lai. The meeting recorded a motion of thanks to Ang for his service. The BGM also approved other amendments to the NECF constitution with regards to the duties of office bearers and signatories for cheques or withdrawal notices on NECF's account.

In his report tabled to the BGM, Chairman Eu gave updates on some NECF nation-building projects. The proposed vocational centre cum camping ministry in Bangi has been put on hold as NECF is unable to fulfill new conditions imposed by the land owner to raise the money required under present economic conditions. The e-magazine Goodtimes.my was found to be financially unsustainable and ceased operations in April. Staff were given adequate termination notice and compensation packages.

Looking forward, Rev Eu said that NECF would assist churches in pioneering nation-building work but that churches had to eventually take ownership of these programmes.

Fleshing out some of these programmes, Ang in his Secretary-General's report to the BGM said NECF had launched initiatives in Sabah and Sarawak in collaboration with pastors' fellowships there. One of these is the launch of the Commission of Sabah Affairs (COSA) on 2 April as a platform for representation and collaboration of NECF member churches in the state. A similar initiative is being done in Sarawak through the Sarawak Ministers' Fellowship, with a pilot project to develop holistic pre-school education for children in the interior as a way to counter attempts to draw these young ones away from the Christian faith. The same project is to be replicated among the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia. A third initiative is the Jubilee! campaign that kicks off on 16 Sept 2012 when Malaysia enters her 49th year as a country.

These initiatives have fostered closer ties between NECF and Christian leaders in Sabah and Sarawak and are deliberate strategies given that the majority of Malaysian Christians are in these two states. Ang appealed for more Peninsular churches to be understanding of East Malaysian counterparts and to assist their ministries.

NECF is also looking into the government's announcement in Budget 2012 that tax reliefs would be given for tithes and donations to houses of worship. Both Rev Eu and Ang said NECF would be meeting the Inland Revenue Board to work through the details and implications for churches and Christians.

On NECF's financial standing, Honorary Treasurer Khoo reported that NECF still relied heavily on donations as membership subscriptions only provided 31% of income. Donations had taken a dip in 2011 and for 2012 so far, since the last appeal for funds made in 2010. There also remained RM55,000 in unpaid subscriptions and it was noted that some smaller churches had difficulties paying. NECF will need another RM291,000 to cover operations for the rest of the year until Dec 2012.

Where are your next-generation leaders?

By Debbie Loh

AT a special talk in conjunction with NECF's 13th Bi-ennial General Meeting and 30th anniversary speaker Rev Dr David Wong asked this question: Who among the audience was age 29 or younger?

That no one in the crowd of about 200 people had been born after the year NECF was formed could be taken as a warning of sorts – can NECF stay relevant beyond the present cohort of members, whose leaders are in the age range of the 40s to 60s? However, finding and grooming next generation leaders is not a problem unique to NECF and is what many churches and ministry organisations face as well.

Wong, pastor of a church in Singapore and former vice president of the Haggai Institute, spoke on “Beyond Finishing Well”, in which he said today's leaders must leave a legacy for their successors. It is not enough for one to have been a good leader if there was no one trained to continue the work. This means leaders have to share and delegate their work, teach and mentor others instead of completing tasks by themselves, have a succession plan and know when to leave the scene.



Drawing lessons from Moses and Elijah, Wong noted that both men reached the point of exhaustion and giving up because the burden of leadership had become too much to bear alone. Moses had to be shown by his father-in-law, Jethro, a better way of dividing and delegating work. Moses, in Israel's battle against the Amalekites, also had the help of assistants of different ages - his brother Aaron, a peer; Joshua, at least one generation younger than Moses; and Hur, believed to be even younger than Joshua. Forward-looking leadership will groom new leaders of different ages.

From Elijah, leaders can learn to prioritise the tasks that matter most in the long-run. Elijah, after God spoke to him in a gentle whisper at the cave in Horeb, was instructed to anoint Hazael as king of Aram, Jehu as king of Israel and Elisha as his (Elijah's) successor (1 Kings 19).

Of the three instructions, Elijah only did the third. By today's reckoning, Elijah could be deemed disobedient or unsuccessful because he did not do all God had told him to. But in doing what was most important for the long-run, the other two tasks were accomplished, not by Elijah but by Elisha (anointing Hazael, 2 Kings 8) and Elisha's associate (anointing Jehu, 2 Kings 9). Beyond finishing as a leader, good leaders will leave work for their successors to continue.

“Ministry has an end point and leaders should work towards it. Our mission should be to share the work so we are less needed and to help people in a way that they will no longer need our help,” said Wong, an experienced mentor and leadership trainer.

For leaders, this also means releasing the self-worth and security one may find in being needed and re-orientating our self-worth in God alone. May today's ministry leaders and senior pastors heed the leadership lessons of Moses and Elijah for the sake of the Church in years to come.

GENERATION NEXT

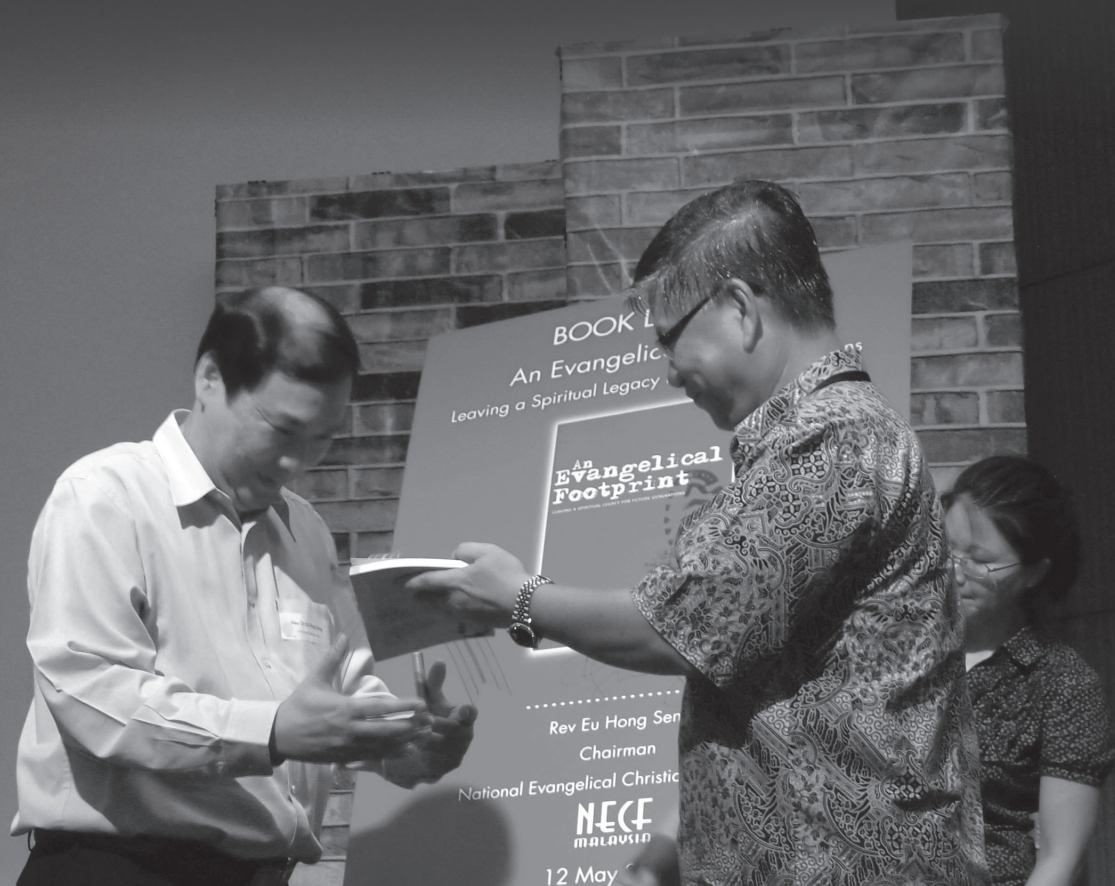
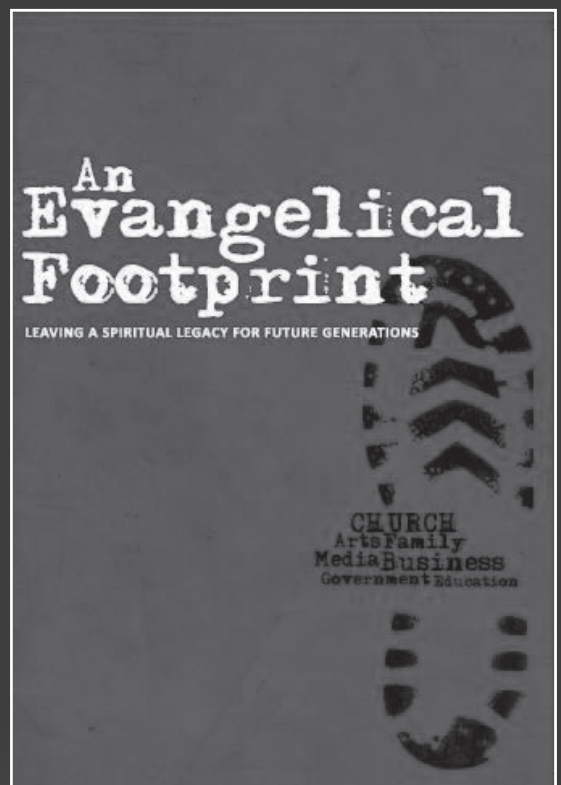
Serving beyond the Church

A NEW book published by NECF Malaysia aims to inspire Christians to discover their vocations in any of the seven spheres of influence: the Church (religion), government and politics, the arts, media, family, business and education.

An *Evangelical Footprint: Leaving a Spiritual Legacy for Future Generations* is a compilation of 43 short interviews with Malaysian Christians from evangelical member churches who are prominent leaders in those spheres. "They present to us the challenges of marrying faith with the realities of daily work and life. Their footprints will be a spiritual legacy for generations to come," outgoing NECF Secretary-General Samuel Ang said in the book's Introduction.

The book is divided into seven sections. Each section carries a feature article exploring the history and present state of evangelicals' contribution to nation building in a particular realm. It is notable that the section on "Church" has the largest number of interviewees but there are far fewer in the sections on education, government and public service and the media. This can give much food for thought about the way we define "ministry" and "Christian service" beyond the walls of the Church.

The book was launched in conjunction with NECF's 30th Anniversary and Biennial General Meeting on 12 May 2012. Price: RM5 per copy. Place orders with NECF.



NECF deputation trips on nation-building

By Eugene Yapp

SINCE February, the NECF nation-building team has been travelling from one pastors' fellowship to another in different towns, cities and regions to share NECF's nation building agenda. The team, comprising outgoing Secretary-General Samuel Ang, Executive Secretaries Eugene Yapp (Research) and Andy Chi (Prayer), spoke on current issues and social trends confronting the nation, as well as some successful initiatives and undertakings by NECF in collaboration with churches.

For the past four years, the NECF team has been working hard to strengthen its nation-building agenda. We praise God that the response has been encouraging from some churches. The result is greater cohesiveness between regional pastors' and ministers' groups with national bodies like NECF and the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM). The Kuching Ministers' Fellowship (KMF), for example, has taken up CFM's statement in 2011 against the impoundment of Bahasa Malaysia Bibles.

With support from NECF, KMF is also undertaking a pilot pre-school development project to build and develop pre-schools, both in terms of infrastructure and syllabus. It will be launched first in and around the Kuching area with plans for further expansion to other parts of Sarawak.

We are also thankful to the Lord for the formation and setting up of a Commission of Sabah Affairs (COSA). With COSA, NECF hopes to be able to communicate and liaise with fellow-believers and churches in Sabah to initiate strategies for the spiritual and physical well-being and welfare of the people of Sabah. One initiative, still at the proposal stage, is a research and documentation project on some of the critical issues and problems faced by Sabahan Christians.

As with all our previous deputation trips, the question-and-answer time was the most interesting and lively. The pastors asked questions covering politics, religious freedom, factors contributing to the current state of the nation, practical things the church could do and even when the 13th general election would be held! The question-time provided great interaction between the pastors and the NECF team. We are thankful to the Lord that some pastors' fellowships have taken concrete actions, such as mobilising their church members to participate as election monitors or as polling and counting agents and by setting up 24-7 prayer initiatives for the nation.

We thank the Lord for His guidance every step of the way throughout this very exciting phase of NECF's nation-building agenda!



Eugene speaking to the Petaling Jaya North Pastors' Fellowship.



Sam addressing the Klang Pastors' Fellowship.

Claiming the high ground in the public sphere

By Eugene Yapp

SOME recent events have created sparks of division within the Christian community. The opinion of one Steve Roads¹ in a letter to a newspaper suggests that Christians ought not to mix politics with religion. At the same time, our young adult population, Christians included, seems more inclined towards activism compared to previous generations. After Bersih 3.0, there was a call circulating in Christian circles to boycott the local newspaper *The Star* for what was perceived as biased reporting.

Whatever your view, these episodes ultimately pose a critical question to the church at large and more specifically to individual Christians: What is the Christian's role in the public life of the nation?

The Christianity that many of us are accustomed to suggests a minimal role in public life and politics, much less active participation. But increasingly, many have become disillusioned with such a standpoint and are re-examining the conservatism embedded in present-day Malaysian Christianity. The call is for a more visionary ethic that impacts society and the nation. Such a call will no doubt cause discomfort to those who see prayer and evangelism as more important priorities than activism. Is this consistent with a Biblical worldview?

The 'high ground' of public truth

The late Bishop Lesslie Newbigin² preached about the falsehood of dichotomous living. Christians, he said, have separated their faith into "me, my God and my family or career". The Gospel, for the most part, is centered upon saving the lost and cultivating vibrant spiritual fervor for the soul. It has very little to do with the physical welfare and well-being of society. Vocabulary such as "public space or the public square" has little significance to the ordinary Christian or even Christian leader seeking to be quietly faithful.

Newbigin challenged this sort of mindset when he said, "The church cannot accept as its role simply the winning of individuals to a kind of Christian discipleship which concerns only the private and domestic aspects of life. To be faithful to a message which concerns the kingdom of God, his rule over all things and all peoples, the church has to claim the high ground of public truth".

"The church cannot accept as its role simply the winning of individuals to a kind of Christian discipleship which concerns only the private and domestic aspects of life. To be faithful to a message which concerns the kingdom of God, his rule over all things and all peoples, the church has to claim the high ground of public truth."

In the Synoptic Gospels, the word "gospel" is translated as "good-message". It speaks about the proclamation of God's saving activity in Jesus Christ as the foretold Messiah. The Gospel accounts demonstrate how and in what ways Jesus engaged with people, including the earthly rulers of His day. If we are to truly believe this complete Gospel of Jesus Christ as God's saving activity and answer to sin which corrupts everything good and beautiful in creation, what Newbigin said must surely pierce our souls. For the Kingdom of God must be done on earth as it is in heaven!

So what does it mean for Christians to claim the "high ground"? It is to represent the Kingdom of God in the life of society and the nation. This will mean making our voice heard at the very least, in arenas where public opinion and truth meet and are contested before it can be decided what is valid and worthy of belief. For others among us, it will mean participating in more involved ways through activism or political office.

Historically, the public space is the *agora* – Greek for a common or public space for assemblies, markets and meetings. It is here where differences met and crossed swords. The *agora* was needed in order for the *polis*, or city-state, to develop and function. In the *agora*, space was created for democratic negotiations on public life issues. When such exchanges concerning humanity and its shared existence can take place freely and in an orderly manner, then what is true and good for the common good is birthed, reinforced and re-articulated.

This means that the public space is not agnostic. Neither is it a given nor a prior; it has to be constructed. It is for people to establish through words and deeds and it is a statement of both intent and action about what being a person is, and what is good for one and one's community. In this respect, religion plays a major and contributing role.

Living the Gospel in the public sphere

One may ask, how can religion make a vital and purposeful impact upon the public space? For Christians, religion is more than a system of belief and doctrines. Neither is it solely about the confession of faith, about piety or the sacred.

Christianity pertains to life principles of faith as demonstrated and validated through the living out of daily life and in cultural ethics. We are informed about these principles through the narratives and stories of the Bible and the Christian Gospel. And so, believers make an impact when they, through their words and actions, live out the Christian conception of God's love, His goodness, righteousness and justice. These were incarnated in Christ whom Christians are called to imitate.

Newbigin asked a pertinent question: How is it possible that the Gospel should be credible, that people should believe that the power which has the last word on human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? His answer was that "the only hermeneutic of the Gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it". In other words, the Gospel is known by how believers live it.

What can we do to live the Gospel in the Malaysian public space? Within this context, Christians may wish to challenge:-

- The religious hegemony buttressed by power for the supremacy of one faith and territorial expansion.
- The hyper-individualism and commercialism that is premised upon a culture of consumption where lifestyles, mannerisms and morality increasingly de-personalise human beings.
- Increasing state monopoly of the public space to manipulate and censor information so that only a certain point of view is accepted as truth.

These challenges require us to move beyond mere forms of activism and prayer to more strategic actions. We need a broad-based Christian social vision that not only critiques the world but becomes a catalyst for new possibilities in Christ. Christians must develop a public square vision that is eschatological, offering the hope of "cities of God" made real now and forever. This vision demands commitment and rigour to see things through. Newbigin issued this timely but sober task:

"If the Gospel is to challenge the public life of our society, if Christians are to occupy the 'high ground' which they vacated in the noontime of 'modernity', it will not be by forming a Christian political party or by aggressive propaganda campaign ...

"It will only be by movement that begins with the local congregation in which the reality of the new creation is present, known and experienced and from which men and women will go into every sector of public life to claim it for Christ, to unmask the illusion which has remained hidden and [to] expose all areas of public life to the illumination of the Gospel.

"But that will only happen as and when local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life and recognise they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as a sign, instrument and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole of society."

¹ *Churches misusing the pulpit, The Star, 25 April 2012*

² *Newbigin, Lesslie. The Gospel in a Pluralist Society. Grand Rapids, MI., Eerdmans, 1989*



Developing leaders, intentionally

By Patrick Cheng

CHURCH leaders and pastors recognise the need to groom successors but many lack an intentional programme. The NECF Leadership Commission has a framework for a five-year leadership development programme which church leaders can implement with those they are discipling. The framework covers five areas:

1. Leadership and Management

For the first three years, NECF and the Eagles Leadership Institute Singapore are holding the annual Eagles Leadership Conference (ELC) Malaysia. Emerging leaders need only attend two days of training a year at the ELC and complete written and reading assignments outside the conference. Conference costs for three years is RM450 per person. Upon completion, participants receive a Leadership Development Certificate.

Conference dates:

Year One: 22-23 June (Fri, Sat) 2012

Theme: Leading Self

Year Two: 22-23 March (Fri, Sat) 2013

Theme: Leading Others

Year Three: 28-29 March (Fri, Sat) 2014

Theme: Leading Organisations

2. Theological Understanding

The remaining two years under the framework should ideally be spent in seminary to help emerging leaders develop a strong theological foundation. Proper theological reflection is necessary to address issues in life, church and society. A number of seminaries have agreed to give accreditation to the ELC Malaysia certificate. This accreditation allows certificate holders to upgrade their leadership training to undergraduate or graduate studies.

3. Character Development

Besides attending the ELC and/or seminary, emerging leaders should also get practical ministry experience. Their churches are urged to create ministry opportunities for them, as all theory and study is ultimately tested when trainees get involved in practical ministry.

4. Financial Remuneration

Discussion on remuneration for emerging leaders who will soon take up positions within the church should be dealt with at some point in the five-year framework. There is nothing taboo about discussing a pastor's salary. Bible scholar Jay Adams once said, "It is not unspiritual to

discuss and even negotiate [salaries] since salaries offered by many congregations are scandalously inadequate." In fact, there are several occasions in the Old Testament where the needs of the temple were neglected for lack of full-time priests and Levites (Malachi 3:10, Nehemiah 13:10-11). In response, King Hezekiah instituted a "salary structure" to pay the various categories of full-time temple workers (2 Chronicles 31:14-19). The NECF Leadership Commission had in 2009 suggested various factors that churches should take into account when fixing pastors' salaries. These were listed in the Nov-Dec 2009 issue of Berita NECF and included the pastor's job responsibilities, congregation size, decision-making, scope of control, years of experience, qualifications and urban or rural location.

5. God's call

When an emerging leader responds to God's call to serve full-time, this call also needs to be recognised by fellow elders and leaders. Confirming one's call to ministry is not a one-off incident but a process that the larger church should be involved in. The church is thus exhorted not to simply lay hands (1 Timothy 5: 22) or appoint someone to leadership in a hasty manner. But once the church recognises God's call upon the person, it should come alongside the person to seek God and implement His purposes for the church.

Conclusion

This suggested five-year framework is an intentional structure for local churches to help potential leaders undergo character formation. It can be viewed as a time of preparation to pass on the leadership baton. The time frame also gives room to study and revise church salary structures. As we begin to do what we can through our frail human endeavours, let us trust God to call people into the ministry. Let's work together to raise more leaders for the Malaysian Church.

The full version of this article was published on the NECF website on 10 April 2012.



Discipleship in the Creative Arts

THE church is tasked with discipling believers but few know how to when it comes to Christians of an artistic vein. Typical church programmes tend to be focused on Sunday School, youth ministry, senior citizens, prayer meetings, social welfare and mission trips. These are important, but may not address the inner need for guidance and affirmation for the artists among us. It becomes even more demoralising when Christians who want to pursue a career in the arts are told that their choice is worldly or unspiritual.



JD of Pop Shuvit

Fortissimo notebook: Quotes to remember

"It is not enough for us just to have a gift. ...The Word of God has to be the foundation for our art and our worship."

"Creativity is our spirituality in action!"

"Art should help us see things as if we have never seen them before. How do we engage an audience to see and think about the cross in a way that they have never seen or thought about before?"

"Never use our creative power to betray God of the glory that is due to Him." – lesson from the Tower of Babel.

"The Psalms give voice to our grievances and objections. Bono described the psalmists as 'blues singers shouting at God.'"

Fortissimo is a new mentoring programme that helps Christians who are aspiring musicians and vocalists deal with these issues. Initiated by Malaysian singer-songwriter Juwita Suwito and friends, it aims to help Christians in the musical arts build strong foundations, spiritually and musically, to positively impact their spheres of influence in accordance with their calling. The programme is endorsed by NECF YouthNet.

Four Forty Records, a social enterprise, and Pelayanan Muda-Mudi (PMM) SIB Sabah jointly organised an Introductory Seminar to the Fortissimo programme at Pusat SIB Sabah and SIB Kota Kinabalu, Likas, in March. The 100 participants came from parts of Sabah and Labuan, with a few from Johor Baru and Petaling Jaya. One man even took a nine-hour motorbike ride from his workplace in the Sabah interior to Kota Kinabalu for the seminar.

Participants learnt about the biblical basis for the arts from actor-director Colin Kirton who explained the reasons Christians are called to live creatively and artistically. He proposed that the Christian's art need not explicitly be about God, but should be God-centred, rooted in a worldview that encompasses creation, fall and redemption, as well as the character and purposes of God. He examined how God and people in the Bible used art and creativity, from the Creation, to the fine art of the Tabernacle, poetry and song composition, preaching and teaching through prophecy, parables and more, culminating in the drama of the Incarnation where the Word becomes flesh.

"The sessions really opened my mind and my spiritual eyes to see how God's word fully supports the various arts," said participant Sylvia George. Participants broke into instrumental workshops led by Suwito (vocals), Wagner Daniel (drums), Daniel Foong (bass), JD of Pop Shuvit (guitars) and Weili Cheah (keyboard). They then played together in band workshop sessions. Fortissimo faculty members – all established musicians and performers – also shared their experiences and personal journeys in the arts in a forum moderated by Peter Peninting, the programme coordinator for Sabah.

"It was an honour to share our experiences and knowledge with the participants. I'm inspired to see the enthusiasm and commitment by all participants. I can see great potential and I hope to see all the participants again," said Wagner. With the seminar completed, Fortissimo participants now look forward to being shortlisted for intensive mentoring which begins in August 2012. It will include quarterly retreats, reading and music assignments and forming a network of peers for mutual encouragement and learning.

Celebrating 400 Years of the Malay-language Bible

By L Kristanto-Loh

THE Malay-language Bible is 400 years old this year. In 1612, the first translation of the Gospel of Matthew into the Malay language was completed by AC Ruyl, a Dutch tradesman. Just a year earlier, the King James Version Bible had been published. Ruyl's translation of Matthew was subsequently printed in 1629. It was the earliest translation of a portion of the Bible ever published in a non-European language.

Did you know that Ruyl translated fig tree as "puhoon pisang". It was simply that a banana tree would make more sense to readers then, who had never seen a fig tree!

To mark the occasion, more than 100 people attended an anniversary celebration organised by the Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) and Seminari Theoloji Malaysia (STM) at Trinity Methodist Church, Petaling Jaya, on 3 March 2012.

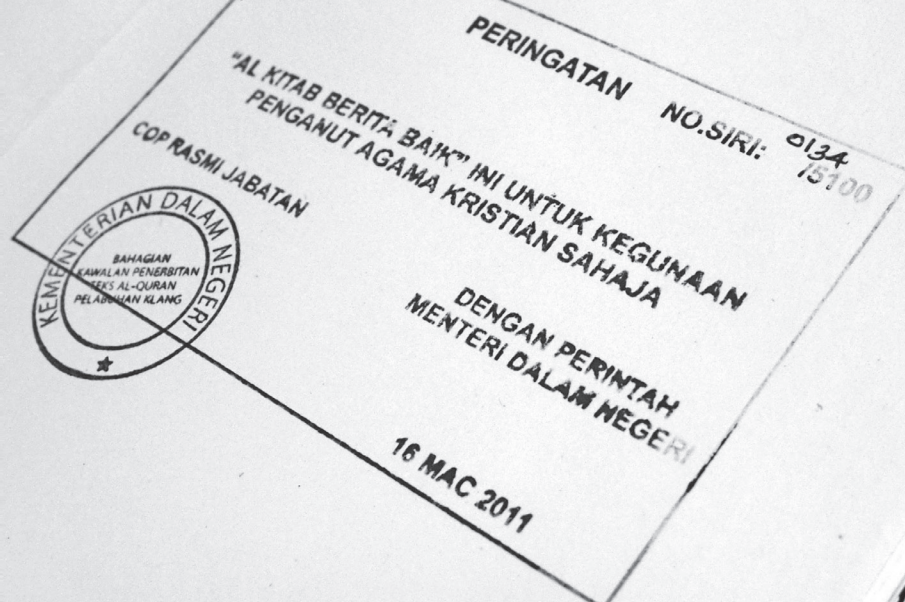
A seminar was held in conjunction with the event. Papers presented were on Ruyl's Malay Translation of Matthew's Gospel, The Allah Controversy: Ideological and Theological Contestation, legal issues surrounding the Bahasa Malaysia (BM) Alkitab, and challenges in printing and distribution of the Alkitab. Translators involved in the translation of the Alkitab also shared their perspectives of the work.

A Thanksgiving Service ended the day of celebration, with a specially-written prayer and a message on the challenges facing believers in East Malaysia.

Finally, Lee Min Choon, President of the Bible Society of Malaysia, honoured the translators present by giving each a token gift of an Alkitab with a serial number. These were part of the consignment of 5,000 BM Bibles confiscated by the Home Ministry, serialised and stamped with the ministry's seal in 2011. BSM has said these "defaced" copies cannot be sold but is keeping them as heritage pieces.

As one of the recipients, I am more convinced than ever that we must preserve the labour of love done by a host of translators over the past four centuries. The 400 years of translation and revision work that has brought us the full Alkitab today is a heritage and testimony of a Divine Hand at work. May God grant us the strength to join the apostle Paul in his resolution in 2 Timothy 2: 9b-10, that "The word of God is not in chains, and so I endure everything for the sake of God's chosen people, in order that they too may obtain the salvation that comes through Christ Jesus and brings eternal glory".

Editor's note: The Alkitab, Kalam Hidup and Perjanjian Baru publications are still banned by orders made under the Internal Security Act (ISA) 1960 for being "prejudicial to national interests and security". This is despite the fact that the ISA has now been abolished and replaced with a new law. CFM has called on the government to revoke the orders.



EXPENDITURE

1. Welfare assistance

For 2011, RM10,000 in financial welfare assistance was rendered to two pastors.

2. Insurance subsidy for East Malaysian pastors

We continued to provide the 50% subsidy towards Personal Accident & Critical Illness insurance coverage for 344 pastors from Sarawak and Sabah. The insurance premium subsidy amounted to RM61,920 for the year 2011. This is the Group Insurance policy specially designed for the NECF Foundation.

3. Study Loans

As at the end of 2011, the Foundation has given out 25 interest-free study loans amounting to RM297,938. Total repayment received as at December 2011 was RM101,515. In 2011, four new study loans totaling RM77,000 were approved and disbursement began in the same year. Efforts were taken to encourage those who were slow in repaying their loans to keep to the agreed repayment schedule. Failure to repay on a timely basis will affect the amount available for new loans.

RECEIPTS

1. Donations received

Praise the Lord! Donations received for the year amounted to RM181,801. This is the highest figure since the Foundation started in 2005.

OTHERS

1. Great Eastern Life Assurance

Since the Great Eastern insurance scheme started in September 2005, there have been 24 insurance claims totaling RM1,027,082 as at 31 December 2011. In the year 2011 there were three claims totaling RM141,311. As at 31/12/11 we have 1,858 members under the Group Scheme out of which 342 are pastors from Sabah and Sarawak.

2. New Loan Category

In 2011, the Lord also provided graciously, paving the way for the Foundation to provide another new exciting loan category, namely the Vocational Education Loan. This interest-free loan is available to children of pastors and full-time workers to pursue vocational skills training, for example, in nursing, mechanic training, electrician training, culinary skills, etc.

To God be the glory, great things He has done!

The Bible and the Ballot

CHRISTIAN thought on the believer's involvement in politics can be a minefield of explosive opinions. Some say politics is dirty and Christians should not get involved but instead live peaceful and quiet lives. Others feel it is enough just to pray for our nation but act no further, for we are to submit to the governing authorities. Yet others believe it is necessary for the Church to speak up on political issues that concern justice and public welfare, but that the pulpit should never be partisan in the sense of endorsing any party. Individual Christians, however, are free to choose their affiliations.

Into this spectrum enters *The Bible and the Ballot*, a joint publication by Graceworks and Friends in Conversation (FIC). One of the book's essays propose that in certain situations, it is alright for a preacher on the pulpit to advocate support for a particular party or condemn another. This is if one party "far better 'fits' the image of justice and forgiveness than another". It is argued that a preacher making such a recommendation is not necessarily being partisan.

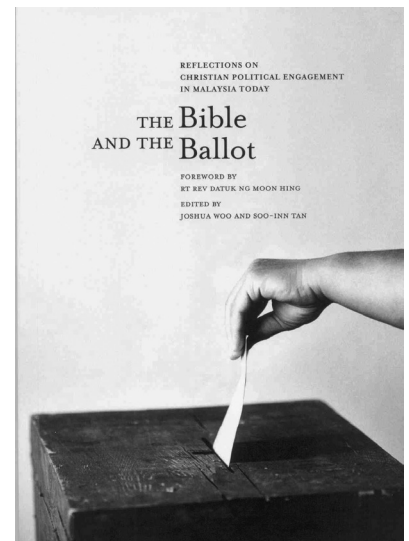
Such views are bound to ignite debate. NECF, for one, subscribes

to the theological position of American theologian Carl FH Henry that the Bible has no mandate for the institutional Church to use the name of Christ in endorsing election candidates, laws or policies. Of course the Church must speak against injustice, but when she does, her mandate is to state the biblical criteria by which all people, including human agencies like government, are to abide. And God does lay down the standards expected of governments. The prophetic books of the Old Testament are replete with such injunctions to the evil kings of Israel.

Henry once said, "The church must do a more effective job of enunciating theological and moral principles that bear upon public life". In the course of doing that, however, the Church may be misunderstood as being politically partisan, even if that is not her intention. In the general course of things, though, the church should not get into endorsing specific political solutions, unless perhaps, there are clear instances where the government acts against the very fundamentals of human existence. It is for further debate to define the criteria of such instances where the Church has to make specific endorsements, such as the times Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived in under Nazi Germany.

Whatever your view, *The Bible and the Ballot* is worth scrutiny for any Christian eager to take the discussion on engaging the public sphere further. The book carries a Foreword by Rev Datuk Ng Moon Hing, the Anglican Bishop of West Malaysia.

The writers are members of FIC, an online forum of Christian discussion on integrating faith, spirituality, community and society. The book retails for RM15 per copy and is available at Canaanland and Gladsounds bookstores.





Looking Out Looking Up

NORTH KOREA On 15 April, the country observed the “Day of the Sun”, the 100th birthday of North Korea’s founder, the late Kim Il-Sung. This nationwide event required all North Koreans to participate in ostentatious displays of reverence and loyalty to Kim, who is exalted as god-like. On such an occasion, huge statues of the “Great Leader” are usually displayed across the country. Citizens are obliged to bow down to his image and to display portraits of him in their homes. Christians in North Korea feel that outwardly, they must participate in the celebrations to avoid arrest. Those who have refused to “worship” Kim have ended up in labour camps. To ensure compliance, North Korean authorities hold indoctrination meetings and force people to attend. “It is very difficult to speak our minds, even to our friends and family. There is a good chance we will be arrested if we speak freely,” a local church pastor reported.



PRAY – for the day when North Koreans will be able to worship and exercise their conscience freely. Pray for the difficulties all North Koreans face under an oppressive regime. Pray that Christians will remain fervent and have continuous, fresh encounters with God. Pray that they will have access to His word and teaching. - OD

CHINA The China Aid Association reports that the government has started a campaign to close Protestant house churches that do not register with the official state church over the next 10 years. Local authorities are to survey and record intelligence on house churches nationwide. These churches would then be asked to register with the only government-approved church, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, failing which they

will be closed down. This strategy was released in a government document in Sept 2011 during a training class run by the government authority on religious affairs. This development comes on the heels of ongoing persecution of the Shouwang Church in Beijing, whose members have been arrested for holding outdoor meetings after the church failed to find a venue for meetings after its lease of a hall was terminated.



PRAY – for true religious freedom in China and that the government, which has embraced modernity and progress on so many other fronts, will be released of its fears and paranoia. Pray that Christians in China will bring tremendous blessing to their countrymen and the authorities as a testimony of the Living God. Pray for the house churches that they will remain faithful under persecution and harassment. - CD

ALGERIA A new Bible translation in the native Kabyle language has allowed many more people to read and share God’s Word here. Before this, French was used but this put older believers at a disadvantage because they did not speak French. Local ministry workers say that the Kabyle translation is the answer to a long-standing prayer for the Word to be available in the local language.



PRAY – for God’s word to minister to people’s hearts and to transform lives. Praise God that the Bible is finally available in the people’s own language. Remember the ongoing ministry of Bible translation in many other languages, that challenges in translation will be surmounted and that such work will bring fruit and a great harvest. - VOM

IRAN The lawyer of imprisoned pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, has been sentenced to nine years in prison for “violating national security and spreading propaganda against the regime”. The lawyer, Mohammad Ali Dadkhah is well-known in Iran for defending death-row cases and was the only lawyer willing to take up Pastor Youcef’s appeal. Youcef was convicted of apostasy and of proselytizing in 2009 but his death sentence has been delayed, presumably due to international

pressure piled on by religious watch groups. With Mohammad Ali facing jail, Youcef will likely find it very hard to get another lawyer and will be at greater risk without an advocate.



PRAY – for God’s mercy upon Youcef’s life and comfort and protection for his family. Pray that with continuing international pressure, his conviction and death sentence will be overturned. Thank God for lawyers like Mohammad Ali who take great risks to defend freedom and justice. Pray for an intervention into his situation so that he need not be imprisoned. - BP, CP

SYRIA Caught in the crossfire between government forces and civilian and army defectors, many Syrian Christians are reportedly considering fleeing the country. They fear that an overthrow of the current Bashar al-Assad government, despite his brutal crackdown on civilians, would strengthen Islamist powers as was the case in Egypt and Tunisia after people’s uprisings there. Protracted fighting, meanwhile, puts lives at risk, making any venture outside in the open a risky undertaking. The United Nations estimates that more than 9,000 people have been killed so far since the revolt first started in early 2011. Besides fighting between the government and civilians, Christians in some areas also say they are being targeted by Muslim militant groups. Christians comprise about 10% of Syria’s population and their freedom of worship has generally been protected under Assad’s government. A parliamentary election held on 7 May 2012 was declared a farce by activists and boycotted by the opposition.



PRAY – for God’s mercy on Syria and for an end to the fighting. Pray that there will be genuine desire for peace and that all parties will be willing to abide by a ceasefire and come to the negotiating table. The major world powers are also split on support and condemnation of Syria, so pray for international resolve to stop the fighting. Pray for Syrian Christians faced with tough decisions to make about whether to stay put or flee. Pray that God will work in the conflict-ridden Arab world to fulfill His purposes. -CP