

beritaNECF

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE



By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

2015: Weeping with the Nation, A Call to Genuine Commiseration

Solomon, considered the wisest man who ever lived, once taught there is “a time to weep”. 2015 is panning out to be such a time for the Malaysian Church.

Right after the news on Flight QZ8501 broke, I received a text from abroad expressing shock and lamenting that “2014 has not been a good year for Malaysia”.

Indeed, the number of crises our nation has faced in the past year is unprecedented in its history.

The tragedies of the still-missing MH 370, the downing of MH 17 and the crash of Air Asia's QZ8501 have sent not only Malaysians reeling, but also left the larger world agape at the uncanniness of three major aviation disasters hitting one country within a single year.

On the back of this triple whammy, Malaysia ended 2014 with more than half of her states in the Peninsula inundated by massive floods – a catastrophe akin to the scale of Hurricane Katrina in the United States almost a decade ago¹.

The year also witnessed further erosion of our religious liberty with the loss of the case at the Federal Court by the Roman Catholic Church in Malaysia on the right to use “Allah” in its publications. Due to the perpetuation of wooliness in the matter, the Church can only watch in dismay as the state authorities continue to treat the Al-Kitab like illegal contraband in a country that openly preaches and boasts of “moderation and tolerance” to the world.

In times like these, it is inconceivable that any sound Malaysian can miss the signs that all is not well in our beloved nation.

Nevertheless, the point is less about what is wrong with our country, but more about the nature of our disquiet over the destiny of Malaysia.

Is our response limited to mourning the tragedies unfolding before our eyes as we watch dead bodies being recovered and witness families in anguish? Or are we truly identified with the pain of the suffering populace and the steady disintegration of the nation's destiny?

Let's consider royal cupbearer turned nation-builder, Nehemiah.

Nehemiah most likely hailed from the tribe of Judah. He was one of the “Jews of the Dispersion,” and in his youth, was appointed royal cup-bearer at the palace. Through his brother Hanani, and other sources (Neh 1:2; 2:3), he heard of the desolate condition of the Holy City, and was filled with sadness of heart. For many days, he fasted, mourned and prayed for the place of his fathers' sepulchres.

The Jews were “in reproach and in distress” (Neh1:3) and this caused him to “weep and mourn” and “fast and pray” for many days (1:4).

The reason why Nehemiah wept in dismay was because he could identify with the afflictions of his people. He unashamedly spoke of the “sins of the children” of God's people, “which we have sinned against You.”

Continued on next page...

What's Inside?

- 3 *Making Sure the 24-7 Prayer Initiative Keeps Going*
- 4 *Malaysian Church's Flood Relief in the Northern States, a Historic Effort*
- 5 *Preparing for Changing and Challenging Times*
- 6 *Call of the Cross*
- 9 *Taking a Hard Look at the Family Factor!*
- 10 *The Tamil Commission Expands its Sphere of Influence*
- 11 *Seminar on Managing The Place of Worship*
- 11 *NECF Calendar 2015*
- 11 *Congratulatory Announcement*



Main Feature: 'Call of the Cross' on pages 6-8.

NECF members, have you paid your membership subscription? Please contact us!

Berita NECF is a quarterly publication of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Malaysia.

...continued from front cover: 2015: Weeping with the Nation, A Call to Genuine Commiseration

“Both my father’s house and I have sinned.” It was *our* sin, not your or their sin.

It is time to cry, to identify

This is so different from the “blame game” many engage in today. Sure, the nation is plagued by corruption, the arrogance of bigots and even wayang kulit acts staged by pseudo moderates. But then, is the Church free from her own besetting sins? If we are not prepared to weep and moan over our own iniquities, then surely we have missed the first step in *identification*.

Yes, the nation is corrupt, but as Nehemiah confessed “we have acted very *corruptly* against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses” (Neh 1:7), I am reminded that Christians can be unwittingly enmeshed in a corrupt system too, on the pretext of the “need to survive in a nation like Malaysia.”

Time to cry, for our nation

Raised as a generation on a manic diet of feel-good experiences via modern digital gadgets and devices, our ability to empathize and commiserate with suffering and adversity is fast becoming fleeting. It is not unusual for us to switch from tragedy one minute to football the next on our television or the internet with nary a second thought.

Too many of us remain cloistered in our own private world, often paying scant attention to issues of national interest especially if they do not appear to affect us directly or immediately.

If we, as the Church, do not bother to stand up and weep in prayer for the nation in times of adversity, what hope is there left for our country’s destiny?

NECF (together with CCM) started the 24/7 prayer call

in Sept 2014 to challenge Christians to dedicate themselves to prayer and fasting for the nation for the next 2 years. To date, many have yet to make this commitment. Church, it is time to weep and moan, and fast and pray, for Malaysia -- wailing “it is *our* sin.”

Time to cry, beyond our nation

Most certainly, Malaysia is not the only country going through hard times in the world today.

From Boko Haram’s kidnapping acts in Nigeria, the onslaught of ISIS in the Middle East and the outbreak of the Ebola virus in West Africa to the enormous human suffering wrought by the many natural disasters globally, it is easy to get overwhelmed by the tremendous needs of our world.

We inadvertently console ourselves by citing there is only so much we can do. Consequently, we neglect the necessity to find time to weep for those who weep beyond our shores.

This is a betrayal of our calling to become missionaries to the world and ultimately, failing as world-class Christian statesmen.

We know very little of Nehemiah. He probably was a eunuch slave, who rose to become a builder, governor and leader. I believe he became a nation-builder, because he built his foundation correctly -- he first learned to weep. His heart was in the right place for his people and nation.

In the face of tragic circumstances and dire need in Malaysia, let our hearts and minds cry for the restoration of our nation.

¹ The East Coast catastrophe is the worst in more than 30 years, and has been dubbed by many as Malaysia’s Katrina.

NECF MALAYSIA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Chairman

Rev. Dr Eu Hong Seng

Vice Chairman I

Elder Kong Yeng Phooi

Vice Chairman II

Pr. Dr. Khoo Kay Hup

Hon. Secretary

Rev. Elisha Satvinder

Hon. Treasurer

Pr. Samuel Ang

Asst. Hon. Treasurer

Rev. Ng Kok Kee

Council Members

Rev. Dexter Low
Rev. Gabriel Jabanathan
Rev. Datuk Jerry W. A. Dusing
Rev. Justin Wan
Elder Thomas Lim
Rev. Samuel Surendran
Rev. Chin Lee Yean
Pr. Chomy Ching
Pr. Tay Wah Seng

NECF MALAYSIA STAFF

Management Team

Dr Khoo Kay Hup
Pr Samuel Ang
Rev Andy Chi

Asst. Secretary-General

Rev Andy Chi

Executive Secretaries (Commissions)

Katryn Tan (Finance/ NECF Foundation)
Daniel Loh (Tamil)
Alfred Tais (Bahasa Malaysia/ OA)
Ngeh Hoong Eng (Chinese)
Irene Than (Office Administrator)
Jack Cheah (Ministry Administrator)

EDITORIAL

Editor

Rev Andy Chi

Artwork

Cmate Communications

NECF
MALAYSIA

ADDRESS

32, Jalan SS2/103,
47300 Petaling Jaya
Selangor, Malaysia
Tel: 603-7727 8227
Fax: 603-7729 1139
Email: berita@necf.org.my
Website: www.necf.org.my

Printed by

Akitiara Corporation
1&3, Jln TPP1/3,
Tmn Perindustrian Puchong
Batu 12, 47100 Puchong, Selangor

Making Sure the 24-7 Prayer Initiative Keeps Going

By Rev Andy Chi

The 24-7 Prayer initiative was first adopted at the Prayer United Network Meeting which was held in Miri from August 12-13 last year, after the nation saw two tragic aviation disasters, namely the MH370 and MH17 incidents. At that meeting, prayer leaders from the different network of churches in the country shared the same concerns and conviction that the nation needed a 24-7 prayer covering to prevent further disasters from befalling her. It was agreed that each organization would be responsible for the 24-7 prayer mobilization among their churches. It was also agreed that this initiative would be launched during the NECF-CCM Malaysia Day Prayer Celebration held at the Calvary Convention Centre on September 16, 2014 and to continue for the next two years after which a review will be made.

Since its launch, the 24-7 initiative has made good progress. At the January 19-21 *Prayer United Retreat* held in Port Dickson, reports showed that all the prayer slots have been taken up for the next two years. This is certainly a historic achievement for the Malaysian Church. This is also true for us in NECF. All of our 24-7 slots have been taken up too.

Nevertheless, church participation is still low. Many are still unaware while others unsure about how to go about in implementing it. Much work lies ahead of us if we want to raise a strong 24-7 prayer covering over the nation. Among the steps proposed to increase and strengthen this initiative is the adoption of the 3 "M" -- *MOBILIZE, MONITOR and*

MOTIVATE. This 24-7 Prayer initiative will not run on autopilot without constant follow up and assistance.

Mobilizing churches is the number one priority. Several suggestions were put forward to do this. One suggestion was to go directly to the different states and towns to conduct briefings and meetings to explain the prayer initiative in greater detail. This would help increase awareness of this initiative, provide opportunities for clarification and assist churches to make their decision. Another suggestion was to allow flexibility regarding the amount of time one chooses to commit to the 24-7. Not everyone can pray for an hour. It would be better to get them to pray for fifteen minutes than not to pray at all. Another suggestion was to use the WhatsApp platform to coordinate, communicate and pray online as it could attract youths, housewives and the retired to the 24-7.

Without a proper *monitoring* system, the 24-7 has little chance to succeed. If left on their own, most people may end up forgetting to pray. To help them keep their commitment, they need some form of encouragement and supervision. Someone needs to remind them of their time slots and ensure that they keep to it. In our 247@NECF, we do not receive individual registration because we can't determine if they are praying. Rather, we encourage individuals to register as a church or group where there would be a pastor or appointed group leader to supervise and remind them of their commitment. This approach gives the 24-7 a better chance of success.

Finally, for the 24-7 to succeed, constant *motivation* and encouragement are needed. There are several ways to get the prayer group motivated. One is to set aside time for all involved to come together to pray and give feedback on their experiences. This will help everyone know where they are at and what God is doing among them. Sharing of answered prayer is also important. This will inspire them to pray more. Teaching is another way to keep them motivated. Knowing more about prayer does enable us to keep on praying.

To have more info, please visit our website at www.necf.org.my and click on our 247@NECF button. If you want a 24-7 team to visit your town to conduct a 24-7 briefing or seminar, please write to prayer@necf.org.my.



Prayer
247@NECF



Malaysian Church's Flood Relief in the Northern States, a Historic Effort

By Rev Andy Chi

The way the Malaysian Church responded to the worst floods that hit the northern states of Malaysia between December 2014 and January 2015 was historic. Christian relief agencies and churches worked together in an unified and concerted disaster response effort that helped more than 2,500 households in the most affected states of Kelantan, Pahang and Perak.

Relief aid was distributed to all in need regardless of ethnicity. The areas or towns that received our relief efforts were Tumpat, Kota Bharu, Tanah Merah, Machang, Temangan, Kuala Krai, Gua Musang, Kuala Lipis, Jerantut, Termeloh, Bera, Kemaman, Sg Lembing and Gerik. The 2,500 households were given food, water, cooking kits, school kits etc. Close to 300 homes, 3 schools, 3 churches, 1 kindergarten, 1 temple, shops and a clinic were cleaned up by our team. And over 10 homes were repaired and restored.

Overall, the operations ran very well. Cooperation among the partners was great despite doing this together for the first time. The response from the churches was also amazing as seen by the tons of relief supplies that were sent to our drop off centres as well as the unending stream of volunteers who went on site to help with our relief teams.

Over 260,000 persons were displaced by the floods and placed in evacuation centres. At the height of the flood crisis, a call was mooted by Rev Elisha Satvinder for a meeting with all the key Christian relief agencies as well as strategic Christian organizations for a concerted disaster response to the affected states. This meeting took place on December 27, 2014 at the NECF. Present at the meeting were representatives from Crest, HisTeam, Full Gospel Businessmen (FGB), International Disaster Relief Network (IDRN) and NECF. The meeting concluded with all agreeing to collaborate together for the flood relief effort. It was also decided that NECF would be the main coordinator for the entire operation, and that it would be led by NECF assistant secretary-general,

Rev Andy Chi. Subsequently, World Vision and several key churches from the Klang Valley joined in the relief operations.

Immediately after the meeting we began our combined effort. We used the "Whatsapp" messenger to communicate and keep everyone informed. It enabled us to coordinate, communicate, share vital info, avoid duplication and send relief teams to affected areas at the shortest period of time.

During the operations we saw "first hand" the flood situation and the damage it caused after the floods receded. While the loss of life was minimal, the loss of shelter, personal belongings, business, livestock and crops was huge. Many lost everything in this flood. Also, during the operations, we noticed initially that very little help was coming from the federal and state governments as they were overwhelmed themselves by the enormity of the flood crisis. So, this collaboration effort certainly came at the right time. There were many without food and water but, thankfully, our relief teams were on the ground to help them. In some areas we were the first to arrive with aid.

Among the lessons learnt is the urgency and need to equip believers and churches with disaster response knowledge and skill. It has highlighted our lack of training and knowledge in this area of activity as well as not to solely rely on the government for the rescue, relief and recovery efforts. Therefore a decision was made to organize a Disaster Response Training from the 13-15 May to be held at Full Gospel Tabernacle. This training is designed to equip and prepare the individual and community on how to deal and respond when disaster strikes. It is full 3 day training from 9am to 4pm. We would like to urge all; especially Pastors and Church Leaders to sign up for this training. Upon completion, participants will be awarded with an International Disaster Response Network (IDRN) badge that certifies that they have taken this training. It is a badge that is recognized worldwide and is able to provide access to disaster zones for relief work.

Preparing for Changing and Challenging Times

By Rev Daron Tan

The floods in the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia in 2014 came as a wake-up call for Malaysia in an age of global climate change. Many believe that our nation is immune to large-scale disasters and thus were shocked to learn that well over 200,000 were evacuated in 5 states of Peninsular Malaysia during the floods. This catastrophe led to massive destruction of infrastructure, disrupting basic public services in affected areas for several weeks. Experts believe it will take years for the affected communities to recover

During this disaster, the NECF initiated a National Coordinated Response with various churches and NGOs to bring basic humanitarian aid to those suffering in several areas. Many lessons were learnt during this response which can serve to reduce the impact of future disasters and improve the services of our response. One of the most basic needs is to provide training with the goal of equipping and empowering local churches to serve as effective channels of practical help during such crises.

The need to train is often met with objections, due to misguided thoughts such as below:

“But I am just an ordinary person, we need help from the professionals!”

Partially true, this myth has excluded so many from participating at various levels to help in a disaster. While search and rescue and medical work require specially trained professionals, many other types of help and services in disaster can be done effectively by ordinary people with a little training. Everyone can learn how to ensure their safety and help each other in such crises with some help.

In a disaster, media coverage is often focused on the front line effort but the truth is that many ordinary people contribute in services and gifts to alleviate human suffering. There are scores of unsung heroes who work tirelessly in the background to enable a response mission. These range from housewives, students and retirees to working professionals who volunteer time and money to serve selflessly.

The old adage “many hands make work lighter” is true in a disaster. When individuals and their community know what they can do to reduce the impact of disaster, they are better positioned to provide solutions in a crisis. This is the reason the International Disaster Response Network (IDRN) gives priority to train ordinary persons including children for community-based disaster preparedness.

“It’s the government’s responsibility and job to help us.”

Many fail to understand that the authorities can only provide emergency services within their capacity. During a major disaster, these capacities are overwhelmed due to the epic scale of the event. In 2005, the UNISDR (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction) called upon all governments to make disaster risk reduction everyone’s business. A total of 168 countries, including Malaysia, are signatories to the Hyogo Framework for Action which calls for nations to build resilience and capacity to reduce the impact of disaster at every level. This includes engaging and empowering the private sector for involvement in disaster response.

When we take the initiative to reduce the impact of disaster in our lives, we are building resilience in our own nation. With an increased frequency of disaster cycles around the world, our survival and recovery from disasters will depend upon our preparedness and involvement. A trained community in disaster preparedness is a safer community. A trained community in disaster response is an asset and a blessing to their neighbourhood and nation during crises.

The IDRN, with over 150 local coordination centres in 35 countries worldwide, is working with the NECF and other local NGO partners in Malaysia to connect and share resources with each other on common goals. Individuals who complete training in IDRN 1100 and 1300 course are badged as members and may connect with any IDRN member or LCC anywhere in the world to network in a disaster.

We look forward to seeing you at the coming National Disaster Response Training in May 2015.



Rev Daron Tan is the pastor of Trinity Community Centre, Kuching as well as an IDRN Trainer and Emergency Coordinator. A frequent explorer of the jungles of South East Asia, he developed a model for sustainable livelihood in exporting aquatic plants and tropical fishes, which was featured at the IDRN Jakarta Training in 2009 for the post disaster/recovery phase. Rev Daron is also a disaster response trainer who has participated with IDRN’s trainings and work in Indonesia and the Philippines. He also served in an advisory capacity to NECF Malaysia during the 2014 East Coast Flood Response.

Call of the Cross

By Rev Dr Lim Kar Yong

**“When Christ calls a man,
he bids him come and die.”**

-- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Of late, I have been rereading Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*, drawing inspiration on how one could respond to the current events affecting our nation. Although Bonhoeffer wrote this book more than 70 years ago, it has a contemporary ring to it. He was a pastor, author and theologian during World War II, and as Nazi Germany conquered a continent and attempted to exterminate the Jews of Europe, Bonhoeffer was one of the very few people who worked relentlessly to resist the evil regime of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich. For this, Bonhoeffer was martyred.

In the midst of persecution and war in Germany, Bonhoeffer's American friends helped him leave the country in June 1939 to teach in a seminary in New York. This became a decision Bonhoeffer regretted. He felt compelled to return to Germany to be with his people at a time when they needed him most.

He wrote, “I have come to the conclusion that I made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.”

Returning to Germany after a few months in the United States, he became actively involved in the resistance movement against Hitler and the Nazi regime. This subsequently led to his arrest in April 1943, and he was finally condemned to death on 9 April 1945 at the age of 39, just a few weeks before World War II ended.

Bonhoeffer left behind his legacy through many of his writings, and *The Cost of Discipleship* is one of his most famous books. In it, Bonhoeffer explored what the call to discipleship meant for followers of Jesus. Arising out of his struggles with the complacency of the German church during his time, Bonhoeffer's exposition on the meaning of discipleship and the cross still rings true today. He exemplified what it meant to take up his cross and follow his master. He suffered for the sake of the gospel and willingly paid the price with his own life.

***For Bonhoeffer, the sufferings that
Jesus went through also apply to
the disciples.***

Bonhoeffer's most compelling words in this book are these: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” For Bonhoeffer, the sufferings that Jesus went through also apply to the disciples. He wrote, “Just as Christ is Christ only in virtue of his suffering and rejection, so the disciple is a disciple only in so far as he shares his Lord's suffering and rejection and crucifixion.”

Suffering for the sake of the gospel is the badge of true discipleship, and Bonhoeffer warned that as Christians, we should not be surprised that we are called to suffer for Christ's sake.

A word about suffering before I proceed. When I talk about suffering, I am not talking about some inconveniences in life or some form of physical sickness, cancer, or chronic disease as a result of our lifestyles or for any other reason. I am talking about suffering that is directly related to the gospel of Christ; in other words, suffering for the sake of the gospel.

Suffering for the Sake of the Gospel: Lessons from the Apostle Paul

Suffering for the gospel may be a distant notion for many Malaysians today, but it is a daily reality for Christians in many parts of the world, such as those caught in the current conflicts in Gaza and Iraq. In the New Testament, the Acts of Apostles contains many narratives that remind us that suffering and dying for the gospel was indeed the price paid by the apostles and early Christians.

Perhaps more than any other apostle, Paul experienced the most suffering. His epistles contain detailed descriptions of his apostolic suffering that are beyond the imagination of many -- prolonged imprisonments, near-death experiences, numerous beatings, uncounted tribulations, extreme dangers in his travels, varieties of physical pains and deprivations, and daily anxiety for the churches he established (1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 2:14-17; 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:23b-33 and 12:10; Philippians 3:10).

How did Paul manage to sustain such intense suffering? What was his attitude towards suffering? What can contemporary Christians learn from Paul?

Firstly, Paul's suffering is a direct result of his apostolic mission. For Paul, the proclamation of the gospel was not done out of convenience or comfort. His missionary activities were often fiercely met with opposition and persecution, and yet none of these ever diminished his

zeal for the gospel and evangelism. The proclamation of the gospel must continue despite negative circumstances.

Next, Paul's suffering clearly demonstrates his deep love not only for the Gentiles but also for his own people -- the unbelieving Jews. While Paul may be better known as the apostle to the Gentiles, he never ceased to be a Jew and neither did he ignore the spiritual needs of the Jews. Five times, Paul was willing to subject himself to "forty lashes minus one" (2 Corinthians 11:24), a punishment that can only be inflicted upon a Jew for various offences by the synagogue authorities. This strongly suggests that Paul never abandoned his own people but continued his evangelistic activities within the Jewish synagogues. Paul's actions clearly demonstrated his deep love and concern for the Jews to the extent of being willing to suffer for their sake (Romans 9:1-4).

*"For Christ's love compels us,
because we are convinced that
one died for all, and therefore all
died. And he died for all, that those
who live should no longer live for
themselves but for him who died for
them and was raised again."
2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (NIV)*

This could only be the response of one who had been gripped by the love and grace of the Lord, and it was gratitude and debt to Christ's love that propelled him to do so (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). This remains the same debt for all of us who bear the name of Christ, the one who calls us to be his ambassadors and spokespersons in Malaysia (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Finally, it was through Paul's very weakness in suffering that the power of God was manifested in his life. In bringing the gospel to the Corinthians, Paul did not subject himself to the prevailing social values and conventions of his day. He declared that he did not proclaim the gospel with eloquence or superior wisdom but in weakness, fear and trembling (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). The only message proclaimed is "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2) and Paul's ministerial style clearly reflected the humility of Christ. His physical wounds and scars resulting from years of suffering were not marks of honour but dishonour and weakness in the eyes of a society that placed high value on physical appearance.

Therefore, it is not surprising that all these factors worked against Paul when his nature of apostleship was called into question and subsequently became crucial points of contention between him and opponents within the Corinthian church. Paul charged these super-apostles for preaching "another Jesus ... a different spirit ... a different gospel" (2 Corinthians 11:4). It is unlikely that the

super apostles were actually preaching a distorted gospel message. What is more likely is that Paul saw a massive incongruence between their gospel and lifestyle, between a message of Christ's cruciform life and a preoccupation with rhetorical devices that sought to impress the audience rather than to transform lives to be Christ-like. As believers today, we need to be mindful that we do not fall into the trap of conforming to the culture and values of our world.

Far from being a cracked vessel, Paul's weakness becomes the very vehicle that God uses "to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Paradoxically, it was through his sufferings that Paul was able to identify with the sufferings of Christ and experience the power of God working through his weakness and the power of the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the gospel.

Is There a Place for Suffering for the Sake of the Gospel Today?

Not everyone has found Paul to be a welcome contemporary voice. To be honest, we would rather be served than to serve; to remain in our comfort zones rather than to experience unnecessary hardship and inconvenience, and to be recipients of God's abundant blessings rather than to be the Master's suffering ambassador for the sake of the gospel. Our worship sometimes reflects our preference for a Jesus Christ superstar -- the hero and miracle worker -- rather than the Jesus Christ who died on the cross and now summons us to take up our cross and follow him daily.

If taken seriously, Paul's life tells a story where at its heart lies endurance and patience in ministry, love and devotion to the churches, faithfulness and obedience to the gospel message, sacrifice and service for his Lord, sincerity and integrity before God, and above all, a rejection of triumphalism and its accompanying pride and focus on self. Paul's life and ministry of suffering is precisely modeled after that of Christ, and so must ours as well. As such, Paul's model of ministry forces a reexamination of our understanding of the relationship between suffering and the proclamation of the gospel and the cost of discipleship.

In the wake of a strong Islamic resurgence in Malaysia since the 1980s, Christian witness and mission have become increasingly difficult. Christian churches face an extremely challenging task of being a faithful witness as a religious minority in a dominant Islamic context. The proclamation of the gospel of Christ has never been an easy task in a world steeped in religious pluralism, and particularly so in an Islamic majority context.

As in Paul's day in Corinth, the gospel of Jesus Christ remains a stumbling block and a scandal (1 Corinthians 1:23). Focusing on the triumphalist aspects of the gospel and idealizing the values of power, eloquence and appearance are naturally more attractive and easily accommodated.

Continued on next page...

...continued from page 6: *Call of the Cross*

This generates a Christian faith that is more appealing to many. But if suffering is necessary and integral to Christian witness, the Church and, especially, the ministers of the gospel need to evaluate whether their lives and ministry conform to the prevailing social conventions and cultural expectations, or reflect a faithful living exegesis of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul's message of suffering grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ serves as a timely reminder to all of us who are commissioned to proclaim the saving drama of God in Jesus Christ in Malaysia. We are called to live the cruciformed life by embracing the cross of Christ. We are to demonstrate that the power of the gospel is at work in our lives so that a clear cruciform pattern results. Any preaching of the cross that focuses on the resurrection while denying the suffering of Christ is to be rejected.

Thus, any elimination of suffering grounded in the gospel of Christ from Christian witness may well be the "different gospel" that Paul spoke against (2 Corinthians 11 :4). The Christian Church in Malaysia is reminded that religious security and a quest for a safe haven of redemption without any risk are alien to Paul's gospel. Without the cross, there is no Pauline gospel, no Christian gospel. Without suffering, there is no Pauline mission, no Christian proclamation. For this very reason, it is all the more urgent that Paul's radical message of the embodiment of the gospel of Jesus Christ needs to be rediscovered and faithfully practised.

Cheap Grace and Costly Grace

In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer talked about cheap grace and costly grace. To Bonhoeffer, "Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks wares... Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price, grace without cost!... Cheap grace is the

preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

Isn't this true that in the comfort of our churches, we could easily turn a blind eye to the events and needs surrounding us? We could easily retreat to our Christian ghettos and fail to be the salt and light that Jesus commanded us to be. We could easily demand for the blessings of God for our own comfort.

If we truly want to be authentic followers of Jesus, however, we need to understand what Bonhoeffer termed as costly grace: "Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

"Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: 'Ye were bought at a price', and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God."

As Christians in Malaysia, are we ready for costly grace? Are we willing to pay the price to be faithful to the gospel? If we were to consider some of the current events in our nation such as the controversy concerning the use of "Allah" in Christian literature and worship, seizures of the *Alkitab*, and the deterioration of ethnic and religious harmony, it may suggest that it will be increasingly difficult for Christians to live out our faith in the future.

When difficult times hit us, how will we respond? Will we still take up our cross daily and follow Jesus? Will we be like Paul and Bonhoeffer who were willing to pay the price for being followers of Christ? Will we still be found faithful in proclaiming the unadulterated message of the gospel?

.....

REV DR LIM KAR YONG is Adjunct Lecturer in New Testament Studies at the Malaysia Bible Seminary and the Seminari Teoloji Malaysia and teaches New Testament Studies in seminaries in Malaysia and the region. He also regularly preaches and conducts seminars in churches. He had served as a pastor of the Petaling Jaya Evangelical Free Church. Dr Lim holds a Ph.D in the New Testament and is the author of *The Sufferings of Christ are Abundant in Us* (2 Cor 1 :5): A Narrative Dynamics Investigation of Paul's Sufferings in 2 Corinthians and *Jesus the Storyteller: Hearing the Parables Afresh Today*, and numerous essays.

Taking a Hard Look at the Family Factor!

By Pastor Matthew Ling



They may be turning up faithfully for church gatherings regularly. They may look all right to us. But are they really?

A news report in 2014 carried the headline, “One divorce in Malaysia every 10 minutes”, and stated that the number of non-Muslim marital breakdowns was 9,020 cases in 2012. The interim report of the ongoing *Malaysia National Family Needs Survey* -- showing a large percentage of Christian families under great distress -- should raise the alarm in the Malaysian Church on how our families are actually doing.

In recent decades, the Church has experienced an escalating rate of family breakups manifesting in various forms, such as an increasing number of divorces, the exodus of Christians from their faith due to family struggles, the failure of Christian parents in evangelizing the following generations and attempts to redefine marriage.

The corporate body becomes dysfunctional as members of its Christian families struggle with strained relationships. The breakdown of a marriage, the most intimate of all human relationships, mars the display of the agape kind of love between God and His Body, and the Church and the world. It incapacitates the family from passing on faith from generation to generation. Therefore, it affects our future, the Church and society. It is an elephant in the room that we cannot simply shoo away!

The seriousness of not *giving enough* to building strong and healthy families in the Church becomes clear only when we recognise that the family is the primary institution that God has put in place to evangelise the next generation. God’s plan for passing on faith from one generation to another is primarily via the family. He is very specific in His instructions on how this is to be done. The Scriptures found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21, Ephesians 6:4 clearly show this. God gives the family the jurisdiction over this key aspect (faith formation of children) of church life.

Families do not automatically become effective in the faith formation of the next generation. Each family must be intentionally and systematically equipped to carry out this life-changing task.

If the Church is not doing much to equip the family to carry out this vital task, it faces the great risk of decline, as has been experienced by Western churches which failed over the years in building families to raise succeeding generations in their faith in God.

How much longer can the Malaysian Church continue to give scant attention to the deteriorating health of our families and yet hope to continue to effectively carry on as the salt and the light of the world in the future? Will we face the replay of Judges 2:10 scenario in our Church here?

A common culture of the Church, in response to a family life struggle, is to conduct a programme to try to “fix it”. This approach is typically ad hoc, stand-alone, and often inadequate. In the context of family dynamics, a problem that surfaces in one area of the family could be intricately linked to other hidden areas. We just cannot fix a profusely-bleeding wound with a small plaster.

Focus On The Family Malaysia, FamilyLife, Alpha Malaysia, and many other family ministry providers may have done well over the years in serving the Malaysian families in certain areas of their needs. However, even with all their expertise and resources, no single family ministry – an individual or organization -- could meet all the needs of the family.

The Church has to take the lead in this instance in deciding what needs to be done in building healthy families in their midst. A holistic strategy that takes into consideration all the key building blocks -- marriage, parenting, faith formation, human sexuality, care for the aged and non-nuclear family living -- is really needed to build the capacity of the family to fulfill its redemptive purpose in a church environment where healthy family-building is its very culture.

The church does not have to take this journey alone. They could forge close partnership with family ministry providers and jointly formulate and implement family ministry plans in addressing their needs.

With the increasing need of the Church to seriously consider the family factor, we have now, in our nation, a tremendous opportunity to rally the Malaysian Church, together with the family ministry providers, to focus on this single endeavour: building homes effective in passing the faith to the next generation.

The Tamil Commission Expands its Sphere of Influence

By Rev Gabriel Jabanathan

The Tamil Commission, a team of 12 pastors, has widened its scope of involvement with the Tamil churches. Rather than just organising national conferences, it has broadened its engagement by setting out 7 major projects to carry out.

A. CONSULTATION MEETINGS ON CURRENT RELIGIOUS ISSUES

One national-level consultation and a few regional consultations were organised to expose Tamil pastors to current controversial religious issues.

B. COMPASSIONATE MINISTRY TO PASTORS' WIDOWS (Pastors' Widows' Fund)

A Fund has been initiated to contribute, in a small way, to the needs of pastors' widows. This is a compassionate ministry to 19 of them. Many of these pastors have served faithfully for many years. A simple statistical survey was made of deceased Tamil pastors:

1. They have served in 17 different towns.
2. Of the 19 we support, nine are from the Assembly of God churches, seven from independent churches and three from mainline churches.
3. Fourteen of the pastors died when they were between 40 and 50 of age.
4. The majority of them, 13, died of illnesses, and of this number the majority died of a heart attack.
5. The average age of death of the 19 is 53.
6. Of the 19 widows, 10 remain unemployed.
7. Most of the widows are in the 50-age bracket.
8. Of those who are not gainfully employed, children's support, government welfare and love offerings are the means of financial support. Some face very difficult times.
9. They have a total of 32 children who are still studying. Some need financial support for their children's studies.

We blessed each of the pastor's widows with a Christmas gift of RM 300 last year. We wish to do more for their genuine needs and we trust the Lord will provide the funds.

C. PASTORS' PRAYER SHIELD SEMINARS

We have organised four such seminars in Klang, Ipoh, Teluk Intan and Ulu Tiram (Johore).

At each seminar, intercessors were instructed and challenged to rise up to pray for their pastors. There is now an awareness that the Church should pray more intently for pastors.

D. PASTORS' INTERCESSORS' PRAYER SUMMIT

On March 28, 2015, about 350 intercessors, who have committed themselves to pray for their pastors, attended a day of teaching on the need for pastors to be prayed for. The aim is threefold:

1. Pockets of intercessors to rise up as watchmen for pastors.
2. A prayer network for pastors to come into operation
3. A national prayer movement to emerge.

The speakers were Pastor Eu Hong Seng, NECF chairman, and senior pastors Gabriel Jabanathan and Simon Chandran.

E. YOUNG PASTORS' AND WIVES' MINISTRY FOCUS GATHERING

This will be held on May 11, 2015. The purpose is to bring young pastors together for a time of re-examining, refreshing and refocusing. Three senior pastors, Pastor Eu Hong Seng, Pastor Kalyanakumar (from India) and Pastor Simon Chandran, will share on relevant issues related to young pastors' lives and ministries.

F. 24/7 PRAYER MOVEMENT

The Tamil Commission is writing to all the affiliated NECF registered Tamil churches to actively participate in this prayer movement so as to be involved in praying for needs and issues on a national level.

G. EAST COAST MISSIONS FIELD

The Tamil Commission is encouraging all our Tamil churches to refocus on the north east coast and to take it up as a missions field. We are particularly focussing on the missions needs of the Indian community and the OA community. We are linking up with church leaders there for missions partnership.

NECF Calendar 2015

March
28

Tamil Commission Intercessors' Summit

April
27
27

Christian Federation of Malaysia Biennial General Conference
Christian Federation of Malaysia 30th Anniversary Dinner

May

11
11
13-15

BM Commission Seminar Pengurusan Rumah Ibadat
Tamil Commission Young Pastors' & Wives Gathering
National Disaster Response Training

June

8-11

Youthnet PJ Nazarite Training Phase 1

July

40-Day Fast & Prayer Launches

August

7 - 15/Sep
21-22

40-Day Fast & Prayer
BM Commission Nation Building Prayer Initiative

September

15
21-23
23-26

National Prayer Rally
BM Commission Mentor Generasi Muda Retreat
Youthnet Nazarite Training Phase 2

November

16-18

BM Commission Pastors Retreat

Seminar on Managing the Place of Worship

The purpose of this seminar is to help the Bahasa Malaysia (BM) and Orang Asli (OA) churches understand a number of issues which affect them, including the rules and regulations imposed by local authorities on the use of shop lots, commercial areas and factory lots by churches. The speaker is Bro. Michael Jalleh, who is also a Majlis Perbandaran Subang Jaya (MPSJ) council member. Bro Spencer Klumai, chairman of the Archdiocese Bahasa Malaysia Apostolate (ABMA), will talk on the guidelines for applying for the religious use of land.

DATE: May 11, 2015

TIME: 9am-3pm

VENUE: NECF

FEE: RM10 per person

This seminar is aimed at the BM and OA churches in the Klang Valley and Kuala Lumpur. For further information and registration, please contact **Sis Usun** at **03-77278227**

Congratulatory Announcement

NECF Council is pleased to announce and congratulate both Rev. Dr. Justin Wan and Rev. Datuk Jerry Dusing to the positions of President of Association of Churches Sarawak (ACS) and President of Sabah Council of Churches (SCC) respectively. Both these gentlemen are currently Council Members of NECF for the term 2014-2016.

THIS TRAINING IS
 An intensive lifestyle teaching focused on specific fundamental character values designed to provoke and cause personal transformation.
 A teaching on the practical application of discipleship principles.
 A foundational spiritual leadership training series that enhances one's effectiveness in living for God.
 A powerful character preparation for serious ministry involvement.
 A training intended to prepare a person to be a catalyst for revival and transformation in all areas of society.

REGISTER: <http://goo.gl/rv8REU>

TRAINERS
PASTOR JEROME OCAMPO
NECF CATALYST TEAM

NAZARITE TRAINING
HUMILITY | HUNGER | HOLINESS [2 CHRON 7:14]

TRAINING SCHEDULE
Phase 1 | 8-11 June '15
 KLANG VALLEY (TBC)
Phase 2 | 23-26 Sept '15
 KLANG VALLEY (TBC)

REGISTRATION
 phase 1 / phase 2 / RM 100 (registration before 1 May '15)
 phase 1 + phase 2 / RM 180 (registration after 1 May '15)
 phase 1 + phase 2 / RM 220 (registration after 1 May '15)

CONTACT
 NECF YouthNet, 32 Jalan SS2/103, 47300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor
 Tel: +603-7727-8227
 Fax: +603-7728-1139
 Email: catalystteam13@gmail.com

NECF YOUTHNET

www.facebook.com/NecfCatalyst

DISASTER RESPONSE TRAINING

13-15 MAY 2015
9:00 AM TO 4:00 PM
FULL GOSPEL TABERNACLE

REGISTRATION: RM150
CLOSING DATE: 30 APRIL, 2015

The goal of the Disaster Response Training is to prepare individuals, regardless of skill set or background, to survive and respond to a disaster. Our training is based on the International Disaster Response Network (IDRN) Training Module and focuses on individuals or groups that generally have no background in Disaster Response. The training is centered around universal global standards and practices, and can be applied to any global community. From individual communities, to governments entities, the training has had proven success.

Jointly Organized by
NECF MALAYSIA
CREST
World Vision
HIS SAHM
Full Gospel Training, Inc.
International Disaster Response Network

Young PASTORS & Wives
A MINISTRY FOCUS GATHERING
இளம் போதகர்கள் / மனைவிமார்கள் கூடுகை

11 MAY 2015 (MONDAY)
9:00AM - 4:00PM
11 மே 2015 (திங்கள்)
அ.ம. 9:00 - 4:00

புலம் கோவில் சென்னை
FULL GOSPEL TABERNACLE
 Willem Engelen, 3 Jalan TPM, Taman Perindustrian UEP, Subang Jaya, Selangor.

Coming together for a time of refreshing and refocusing

SPEAKERS
Rev. Jagdish Kumar
 SENIOR PASTOR
 Harvest Assemblies Ministry, India
PRINCIPAL
 Theological Seminary

Rev. Eui Hong Sang
 SENIOR PASTOR
 Full Gospel Tabernacle
CHAIRMAN
 Christian Federation Malaysia
CHAIRMAN
 NECF Malaysia

Rev. Simon Chennan
 SENIOR PASTOR
 International Christian Assembly (ICA)

இளம் போதகர்களுக்கும் தங்கள் மனைவிமார்களுக்கும் ஒரு அரிய வாய்ப்பு வாய்க்கும் இக்கியப்பயலோம். தரிசனத்தைப் புதுப்பித்தல்மிகவும். பங்காளத்துவத்தை வளர்ப்போம். உலகிய நோக்கத்தை கூர்மைப்படுத்திக்கொள்கோம்.

NECF MALAYSIA
 Organized by: The Tamil Commission, NECF Malaysia
 ஏற்பாட்டாளர்: தமிழ் கமிஷன் - என்.சி.எம்

NECF MALAYSIA

ABIDE IN ME
JOHN 15:4
40-DAY FAST & PRAYER - 07.08 - 15.09.2015

Abide In Me
JOHN 15:4
40-Day Fast & Prayer
07 Aug - 15 Sep 2015

ABIDE IN ME
 This year's 40-Day Fast and Pray booklet is ready. To order please visit our website www.necf.org.my and download order form.

For more info, visit www.necf.org.my