

EDITORIAL

Balancing Boldness with Tact

Freedom of religion has its basis in the modern legal concept of being free as a matter of right. The most well-known expression of this ideal is found in the United States Declaration of Independence (1776): “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” After the Second World War, the protection of human rights became the concern and duty of the international community.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) was adopted by the 58 member states (at that time) of the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. Participating member states were required to implement laws to turn an ideal theory into practical jurisprudence.

Article 18 of this statement says: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Since then, a number of international covenants ‘expanded’ on the meaning of human rights contained in UNDHR. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), both adopted in 1966. These three instruments together form the

International Bill of Rights.

Malaysia has not ratified these three instruments and is not bound by them. However, the Federal Constitution in its own way guarantees freedom of religion for all Malaysians (when applied consistently).

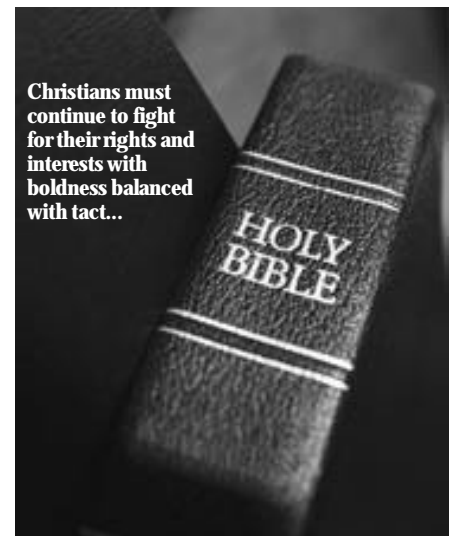
In Malaysia, Christians are a minority (a significant minority). It is good to note that Malaysia practices democracy, where every citizen and resident is (supposedly) free to make personal choices. In a multi-religious country, freedom of religion is essential to national harmony.

Having said this, freedom of religion cannot be viewed as an absolute, as is perceived and practised in the First World.

‘Religion’ Through Western Eyes

In other words, total religious freedom is very much a First World philosophy that reflects First World contexts and concerns. Technologically advanced and rich, and having been exposed to a long history of civil and political rights movements, the First World views human rights through ‘individualistic’ glasses. It is the individual’s right to express himself and pursue his own happiness.

It would be wrong to hoist the entire concept upon Third World countries struggling with problems of poverty, political instability and economic subservience to rich nations. While acknowledging the claims of individual rights, these countries often feel that these rights must be subordinated to the rights of the national community to self-determination and development. Full liberty must await a more suitable time,



Christians must continue to fight for their rights and interests with boldness balanced with tact...

for the peoples of these nations may not possess the necessary ‘mindset’ yet, and rapid changes can lead to social turmoil.

For example, in Malaysia, there are sensitivities with respect to the position of Islam. At the same time, the Government is opening up and granting increasingly more liberties to adherents of other religions. It is a place of many tensions and paradoxes, where an accurate index of religious liberty cannot be produced from a simplistic set of criteria published by some ‘international watchdog’.

And like other religious adherents in the land, Christians must continue to fight for their rights and interests with boldness balanced with tact in the numerous potentially-explosive issues, such as the purported ‘ban’ on Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia Bibles, controversial cases resulting from conversion into and re-conversion out of Islam.

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What Does It Mean To Know God?

*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless
until they rest in you. ~ St. Augustine*

Is it really possible to know God? How can we know Him? Let us consider the account of Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3 & 4).

The Bible records that God revealed Himself to Moses in a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire. "And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed" (Exodus 3:2). Then God then revealed His name "I AM" to Moses. "And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM' has sent me to you" (Exodus 3:14). This shows that we can know God because He is a God who has chosen to reveal Himself.

When Moses persisted to know more, God revealed His power to Moses (Exodus 4:1-5). "Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.' 2 So the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A rod".

God commanded Moses to throw down the rod and it became a serpent. God then commanded Moses to pick up the serpent and when Moses obeyed, it became a rod again. To Moses the rod was ordinary and common but it became an instrument for God to reveal His miraculous power. Moses only needed to believe and obey for God to reveal His power.

Our knowledge of God grows when we obey His commands, no matter how "ridiculous" they may appear to us.

By
Rev. Datuk
Dr Prince
Guneratnam

The principle of faith and obedience that brings experiential knowledge of God and His power is also seen in the account of Elijah and the widow in Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16). Her trust

in God and obedience resulted in a revelation of God's creative power.

In the New Testament we see this same principle illustrated in the story of the boy with five loaves and two fishes (John 6:1-14). Even before Jesus asked the disciples to get food to feed the crowds, He already knew what needed to be done. "Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do" (John 6:5-6). The willingness of the boy to place the limited food he had in the hands of Jesus resulted in a revelation of the power of God.

God desires to reveal Himself. Jesus said that those who are "born again" by the Spirit of God have eternal life (John 3:1-16). And what is "eternal life"? In His High Priestly Prayer in John 17, Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3).

May our constant desire be like that of Paul when he said, "... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Philippians 3:10). Have faith in God and obey His commands. You will see Him and experience His power in your life.



Fight We Must, But Wisely

It's Only Meaningful If...

In other words, freedom of religion leads to actual freedom only as long as men and women profess religion. As an illustration, take the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. With respect to religion, it merely states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Coming out from under the yoke of the State-established Church of England, early pilgrims to the United States sought to prevent this form of religious tyranny from ever recurring. The original intent of the Amendment was to allow citizens to freely practise religion at all levels, including in the government.

However, this 'rule', commonly known as 'the Separation of Church and State', has been employed in a more secular age to ban prayers and the teaching of creationist ideas in public schools, among other things.

With an eroding moral core, many may begin to argue that the State, through the laws, is imposing 'religion' on the people.

There was a bizarre case of one expelled midshipman who appealed to the US Supreme Court against the US Naval Academy claiming that the

Academy's code of honour ('do not lie, cheat or steal') 'failed to meet the minimum standards of fundamental fairness'. The appeal was thrown out because the judges had some moral sense of right and wrong – that is, they have 'some religion'. What would happen if they did not?

Freedom of religion is only freedom *for* religion. Freedom *from* religion leads to anarchy, which is a freedom that enslaves.

Christians in Malaysia should be grateful that the moral core of the nation is still intact. We are thankful for the common values we share with those professing other religions. Let's continue to pray that the Lord will preserve the moral integrity of our nation. Let's continue to be the 'salt and light' for our nation. In this atmosphere, religious freedom will continue to be meaningful and enjoyed by all.

Free to Choose

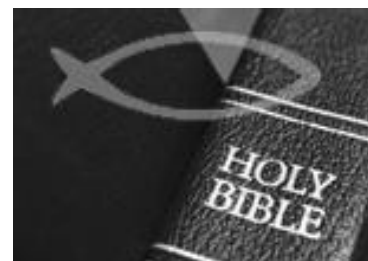
"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (Jn. 8:32) "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (Jn. 8:36)

Freedom of religion is still a luxury in today's world. In many countries, becoming a follower of Jesus Christ is a sure invitation to persecution.

Nevertheless, many have embraced Christ in such trying conditions because they have found 'the pearl of great price' for which they are willing to give up everything else, including life and livelihood. Christians are also called upon to preach the Gospel in the face of all man-made restrictions and prohibitions because they must "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

At the same time, it is the Christian's duty everywhere to fight for freedom of religion so that nothing hinders the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Freedom of religion can in many cases free individuals or even whole peoples to submit themselves to the true and living God that they may be truly free.

Freedom of religion is worth fighting for. As we respect the image of God in each and every person, we pray that they will in turn be led, on their own accord, to conform to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Re-formed Commission to Spur Tamil Work

THE re-formed NECF Malaysia Tamil Commission has been charged with the task of empowering Tamil-speaking churches in Malaysia to play a more effective role in reaching and discipling the Tamil community.

NECF Vice-Chairman Rev. Dr Eu Hong Seng has been appointed the pro-tem chairman for the commission, which comprises eight members, all who are new except Rev. Dr John Nagamuthu. In its inaugural meeting recently, the commission agreed to focus this year's effort on uniting Tamil pastors and workers with a renewed vision for the Tamil work.

Among the activities planned towards this end is the 1st NECF Tamil Conference 2005, to be held in August. Themed "Power of Partnership, the two-day conference beginning August 23 will be held at Wisma Eagles, Subang Jaya (see page 14 for more details).



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Rev. Nagamuthu (Rhema Assembly, Seremban), Rev. Gabriel Jabanathan (Charis Word Centre, Kuala Lumpur), Pr Joshua Singarajoo (Ebenezer Life Centre, Johor Baru), Pr Simon Chandran (Emmanuel Christian Assembly, Taiping), Rev. Eu (NECF Malaysia), and Rev. G.K. Bani (Tamil Baptist Church, Penang)
 NOT IN PHOTO: Rev. D Azariah Rajendran (Hosanna Assembly, Melaka) and Pr Philip Jayabalan (Victorious Living Assembly)

The Ban That Was Not

THE Home Affairs Ministry allows the import of Bahasa Indonesia (BI) Bibles under two conditions – that the Bibles carry the phrase “A Christian Publication” on the inside front cover, and they can only be sold at designated Christian bookshops such as The Bible Society Malaysia, SIB and Catholic bookshops.

This is the current practice, which was agreed four years ago at a meeting between the then Home Affairs Minister Dato’ Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and representatives from the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism. Dato’ Badawi had also agreed that some of the prohibited words related to Islam, such as “Allah” may be used, but only within the church and Christian community to avoid confusion among Muslims.

NECF Malaysia Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong made the clarification following the controversial remarks by a cabinet minister that Bahasa Malaysia (BM) and BI Bibles could not be circulated in the country as this could be seen as an effort to spread Christianity among the Malays.

Datuk Seri Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department, had told the parliamentary session in April that the prohibition had been in force since Independence and was in line with the Constitution. His latter explanation that permission from the Internal Security Ministry was needed to bring in or possess such Bibles stirred even more confusion roused by his earlier statements.

Immediately following Datuk Nazri’s remarks, Christian leaders from NECF Malaysia, Christian Council of Churches and the Catholic Church of Malaysia protested by releasing separate press statements, which were published by the local dailies.

NECF also wrote a letter of objection to Prime Minister Dato’ Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. NECF said the statements were inconsistent with the spirit and the letter of our Constitution, which upholds the freedom of religion for everyone. They were also inconsistent with the Prime Minister’s policy of promoting religious harmony.

Leaders from the three Christian organisations also held a flurry of meetings among themselves and with other cabinet ministers whom they thought were able to help quell the controversy. Due to the quick action and vocal objection of the Christian leaders, the controversy ended five days after it started, when the Prime Minister told reporters that there was no such ban.



Detained BI Bibles

Meanwhile, the Christian community is still awaiting the Internal Security Ministry’s formal authorisation to release the 1,000 Bahasa Indonesia Bibles that the ministry has detained at the Port Klang customs for the last two years.

At a recent meeting between leaders from the Christian Federation Malaysia (CFM) and Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, the latter said that the PM had authorised the release of the Bibles. The Bibles, imported by The Bible Society Malaysia (BSM), have been detained by the Home Affairs Ministry since April 24, 2003.

New Head for 20-Year Society

THE Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) recently celebrated its 20th Anniversary with a special Thanksgiving Service and Dinner.

In his speech, BSM President Elder Kong Yeng Phooi testified to God’s steadfast love for the Society as it strove to meet the scripture needs in the country through translation, production and distribution of God’s Word. Elder Kong also paid tribute to faithful men who had served this cause as founding members of the Society, three of whom were present that evening — Mr David Boler, Rev. George Vergis and Mr Diong Chin San.

The highlight of the evening was an address by Dr Barclay Newman, Senior Translations Officer with the American Bible Society, who spoke on the subject “Communicating God’s Word through Contemporary Language”. Dr Newman introduced the audience to the Contemporary English

Version (CEV) of the Bible, a faithful translation from the original languages that can be “read aloud without stumbling, heard without misunderstanding, and listened to with appreciation and enjoyment”.

The dinner was also a timely occasion to introduce BSM’s new general secretary, Joel Ng, who had joined the organisation weeks before. The former freelance editor is entrusted with the responsibility of achieving the widest-possible distribution of the Bible, and helping people to interact with it meaningfully.

“To do this, God’s Word must be made available in a language people can understand, at a price they can afford, and in a format they can appreciate. That is an incredible challenge,” he said.

The BSM position is Joel’s first full-time ministry engagement. Prior to this, his service has revolved around his church (Life Chapel, Petaling Jaya), where he was heavily involved in planning church-wide evangelistic strategies.



BSM Board Members (standing) with BSM founding members (seated). Standing 3rd from right is BSM General Secretary Joel Ng.

Review Laws to Correct Imbalance

By LEE MIN CHOON
Chairman of the NECF Malaysia
Religious Liberty Commission



(MAIM).

Under Islamic Law, a non-Muslim is not entitled to inherit the estate of a

THE plight of the family of deceased fireman Abdul Wahid Lim Abdullah illustrates the hardship caused to families when one of their members converts to Islam. Among the many changes forced on the family as a result of the conversion is the issue of inheritance.

Abdul Wahid Lim, formerly known as Lim Sek King, became a Muslim in July 1992 without his family's knowledge.

Four months later, he drowned while crossing a swollen river to rescue 49 campers trapped near the foot of Gunung Ledang, leaving behind a wife and three young children. He did not leave behind a will and his estate – worth some RM100,000 at the time of his death – was then placed under the administration of the Malacca Islamic Religious Council

Muslim. However, a Muslim can by way of a will make a settlement or bequest of his property to a non-Muslim but only up to one-third of its value. Therefore, the non-Muslim family of Abdul Wahid Lim was kept out of his estate. Thirteen years after the

incident, their plight was recently raised in the Malacca State Legislative Assembly by Goh Leong San (DAP–Bandar Hilir).

There is a strict legal demarcation over the property or estate of a deceased Muslim that prevents non-Muslims from sharing in it. Even if the non-Muslim family member is nominated as the

“Under Islamic Law, a non-Muslim is not entitled to inherit the estate of a Muslim. However, a Muslim can by way of a will make a settlement or bequest of his property to a non-Muslim but only up to one-third of its value.”

beneficiary under EPF, insurance or other endowment funds, the non-Muslim merely holds the monies paid out for it to be distributed according to Islamic law.

This situation clearly puts the non-Muslim family members at a disadvantage as seen in the following:

a) Dependent wives and minor children are deprived of support from

the deceased father's estate just because they are non-Muslims.

b) The non-Muslim family is unable to seek legal recourse in the civil courts as the estate of a Muslim falls under the jurisdiction of the Syariah Court. Non-Muslims are not permitted to apply for

any relief in the Syariah Courts.

This anomaly needs to be corrected by legislation and the responsibility falls on the State Governments. However, the Federal Government should take the initiative by proposing uniform amendments to correct such existing imbalances.

BM Leaders' Conference

Pastors Must Keep Learning

PASTORS must keep learning to avoid a 'knowledge gap' between them and their congregation., according to Rev. Dr Nus Reimas.

“Our congregation is growing in knowledge and if pastors don't keep in touch with the times, there will be a lot of problems within the church,” the General Secretary of the Indonesia Evangelical Fellowship said to over 120 pastors and leaders of BM and Orang Asli churches from all over Malaysia.

The event in April was the NECF Malaysia three-day BM Leaders Conference themed “Pemimpin, Karakter, Wawasan dan Pengurusan” (Leadership, Character, Vision and Management).

Rev. Reimas stressed that pastors must be flexible and 'changeable' according to what they have learned. “I know Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, and He never changes, but that does not mean

you don't change, he quipped.

Speaking on the qualities of a leader, he said an effective leader has a distinct vision of his church's direction. “As pastors with a clear vision, our character, energy level, passion, and commitment will automatically match the clarity of our vision. We won't feel bored because we know where we are going. Instead, we are excited and we infect our congregation with our excitement,” he said.

“If they (the congregation) do not know where the church is heading, they will be bored and find church life meaningless,” Rev. Reimas cautioned.

As pastors too, they must strike a good balance between being people oriented and goal oriented. “Most pastors are goal oriented and that intimidates the congregation because they seem to care only about the task at hand. On the other hand, if pastors are too people oriented, they tend to lose sight of their vision. So,

good control of the people is important.

“Controlling people does not mean controlling them until they cannot move without your direction. It means to guide them until they can complete the task on their own. Always remember that the goal of controlling is to equip and guard the momentum until the task is done,” Rev. Reimas shared.

The second speaker, NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong, shared on the challenges facing pastors and leaders, one of which was the poor delegation of work, which therefore resulted in imbalanced distribution of workload, with most of the work done by pastors and leaders.

“Delegation involves mobilising and motivating the whole church to do something. As leaders, we need to help members develop their talents and skills, and then give them opportunities to use them in the church,” he said.

Help for the Homosexuals

The gay issue may not be as critical in Malaysia as it is in the West, but it nevertheless is a budding problem (and threatens to bloom, if it is not nipped), even within the Christian community. This is largely influenced by the media, which is surreptitiously sending the message that homosexuality is an acceptable and regular lifestyle, as normal as singlehood.

“The Church needs to realise that there are many Christian homosexuals struggling with their sexuality,” according to Edmund Smith, a former homosexual who now runs a ministry – Real Love Ministry (RLM) that helps gays and lesbians who have decided to leave their homosexual lifestyle.

“In fact, 70 percent of the people that we work with are Christians,” he revealed. The Church must come into the picture and work with us to help them.” Edmund observed that churches generally have a “hands-off” attitude towards homosexuality. There is therefore a great need in Malaysia for a ministry to firstly, educate and equip churches to counsel people struggling with the issue; and secondly, help those who have decided to turn away from the homosexual lifestyle.

RLM was started by Edmund and his wife, Amanda, in 1999 to fulfil these two objectives. It conducts a four-season recovery programme for its members, who comprise only gays



and lesbians.

At each season, members face up with the issues that contribute to their homosexuality bent, and they must resolve those issues before moving to the next season. For instance, at Season 1 or the Education Season, (the first season in the programme), helps members to deal with the perception of their gender and appearance.

Once these issues are resolved, members move on to Season 2 – the Celibate Season – where they learn how to love people of the same gender in a platonic way. By the time members reach Season 4, they are actually ready for heterosexual relationships which will hopefully lead to marriage.

The journey of recovery is a challenging journey, and should not be travelled alone. RLM therefore assigns journey partners, called RLM Befrienders, to walk alongside its members.

Currently, about 200 people are participating in RLM’s programme in Penang, Ipoh, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and Johor Baru. As membership is free, RLM depends on freewill offering and donations to finance its work.

RLM also conducts awareness programmes in churches, schools and youth groups to educate the public on homosexuality. Those who wish to invite RLM to share about its work may contact Edmund at 016-680 9996.

Edmund & Juwita to Sizzle Foundation Dinner

EDMUND SMITH, founder and director of Real Love Ministry (RLM), was a singer, dancer and actor long before he went into full-time ministry. He started off as a dancer at the age of 13, doing Portugese traditionals, Indian classicals and expressive dance.

Edmund gradually moved on to singing and by his 20th birthday, was busy singing in pubs. Eager for more excitement, Edmund then moved to Singapore when he learnt acting and subsequently landed a role in the movie “Chicken Rice War”.

Today, apart from his duties in RLM, Edmund is still actively involved in the music industry. He recently released his first solo album, “Wake Up”., where he shares his experiences in life and love.

Edmund will be performing, on



NECF’s invitation, at the NECF Foundation first anniversary dinner in Melaka on June 12 (see page 14 for more information on the dinner).

Another singer who has accepted NECF’s invitation to share a few songs at the Foundation dinner is JUWITA SUWITO, a petite lady with powerful vocals, which landed her the award for Best Local English Album at this year’s AIM awards, the Malaysian equivalent to the US Grammy awards.

“Brand New World” is Juwita’s first

album, which includes five songs that she wrote herself. The album accentuates her life’s experiences and childhood musical influences.

Born in Melaka and of Indonesian-Singaporean parentage, Juwita has been performing since her adolescent years in church groups and also as a soloist. She also plays, among other instruments, the piano, for which she earned a Performance Certificate at age 15 and an Associate Teacher’s Diploma at age 17, both awarded by the Trinity College of Music, London.

Besides her singing commitment, Juwita is also National General Secretary of the YWCA of Malaysia and one of the founding directors of Oops! Asia, a recording company that produces Christian albums.

women to women

Dad & I

BY KOK SU MEI

'Dad, I still see you through little-girl eyes'

I drove Dad home from his office today. He'd hurt his back and couldn't make the ten-minute trip himself. It reminded me he was getting old, a reminder that also strikes me when I catch a glimpse of his graying hair or find myself explaining a road we're on. My best friends confess to feeling the same. Our fathers are growing older, and sometimes, it scares us with a selfish fear: what will we do without our personal fortresses?

Where do I start describing the fortress Dad has been? With his hands on my bike when I learnt to cycle? His hands desperately feeding syrup to my dying hamster? Memories jostle for a place as I start to write.

Dad has always been Mr. Fix-it-all, the one I run to for ready solutions. (Mum's for the endless talk-time we women are so fond of, which have no conclusions but satisfy us anyway!) From dying hamsters and beheaded dolls, Dad's wisdom is now called on for newer dilemmas: stalled cars, broken stilettos, unruly students. Somehow, he knows what will fix them all.

Dad solved problems I didn't even know were there. When I got my first leotard for my ballet class, he asked for a little skirt that would cover my thighs. That protectiveness took many forms as years went by: replacing my white t-shirts with coloured ones as puberty dawned, waiting up when I drove home from choir practices at night. Before I was old enough to feel the expectations put on church leaders' kids, he told me he didn't care what others thought of him. I knew it was true. I remember him buying me a lovely watch to keep time in my PMR exams, then having no more cash for his own pair of shoes. He took to the pulpit the next morning in black canvas school shoes he'd dug from the back of some

shelf. I treasure that watch today (Dad revives it whenever it threatens to expire) because it captures the love and single-mindedness I associate with him.

No Guilt or Fear

Being protective didn't stop him from making me stand on my feet. The week I got my driver's license, he told me to drive myself to the youth meeting and pick his usual passengers along the way. I was secretly relieved when Mum protested. But Dad was sure I could do it, and so I did. My first car crash (entirely my fault!) didn't break his stride. He paid the motorcyclist for damages, said I may as well bash up that car as any other, and handed me the keys again. Talking now to girlfriends who spent years shirking the wheel, I appreciate how Dad wouldn't allow me to fear (though I doubt he anticipated having to locate me each time the car broke down). Today when Mum worries about her still-single daughter, as mothers often will, Dad shrugs and says there are worse things in life.

But the biggest problem Dad solved was done so unconsciously and so well. We second-generation Christians are, sadly, infamous for our apathy towards the faith. Parents who live sold-out lives for God make a difference. The way fathers relate to their children can also shape their perceptions of the Father above.

I liken myself to Peter rather than Paul – no bright light and dramatic conversion, but a gradual understanding of Christ intercepted by failures and false notions. One thing that dogged me was a fear that God would give up on me. It existed from the first time I skipped my quiet time to a particularly guilt-ridden day at Residential Bible School ten years later. I'd overslept and missed pre-dawn prayers, our mission team was in a mess,

We are not into the heavy commercial rush that dangles and displays gifts for children to buy their dads and mums, come May and June.

But we are all for honouring fathers and mothers.

Not just these two months but all year through.

Daughters pay tribute to their dad and mum in these articles.

And a seasoned mother of four grownup children lets us into glimpses of parenting.

and I'd been mean to several of my peers. Surely I was beyond redemption if I could fall in such idyllic circumstances, away from routine life.

Then I read Romans 8:15 and Dad came to mind. I thought of how our relationship knew no guilt or fear, how he had never said he was disappointed in me, even when I did let him down. It proved to be a milestone in my spiritual life, my first step towards understanding God's overwhelming grace. How I thank God for a father who projected gospel truth in ways the best theologians never could.

Powerful, Protective Love

Dad's arms are my mental metaphor for love that is tough – not the fragile, wispy stuff of popcorn movies – powerful, protective love that encloses me and will not let me be hurt. Our family laughs at how Dad patted his children to sleep: strong, regular thumps on the back that sent us bouncing on our beds while Mum called worriedly from the doorway. Often, it beat time to 'What a Friend we have in Jesus', sung just a little too loud for a child's lullaby. I'm not sure they ever sent me to sleep, but there was something in that masculine strength that made the world a safer place.

His hugs still do that today. I lose my breath in his squeeze, my arms cannot meet around his girth, and I feel like a little girl again. (Then he steps back and



When Mum *GROWS* Old

Ministering to our aged mother

BY GOH KAI LIAN, HAI BEE AND HAI FONG

God has given us many precious gifts in life. Ma is one of them. She wanted very much to go home to be with the Lord before Pa, but God has other plans. She is uneducated but wise in her own special ways. For example, she is our role model in teaching us to esteem our elders at all cost. Therefore, no matter how unfair the treatment received, she has taught us to be longsuffering and respectful always. We believe today she is reaping the fruit of her own honouring of her adopted mother: “the first commandment with a promise: ‘that it may be well with [her] and she may live long on the earth’.” (Ephesians 6: 2-3)

As a homemaker, she has been most organised and systematic in the management of the household chores. She has been looking after us all our lives and now we count it our privilege and responsibility to ensure that her sunset years are made as comfortable and meaningful as possible.

Alert and Gutsy

Ma is 83 and suffers from diabetes, heart problems, rheumatoid arthritis with all its aches and severe joint pains, and lately, kidney failure. Attending to her medical and physical needs is one big responsibility. Thank God there are three of us to take turns to accompany her to the different hospitals for her medical check-ups. Staying with her throughout her hospital consultation and wheeling her around in the wheelchair alleviates the stress of waiting for Ma; without the wheelchair she has to hobble around painfully and laboriously. Nonetheless, we are thankful that she can still move around the house and with a walking frame, even venture to do her weekly marketing in the wet market. Her greatest fear is to be bed-ridden and dependent on others. Therefore, her fervent prayer is to be able to walk right into the presence of God. Hence, it is also our prayer that God will grant her heart's desire.

She is a good cook especially of the Penang Nyonya dishes. She delights in selecting her own ingredients and thinks about what to prepare for every meal every week. She enjoys what she does best, that is, honing her culinary skills. She even watches local TV and ASTRO programmes on cooking lessons without fail when she is made aware of them. Thus, telling her to slow down because of her limited and painful mobility requires tremendous patience and understanding. Unless she is laid low or is horizontal on the bed, nothing is considered impossible to our dear old lady. To date, she makes her own Nyonya rice ~~dumplings~~ *her own Yee Sang*, and even moon cakes. The entire process of finding work for herself keeps her mentally alert and gutsy instead of lapsing into a state of amnesia and wasting away. Oftentimes, we are also kept on our toes as we attend to her interests and her search for crockery, utensils and ingredients.

When we are at work, we have to remember to put the cordless phone near to her bed or the telephone next to her seat, if she is watching TV in the hall. Should we call home, we have to wait a few minutes longer to enable her to get to the telephone. We have to remind her constantly not to be overly anxious to get to the telephone but to let go of the call if she is unable to attend to it. We get ready her breakfast, and place the thermos flask, mug, necessary utensils as well as the bottles of medicine she has to take daily – all within her reach. Thankfully, she knows how to dispense her own daily supply of medicine after we made and explained to her a certain numbering pattern on the medical packages. Every night, we must remember to put her eye drops for her dry eyes or she would remind us if we forget. However, she will not bother us if we are too preoccupied with work or suffering from plain work exhaustion.

We also try to reduce the number of daily tasks she has to

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• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: DAD & I

says, ‘Skinny lah, you’ and I laugh because I know yet another skirt couldn’t buckle that morning.) So when I read Elisabeth Elliot’s tagline for her radio program this year – you are loved with an everlasting love, and underneath are the everlasting arms – I thought of Dad and understood the security she meant.

A new aspect came to our relationship when I entered varsity and confronted new ideas in campus and a new church. I’d spend Sunday evenings flipping through my Bible until, stumped, I would

reach for the phone. Dad’s stomach must have been growling by the time I was through, but how I treasured that point of reference as I worked through my thoughts. We chatted for hours after dinner the days I was home. I loved the way he got excited about my questions and we flipped through umpteen bibles and books together. Eventually, Dad loaned me his concordance to be taken to my rented room. I’m not sure if he was more pleased or frustrated as bible dictionaries and commentaries started disappearing as well, particularly those he’d highlighted as the best. I wonder,

too, if he missed my calls as I learnt to use them well.

I’ve noticed a slight shift in our chats these days. I’ve picked up a book or two that Dad asks to borrow. And I’ll never forget how startled I was the day he asked for my thoughts as he prepared his sermon! It was a generous invitation to walk together as children of God, an affirming nod from the man I respect.

But, Dad, I still see you through little girl-eyes.

Kok Su Mei is studying for her Masters (English) degree in Universiti Malaya. The Kok family worships at Kajang Gospel Centre.

attend to as much as possible, like drying the clothes under the porch, watering all the plants, emptying the potty in her commode, placing the relevant keys in specific places and clearing the household garbage. Should we forget any of such tasks in our haste or busyness, she would think of creative and practical ways to attend to them herself. Fully aware of her limited mobility, she would keep an eagle's eye on the weather conditions so as to give herself ample time to take in the clothes when it threatens to rain.

Sometimes, she would fling the things she does not require anymore, in the direction she would be heading later on so as to minimize the effort and time taken of going back and forth. In other words, she plans a few steps ahead! We worry about her being left alone at home, but have learnt to train her and ourselves to know that God daily watches over her and protects her. Therefore, when she is in dire need, she knows the Lord is just a prayer away. Her wish is that we will be around when she breathes her last breath in God's timing and her prayer is that she will never be too much of a burden to us.

His Big Picture

In our ministry to our aged mother, the lightweight and foldable wheelchair has been a good investment and a blessing, especially for special occasions where distance and elevation are real challenges for her. It took some time to educate Ma on her need to use the walking frame and not just the walking stick, especially after several trips and falls. By God's grace, she was also able to change her typical Chinese woman's mindset concerning the commode and the wheelchair as being strictly for the handicapped. We had to enforce the principle and importance of mobility for her so as to override her sheer shyness of public embarrassment on the use of such facilities for the aged.

Therefore, nowadays whether it is to attend a wedding dinner or visit a new place, she is no longer left out. There are times when we have to survey a place beforehand or make prior enquiries so as to ascertain its limitations for her condition. We do all these to help her to connect with the outside world as much as possible, including trips to the supermarkets from time to time. Oftentimes, both she and we are amused by stares or friendly smiles, or even pleasantly surprised by the first class treatment she receives by virtue of the fact that she is in a wheelchair! For example, recently when she was wheeled up to the stamping counter for parking tickets at the *GIANT* hypermarket, she earned for herself free parking status.

Understandably, being restricted in her movements can be terribly frustrating to a formerly active and highly independent person. Now Ma has to rely on us to bring things to her, and most of the time immediately, for she does not have much patience to wait. Therefore, we have to learn patience to attend to her needs above our own personal agendas. Undeniably, this can give rise to conflicts at times. We have to depend on God's grace to see His big picture in the area of honouring our mother in every possible way. There are times when we have to explain to her sternly that our delays are not our denial of her needs. Wherever possible, we go alongside with her desires so that she knows we are not deliberately ignoring her legitimate requests

as the matriarch of our home.

In Tandem not in Tension

Ma is basically an inquisitive person with a barrage of questions to ask. Sometimes we do grow weary of her nagging and her cross questioning, and shut her off completely. However, we learn to make amends when we know she is hurt by our unwise words. Indeed, she too requires tender, loving care. Thus, we try to keep her informed of happenings in our lives. Generally, we communicate well with her in the things that she needs to be made aware of.

In the past four and a half years, she has come to accept and be creative in her own aloneness, after Pa's demise. She maintains a daily routine of listening to the radio in the mornings whilst doing her household chores seated on a high or low stool depending on the need. Interestingly, she keeps herself abreast with local and foreign news even though she is an illiterate person. At meal times or in the car, she would inform us about what she has heard or seek clarification from us. Such moments allow us to give her a sense of pride and fulfillment as an elderly person aging with dignity and still possessing the zest for learning instead of deteriorating into meaningless existence.

Her daily tasks include making preparations for the evening meals and looking into every aspect of domestic management as she is able to cope with in our absence. She disciplines herself to watch television only in the evenings, manipulating the remote controls fairly well to select her favourite channels. On special occasions, we sometimes watch TV with her to explain to her the significance of certain events, for instance, the tsunami disaster, and the burial of the late Pope John Paul. Speaking only a smattering of English, she sometimes amazes us with her ability to grasp bits and pieces of our conversation in English and is even sporting enough to be corrected in her pronunciation. We believe there must always be an element of fun and humour in this care-giving ministry so that everyone learns to work in tandem and not in tension with God's plans and purposes for us as family members. Whenever we hear of ill-treatment of the elderly, they are solemn reminders that when the aged are "persecuted" or neglected by their children, they are actually like Saul persecuting Christ afresh (Acts 22:6 -9). The Lord is not pleased at all in such cases and vengeance belongs to Him. Conversely, when we honour and take good care of her, it is such a powerful testimony of the God of love whom we serve. It certainly opens windows to unbelieving elders to take a more positive view of Christianity.

Ma attends church on Sundays and the sisters' fellowship on Thursdays. She shares candidly with us interesting anecdotes from the messages she has received or testimonies she has heard. In unassuming ways, she reaches out to people in her own inimitable manner. Whenever she expresses her desire to visit a relative or friend or even a place, we would often oblige so as to make her generally fulfilled. We believe our aged and ailing mother should always feel loved, honoured and cared for in spite of her idiosyncrasies and sometimes child-like tantrums for she too belongs to the kingdom of God and is precious in His sight.

The Goh sisters worship at Jalan Imbi Chapel, Kuala Lumpur.

A Mother's Jottings

Glimpses of Parenting

"I'm glad to be home, mums" was part of Eunice's tribute on Mother's day. After SPM she had left home for A-levels in Singapore and after that spent six years in the US. She has chosen to come home and work at a job before embarking on the next part of her life journey with God.

Her two older brothers had blazed that trail earlier but Jon returned to Singapore to serve the government that gave him the scholarship and Jeremy went on to post-doctorate research and a teaching tenure in a US university. Both are married and have made their choices of city and life-style.

For the recent Mother's Day celebrations at church, some 30 families sent in photos and one-liners to create a slide show to delight mothers. All my four children sent in their thoughts. Jon, now 34, said, "Mum gave me words of encouragement and appreciation from the time I was young and I remember many of them to this day." Jeremy, 32, said, "As I grow older, mum grows wiser...she doesn't give me advice until I ask...very wise indeed." His weekly air-letters, later, e-mails let us know what he has been doing and cooking the last 15 years. Our most frequent question: "What are your prayer requests?"

At 59 and just completing 4 x 17 years of parenting, I remember only glimpses of the years that had been. To keep the glimpses sharp, I sometimes described the early years of family life for our 'baby' Elena. Nine years younger than Eunice, she practically grew up without her siblings. I filled the gaps for her and told her about bringing up teens in the 80s being different from each decade that followed. She had the most of me after my retirement from school teaching. Savouring life together in daily conversations in the car, on the sofa and before bedtime, we had many 'bringing mother up to date' moments and prayer times. I got to see the world through her eyes.

As I listened to her analysis of feelings, events and aspirations, I often shuddered at the thought of the insufficient, minimal parenting that I must have done for her much older siblings. *And if they were weak in any thing, was it because I looked after my students in school and had little energy left to walk through the teen years with each of them?* Most certainly, their father's clear-cut fathering and personal touch formed the backbone of their stability.

But God has filled the gaps as we muddled through the building of family. Armed with a few skeletal truths and principles, my husband, Micky and I built a working home. Our diet: *Grow a thankful spirit, Keep the sabbath holy, The home is more important than the school (so all the four kids went to the same neighbourhood school), Serve God-serve others, Our home is open to people, Learn to listen, Ask for help, Live simply, Be a friend, Learn to say yes to God and no to the things that displease Him, Love the Lord, Study His Word, Listen to His voice, Do the needful thing etc.*

God's presence in our lives gave us shape and softness, made principles work, grew intentions into reality. We talked at meals as friends, always grateful for simple fare. Friends and relatives came to visit and to stay. Many hours went to serving in church, Bible study, listening to people, leaning on God to carry us

BY MRS KUA KUN HAN

through as we studied and taught. God gave each person his/her identity and significance and the motivation to do His will. We didn't have the energy to keep the home ship-shape but there was always time for discussion. With both of us away at our teaching jobs for hours, we were assured of God's presence with the children at school and at home. Their achievements were by-products of their stewardship of time, talent and strength. And always, His grace and enabling.

Families are His Clay

With half of the family living away from us, we've learnt to pray simply. A thought about each absent member is translated into prayerful listening to sense his/her situation. This leads to a prayer of thanks or a relevant petition. In this way, God covers the distances daily. He is, by His spirit, with us, more than a father or mother can be with the children physically. God's presence has made us even more conscious of our inabilities, sinful nature, etc. Our deep need is to respond to His very Person, not to...more stuff, more know-how, more remedies.

Anxiety and fear, easily the hallmarks of this age, are not good lenses for looking at the past, present and the future. Grand plans for ourselves and for each child can produce only anxiety. We are to discern the times and serve our generation, not bear its marks of lostness.

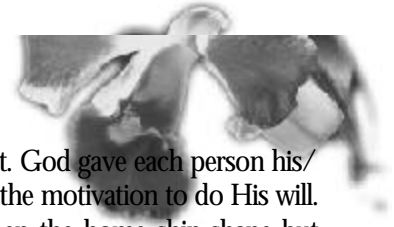
God grows a new person out of whatever state he was in. He grows each child to be like Jesus. This grand plan is the only one that works. Families are His clay. When parents are on His potter's wheel, their children see how real God is. Truth grips their hearts as they see God's loving hands on their parents' lives. It is crazy to want to be godly parents but trust the world to bring up the kids. (Well-to-do Christian homes may actually have two sets of values.)

When the older ones left home in their late teens, I asked them to forgive us – their parents, for all our shortcomings. I wanted them to be free to walk with their Heavenly Father without our negative imprints on them. Elena, now 17, will release us in forgiveness when the time comes for us to let her walk out of our sight when she leaves home.

And if from time to time, I shudder at my negligence and lack of wisdom as a mother, I will also remember to give thanks... 'For the Lord is good and His Love endures forever.'

Nowadays, in the midst of volunteer work with teachers and students, helping to promote SPM Bible Knowledge and engaging the gears of prayer to move God's purposes in peoples' lives, I pause to admire the parenting work of our Heavenly Father. Only He can shape lives to perfection. He uses His own standard and does it all in His time. He will bridge the huge gap between our present frailties and the moment of presenting us faultless and with great joy before the Father!

Kun Han and Micky worship at Cornerstone Doulos, Bandar Sunway, where Micky is the Pastor. They enjoy having both their daughters with them. Both their married sons are in the US.



Pastors Intact

NECF Malaysia Research Executive LIM SIEW FOONG shares her assessment on the responses filed by 192 pastors on the *Emotional Connection Between Pastors and Congregation Survey*. The recently-concluded survey, initiated and facilitated by the NECF Research Department, was conducted between March and December last year. This is the first of a series of articles. Look out for the rest in the coming Berita NECF issues.

In his book "Leaders on Leadership", reputed US researcher George Barna, said, "If leaders were not required for us to progress in spiritual depth and Christian formation, He (God) would not have sent them".

The Greek word for 'pastor' in Eph. 4:11 literally means shepherd, that is, one who is responsible for the care and leading of a congregation. It is interesting to note too that only in this passage are congregational leaders called shepherds. So, at the heart of the word 'pastor' is the idea of a shepherd, and thus Christian leadership.

ASSESSMENT 1

In the midst of economic prosperity, present and anticipated political landscape, prevalent religious pluralism, and a globalised culture, has the job of a pastor been easier or tougher?

Much is required of the pastor. Constantly scrutinised and rarely applauded, he is expected to be the administrator, teacher, fundraiser, janitor, counsellor, mediator, visionary and so on.

In this survey, 96% of the

respondents feel that their congregations have high expectation of them (*Table 2), but only 45% consider it important to meet the expectation (**Table 3).

Most of us will agree that many pastors work long hours, are constantly on call, and often sacrifice family time to tend to congregants' needs. These they do out of their perception of good shepherding, as a good shepherd should lay down his lives for his sheep regardless of physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion.

While many pastors are working hard and appearing to enjoy their pastoral ministry (81%), only 63% of them are feeling appreciated by their congregations. Despite the lack of recognition and appreciation, those who feel discouraged in ministry are only 12% (Table 2). This seems to indicate the perseverance and faithfulness of our pastors to their vocation, no matter what their feelings.

Are our pastors doing well? This requires an honest, soul-searching self-examination. Yet the survey does imply an issue of boundaries – both the pastors'

An effective pastor:	Agree
• Is someone who leads the church, is in charge of the church administration and finances, the congregation and his own life	59%
• Views the ability to handle any situation as important	87%
• Ensures his/her life is exemplary at every level	80%
• Is able to show his congregation how to bring their lives under control	83%
• Must appear to be stronger than he really is in order to meet members' expectation.	20%

	Overall (Out of 192 respondents)	* Pastors with high-expectation congregations (Out of 184 respondents or 96%)
• Feeling satisfied	76%	78%
• Feeling appreciated by congregation	63%	64%
• Enjoys being a minister	81%	81%
• Feeling discouraged in ministry	12%	11%

	Is it important to meet congregation's expectation?	
	Yes **45%	No 55%
• Feeling satisfied	83%	69%
• Feeling appreciated by congregation	61%	62%
• Enjoys being a minister	81%	67%
• Feeling discouraged in ministry	18%	6%

and the congregations' – whether it is overt or covert, recognised or unrecognised.

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Next issue: How pastors perceive their congregations and relationships.

Women On Board CFM Committee

WOMEN now have a direct say in matters affecting the Malaysian Christian community of Protestants and Catholics.

At the Christian Federation Malaysia (CFM) biennial general conference in April, the 60 delegates voted unanimously to expand the executive committee to include at least three women, one from each member organisation.

CFM comprises three member organisations – Catholic Church of Malaysia, Council of Churches of Malaysia, and National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia – and they take turns to hold the chair, which now goes to the Catholic Church

Bishop Dr Paul Tan, the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Melaka-Johor, is the new chairman, taking over from ~~NECF Rev. Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam .~~

~~While deliberating the current issues, the delegates voiced full support for the Prime Minister's call to intensify inter-religious dialogue in the country. 'Progress, prosperity and peace cannot be built upon division, strife and conflict. They can only be built when there is unity in diversity, which can only exist when there is respect for and acceptance of others of different faiths and mutual trust and cooperation,' Bishop Tan said.~~

~~CFM is committed to setting up an interfaith commission that will act as an~~

CFM COMMITTEE

Chairman: Bishop Dr Paul Tan
Vice-Chairmen: Tan Sri Bishop Dr Lim Cheng Ean, Bishop John Lee and Rev. Dr Eu Hong Seng
Hon. Secretary & Asst. : Rev. Dr Thomas Philips and Mr Kong Yeng Phooi
Hon. Treasurer and Asst. : Mr Samuel Ang and Bishop Selvanayagam
Committee Members: Rev. Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam, Mr. Michael Chua, Ms Margaret Engduyan Kunchit and Rev. P. Tevaraji

advisory, consultative and conciliatory body to assist the government with interfaith issues.

Marketing the *Good* News

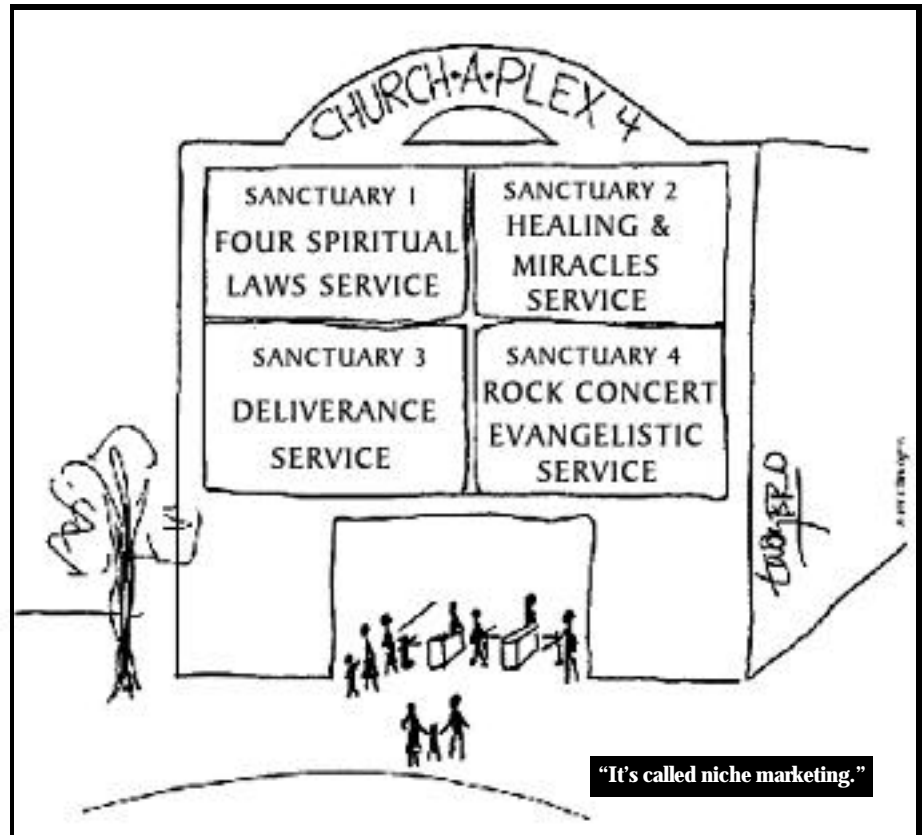
By Michael Tan

What is common between selling a product and sharing the Gospel? Are modern churches importing secular marketing techniques and sales gimmicks in their evangelistic programmes? And employing wholesale all the razzle-dazzle of showbiz to get audiences? Or are we still stubbornly hammering out the timely and timelessness Gospel message through antiquated media like sermons and tracts? Just how are we marketing the Good News?

By definition, marketing is the service of fulfilling the needs of people. In business, it involves the process of identifying the needs of a target group, developing a product or service to meet those needs, and communicating the benefits to the group. In this broad sense, the Church has always done marketing. We are called to be fishers of men and women and we call this process evangelism. To evangelise simply means to announce the *evangel*—the Good News. Of course, the term marketing in its modern business usage did not exist in ancient times. But like the early disciples in the Sea of Galilee, we are also casting our nets with the aim of catching people for the Lord. Marketing is just another word for how we cast our nets.

We may cringe at the idea of marketing the Good News. Indeed, marketing often reminds us of negative experiences associated with pestering telemarketers, pushy sales people, and devious tactics. “They will say anything and promise anything to close a deal!” is how we will respond to a slick sales pitch. But the problem is not with the concept itself. Marketing happens whether we plan it or not. Bad marketing does not invalidate the need to get useful products or services into the hands of people who need them.

Unfortunately, bad marketing has tainted the Church’s effort to spread the Gospel. Non-Christians often perceive Christians as pushy and confrontational when they are talking religion. It doesn’t



help if we use deceptive methods like inviting friends to a barbecue party and then shoving more than just meat down their throats without first alerting them! Really, we are no better than commercial advertising if we misrepresent church with glossy pictures of people better looking than the congregation! In fact, we are not telling the whole story if we only promise eternal life and forgiveness in order to secure a response. The Gospel both offers and demands more than just providing a way to heaven when we die. A bullet point version of the Gospel is really a product of the modern marketing machine and may have lost the ability to be compelling or winsome in contemporary society inundated with byte-size fast-paced messages.

How then can we be effective in marketing the Good News? What do we need to consider in our strategy?

Firstly, we need to get the Gospel right.

In his book *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard asks three questions that penetrate to the very heart of the matter:

“Does the Gospel we teach and preach have a natural tendency to cause the people who hear it to become full-time disciples of Jesus? Would those who believe it become his apprentices as a natural next step? What can we reasonably expect would result from people actually believing the substance of our message?” St Paul put it in another way when he said that the Gospel “is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

In other words, the power is in the story! Ultimately, it is not the methods, the media, or the slogans. If what we market is the on-going, unfolding story of the Gospel – which is Jesus inaugurating the Kingdom of God – then we will realise the awesome task we have in articulating it through appropriate word and action.

Needless to say, we have to be authentic, not just slick. We should proclaim the attractiveness of the Gospel without compromising its demands. We have to solicit commitment not rev up

Mediation Fast Gaining Acceptance



MEDIATION is fast becoming a preferred method of resolving disputes, judging by the number of cases settled through this approach instead of going to the courts.

Legal Aid Bureau director Faridah Abraham said since amendments were made to allow mediation services two years ago, the bureau had successfully resolved between 30 and 40 percent of cases through mediation. She added that the bureau hopes to increase the mediation success rate to at least 70 percent in the future (*The Star*, April 12, 2005).

NECF Malaysia has long recognised the potential of mediation as a bridge between the Church and the community. Over the past few years, it has been working towards setting up a mediation

ministry that will train Christians and equip churches to provide mediation services to their communities.

To help start the training, NECF has engaged Eagles Mediating and Counselling Centre (EMCC) Singapore to conduct its programmes here. EMCC is a ministry of Eagles Communications, Singapore.

EMCC has a reputable track record in Singapore where it is the only agency appointed by the Singapore Subordinate Courts to mediate divorce cases. It is a full member of the National Council of Social Services and the only non-profit organisation that provides mediation and counselling services under one roof.

EMCC's mediation services encourage conflicting parties to reach a mutually acceptable solution by facilitating dialogue

and guiding them through a cooperative decision-making process that provides opportunity to restore trust. The agency's mediation services extend beyond individuals to professional groups, religious organisations and educational institutions.

NECF will hold its first mediation training course in September. The course will run over a period of nine months and cover in-class workshops and practical sessions where participants get to observe and conduct mediation sessions with their coaches. The intake will be kept small to allow good interaction among the facilitators, coaches and participants.

NECF has appointed Patrick Cheng to head the mediation ministry.

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

statistics.

Secondly, we need to use flexible methods

Howard Hendricks was credited as having said that the church should be prepared to die for its message but not for its methods. Sadly, churches are always suspicious of new ideas and fresh approaches. Methods are to be adapted in every generation.

Mass media can be a great ally in communicating the Gospel on a large scale. All available technologies can be harnessed for the Gospel. In many places, radio is still the only way for people to hear the Gospel. The goal is to reach as many people as we can, not to be better than Hollywood or MTV or the other mega church in the city!

Marketing is getting the Gospel out in an effective way. Preaching may not always be the best means of getting the job done. But whatever the appropriate means is, it must be done well. Because we honour God and respect our audience, we seek to do our best in communicating well.

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*

must be applauded for its high quality. Gibson remarked that he made it because he was tired of seeing amateur or sugar coated religious films. He was surprised at its acceptance by many non-believers and felt that they appreciated the honesty and intensity of the production.

Thirdly, we need the driving force of passion

Quite ironically, the term evangelism has been hijacked, secularised and corporatised. Guy Kawasaki, who was formerly the chief evangelist of Apple Computer, is considered by many to be the father of evangelism marketing. His 1991 book, *Selling the Dream: How to Promote Your Product, Company, or ideas – and Make a Difference – Using Everyday Evangelism*, is the seminal work for understanding how

to build loyalists and supporters for a cause that could change the world. In this context, evangelism marketing is the process of getting buyers to believe in a product or service so much that they are

compelled to tell others about it. It is well known that Apple users are a fanatical bunch. Guy's book tells how an organisation can

transform customers into passionate and influential evangelists and drive sales for its products.

Guy is a Christian and has attended training in evangelism at the Billy Graham School of Evangelism. That's his inspiration for evangelism marketing. His ideas and insights have created waves in the business world of marketing and sales, especially in the IT industry. Sun Microsystems, a major IT company, has a bigwig called Vice-President, Technology Evangelism and Marketing. The point is when you are passionate about your product, you don't need to be forced or manipulated to share it!

That's what evangelism is all about. In *The Christian Persuader*, international evangelist Dr Leighton Ford wrote, "Before evangelism is a programme, it must be a passion that issues forth in saving actions". If the Gospel meets the deepest needs of humanity, then we must market it more enthusiastically, more passionately, more sensitively, and more effectively than the product evangelists of the business world.

Purpose driven. Jesus driven.

Michael Tan is editor of *VantagePoint*, a bi-monthly publication of Eagles Communications (Singapore). This article first appeared in the March-April 2005, issue. Used with permission.



NECF Foundation 1st Anniversary

THE NECF Foundation is celebrating its first anniversary with a dinner at City Bayview Melaka on June 12, with special performances by AIM 2005 award winner Juwita Suwito and singer/dancer/actor and now full-time minister Edmund Smith.

Tickets to the dinner are available at RM700 to RM5,000 per table. Proceeds from the ticket sales will go to the NECF Foundation. There will also be performances from a Melaka Tamil church and the Salvation Army.

The tickets may be purchased from Frank Lee of Bethel Church Melaka (012-612 7570); Pr Jerry Lim of Melaka EFC (019-655 2760); or Rev. Lai Moo Him of NECF (016-335 5836).

NECF Tamil Conference

THE conference aims to unite Tamil pastors and workers together, and impart a renewed vision for the Tamil work in Malaysia. The two-day conference, organised by the NECF Tamil Commission, will be held at Wisma Eagles, Subang Jaya, and begin August 23. Speakers are Rev. David Mohan and Rev. Mohan C. Lazarus, both from India.

Rev. Mohan started New Life Assembly of God church in Madras in 1973. Today, the church runs six Sunday services for over 15,000 people. The church has also planted over 120 churches.

Rev. Lazarus serves with Jesus Redeems Ministry which has sent out 104 missionaries through over 20 mission agencies throughout India. The conference fee of RM20 (subsidised) covers meals and materials.

New Members

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

- **Association of Global Mobilization Training, KL**, represented by *Houston Ray Johnson, Jr.*
- **Jus Chapel Tribal Ministry, Melaka**, pastored by *Joseph O' Boon Chai*
- **Theological Centre for Asia, Petaling Jaya**, represented by *Rev. Derek Tan*
- **First Assembly of God, Kota Baru**, pastored by *Alan Tan*
- **City Revival Church, Subang Jaya**, pastored by *Rev. Suresh Sundram*
- **Gereja Injil Sepenuh, Kuching**, pastored by *Rev. Vincent Tharuman*
- **Christian Dance Fellowship, Malaysia**, represented by *Rev. Karen Liew*
- **Amazing Grace Christian Assembly, Penang**, represented by *Michael Yap Sau Moi*

We also welcome six people as **Associate Members:** Dr Loh Seck Poh; Pr Kenneth Leong Chu Hong; Julia Teh Ooi Heng; Dr Oliver Ho; Pr Wong Poh Kong.

Prayer Conference for Children

NECF Malaysia will run a prayer conference for children aged between five and 12 on Aug 26 and 27 at PJEFC, Petaling Jaya. The sessions will run simultaneously with the English-speaking prayer conference, which begins a day earlier and is held at the same place.

The facilitators are Jeffrey and Irene Chew (from Semarak Revival) and Eunice Wong (from Full Gospel Assembly, Cheras). The conference fee of RM20 covers meals and materials.

Jeffrey and Irene's experience in the children's ministry covers the academics as well as the spiritual. Jeffrey is the treasurer of the 'Children At Risk Network', a network of evangelical children homes and organisations. The couple conducts the children intercession programme during the National Intercessors and Prayer Advance twice a year. Jeffrey was recently invited to the Lausanne Forum 2004 to help draft the paper on 'Children and Prayer in Evangelism'.

Meanwhile, they run a kindergarten in Petaling Jaya with over 500 students. Irene has been involved in prayer ministries, such as the Spiritual Warfare Network, NECF Prayer Commission and the National Intercessors Prayer Advance. Currently she coordinates prayer in the KL Prayer House.

Eunice has been training children intercessors at The Wall. She helped to write the materials for last year's 40-day children's edition prayer booklet.

40-Day Fast and Prayer Devotional Guide

THE annual NECF National Fast and Prayer begins July 22. As usual, NECF Malaysia has prepared a 40-day devotional guide to take participants through the period.

The prayer booklets are now available for purchase at the NECF office. Alternatively, churches may place their orders through fax or e-mail, or purchase them at selected Christian bookshops.

The booklets, which come with the charity campaign saving boxes, cost RM1.20 each (sales and confirmed order) and RM1.50 (consignment). The adult version is available in the four languages – English, Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese and Tamil – while the children's version is available in English, BM and Chinese.



Neighbour Focus

WE continue with our prayer focus on South-east Asian countries in preparation for the 3rd South-east Asia Prayer Consultation that will be held in Kuala Lumpur in October. Representatives from 11 countries will attend to share and pray over the issues in their countries.

This issue, we highlight Laos and Cambodia (shaded black on the map, top and bottom respectively). The reports are provided by the NECF Research Department. We hope to raise awareness of our neighbours and the urgent issues facing them, and may the increased knowledge enhance our prayers for them.



C A M B O D I A

Population: 13,363,421 [July 2004 est. CIA Factbook]

Ethnic groups: Khmer 90%, Vietnamese 5%, Chinese 1%, Others 4%

Religions (estimated): Theravada Buddhism 93% (4,100 pagodas throughout the country), Christianity 1-2%, Others 5-6% (700,000 Muslims, 2000 Vietnamese Cao Dai, 200 Baha'I Faith, etc.) [International Religious Freedom Report Sept 2004]

THE “killing fields” of Choeung Ek, located 14.5km from Phnom Penh and a tourist attraction with 8,000 human skulls in a glass shrine, represents the horror of genocide and a painful past of Cambodia. Despite political progress, the government’s human rights record remains poor due to serious problems of corruption and human rights abuses.

The country ranks 130 from 175 in the UN’s Human Development Index and is one of the poorest countries in the world, even with a free market economy and foreign aid accounting for at least half the government budget. Basic health services are generally inaccessible. Furthermore, it has the most widespread AIDS epidemic in Asia.

Communist Khmer Rouge forces captured Phnom Penh in April 1975 and during its regime under Pol Pot’s dictatorship (1975-1978), at least 1.7 million Cambodians died. A December 1978 Vietnamese invasion led to a 10-year Vietnamese occupation and 13-year civil war. The 1991 Paris Peace Accords mandated democratic elections and a ceasefire, but, it was not respected by the Khmer Rouge. UN-sponsored elections in 1993 helped to restore some semblance

of peace. Factional fighting in 1997 ended the first coalition government. The first democratically-elected leader was ousted in a coup staged by Hun Sen, who was elected Prime Minister in the 1998 election that was reported to be severely flawed by violence and intimidation. Some hardcore members of Khmer Rouge were recruited into the government and armed forces. The July 2003 election was relatively peaceful. Hun Sen once again emerged victorious, and a coalition government was formed after a year of negotiations between the contending political parties.

The government is said to be highly “motivated by material benefit accrued from stealing foreign aid and facilitating organised crime rackets” (Far Eastern Economic Review, March 2005). The judiciary, though constitutionally independent, is subject to interference by the current regime and is corrupted by bribery and intimidation of judges. The judicial system is weak and unable to protect human rights or fairly resolve commercial disputes.

Media is largely controlled. Societal discrimination and domestic violence against women remains a problem. The 2004 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices recounted the on-going problems of forced child labour and trafficking women and children, including for the purpose of prostitution. The government’s non-interference on human abuse cases contributes to rampant torture and physical mistreatment of prisoners. There is also the problem of unlawful seizures of land by powerful government officials.

Although Buddhism is considered intrinsic to the country’s ethnic and cultural identity, the Constitution

prohibits discrimination based on religion. There has been no report on religious prisoners or detainees, forced religious conversion and no significant constraints on religious assembly. The 2003 Directive on Controlling External Religions requires registration of places of worship and religious schools, teaching respect for other religions, and government approvals for new construction of places of worship. It also prohibits public proselytising, but the enforcement has so far been limited to a ban on door-to-door proselytising during lunch hours between 12pm and 2 p.m. daily (International Religious Freedom Report Sept 2004).

The relationship among religions appears amicable with some reported minor conflicts between Muslims and Christians as well as occasional tensions among the branches of Islam.

PRAY FOR: **The** government to govern the nation with integrity, wisdom, justice and fairness; **An** effective judiciary to balance executive decision-making and monitor policy implementation.; **Strong**, effective measures to combat lawlessness and corruption; **Effective** policies and strategies to eradicate poverty, and for fair distribution of resources to all areas and key institutions, such as health and education; **An** effective healthcare system. Every day, 20 more Cambodians are infected with HIV; **Protection** of women, children, youth and families from the effects of prostitution, drug abuse and human trafficking; and **Unity** among churches and active involvement in nation building, and for more cooperation among Christian, government, religious and secular institutions.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: NEIGHBOUR FOCUS

LAOS

Population: 6,068,117

Ethnic groups: Lao Loum (lowland) 68%, Lao Theung (upland) 22%, Lao Soung (highland) including the Hmong and the Yao 9%, ethnic Vietnamese/Chinese 1%

Religions (estimated): Buddhist 60%, Animist and others 40% [including various Christian denominations 1.5%: Roman Catholics (30,000–40,000 adherents) and Protestants (60,000 adherents)]

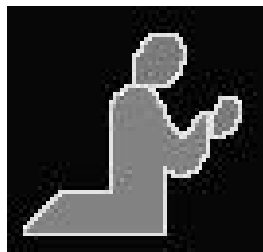
(Statistics: CIA Factbook, Feb 10 2005)

LAOS is extremely poor and heavily dependent on official foreign aid and remittances from citizens living or working abroad. 85% of the population are engaged in subsistence agriculture. It has primitive infrastructure, no railroads, a rudimentary road system, and limited external and internal telecommunications. Electricity is available in only a few urban areas.

The Government of Laos has a poor human rights record, particularly towards minorities and Christians. International Religious Freedom Report 2004 has listed the Government's totalitarian regime as a barrier to religious freedom.

The Communist Pathet Lao took control of the government in 1975 and the country has since been an authoritarian, Communist, one-party state ruled by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). The LPRP controls governance and the choice of leaders at all levels. In April 2002, the National Assembly re-elected the President and Vice President and ratified the President's selection of a prime minister and cabinet. Citizens do not have the right to change their Government.

In August 2003, the United Nations Committee to Eliminate Racial Discrimi-



nation strongly criticised Laos for failing to honour its obligations and expressed its grave concerns regarding reports of human rights violations, including brutalities inflicted on the Hmong.

Amnesty International condemned the Government of its use of starvation as a "weapon of war against civilians" (Oct 2003). The 2004 Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Laos deplored the Government's systematic hunting down and attacking the civilians by air and ground forces.

Societal discrimination against women and minorities persists. Human trafficking of women and children remains a problem. Pressure from the international community has yet to improve the Government's human rights record.

Security forces, including the police, use arbitrary arrest, detention, and surveillance. Citizens' privacy rights are constantly infringed. Freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association are restricted. All media are under the strict control of the Party. There is no freedom to make criticism, while protests are repressed with violence. The administration of justice and corruption in the judicial sector is jeopardised by the lack of freedom of expression and subjection to the Party's influence.

The Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC), the front organisation for the Party, is responsible for the oversight of religious practices. Though closely monitored by the LFNC, Buddhism has been regarded as an integral part of the national culture and way of life. The cultural significance of Buddhist festivals is recognised and openly attended by government officials.

Article 30 of the Lao Constitution provides for freedom of religion. However, the Government continues to restrict freedom of religion of the minorities, drawing restrictive interpretation of Article 9,

which discourages all acts that create divisions among religions and persons, and

Decree 92 (2002) as justification to prohibit religious practices, proselytising and religious conversions, especially to Christianity. In other words, "religious practice is 'free' only if practitioners stay within tacitly understood guidelines of what is acceptable" to the Government and Party (IRFR 2004). This has led the local authorities to intervene frequently in the activities of the minority religious groups.

Laos ranks fourth in the recent Open Doors "World Watch List" of countries where Christians are persecuted. The Protestant Church continues to suffer local-level efforts to close its churches, arrest church leaders, and force members to renounce their faith.

Some people see the Church as a threat to traditional animist beliefs, others view it as a Western or imperialist "import", while some authorities feel it harbours disloyalty to the Government and Party.

PRAY: For democracy in both political and judiciary systems; **for** the oppressive Communist government who is reported to be 'committed' in eliminating Christianity; **for** God's intervention that there will be a change of heart and mind of the leadership, respect for human rights especially of the minorities and Protestant Christians;

PRAY: for training of Christian leaders – over 90% of trained church leaders left Laos in 1975 in the face of persecution. It is still dangerous and difficult for church leaders to leave the country to get training; **for** small house group fellowships to continue growing; **for** Christians to bear whatever difficulties joyfully; and **for** wisdom to deal with the authorities and hope despite the bleak circumstances

