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EDITORIAL

## Partnership beyond the rhetoric



**‘CHRISTIAN unity, partnership, networking and stewardship’** are becoming common buzzwords of the Christian ministry today. We are constantly trying to affirm the implication of these spiritual jargon in our pursuit to demonstrate our spirituality in the context of our relationship and ministry.

As a concept, it is a biblical mandate commanded by the Lord in His last priestly prayer in John 17. In reality, however, these words limp weakly behind the practice of Christians, pastors and leaders today. While we may talk about ‘Christian unity and partnership’, the actual experience of the relationship between church and ministry tend not to harmonise with our ‘unity talk’. Instead, we frequently find ourselves doing our own things, promoting our own programmes and developing our own identity. In the process, we become increasingly inward and self-centred in many ways.

While recognising our human failure, we must seek to honour the command of Jesus that ‘we may be one’ and take to heart the serious consequences of our refusal to be faithful to His Word. In the midst of a sceptical world, we must work together and share our resources if we are going to have any hope in dealing effectively with the enormous challenges heading our way. We must move beyond the rhetoric of talking about collaboration and take steps to make it a reality.

When churches and Christians co-operate in an integrated partnership, they reach out to many more people in less time at a lower cost. The result is a stronger, more unified local church. Manpower is then maximised and the credibility of the message is strengthened.

Christian unity presents a powerful model of corporate witness to the world. Separate, individualistic ministries rob Christianity of believability. To establish viable churches within the community, we must offer a Christian community, at least as strong and relational as the one from which the converts come.

Partnership reduces duplication of effort and dissipation

of resources. Our scarce and overworked resources of people, money, time and facilities cry out for co-ordination of effort. The Church has the resources to fulfil the Great Commission, but not enough to waste in duplicate efforts and conflicting agenda. Worse than the waste and garbled message that come from duplication is that some areas of ministry are completely left out. The unfinished task can only be fulfilled through godly unity and co-operation in tangible and visible ways.

Partnerships provide an active working forum in which ministries can co-ordinate their plans and resources and develop a common strategy. Usually partnerships begin with limited but high strategic projects which allow the relevant ministries to work together. Along the way, other ministries benefit from that co-operation. As the partnership grows in maturity, task forces or working groups of ministries typically begin to form around issues critical to the Church.

Working together and sharing resources can multiply the impact of our efforts in time, personnel, money and knowledge. If we are to effectively witness for Christ as a community of believers, we have no other option but to work together. Wherever we are and whatever ministry we are doing, there are powerful benefits that come from God’s people working together to share Christ and serve in His Name.

The nature of Christian unity and partnership must reflect the new realities of changes and challenges, and of our understanding of the appropriate relationship between churches and ministries. We must seek to minimise the differences in doctrines and practices while at the same time, accentuate our commonality. Our aim is not to compete with each other in resourcing and implementation but to complement each other’s strengths. We are to discard the things that hinder openness and oneness, confessing these things and claiming together the cleansing of the Lord. Out of this pursuit, a common purpose will emerge for a body of people growing together and sharing together. ■

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# The Good Samaritan Culture

By Rev. Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam,  
NECF Malaysia Chairman

WE are growing into a more modern and affluent society as our country continues to develop and grow. It is so easy to fall into a materialistic culture. We are in danger of losing the 'good Samaritan' culture of caring for one another, recognising our neighbours, and helping each other when we see the need.

The Bible warns us that when we allow the materialistic culture to seep into our lives, we will lose the right priorities. Our judgements become compromised and we will no longer have faith in God. The Bible says, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24) 'Mammon' simply means anything other than God; it can be money, material possessions or friendships that take the rightful place of God in our lives.

Jesus related an incident of a rich young ruler who came to Him, wanting to know how to have eternal life: "Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' So Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery', 'Do not murder', 'Do not steal', 'Do not bear false witness', 'Honour your father and your mother'. And he said, 'All these things I have kept from my youth'. So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me'.

*But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich". (Luke 18:18-23)*

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*"When we allow the materialistic culture to seep into our lives, we will lose the right priorities."*

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How easily we can be deceived without realising it. Like this young ruler, we can be bound by materialism and yet do not know it. The Bible says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where

thieves do not break in or steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21) Jesus is not against having riches. This young ruler needed to put his treasures in the right place. It was certain that his master was not God. Though he was 'sorrowful', he did nothing to change the situation when he was made aware of it.

### Danger of a Materialistic Culture

In a materialistic culture, possessions are not our only concern. There is something else which is even more destructive and Paul pointed that out to us in Galatians, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law". (Galatians 5:16-18) When we accept the materialistic culture, the natural man or our flesh controls us, so that we do not do the things that we wish but instead we do the works of the flesh. "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in the time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21)

The danger of this materialistic culture is that when we allow it to control us, we become its slaves just like the rich young ruler was a slave to his possessions. This is the deception of Satan and we must not let God's grace and power be denied in our

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**Good Samaritan Culture:** *from page 2*

lives. Instead, we should seek God with repentance and bear the fruits of repentance.

**Four steps**

There are four steps to help us avoid this materialistic culture. Paul said, *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”*. (Romans 12:1-2)

**Firstly**, we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. We are to live for the glory of God daily. **Secondly**, do not be conformed to this world. Do not let the world mould you but be conformed to Jesus. **Thirdly**, be transformed by the renewing of your minds. Whatsoever we think, so we are. We need to fill our minds with His thoughts. **Fourthly**, we need to put God first as it is said in Matthew 6:33, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”*

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*“When we accept the materialistic culture, the natural man or our flesh controls us”*

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All these four steps involve an act of the will. God never forces us to do anything. We need to choose what we want to do. If we want to be blessed by God, we need to make up our minds as James said in James 1:7-8, *“For let not the man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”* Do not halt between two opinions like the people during Elijah’s time (1 Kings 18:21). As Joshua said, *“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.”* (Deuteronomy 30:19) So choose whom you will obey; and I encourage you to choose Jesus and live for the glory of God! By doing so, the ‘good Samaritan’ culture in you will be a formidable witness for Jesus. ■

## UNITY IN VARIETY



*Christian leaders from diverse nationalities and church backgrounds at the recent Amsterdam 2000 conference.*

THERE is beauty in variety but when variety is viewed as ‘differences’, the beauty may be marred by judgement and criticism. Take denominational differences, for example. We bicker over worship style, prayer form, and other non-essential matters such as who our heroes or heroines are. Differences then lead to disunity.

How can we regain church unity without erasing the differences? Study church history—opined Pastor Key Yuasa, Vice-Chairman of World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF). “By studying how the different denominations come about, and their achievements and failures throughout their history, we can then appreciate and understand each other better. Understanding church history and the different denominational backgrounds helps us Christians in this generation to appreciate and accept other brothers and sisters who started out in different times and different places,” Yuasa said in an interview with *Berita NECF*.

There are many images of the Church in the Bible and each denomination reflects an image, Yuasa added. He quoted the three main historic images that have been studied by Leslie Nubigin of Scotland:

- Catholic church image (monastic community lifestyle);
- Congregational image—the classic Protestant view. There are two types of congregation styles under this image. Firstly, the Superior-led congregation has a leader ruling over the congregation. Secondly, the Word-based congregation is the classic Protestant model where the Church is ruled and reformed by the Word.
- Pentecostal image.

Yuasa stressed that all the images are biblical and authentic and therefore, we must accept and appreciate those living under the images. For example, people are bewildered by the phenomenal growth in many Pentecostal groups today. “Though it has its shortcomings, we must realise that its teaching (the Body is the temple of the Holy Spirit) is a biblical and legitimate one,” he advised.

But even before considering church history, the Holy Spirit must be at work in our midst, stirring our hearts to love one another for God’s love is the perfect bond of unity, Yuasa said. “When you have this love in your heart, you can accept and relate to any Christian who is different from you,” he added.

Yuasa was in Kuala Lumpur recently to attend a planning meeting for the 11th WEF General Assembly which will be held here next May. He is also the Vice-President of the Brazilian Evangelical Association and President of the Holiness Church in Brazil.

During his stay here, he also visited the 24-hour Prayer Tower, a combined churches’ effort. He commented that the ministry is a “fantastic symbol of unity that is an example for many evangelical churches elsewhere”. ■

**Rev. Eddy Ho**, NECF Malaysia Council Member, recently attended the EFA Theological Commission consultation on 'Biblical Stewardship' in Bangkok. He reports.

THERE is a need to awaken the Church in Asia on the biblical mandate on stewardship. In the Scriptures, stewardship is a very important subject and should encompass the whole life. Yet when it is mentioned, especially in the Western countries, it is usually referred to monetary giving such as tithing, fund-raising and annual budgets. Usually, when a minister preaches a sermon on stewardship, the congregation is immediately ready for an appeal for special offering or financial drive.

Is this what biblical stewardship is? Does stewardship always have to do with money? These are some of the key questions raised at the consultation on Biblical Stewardship held in Bangkok in early September organised by the Theological Commission of Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA).

The objectives of the consultation (the first theological consultation sponsored by EFA) were to: Provide the Church in Asia with a biblically sound, theologically precise and contextually viable foundation for Christian stewardship; present a joint statement of findings on evangelical convictions regarding the many facets of stewardship; and produce a compendium of the proceedings in an edited volume for publication in 2001.

Twenty-two participants from 15 countries—India, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Australia, South Korea, Japan and Malaysia—attended the consultation.

At the consultation, they learned that in some regions, stewardship was seen mainly as a mobilisation of members for church ministry. For example, in South Korea, churches

## WHOLE-LIFE STEWARDSHIP NEEDED FOR ASIAN CHURCH



regularly hold 'stewardship retreats,' where they mobilise and train senior and new church officers to prepare them for the ministries of the church for the coming year. However, stewardship means more than just fund-raising and human resource mobilisation for Christian service. It should have broader implications for Christian responsibility in every aspect of our lives.

A model of this whole-life stewardship is the Myanmar Church. Myanmar Christians practice 10 ways of giving—tithing, freewill offerings, handful of rice offerings (where the Christian household saves a handful of rice whenever they cook their meals and gives it to the missionaries, pastors and the poor), grace box (or voluntary giving), seed faith box (to help poor families pay their children's school fees), faith promise, first week Sunday donation, fasting day (where money saved from breakfast and lunch is given to the poor), love offerings for full-time ministers and benevolence fund.

Despite their poverty, the average Myanmar Christian gives about 20 to 25 per cent of his income to God's work. Most of the pastors do not get regular monthly salaries and live on the

donations of farm produce of their church members. Elsewhere in Cambodia, the pastors normally get one bag of rice a month instead of monetary remuneration.

Christians also have to live responsible lives and not over-indulge in luxuries. An example was mentioned of a country where churches wasted a lot of money to rebuild their churches and decorate them. The issue was not the renovation per se, but that the money used for

the beautification work could have been used more profitably for missions which was greatly in need of funds.

Participants spent considerable time discussing the concept of living a responsible lifestyle. Does it mean living a simple lifestyle? Ultimately, one has to decide for himself what a responsible lifestyle is, be sensitive to those around them and above all, set a good testimony.

In the area of time, the participants found that the attitude towards time differ from place to place. In societies which have adopted the Western perception, time is very precious and people value punctuality. However, in countries such as the Philippines, time is approached with a lax attitude. Punctuality is well tolerated and generally, a simple goodbye can start from the house and continue all the way to the bus stop.

Christians also have a responsibility to the environment, which is God's creation. The cultural mandate, which was given to man at the creation, was never withdrawn, although the world was marred by the fall of man. In view of this Christians should take care of the earth. As Dr Rodrigo Tano said in his paper, although man is to have dominion

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**Whole-life stewardship:** *from page 4*

over nature, he is not to be a ruthless ruler or harsh conqueror.

In view of this, man should also have a right attitude towards work. Man's work bears the mark of his personality and is an extension of himself. The way a man works reflects his mental, psychological and moral faculties.

Christians also have to maintain an exemplary family life. However, this matter is very sensitive in some cultures. For example in Nepal, it is not appropriate to preach or discuss about the family or how one should deal with it. As reported in a paper, "It is common practice in Nepali churches to preach or teach about stewardship of time, treasure and talent but not on the stewardship of the family." This does not absolve the church from being responsible in family life and to set an example for the society at large. Generally in Nepal, women have no status or rights and they are often the victims of domestic violence. It is therefore the responsibility of the church to ensure that there is a proper focus on family life. "The church also should initiate to uplift the status of the wives as co-heirs in Jesus Christ with men," the paper rightly said.

Stewardship also extends to the area of leadership development, perhaps a more complex area of stewardship. While leadership development must take into consideration the on-going changes in the world, it also has to be sensitive to the cultural uniqueness of Asians. The Church has a responsibility to develop responsible leadership that is respectable and credible to society.

Earlier, Commission Chairman Dr Chris Marantika (from Indonesia) gave the keynote address on 'Empowering God's People through Biblical Stewardship.' Introductory papers on the meaning of stewardship, such as the Old and New Testament understanding on the subject, were presented. Other papers discussed biblical teachings on stewardship of work, God's creation, God's gifts and talents, time, our being, leadership and money. Several participants also gave case studies on stewardship from the contexts of their countries in each of the areas discussed. ■

## STATEMENT FROM THE CONSULTATION ON 'EMPOWERING THE PEOPLE OF GOD THROUGH BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP'

### Theological Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia

We, the twenty-two delegates from fifteen countries, who attended the consultation on 'Empowering the People of God through Biblical Stewardship', organised by the Theological Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia, under the sponsorship of the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia, at the Alliance Guest Home, Bangkok, Thailand from September 4 to 7, 2000, articulate the following statement of our individual and corporate affirmations and commitments.

We affirm our faith in the living and triune God, who revealed Himself in nature and expressed His will in the Bible. Thus, we commit to uphold its absolute authority in all matters of belief and behaviour particularly in view of our witness as the church amid the context of cultural, political and socio-economic diversity and religious plurality in Asia.

In the beginning, God created ALL things including man for His glory and He assigned man to be His steward (Genesis 1-2). Man is the manager of ALL things as he is also a servant accountable to God. Although fallen man has failed in his assignment, God redeemed mankind with a renewed stewardship mandate. In the end, God will bring about a new order of man and things (2 Peter 3:10-13).

As stewards of our very being before God, called to be His witnesses in holiness, righteousness and love, we commit ourselves to be His people reflecting His character in our daily living and our relationship with others (Matt. 5:13-14; 1 Pet. 2:9-10).

As stewards of the family and society, we affirm that the family is one of the richest gifts of God, the first unit of society, church and humanity. God designed the heterosexual marriage. We also celebrate that we are not only members of our families but also members of the household of God and humanity. Thus, we commit ourselves to the renewal of family as a loving, healing, supporting and praying community and we renew our commitment to honour and respect the authority of God, parents, church and society, and dedicate ourselves to the renewal of family and society through spiritual restoration.

As stewards of the gospel of God's grace and reconciliation and of the Christian ministry, we commit ourselves to equip and motivate God's people in the church of Asia to plan, to strategise and to share the gospel to every creature, and further more, to be used of God to promote peace and justice in the Asian society.

As stewards of spiritual gifts and talents, we commit ourselves to empowering God's people through a balanced biblical teaching so that they may discover their own gifts and use them responsibly in the local church in order that the Body of Christ may be built up in every aspect and God's name be glorified.

As stewards of time and space, of all things natural and spiritual, we commit to maintain a proper balance of time and space that is given to us for the advancement of God's kingdom, our work and leisure, and to be responsible individuals to the environment and spiritual welfare of the world, so that God's cultural and spiritual mandate can be fulfilled.

As stewards of money and possessions, we commit to live a simple lifestyle and to give as much as we can to evangelism, missions and social concern, so that the Great Commission can be fulfilled.

In humility before the living God, we confess the need to rectify our failures and renew our commitment to obey our stewardship mandate and to model before God's people and before the world a responsible stewardship of ALL things under God. For what God has accomplished among us at this consultation, we give Him all the glory even as we thank the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia for having sponsored this gathering. ■

# CHURCH OF MALAYSIA TO HOST WORLD EVENT

**Dr Billy Graham and Dr John Stott to be honoured**

THE Church of Malaysia is about to create history in the evangelical world when it hosts a double international event in Kuala Lumpur next May—the 11<sup>th</sup> World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) General Assembly and WEF's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

WEF will add significance to the event by honouring two key evangelical figures—Dr John Stott and Dr Billy Graham—for their contribution to the evangelical movement.

At least 600 overseas participants from 116 countries worldwide are expected to attend the conference co-organised by WEF and NECF Malaysia in partnership with local churches. Locally, NECF Malaysia hopes to register several hundred Christian leaders for the conference to be held from May 4 to 10, 2001. Prospective speakers are internationally renowned figures such as Clive Calver of UK, Valdir Stumagel of Latin America, George Verwer of OM, Chris Wright of All Nations UK, Miroslav Volf from Eastern Europe and John Haggai.

The theme—Serving Churches Worldwide—will encourage churches to serve one another to advance God's Kingdom on earth. "We need to encourage each other, re-affirm one another, and commit ourselves to work together within the framework of a common vision and strategy in ministry...to work as one body to reach every person with the gospel of

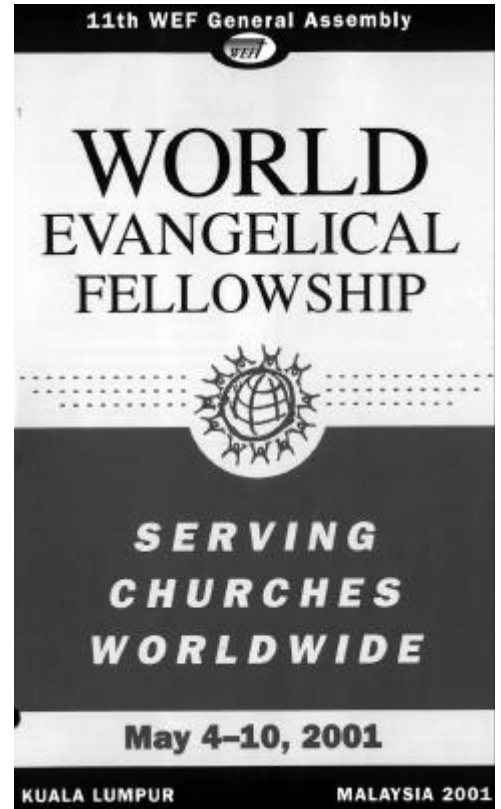
the Kingdom," said Dr Jun Vencer, WEF International Director.

He added: "It was churches that gave birth to WEF in order that it may be their handmaiden to equip and mobilise them through their regional and national fellowships to disciple their communities and countries for Jesus Christ. And WEF has been persistent in its task of empowering churches to transform lives and societies."

Meanwhile, NECF Malaysia Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong described the opportunity to host the conference, held once every four years, as a rare privilege and honour. "Malaysia, despite being a small country, has been chosen to host this momentous double event. The opportunity is a blessing to our local leaders. It will strengthen our involvement globally through the networking of key world leaders and give the Malaysian Church the scope to develop its potential in reaching out to the other parts of the world," he commented. "Let us count it a privilege and prove that *Malaysian Church boleh*," he urged.

The task of planning the double event is immense and NECF is calling churches to be partners in the organising work. Churches can participate by:

- Helping directly in organising the conference;



- Contributing financially;
- Praying for the conference; and
- Sending participants to the conference.

*For more information, please contact NECF Malaysia at tel: 03-7727 8227; fax 03-7729 1139; e-mail: enquiries@po.jaring.my*

## BE A RESPONSIBLE CHRISTIAN... Pray for your nation

FOLLOWING the highly successful National Day Prayer Rally, NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission has launched a prayer move to mobilise Malaysian churches to pray for revival, unity and a great harvesting of souls.

The '40-Day Fast and Prayer' was officially launched on 28 October 2000 to mobilise churches to participate in the initiative. About 70 people from churches in the Klang Valley attended the launch held at SSMC, Petaling Jaya. NECF Vice-Chairman Rev. Dr Eu Hong Seng gave the message.

The Commission strongly urge all Pastors' Fellowship in the different states to help mobilise their churches to

participate in this initiative which begins on 22 November and ends 31 December. A structure copy of the fast and pray calendar is available with this issue of *Berita NECF*.

Meanwhile, the Commission reported visible evidences of God's grace as a result of the united prayer rallies in 14 states on 30 August. Among them are:

- Change of mindset attitudes towards religious liberty;
- Exposure of corrupt practices in public places; and
- Acceleration of efforts to curtail social ills and moral decay that affect our nation's youths.



ISSUE 54  
Women TO Women

# Develop a more spiritual rhythm to your life

by Dr Christine Sine

*HOW do we develop a life that reflects more of the life God intends us to have? To find the rhythm for our lives we have to look at the life of the Lord Jesus. We have to ask, "What were the things He gave priority to in terms of how He spent His time"?*

## 1. JESUS HAD A VERY STRONG SENSE OF PURPOSE

Jesus knew very confidently what God had called Him to do. One of the reasons why so many of us get caught up in the things we're doing is because we do not have a clear sense of what it is God has called us to do. We do not know how to say, "No" to the things God has not really called to do. Think of the number of times Jesus said, "I've come to do My Father's will." Jesus had a very clear mission statement, a clear sense of purpose that came out not from the world around Him but out of a sense of what God had called Him to do. That sense of mission comes out in Luke 4:17-19. Jesus stands up in the Temple of Nazareth and He announces His mission statement. He says, "This is what it is God has called Me to do." Jesus' mission statement focuses on bringing glimpses of God's Kingdom into people's lives. Everything that He did basically revolved around the fact that He came to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Every action He took, everything He committed His life and resources to really flowed out of a sense that what He was doing was announcing the Kingdom of God and proclaiming what it meant to be part of that Kingdom. As a result of that He knew what to say "Yes" to and what to say "No" to as well.



*When you look at the life of Jesus, it's amazing some of the things He sometimes had to say "No" to.*

When you look at the life of Jesus, it's amazing some of the things He sometimes had to say "No" to. Here was Somebody who literally carried the weight of the world on His shoulders and yet it never seemed He was over-stressed or overburdened. He always seemed to walk at a very contented pace. All of us love to jump to action when there's a crisis. But Jesus didn't do that. He delayed going to see Lazarus even when the people had come to tell Him that His friend was dying. They were saying, "Come quickly" but Jesus said, "I'm not going." He waited two days before He went. I suspect He was probably praying and asking God, "What is it You want me to do in this particular situation?" I don't think He got up and moved until He knew very definitely what God was saying to Him what He should do. How many fewer mistakes we would make, how many less times we would put our foot into our mouths and how many things we don't need to be doing if, whenever there was a

crisis, the first thing we would do is to sit and wait till God says, "This is what I want you to do" instead of rushing off and doing what we think is the right thing for us to be doing.

Another time that intrigues me is when Jesus came back from the dead. He had 40 days to prepare the disciples and get the people who had followed Him ready before He came back again. And you would expect, again, that He would be rushing from place to place, that He would be teaching them all kinds of doctrine, and telling them all kinds of things that they should be doing and that He would be very, very busy. Yet, when you look at the things Jesus was doing, He was walking down the road to Emmaus, meeting two people and spending hours, it would seem, telling them the things He wanted them to hear. In another situation, we find Him sitting on the beach, actually making breakfast for His friends. That's absolutely amazing to me, and I say, "Lord, I wish I was in such a state and had such a sensitivity to Your Spirit that I didn't rush from here to there, to the next thing, doing all the things I think I should be doing. I need to really take time to listen to God and hear Him say, "Yes, that's the thing to do" or "No, you shouldn't be doing that. It's something you can put off till next week or next month or it's something you don't ever need to be committing yourself to." We will find our lives less pressured if we really allowed ourselves, like Jesus, to be led by the Spirit.

All of us need a strong sense of mission that comes, not out of the culture we've grown up in, but a sense of mission that comes out of our study of Scripture and out of a sense of God's purposes for our lives. Many of us do not have a strong

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**Develop a more spiritual rhythm to your life:** *from page 7*

sense of purpose in terms of what God has called us to do. You might want to consider doing this some time in the future. Sit down, look back and ask, "What has God said to me in the past through scriptures? What is it He has said to me through prayer? What are the needs in the world that make my heart ache? What are the things you feel God could really be calling you to do in terms of a sense of His purpose? Then sit down and spend time in reflection and prayer and work out a sentence or a couple of sentences that give you a strong sense of what God has called you to do as part of His mission. Our mission statement comes out of Proverbs 31:8,9 - to be a voice for those that have no voice and to bring glimpses of God's Kingdom into people's lives. God can give us a sense of what His purposes are for us and help us reinvent our lives in a way that we can make that possible.

Coming out of that sense of mission, the number one thing that Jesus gave time to was His spiritual life. Jesus knew that the only way He could be committed to the things God had called Him to was to have a strong spiritual life. None of us can follow through and commit our lives and time to the things that God has called us to unless we spend a lot of time working on our spiritual lives. Jesus often drew away to a lonely place to pray, and sometimes He left prime ministry situations to get away to a lonely place to pray. He never made any kind of important decision in His life without spending at least a whole night in prayer. How many less mistakes we would make if only we were willing to spend as much time in prayer as Jesus was willing to do. Decisions like changing jobs, working more hours at our jobs, committing our kids to all those extra-curricular activities - these are things we often do not think of as spiritual decisions. Yet these are the things that take us away from our availability to God in the areas God is prompting us to be committed to. We need to make decisions in every area of our lives prayerfully. Spend a night, a day, a weekend; for major decisions, spend 40 days. That may be overwhelming so a start may be two or three days for major decisions.

## **2. JESUS SPENT A LOT OF TIME MENTORING AND DEVELOPING DISCIPLES**

One reason why we, especially those in fulltime Christian service, become over

busy could well be because we fail to develop a team of people around us. These are people God intends us to mentor, to prepare to follow on the good work He has given us to do. The effective method Jesus used was the "on the job apprenticeship method." Jesus constantly had people with Him. He was constantly teaching them through parables, through example. The people were constantly learning truths - truths about how He was spending His time, truths about what was important to Him. It was a constant learning experience. One of the things God intends for all of us to have is a team of people we are teaching truths to. Don't just sit and teach. Interestingly, Jesus didn't just work with these people. He was doing other things with them too. They were constantly having fun, food and fellowship together. Jesus went to the wedding at Cana to have fun and He made

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*None of us can follow through and commit our lives and time to the things that God has called us to unless we spend a lot of time working on our spiritual lives.*

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it more fun for the people by turning water into wine for them! We talk about celebrating our faith, yet for many of us, there's not much celebration in it at all. We're not doing things together, the things that have a sense of celebration of our faith. We have a lot to learn from the Jewish people and from other people in other parts of the world. Here's something for us to consider: would we be as caught up in the consumer culture if we had more celebration in our faith? The shopping malls give us a sense of festivity. They know we're likely to spend more when we go in (and the malls are all decorated up) because there's a craving in our hearts for celebration.

## **3. JESUS WORKED FOR THE PURPOSES OF GOD**

Healing the sick and feeding the hungry - these were the purposes Jesus committed His life to. He was committed to doing the Father's will. He told His disciples to do what they saw Him do. I've been challenged as I realize that what God has called us to is not to use our lives

for ourselves, but that our lives are meant to reach out to other people. We are to reach out with compassion, with caring, and with the Good News as well. If our lives were more committed to these purposes, we would likely see more people becoming Christians and becoming followers of Jesus.

The world knows the kind of things Christians are to commit their lives to and yet they are so hungry to see us reaching out and caring in compassionate ways that we aren't always doing. There are many more things God would have us committed to and many more ways He would have us reach out to people with both physical and spiritual needs. I need to be constantly challenged because it's so easy to slip back and to do the things that aren't important that take up my time and energy and leave me with no time and energy to do the things God would like me to commit my life to.

It's not easy to make changes in our lives but we need to make them in order to let our lives be committed to the things Jesus found to be important. The worst thing, I think, is to say we are going to change our lives all at once. This may be possible sometimes, but for most of us, God will intend that we take a little piece and make one change at a time. Gradually, over a period of time we then look at our lives to see how we can become more of the people God intends us to be. Tom and I go on a prayer retreat three or four times a year, not to pray for the world or our friends but basically it's a time to draw aside and to go to a lonely place to pray and seek God's direction for our lives. We go to a place far away from home, from the phone, the TV. This is a good thing for couples and for families to do together. Read the Scriptures, take time to listen to what God wants you to commit your lives to for the next few months/years.

Let us learn from the Lord Jesus how to change our timestyle and lifestyle to develop a more spiritual rhythm for our lives. ■

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*Christine Sine is a doctor. She helped develop and direct the healthcare ministry for YWAM's mercy ships. Christine and her husband, Tom Sine, conducted the "Mega Trends" seminar organized by the NECF Malaysia Research Commission. This article is an extract from the message Christine gave to the women at an evening meeting.*



# Ministry in Myanmar

by Vicky Ng

WHEN I first heard about the Great Commission Institute (GCI) conducted by Asian Outreach to train local Asian pastors and church leaders in the Word of God, something stirred within my heart and I wanted to be part of this tremendous work.

In July this year I was given the privilege and opportunity to go and conduct the GCI in Myanmar with two other pastors from Singapore and Japan. Myanmar was hitherto an unknown destination.

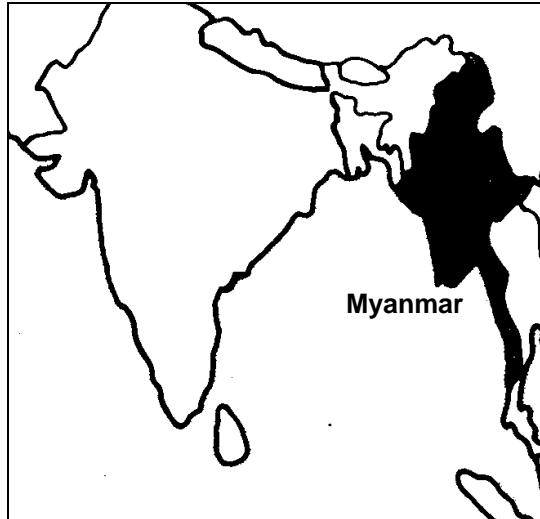
In my younger days I had read challenging and fascinating exploits by Isobel Kuhn among the hill tribes and ethnic peoples, the Chins, Karens, the Shans of Myanmar. Now I was thrilled to be going there myself.

A core of 30 dedicated workers, pastors and church leaders from the various ethnic groups came together for their 1st GCI in Yangon. Some had travelled from the remote parts of the Shan state at considerable cost and expense to be part of this training and equipping programme.

Meeting some of these dedicated servants of the Lord was an eye opener and a rebuke to my "cosy" Christianity. Two personalities stood out among the crowd.

Sister Say My is in her late 50s. As a young lecturer in the University of Yangon, she had heard the Lord's call to quit her secure post to do pioneering work among the sea gypsies inhabiting an island off Myanmar. With the help of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) she laboured for 30 years to devise a written language for this unique group of people. She was delighted to show me the New Testament in the sea gypsies' written language which had just rolled off hot from the press. Today a church of 50 people has been established in an otherwise remote and unknown island. What a testimony of God's faithfulness!

One of the translators at the GCI was



Dr Sai, a Shan. He was practising as a medical doctor in Hongkong for many years before he resigned early this year and became a full-time staff of Asian Outreach. God had laid a burden on the heart of Dr Sai to reach his ethnic people, the Shans. Today he is involved in translating the Shan Bible into the modern Shan language, preparing Bible broadcasts for the Far East Broadcasting Corporation (FEBC) in the Shan language which are beamed from Manila. These messages nurture Shan church leaders and pastors.

The largest denomination in Myanmar, through the dynamic ministry of Adoniram Judson, is the Baptist denomination. Sadly, through the years, nominalism has set in and the Myanmar church welcomes support, cooperation and assistance, especially from the Asian church, to build up the indigenous church there. Churches in Malaysia have been working actively alongside the church in Cambodia with fruitful results. Perhaps it is time for some of our churches to be focussing on Myanmar. It is a vast nation and opportunities abound to create strategic partnerships with our Myanmar brethren for the establishment of God's Kingdom there. ■

*Vicky Ng is a practising lawyer in Kuala Lumpur. She worships at Praise Baptist Centre, Sri Damansara, KL.*

## Singles and Prayer Retreats

Year-end. By now, at least once, all of us would have observed and remarked, "How fast the months have gone by." And it's that time of year when we are thinking of holidays, Christmas, spring cleaning... and the uncertainties and challenges that lie ahead of us. Year-end is an excellent time to get away for a prayer retreat. Singles will find the exercise extremely beneficial. Anytime is a good time to take stock of where we stand with the Lord but a year-end rendezvous is especially helpful to review the year that has gone by and to receive instructions from the Lord for the year ahead. Some of us find it workable to take a day off and stay home. But if home has too many distractions, among them the refrigerator or the calls of the "Old newspaper! Old newspaper! " vendor or the persistent honking of the gasman or whatever, then it would be best to go to a quiet place. ReconRe Ministry has apartments, at very affordable rates, that make excellent retreat centers for singles. You may go on your own or with a friend, take a room each and spend time waiting in the Lord's presence. Glory Place in Mantin is also another excellent choice. Please call first to make reservations. ■

Reconre: 03-4452420  
Glory Place: 06-7996122



# Of Gifts and Giving

by Goh Poh Gaik

I WAS at a women's meeting in the Klang Valley the other day and was pleased to hear the announcement regarding changes in the way this Women's Fellowship customarily celebrate Christmas. The usual practice was to bring a gift for the gift exchange. That way you give a gift and you get one in return. Although gift giving and gift receiving lend a note of festivity to the occasion, most of us would acknowledge that more often than not the gift we bring home would be some kind of decorative item that gets stashed away at the bottom of a drawer. And could it also be that the gift we had brought would also be some unappreciated item that the recipient is also going to stash out of sight and out of use? So the Committee of this Women's Fellowship - wise and sensible women they are - have decided to do away with this gift exchange. Instead of giving, mostly unappreciated and unneeded gifts to each other, they will

at their Christmas gathering this year bring a cash gift in prepared pink envelopes and place these on the tree. The money will then be used to purchase gifts for the needy and underprivileged. Apparently they had done this with great success last year. The women gave generously. The gifts bought and given away were appreciated and the recipients had written letters of gratitude to the women. I was hugely pleased to hear this and to the women I would like to say, "Well done! That's the way to go."

Which brings us to look at our fellowships and our households and the way we go about celebrating Christmas. Are changes in order? Gifts will feature, of course, because God gave His very best Gift to us in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. Could we, this time around, identify someone lonely or neglected, someone discouraged, someone going through a period of pain and suffering, to buy a gift for? There are colleagues, neighbours, relatives, members of our congregations for whom the message of Christmas will take on fresh

meaning when we hand over a gift, place a hand on their shoulder and where possible pray for the Lord's peace for them. Shopping for these ones will also bring a renewed sense of purpose for us. And please, no junk item.

Women have a definite advantage when it comes to giving gifts. Food items make welcome gifts and women (some men, too) cook and bake. So instead of joining the shopping crowd in the mall feverishly looking for gifts, what about staying home and putting your baking/cooking skills to good use? Your family members will be treated to delicious smells and taste as well!

One more observation is in place. Should you discern that someone in need is going to receive an avalanche of attention and gifts this Christmas season, you may wish to schedule your own gift giving to another later date. Loving and giving aren't meant to be seasonal activities.

What about the household/family members? You may agree on just small gifts, giving items that will be appreciated and used. Draw up some kind of a wish list, like bridal couples do. There may be no element of surprise but the pleasure is in giving what someone is pleased to receive.

And finally and most significantly, let us not forget our Saviour and Lord. He desires no trinket. He wants our yielded hearts, our surrendered lives. On top of your "To Do" list mark in time with the Lord to commune and worship Him. Then with His river of love flowing through you, go with light step and a full heart to love others in His Name.

Have a blessed and Christ-filled Christmas. ■

## WOMEN to WOMEN

Adviser/Co-ordinator : GOH POH GAIK

Women to Women, a project of the NECF Commission on Women's Concerns, is a bimonthly supplement to Berita NECF. It has the broad objectives of :

- educating and raising awareness of social and theological issues affecting women
- stimulating efforts towards networking and dialogue amongst women
- encouraging one another in the use of our gifts and talents for the Lord's Kingdom

Your letters and contributions (feedback, suggestions, ideas, articles, poems, cartoons, etc.) are most welcome.

Send to :

The Co-ordinator, **WOMEN TO WOMEN**  
NECF, 32A, Jalan SS 2/103, 47300 Petaling Jaya,  
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.

*The views expressed in this supplement do not necessarily reflect those of the Commission or the NECF.*



## SIGNS OF THE TIMES

# The Christian Perspective to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

By Edmund Ng

THE tiny nation of Israel in the heartland of the Arabs is once again the recent focus of world attention. Not that the hostilities between the Israelis and the Palestinians are anything new, but the stone-throwing has erupted into ferocious gun battles which saw more than a hundred dead. In retaliation, the Israeli army clamped a closure order on the occupied territories of Gaza and West Bank while their helicopters bombarded Palestinian targets. This tension panicked Wall Street to fall 379 points in one day on Oct 10, 2000. Meanwhile, an American warship and the British Embassy in Yemen have been bombed, Israeli soldiers are kidnapped in Lebanon, oil prices are escalating and Saddam Hussein is threatening war again. An emergency Peace Summit was hurriedly arranged in Egypt and the usual rhetoric followed.

The tense situation in Israel also brings into focus the question: How do we Christians view the Middle East Conflict? Our perspective will undoubtedly depend on our theological mindset. However, let us first understand the historical background that gave rise to this seemingly dead-end situation.

### WHY SO MUCH CONFLICT?

Canaan is one of the old names for Palestine. According to the Bible, the Israelis led by Joshua conquered Canaan around 1500 BC. According to God's instructions, they exterminated most of the Canaanites living there then. Israel flourished as a nation but subsequently, Palestine came under the rule of the Babylonians, Medo-Persians, Greeks and then the Romans. The Roman troops under Titus levelled Jerusalem to the ground in AD 70 as prophesied by Jesus (Matt 24:1,2). Many Jews were killed while others fled from Palestine. In fact, during the Byzantine Period (325 - 614) when Constantine the Great converted to Christianity and Byzantium made the capital of the eastern half of the Roman Empire, the Jews were allowed back to

Jerusalem only one day a year on September 8, the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple.

In AD 637, the Muslim Arabs overran Jerusalem and ruled Palestine for five centuries. The local populace living there, which came from diverse ethnic origins, adopted Islam and came to be known as the Palestinian Arabs. Then Christian Europe rose to fight against the Arabs in the crusades. There were eight main crusades lasting two centuries. The crusaders were eventually routed by the Mamelukes in AD 1291. The Muslim masters treated harshly the small number of Jews remaining in the land. Soon, the Ottoman Turks overran Palestine and ruled



the land until the beginning of the 20th century. The majority Palestinians and the minority Jews both suffered much under the 'abominable Turks'.

In 1916, the Palestinians revolted against the Turks. They were aided by a former British archaeologist later known as Lawrence of Arabia. The Turks fled when the British arrived in Palestine at the start of World War 1. Both the Palestinians and the Jews welcomed the British colonialists. In the meantime, more Jews started to arrive in Palestine as a result of persecution especially prevalent in Europe. They were further motivated by two factors. Firstly, a Jew in Paris by the name of Eliezer Ben Yehouda believed that he received a vision from God to re-introduce the Hebrew language in Palestine. Secondly, another Jew by the name of Theodor Herzl launched a political movement known as Zionism for the rebirth of the nation of Israel.

Soon, the *aliyah* or returning Jews became a social, economic and political threat to the Palestinians. The British issued the Belfour Declaration in favour of establishing a national home for the Jews in Palestine without prejudice to the rights of the Palestinians. Sadly, they were not able to keep their promises. The subsequent Peel Commission recommended the partition of Palestine between the Jews and the Arabs. This was rejected by the Palestinians. When the potato got too hot, the problem was relinquished to the United Nations. The UN Special Committee also advocated the partition of Palestine. In 1948, the British withdrew from Palestine and Israel declared her independence. Immediately, Arab hostilities broke out against the Jews. Since then, four major wars have been fought between the Arabs and the Jews.

### WHO IS RIGHT?

The conflict involves two groups of people of two races laying claim to the same territory for reasons closely tied to their religion. One people, through their steady immigration, wealth and persuasion of the super-powers, have doggedly established her own state in order to affirm their own sense of identity as a race and a nation. Another people, who were already living in the land and accommodated the immigrants when they came, have to contend to be treated as a minority with second-class citizenship.

The Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) has, as its Manifesto, the total annihilation of the Jewish state by force. Palestinians were trained as terrorists to carry out acts of violence that included the murder of civilians, airplane hijacking and the disruption of the Olympic games. Many Palestinians still harbour an 'all-or-nothing' attitude and the PLO has often threatened to declare themselves an independent Palestinian state.

**The Christian perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: from page 11**

On the other hand, the Israeli Government has razed hundreds of Palestinian villages to the ground, treated them with hostility and cruelty, and economically discriminated against them. The Jews are equally guilty of their acts of terrorism. The former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir went to the extent of saying that "there is no such thing as a Palestinian people". The tragedy is that the Jews, in affirming their own aspirations to be a people and a nation, have denied the same rights to the Palestinians.

Some Christians tend to see the Palestinians as God's enemies to be routed from Israel in the same way God commanded the Israelis to slay the Canaanites in the Old Testament times. They think that after all, the Arabs have formed an ungodly alliance with communist Russia to exterminate God's chosen people. They believe that if God is redeeming the land for the Jews in fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, Israel must defend its land at whatever cost to human justice. Therefore, they are against any peace effort that involves the partition of land for the Palestinians.

The problem with such a view is that these Christians have decided what should happen according to their interpretation of God's plans. They are indeed twisting the arm of God to act in certain ways to fulfil His plans. They will not see the problem in terms other than their own theological mindset. This in turn is a major stumbling block in presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Jews, the Muslims and the unbelievers of the world at large. This is because we will not be able to reconcile a righteous God of love with one who is ruthless and careless of human justice so long as His plans are fulfilled!

**OUR WITNESS FOR CHRIST**

As the Jews and Palestinians are not Christians, we can only point them to Christian principles that are acceptable to them in their own religion. In particular, they must first stop their violence and hostilities as Jesus exhorted us to love our enemies. We must voice our rejection of anti-Semitism, Arab-bashing and all forms of racial discrimination as Jesus commanded us not to judge others. We must insist on social and individual justice and respect for both parties as all are made in the image of God and all are to be brought into the saving knowledge of Christ. There must be care and concern for the underprivileged, suffering and needy, whether Palestinian or Jew, as Jesus came to bring the Good News to the poor.

Some Christians also harbour a fatalistic view that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will never be resolved until Jesus returns. While this is essentially true for everlasting peace, Ezekiel 38 and 39 speak of a people living in peace before being attacked from the north. On the other hand, the conflict can well escalate into World War 3 prior to the signing of the seven-year treaty with the antichrist. Whatever is our eschatological perspective, let us remember that Bible prophecies of the end-times are not given to satisfy our curiosity of the future but to tell us how we should live our present Christian lives as we see events happening in line with the prophecies.

Jesus is coming back soon but for the over-comers only. The important issue is whether we are ready for the return of Christ. Are we living our lives right with God? Are we putting God first and pursuing His purposes or are we still pursuing the things of the world and building our own kingdoms on earth?

While there is still time, have we been faithful in reaching out to our loved ones, neighbours and the unreached peoples "from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth?"

Whatever the case, there is something we can do that is more important than what President Clinton and the other world leaders are capable of. God has one clear instruction for us in this matter: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122:6). Perhaps there is no moment in our lifetime more critical than now to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Pray for an end to the violence and hostilities in Jerusalem and Israel as a whole. Pray for God's supernatural intervention for peace, so that the Israelis and the Palestinians will take into account each other's hope and needs, showing love and mercy to one another. Pray that they will repent of their sins and live with the fear of God through Jesus Christ. As we do this, God promised that He will bless us in return (Gen. 12:2,3).

In God's divine plan, Jerusalem is His appointed centre from which peace and truth will go forth to all the earth and to which worship and offerings from all nations will return. As such, Jerusalem is the focus of the spiritual forces of darkness. Hence, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will defy all attempts to find a solution by political means. Only the power of prayer can accomplish this. The hope of the world lies in the ultimate fulfilment of peace in Jerusalem. Therefore, to pray for the peace of Jerusalem is to pray that the Prince of Peace will soon establish His kingdom upon this earth with Jerusalem as His capital city (Isa. 62 and Zech. 2). Pray that we ourselves are ready when Jesus returns (1 John 3:2,3). ■

*(This article is a contribution of the NECF Malaysia Research Commission.)*



*The Council and Staff of NECF Malaysia  
wish all readers a blessed Christmas  
and a joyous New Year.  
May our Lord's peace, hope and love  
continue to rest on you.*

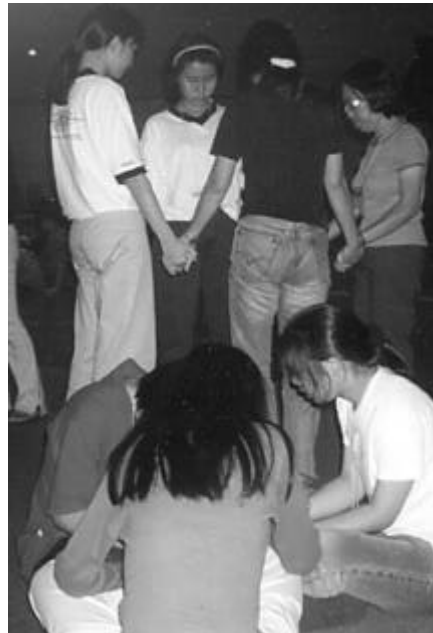
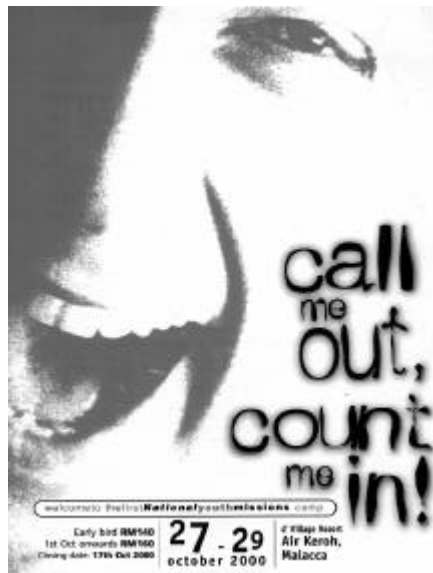
# YOUTHS STUNG BY MISSION S BUG

THEY came in droves, from far and near. They stomped, clapped, cheered, marched around the hall and had a great time. They were the 457 participants of the very first National Youth Missions Camp organised by NECF Malaysia held in end-November.

The camp was evident that young people in Malaysia today are answering the call to reach their own generation, whether they be 12-year-olds curious about missions, 18-year-olds contemplating going into the missions field or 25-year-old youth workers leading their youth group into the missions frontier.

Each session started with dynamic and energetic worship sessions led by talented and spirited youth worship teams—the Asian Youth Ambassadors (AYA) and the Agape singers from PJ Evangelical Free Church (PJEFC). The worship sessions were certainly among the camp's highlights.

The campers, from 123 churches, some coming from as far as Kuching, were



*Some sat, others stood. Whichever way, God heard.*

treated to a gala of mission-oriented programmes. Young people, who had been on medium-term mission trips, shared their testimonies and the bi-lingual Mandarin and English workshops and messages certainly exposed, challenged and encouraged the campers.

Lessons were gleaned from the lives of great, godly men—from Joseph and Jacob to William Carey and Eric Liddel. A bigger treat was to hear from the lips of three highly anointed men on what God is doing all around the world. Dr James Hudson Taylor, great-grandson of the legendary Hudson Taylor, is a living testament of how God's faithfulness lasts through so many generations. From a young boy in China, once held in a Japanese concentration camp, he has continued his family's legacy of missionary work in Asia and beyond. Many campers unfamiliar with James Taylor's background were thoroughly astounded when he spoke impeccable Mandarin.

Pastor Chris Long was a great hit with the youths. Yet, through his humour and hilarious antics, his message on the vital role of young people in missions came through clearly.

Most of the campers responded to the various challenges thrown by the speakers by going forward for prayer. Missionary Ed Pousson gave the closing challenge by tracing how major missionary and evangelism movements around the world today began by just one or two people who decided they wanted to make a difference.

True, the camp was fun-filled and totally cool, but the most exciting part of the camp is that this is just the beginning. From here, we will see the birth of a new



*Dr James Hudson Taylor addressing his workshop participants in flawless Mandarin.*



*Pledging their hearts to missions...during the altar call.*



## Mission leaders urge end to 'fighting words'

Christians should drop their fighting spiritual talk because it's alienating the very people they are trying to reach with the love of God, says a group of missionary leaders and theologians. They want churches and missionary groups to come up with a new dictionary for their ministries, replacing words such as 'target,' 'army' and 'crusade' with the likes of 'blessing' and 'healing.'

Military-style language may have biblical roots, but it has been misused and is too often misunderstood, concluded more than 30 delegates to a think-tank at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, in June. New technology such as the World Wide Web has made it even more important for Christians to be careful.

In a joint statement from their Consultation on Mission Language and Metaphors, the participants said they regretted that "certain words and images long employed to call the church to missions have increasingly caused offence to the very people with whom we are seeking to share the Good News."

Participants came up with a blacklist of words they said were unhelpful. Some were biblical, some were 'motivational tools from the secular arena that we use to inspire involvement and action.' Many are military in nature: 'target,' 'conquer,' 'army,' 'crusade,' 'mobilise,' 'beachhead,' 'enemy' and 'battle.' "Warfare metaphors had been misused and were 'increasingly counterproductive...sometimes endangering the lives of local believers...We advocate an immediate end to the inappropriate use of such words," they wrote.

The statement asked: "Can we find more reconciling, redemptive words and images in Scripture and elsewhere that will aid us in expressing love, respect and effective witness for Christ, rather than creating an atmosphere of adversarial confrontation?" The statement said that the Bible contains many possible alternatives—such as 'blessing,' 'inviting,' 'sowing and reaping,' 'fishing,' 'restoring family relationships,' 'becoming reconcilers,' 'peacemakers' and

## US Report on International Religious Freedom

A significant percentage of the world population does not have the right to religious freedom, and Iraq and Afghanistan are among the worst offenders, according to a recent State Department report on religious freedom worldwide. "Much of the world's population lives in countries in which the right to religious freedom is restricted or prohibited," the report said.

The situation exists even though 144 countries belong to an international covenant that acknowledges the right of all citizens to religious freedom, according to the study. In 1998, Congress required the State Department to issue an annual report on the state of religious freedom worldwide. The 2000 report covers the period from July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2000 and includes reports on 194 countries and territories.

The report says that in Iraq, the government has for decades conducted a 'brutal campaign of murder, summary execution and protracted arbitrary detention against religious leaders and adherents of the majority Shiite population.' Security forces murdered senior Shiite clerics, desecrated mosques and holy sites, forbade Shiites from practicing their religion.

In Afghanistan, the government has engaged in persecution and killing, particularly against the Shiite minority. The Taliban enforced its strict interpretation of Islamic Shari'a law, and according to reports, public executions, floggings, and amputations took place weekly against those who violated the law.

In China, the government's respect for religious freedom in China deteriorated as the persecution of several religious minorities increased. While membership in many faiths grew rapidly and government supervision of religious activity was minimal in some regions, government officials in other regions imposed tight regulations, closed houses of worship, and actively persecuted members of some unregistered religious groups.

In Myanmar, the government continues to repress systematically members of both minority faiths and the majority Buddhist population. Buddhist monks who promoted human and political rights have been arrested, and some Buddhist monasteries destroyed.

The report also found varying degrees of repression in communist countries such as Cuba, North Korea and Vietnam. Among countries friendly to the United States, the report said religious discrimination exists in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel. The study concluded there were 'significant improvements' in Azerbaijan and Laos. In Azerbaijan, the report traced the changed situation to a presidential pledge last November to improve the status religious minorities.

In Laos, the government released in mid-June a large number of Christians who had been imprisoned because of their faith, the report said. It added that there were noteworthy improvements in 31 other countries.—*World Evangelical Fellowship's Religious Liberty E-mail Conference.* ■

'ambassadors.'

Advances in global electronic communication have only added to the need for change, agreed the consultation participants. For "the technology that opens the world to us also opens us—and our words—to the world. We can no longer maintain a dichotomy between what we say to the 'home folks' and what we say to the world."

Calling for "ongoing dialogue" about these communications issues, the consultation affirmed that there is an ongoing spiritual battle, that the gospel is an offence and stumbling block to those who

reject it, and that missionary efforts would be opposed by some regardless of the language used.

But Christians need to do all they can to avoid unnecessary conflict, participants said. "We encourage Christian mission agencies and local churches to re-examine Scripture and re-state their global task in terms consistent with the teaching and mission of Christ," who is "the great master of redemptive metaphors—see His parables."—*Pulse* ■



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### HOW TO BEAT THE BLUES

DEPRESSION is so prevalent in our society that it has been called the 'common cold' of psychological disorders. Christians are not immune from it and indeed, many suffer long periods of the 'blues' without seeking help.



Depression could increase the risks of developing heart disease later in life, according to a recent report in *The Star* which quoted a newly-published American research. The research found that people who report feeling the most serious symptoms of depression are 40% more likely to suffer from cardiovascular disease than those who rarely experience it.

In *Finding Hope Again*, the authors reject the notion of shame and defeat that some suffering Christians feel over their plight and stress the urgency of getting help. The book discusses the physical and emotional consequences of depression and how to resolve the problem.

In January 2001, Dr Hal Baumchen, co-author of the book, will be in Kuala Lumpur to conduct a seminar on overcoming depression. Professional and lay counsellors and those involved in counselling troubled people will benefit greatly from the seminar. Baumchen is a licensed clinical psychologist with 14 years of counselling experience.

The two-day seminar will be held at

Renewal Lutheran Church, Petaling Jaya, from 5 January (Friday). The registration fee of RM80 includes the book, *Finding Hope Again*, a workbook, lunch and tea. The seminar is organised by NECF Malaysia.

For more information, contact 03-7727 8227 (tel.) or [enquiries@pc.jaring.my](mailto:enquiries@pc.jaring.my) (e-mail).

### 'RAYAKAN YESUS' CONFERENCE FOR BM CHURCHES

NECF Malaysia BM Commission will hold a national conference from March 4 to 6, 2001 to encourage and equip the BM churches to face the challenges and opportunities of the new millennium. The theme of the conference, which is organised in partnership with BM churches, is 'Harvest in the New Millennium.'

Among the speakers are Dr Abraham Alex Tanuseputra, the Senior Pastor of Surabaya Bethel Church which has planted about 1,000 churches in Surabaya with a combined congregation of 85,000 people. He will be sharing on the opportunities for evangelism in today's troubled times.

The other speaker is Archdeacon Fred David who has served among the interior people of Sabah for 20 years and helped to plant more than 80 churches there. He will share on the importance of the BM ministry in the new millennium. SIB Semenanjung Senior Pastor Richard Samporoh will also speak at the conference on working together in harvesting. The conference is open to all interested in the BM work in Malaysia.

For more information, contact Alfred Tais at NECF Malaysia at 03-7727 8227 (tel.); 010-268 3119 (mobile phone); [artm@pc.jaring.my](mailto:artm@pc.jaring.my) (e-mail).

### AMPANG CHURCHES TO HOLD CHRISTMAS PARADE

CALLING all Christians living in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur. Join hands (or rather, legs) to march as a family at the Ampang Christmas Parade cum Prayer March on December 17 (Sunday) organised by the Ampang Pastors' Fellowship.

It will be a fun-filled festive event

with colourful flags and banners, elegant tambourine dancers, a marching band, clowns, a float parading the nativity scene, singers and musicians. To add vrroommm to the parade, 20 motorcyclists with their pillion riders carrying celebration flags will escort the marchers. Children will also join in the fun as they march proudly waving attractive balloons.

The organisers are hoping to attract 500 Christians to participate. They will assemble at Dewan Ahmad Razali at 7.00p.m and march out in groups of 50 people wearing 'Cintai Ampang' and 'Let There Be Love, Joy, Peace' T-shirts of similar colours. (The T-shirts are available for sale from the participating Ampang churches.) The participants will march back to the hall for a time of thanksgiving and prayer.

To date, there are six participating churches and the organisers are hoping to recruit more churches. The six churches are The Hope of Glory Centre, Revival Centre, Community of Praise, Friends of the Fellowship, Ampang Chinese Methodist Church and Metro Tabernacle Tamil Church.

To find out more, contact the participating churches.

### WORSHIP RALLY FOR YOUTHS

GOOD godly music is beckoning our young people to gather at the combined churches Worship Explosion rally at Juara Stadium, Bukit Kiara on December 14 to 16 (Thursday to Saturday). Though organised specially for youths, it's open to all, young and old.

*Thirsty Child*, a band from US, will lead the worship starting nightly at 7.00pm. The band comprises full-time missionaries who have travelled and ministered all over the world on Mercy Ships run by YWAM. Admission to the rally is free.

During the day-time of the same dates, there will be a worship conference from 10.00am to 5.00pm daily at the same place. The conference, *Dying to Live*, is one of a series of conference aimed at reviving youths through worship. The ultimate goal is to reach out to the lost. Registration fee for the conference is RM10 per day or RM25 for three days.

For more information, call Christian Life Center at tel. 7956 8860. See also the website [lazarusnow.com/rgeneration](http://lazarusnow.com/rgeneration)

# For Your Intercession



## TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan is a desert—physically and spiritually. Desert covers 80% of this Central Asia republic, while fewer than 500 of the 4.3 million people are Christians. The Turkmen survive by digging wells and underground tunnels for water, but few have discovered where to look for the water that will bring them eternal life. Islam is the dominant religion. Since independence in 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union more and more mosques have sprung up. Yet for most Turkmen Islam is as much a matter of national identity as belief. Few know anything about their religion—or any religion.

Christians are a tiny, severely persecuted minority in Turkmenistan. The government opposes the Gospel at every step and turn. A church building was bulldozed a few months ago while in March, a Christian leader and his family were deported. Christian workers' visas have been withdrawn. Yet new believers are showing boldness, courage and maturity beyond their years. Satellite television and foreign businesses and influences are helping to change Turkmenistan culture. Growing materialism is turning many away from traditional religion. Yet most Turkmen are open to talk about spiritual things. Pray for Christians to make the most of every opportunity to share about their faith, for training of church leaders and adequate teaching materials. ■

## ISRAEL

The Church in Israel is growing. There are around 4,000 Christians in the land today—more than double the number in the 1980s. They represent over 80 congregations and house fellowships. There is increasing cooperation in spreading the Good News. Pastors in Jerusalem are getting together for prayer and worship. Similar get-togethers are happening in Galilee and other parts of Israel. Messianic Jewish ministers are seeking to work more with Arab Christians. Pray for the barriers to really come down. One of the biggest needs of the Messianic Christian community in Israel is for more trained leaders. Many

men are pastors because there is no one else to do the work. Pray for more anointed Christian leaders in Israel. ■

## GHANA

Akosombo in Ghana has the world's largest man-made lake. The town was founded when a dam on the Volta river created Volta lake, which in turn led to the building of the hydroelectric power station to tap the potential of the river for Ghana's industrial and social development. Fittingly, a mission called Jesus: Light of Akosombo, an African Enterprise initiative, proved a powerful event, with over 3,000 first-time decisions for Christ. Despite Muslim organisations pouring money into Ghana and attracting poor Christians to embrace Islam, reports indicate that the Bible has become the fastest selling book there. Pray for the ongoing work of the Gospel and for Christians to read and be strengthened by God's Word. ■

## COSTA RICA

Life can be brutally short for Costa Rica's street children—as missionary Ronald Villalobos. The dozen girls aged between 12 and 14 he counselled and led a Bible study with last year are now dead. Ronald's organisation, Christ for the City International (CCFI) has built a rehabilitation centre near the city of San Jose where 100 street girls can undergo treatment for 15 months. The National Child Trust financially supports non-governmental organisations to help the country's street children to Christianity providing they offer them rehabilitation. One Christian worker described his work as seeking to get the streets out of the kids rather than just getting them off the streets. Pray for the CCFI ministry and its centre called Renacer, meaning 'to be reborn' in Spanish. Pray also for the street children to be transformed by Christ. ■

## COPENHAGEN

In Pusher Street, Copenhagen shopkeepers openly display their 'goods'—marijuana, hashish and much more. The street lies in an area called Christiana, a hippy haven. But God is at work there. Up to 750,000 people visit Pusher Street, Copenhagen

yearly, some to buy drugs from the market, others just to breathe the air filled with marijuana fumes. Shining in this dark place is a recently planted church led by John Andersen—nicknamed 'Jesus' by his neighbours. Kjeil Sjoberg, a Swedish intercessor now with the Lord, once said that Christiana district was a satanic stronghold binding the whole of Scandinavia. It has a Buddhist temple, a spiritualist energy workshop, an occult school, a New Age pyramid and numerous esoteric events take place there. Recently, however, Ole, one of Christiana's key occult leaders, accepted Christ. Pray for others like him to be converted and for more. Andersen believes that if more occult leaders are set free, the spiritual tide will be turned there and perhaps, in the whole of Denmark where so many people have embraced Eastern religions, New Age and reincarnation. Pray for more occult leaders to be converted and for people to turn to the real Jesus. ■

## SUDAN

Andre is covered in scars. But he is glad to be alive. The 99 other members of his church in Sudan were burned to death when soldiers burst in. Burning Christians is a common government tactic to force Christians to give up their faith. Despite the countless atrocities the government has carried out against Christians, nothing can stop the Church from growing. A Bible warehouse there is emptied four times a year as the spiritual hunger continues unabated. Pray for the suffering Church in Sudan. ■

## INDONESIA

Christians in Indonesia have been suffering escalating hostility for years. During the first 45 years of Indonesia's independence up to 1990 around 50 churches were wrecked. In the following eight years 200 were burned down. During 1999, the ethnic tension erupted into a war on Christians, with many being killed in the Moluccas. Amidst the violence, Christian leaders asked Open Doors to hold nationwide seminars designed to strengthen them. Many denominations came together for the first time through attending the seminars. Pray for the Lord to work mightily through His newly united Church. ■