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Baptist News

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Editorial Column 

Living Together in the Household Of God.

The theme for CBCNEI Annual General Meeting this year is , “Living Together in the Household of God..Eph 2:19” . It has a core message of sharing the beautiful vision of “oneness “in God’s household.

What a vision: all of us in our irreducible difference, together in one household by the grace of God and the power of the crucified risen one. The Household of God not only means the church, but also the whole world and universe that were created by God.

When we say “living together” we need to seek the following questions: where? With whom? Why? How? In seeking the many dimensions in our understanding of living together, we must think about these; we live together for unity, to respond to causes and issues together. And we live together in love. While most of us tends to focus only on love among the fellowship of believers, in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12), Jesus calls us to break free and step out from our deceptive comfort zones, to empathise with those who are in vulnerable situations and to help them. He clearly wants us to respond to realities in a love and compassion as he exemplified, to be able to yearn for justice and peace and to have the courage to respond with answers and voice out for those

voiceless, forsaking our own interests and life. We must not limit being followers of Christ to our denominational, ethnic, class, regional or national silos. We have to listen to each other's narratives, challenges and successes

Sometimes we need to cross the boundaries and break down barriers set by ethnic and religious differences in order to be truly human. Being truly human means reaching out in compassion and love, sharing life in its fullness with someone who has been deprived, and empowering the other to live life abundantly in overcoming and transforming the walls of separation, division, and hostility that prevent us from being in solidarity with one another. Living together is our only hope to survive together in this world. So let us try to transform our perspective and lifestyle with regards to the wider circle of the household of God.

Lastly, on behalf of the editorial team I would also like to extend our thankfulness for subscribing Baptist News. The News flash is the column where we collect the events and activities of the council and keeps you updated. Last year has been a blessed year, we thank the Lord for all what He has made us achieve to strengthen His Church, household of faith. We request you to keep praying for upcoming 66th Annual General Meeting to be held at Imphal from 29 April to 2nd May and also for the many events and program lined up for this year.



Rev Dr Solomon Rongpi
General Secretary, CBCNEI



Living Together in the Household of God

(Becoming a Household of Love, Faith and Hope)

Rev Dr Solomon Rongpi, General Secretary ,CBCNEI

In this time of so much conflict, violence and suffering, our CBCNEI Annual General Meeting theme beautifully captures the vision of many people all over the world. The vision of “Living Together in the Household of God” is not only the vision of the CBCNEI in the NEI. It is the vision of all who believe that everyone’s survival depends on our ability to live together as members of “one global family” - or to use a more biblical language, “the household of God”.

The first part of the theme is “living together”. What does living together mean?

First, living together is not mere co-existence. In cities, people can co-exist by living close together in an apartment blocks without even knowing one another. Although we lived in one apartment block in a small neighborhood, many do not know any particular tribe and the tribe in the neighborhood either did not know English or simply had no time to be friend. The apartment block kept people physically close but they do not take time to know each other. They simply co-existed but they were not even acquainted with each other. Co-existence may sound peaceful but it is not meaningful enough. Living in mere co-existence is therefore not a good enough example.

Second, living together is the opposite of living against others. In the biblical story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), this way of living was exemplified by those who attacked and

robbed the man who was travelling to Jericho. In our own context are many illustrations of living against others. There are many people who are robbed of their human dignity and their right to fullness of life. Gender injustice that is prevalent in our patriarchal societies, the rich and ruling class oppressing the poor and powerless, or certain races or religious communities discriminating against others, or when human beings abuse nature for profit or out of ignorance – these are some examples of living against others.

Third, living together definitely does not mean living away from people. In the Good Samaritan story the priest and Levite exemplified this attitude very clearly. Both saw the helpless man, who was beaten and left for dead. Yet, both walked away on the other side. Today, walking on the other side is a common stance especially in the face of risky engagements such as working for peace with justice. There are many reasons why people would rather walk on the other side - it is much safer for one's sake; it may make one unpopular or put one's religion, ethnic or social status at stake. In the case of the priest and Levite of the Good Samaritan story, their religious traditions, teachings and rituals kept them from helping someone in need. Jesus strongly criticized such a self-serving religiosity that seeks to keep oneself pure and clean, to the neglect of our social responsibility. If our theology keeps us away from people in need and ensures only our own security and comfort, we must be drifting from the way of Christ Jesus who came that others may have life in its fullness. Living away from people is dehumanizing, both for the one in need of help and the one in a position to help.

Finally, living together means it is being in solidarity with the people in their struggles for life regardless of their color, race, creed, religion or ideology. This was well exemplified by the Samaritan, the despised other who ends up crossing the boundaries and breaking down barriers set by ethnic and religious differences in order to be truly human. Being human means

reaching out in compassion and love, sharing life in its fullness with someone who has been deprived, and empowering the other to live life abundantly. Thus, living together involves an active engagement that questions, overcomes and transforms the walls of separation, division, and hostility that prevent us from being in solidarity with one another. Living together is our only hope to survive together in this world.

The second part of our theme provides a clue as to how we ought to live together “in God’s household” means being part of God’s household.” But what does it mean to live together in “God’s household”? How should we understand God’s household?

If we scan the Bible Concordance, we will find that the Bible has at least 119 references to *oikia* for “household” and “households”. In the Old Testament the word ranges in meaning from house or dwelling, to family (and all who live in the house, including slaves and servants), to clan or tribe (meaning a group of households), to an entire nation. In the New Testament, *oikia* refers to “father’s house”, the Jewish temple, church community which began in households/families. As a Jew, Jesus referred to the Jewish temple as his “Father’s house” (John 2:16) during his radical act of cleansing it. As he was facing his imminent death, he used the “Father’s house” in reference to heaven as abode of God and God’s children (John 14:2). ‘God’s household’ is a familial and familiar metaphor for the reign of God in our personal and communal lives as people in relation to the whole of creation. In this age of empire building, the metaphor of the kingdom of God may help to convey an alternative vision to the kingdoms of the world; but God’s household conveys something that touches the very core of our lives - starting at home, into the church, the country and the world/universe. There are indeed several senses in which *oikia* or “household” is used in the Bible and they do not always provide the best examples of what it means to be a good household, much less of a household of God. I

would want us to focus and ponder on three senses of the word: as household of love (the family), as household of faith (the church), and as household of hope (the world or universe, which includes the country).

Conclusion:

We live in concentric circles: the household of love (symbolized by the family) and the household of faith (symbolized by the church). We also have to remember that there are other concentric circles around us, and together, we are all parts of the wider circle of the household of hope (the world/universe), which is the household of God. Our theme, “Living Together in the Household of God,” humbly assumes that even though the household of God is a given, by virtue of the fact that God created all of us and everything in creation, we are far from living together as members of the one household of God. This may be due to a limited understanding of the household of God or due to our captivity to a narrow theology that has blinded us to the depth and breadth of God’s love. We can truly participate in realizing this vision of “Living Together in the Household of God” if we try to set our two concentric circles right - our household of love and household of faith - and transform our perspective and lifestyle with regards to the wider circle of the household of God. What are some practical implications of this for our life and mission as CBCNEI in the years to come?

(Endnotes)

¹ Hope S. Antone, “*Living Together in the Household of God*” in CTC Bulletin, Vol. XXII, No. 2. August 2016.



Living Together in the Household of God: A Call for Oneness



Mrs Aienla Kichu, Associate Pastor Women, Aliba Baptist Church, Mokokchung.

In a world of violence, disunity, hatred, discrimination and exploitation, the theme 'Living Together in the Household of God' is the perfect call. In fact, to live together, the oneness of everything and everyone in God's household speaks the very heart of God. Was not this God's master plan when He created the universe and all the things in it? The Garden of Eden was fully alive and complete when God, Adam and Eve and all His creations lived **together**: they talked, laughed, played, slept, dined together, loved and cared for one another. The air of peace, harmony, unity, solidarity and tranquility filled the household of Eden.

But when the Serpent entered the picture and human fall in its trap, the household of Eden was broken. Deception, fear, sadness, lies, punishment, and separation gripped in. But God's love for His household could not let Him give up. To rebuild His household together, people and nations are being called out generations after generations. The coming of Jesus Christ to this world is another proof of God's compassionate heart that deeply longs for his creation to come together as one.

The book of Ephesians Chapter 2:11-22 calls for “**oneness in Christ**”. We, *who once were outcast and without hope have been brought under God’s household through the blood of Jesus Christ (vv. 12, 13). We are now no longer foreigners and aliens but we belonged to the family of God (v. 19)*. But are we really living together in the household of God?

Can we say that there are no dividing walls among us? If Christ has broken the barrier between God and us, then why do we keep building barriers among ourselves? Why do the rich and the powerful have to always push down the poor and the powerless? Why does the so-called gender bias still exist?

I remember looking at the picture of a large sign-board which stands near a roadside on the way to our school some 20 years back. There was this picture of a boy and a girl sharing an apple and below the picture said, “GIRLS AND BOYS ALL THE SAME.” O, how I wish that is true! It is a sad thing that the Church which stands for oneness could not even give same room to both men and women. But this is only one part of many problems. What about the disunity even among the Baptist churches in North east India? (Forget about the disunity with other denominations), we are so filled with ‘my church is better than your church’ attitudes, unhealthy competitions, jealousy, favoritism etc. How about our attitudes and treatments towards people living with HIV/AIDS? People with Differently Able? Where are our voices amidst all the injustices, corruptions and discriminations taking place? And how good and active are we, as God’s chosen stewards, taking care of God’s wonderful creations that is falling apart? Cannot we see how walls after walls keep growing among us? Is this how God pictured when He first created the world? A big NO!

Today God’s dream of every creation living together in His

household in perfect harmony is at stake. We know the world is suffering; there are cries for acceptance, of rejection, poverty and thirst for justice everywhere. The whole of God's creation is calling for help. So let us stop making walls among ourselves, let us stop being self-centered. Let us know that God has done His part, Jesus has done His part. And now, it is our turn. As God's people we must unite and work hard to bring together all the members of the world under His household, and to live in peace and harmony with one another. And let Love dwell in this household as we live together.



Mr Atungo Shitri, Secretary, Justice & Peace Ministry, CBCNEI and Ms Chubanaro Jamir were united together in a Holy Matrimony on
November 19, 2015.

The staff of CBCNEI wishes them happiness and blessings as they start their new life together.



National Consultation on Tolerance and Intolerance: Towards a Theological Musing

as reported by Mr D. Hriini Zho, Assistant to Secretary, Justice & Peace

The national consultation on “Tolerance and Intolerance: Towards a Theological Musing about Indian Society today” was organized by the ISET and ECC from 9 to 11 Feb, 2016.

Rev Dr Reji Samuel, Dean of the ISET addressed the gathering with a warm note of welcome, and a brief introduction to ECC was given by Rev. Sudhakar Joshua, Deputy Director , ECC. The programme was inaugurated by Very Rev Dr Cherian Thomas Director , ECC. Dr. Bennet Benjamin brought greetings.

Resource persons were Rev. E. Deenadayalan, Dr. Bennet Benjamin, Dr. James Chellapa, Rev. Dr. Allan Palanna, Ms. Asha Ramesh, Rev. Christy Gnanadhas , and Very Rev. Dr. Cherian Thomas, 44 delegates from states of Haryana, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Punjab, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Nagaland, Mizoram, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka , representing various churches, Institutions and NGOs attended the programme.

The consultation addressed the following topics: Issues of Fascism & Intolerance and the Hope for the Nation , Secularism - a Way of life , Good Governance and Chris-

tian response ,debate on the Myth of Religious Conversion and *Ghar Wapasi*, Intolerance Issues a Biblical / Theological Critique, Gender Intolerance: Issues of Gender, Transgender and Homophobia, Caste and Intolerance: Perspective of Dalits/ Tribals, Towards a Theology of Wholeness : a Kingdom of God Perspective.

The second day morning devotion was led by Rev. Dr. John Samuel, followed by 4 sessions on the various faces of tolerance and intolerance in Indian society. The day wrapped up with a joyful fun-filled cultural evening with all the delegates bringing in different items both cultural and entertaining ones. The third day bloomed with meaningful eco-friendly devotion, with all the delegates planting a sapling marking our love for nature.

With this, the gathering departs with the statement:

India being a land of religious diversity where the golden rule of all religions is “to treat (love) others as yourself”, preserving the pluralistic nature of Indian society is vital. Authoritarianism is growing to be a threat to secularism. Hence, social reality should not be looked from the perspective of faith but in a more secular view. Good governance maybe brought by attending to people’s needs at all levels.

Summing up all these insights, we come to an understanding that tolerance in an ideal manner would be hospitable faith and we promise to ourselves to practice harmony in our life, personal and social, through self reflection which can suggest a way forward.

We all agreed on the need for restoration of the values of diversity, pluralism, and peaceful coexistence in our land of India.

The Constitution of India guarantees ***‘Equality, non-discrimination, freedom of conscience, thought and***

expression'. These values need to be protected, preserved and upheld in a time where these values are being threatened by creating barriers to the enjoyments of these rights to vulnerable sections including Dalits, Muslims, women, indigenous population, sexual minorities and other vulnerable groups. In addition to human lives the ecosystem, land, water, air, and all creation is also suffering the ill effects of exploitation and injustice.

We affirm that one faith enjoins as to be inclusive accepting of diversity and plurality nurturing life and being in solidarity with the vulnerable. The gospel includes good news to the poor, the excluded, the captive, the alien, the migrant and the suffering creation. We commit to working jointly to counter intolerance and usher in religious communal caste gender ethnic racial and ecological justice.



The Household of God



Mr T Rhonbemo Lotha, Faculty at Eastern Bible College, Dimapur

The word “together” or “togetherness” is a beautiful term that reflects the state of being “in unity” or “in proper relationship,” which is also opposite to “division” or “lack of unity.” It is a priceless quality for every human relationship, and perhaps, the backbone for every family, society and nation for its meaningful existence. The God of the Christian bible is the creator and the source of this quality: ever since the time every relationship were torn apart due to human’s disobedience, it had been His plan and will to restore fallen humanity into relationship, whereby, human live together as His children. This idea is seen in most of the Pauline writings, precisely the epistle to the Ephesians. The phrase “living together in the household of God” echoes the analogy employed by the writer of the epistle to the Ephesians (2: 19) to describe the eternal purpose of God in Christ for His Church.

Concept of Unity in Epistle to the Ephesians

The epistle to the Ephesians is seemingly the frontline to

the Pauline theme “oneness” or “unity.” Paul’s gospel of “oneness” usually appears with the analogy of Household codes as it perfectly reflects the most intimate social relationship that brings unity in reality. This household analogy almost always display and urge the idea of submissiveness either in relation to marriage/family (Eph 5:25-33) or of service (Eph 6:5-8) as the antidote to disunity and distance. It is the presentation of the household as a harmonious unity with each one, by submission, fulfilling his/her role within the whole as an expression of common bond to Christ which transcends all differences.

In another words, it is executing one’s ethical duties in relation to each other within that household. This is in aligned with the knowledge of the link between the household code and ethics adopted from the Hellenistic-Jewish world, in which the earliest Christian congregations who were committed to an ecstatic form of religion and belief in the imminent end, had less concern for such practical ethical instruction. However, with the delay of the Parousia and the increase of the practical problems, the already existed pagan originated concept was implemented, Christianized by adding “in Christ” as its basis. Ethically, the concept of unity in Ephesians implicitly suggests the appropriate application of each individual’s ethical duties within the household as a result of harmony in and through Christ.

Nevertheless, Acts’ narrative on Paul’s mission at Ephesus (Acts 18:19-20:1) recounts the Pauline unity in Christ in the light of its diverse characters, groups and incidents. The Pauline unity that emerges in this diversity at Ephesus construes the author’s Christological orientation in making “oneness” plausible throughout the epistle. This truth is vividly evident in Chapter 2 where God’s limitless grace is extended to believers through redemptive blessings in

Christ. Meanwhile, Paul previews the former state of the Gentiles in the preceding verses as Christ less, stateless, outcast, hopeless and Godless, but now how they have obtained a high estate regardless of their previous low position. There is a heavy downplay of Jewish prerogatives over the gentiles' new estate in and through Christ which brings long-run socio-cultural barrier into ceased. As such, Christ has abolished the distinction between Jew and Gentile, and for which Paul here is seen fighting against the reemergence of such distinction creating disunity in any form - in terms of one's status in Christ.

Living Together in the Household of God (Ephesians 2: 19)

Although, there are apparently no specific problems and issues that have given rise to this Epistle, however, the flow of the theme "unity in Christ" throughout the writing in the context of multi socio-cultural settings entails the problem of division among the audience of the writer, noticeably on the basis of their worldly differences. Also, there was probability of threats and hindrances for peaceful co-existence among communities specifically, between Jews and Gentiles as a result of their differences. This is obvious because Chapter 2: 14, 15 & 17 introduce the vital theme of peace evidently addressing the threats that prevent them (Jews and Gentiles) for coming together as one. Thus, the context of the Epistle may be briefly identified by lack of unity resulting in hostility and prejudice.

In Eph. 2: 19, Paul emphasizes on the consequences and results of salvation rather than situational issues; bringing in the concept of oneness (as a result of salvation) by means of comparison- past v/s present state. Interestingly, the author brings the household analogy to elucidate this idea of oneness or unity while nominating a high Christology.

Besides, it is important to note that the background of Ephesus exposes a diverse cultural, racial division between the Jews and Gentiles (19: 17) creating barrier within the household of God. Thus, the crux of the subject centered in the constitution of God's household. In that, Paul's attempt is to present Christ as the center of unity where both Jews and Gentiles alike constitute the household of God. Therefore, the verse concerns the privileges of being a member in a new family expected to maintain harmonious living (possible only by submitting to one another) in the midst of diversity.

Keeping in view the barriers between communities as mentioned, the central idea of the Epistle is seen to be a call for unity, while Christ being the basis of coming together. The point here is, prior to the actions of Christ on the cross, the Jews and Gentiles were living against each other (opposite to living together in harmony), but now the cross serves as a way of peace and the means of unity in the fellowship of the Church, which is the household of God. In this, the Gentiles are no longer people from different tribe or country, and no longer homeless, but they belong as fellow-citizens and children together in God's own family. Thus, in and through Christ, the divisions were brought to unity; hostility and enmity were brought to peace; strangers and aliens were given the status of children; and both the Jew and the Gentile Christians are brought together as one family with equal status in the household of God. Hence, their co-existence is not without care and concern for one another; and not without love and affection; and not without the feeling of oneness, which is possible only in and through Christ.

Again, the household terminology that appears in the Pauline corpus sheds light on the relation which God's people have with one another and with their heavenly Father. In the

light of the Roman world-view of the time, the same terminology in Ephesians 2 seem to have also incorporated the privileges - refuge, protection, identity - for becoming a member God's household. This once again unearths the certainty of one's insecurity for the fear of the other in the existing context. Appropriating the situation, therefore, the household analogy here is also a means for affirming the truth - security does not lie in their struggles or efforts because it only multiply walls; but it is possible in God's household alone where the Jew and the Gentile Christians live together as one in Christ.

Implication

No one can deny the fact that we are living together in the same world, popularly known as globalized world or global village in modern term. Whether we like it or not, we have to live together in it with our diversities. We can choose to live together in peace and harmony while respecting our differences, or we can choose to live against each other on the basis of our differences. To such options, the present world seems to have opted for the latter which is evident in the existing realities - violence, conflicts, struggles, dominations, discriminations and so forth. Not an exaggeration, but the present world represents an age of building walls between individuals, groups, societies, communities and nations; and as a result, each group is living in fear of the others. Divisions on the basis of race, colour, sex, language and status are undeniably dominant. Consequently, today the value of living together is far gone, while the feeling of oneness sounds otherworldly.

Evidently, the present emerging divergence marked the paganish christless state of life which is inappropriate for the members of God's household as with Ephesians' community. Living together in one household is sensible only when each member of the household overlooked the

reality of socio-economic, political and cultural diversities for the sake of Christ, the one and only founding cornerstone of unity. In such a context, Paul's approach to the communities at Ephesus has significant implication for each and every member of God's household. In the face of the differences we have, we are supposed to live together in harmony because Christ has removed all the barriers and has brought us together into one fellowship. Thus, our living together cannot be either mere co-existence or against each other, but in oneness as members of the same household with humble submission to one another. The point is this: though there is a little ground of hope from human point of view, however, the socio-economic, political and cultural barriers that exist in the present church and society can be diminished within the confines of being made equal in Christ.

Notably, most of the problems of the day occur when each group tries to maintain their own separate identity and security in the world of diversity over against the household code of God. However, Paul's idea entails that our real identity and long-lasting protection lies in the household of God urging the spirit of submission (for communal benefit) rather than aggressive resistance (for personal benefit). The emphasis here is that on the cross, Christ has reconciled the broken relationship both vertically and horizontally, broke every barrier and has given us "New Humanity" in Him. Thus, our identity and security comes along with our submissiveness to one another in Christ; because we all are one in Him, sharing equality in the same family. Drawing lines of differences within one household simply depreciate the redemptive-harmonized work of Christ and handicaps the growth of the church. Instead, we should respect each other's difference and be united in Christ, for there is no human-made division in this household. Each member is

somehow obligated to, and responsible for the maintenance and up-growth of the household as a whole.

Conclusion

The study has highlighted that the crux of Eph 2: 19 is “oneness” or “unity in Christ” which flows throughout the epistle. The context declared that an individual coming together as one body in Christ is the subject matter for a believer to become a permanent citizen of God’s household. In fact, oneness or unity is expected- from the smallest to the biggest unit of society- in order to make our existence significant. Thus, Ephesians 2: 19 serves as an antidote for the life style of the multi-socio-cultural oriented contemporary world, where by, human live together in peace and harmony.



Mr D. Hriini Zho, Assistant to Secretary, Justice & Peace Ministry, CBCNEI and Ms Moterou Rachel were united together in a Holy Matrimony on December 22, 2015. The staff of CBCNEI wishes them happiness and blessings as they start their new life together.



Social Teachings of Baptist Churches

Rev Dr Woba James, Associate Professor in History of Christianity, Eastern Theological College

Today the Baptist churches (as any other churches), are confronted with so many social problems. Some of the social issues that people faced with today challenge us to reflect upon our Baptist church's stance and to clearly direct believers toward sound biblical and theological teachings upon the issues. This paper will therefore make an attempt to highlight some of the important social teachings of the Baptist Church in brief with a view to open up the possibility of critically reflecting upon our own church's teachings on the subject matter.

1. Family

Family is neither a recent 'phenomenon' nor limited to a particular place, time or species but a universal reality. Carle Zimmerman and Peter Berger, both sociologists, point out that the nuclear family is the heart of society.¹ The family not only spans the centuries, but it extends across cultures as well. Anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski, Robert Lowie, George Murdock, Peter Laslett, after years of research and painstaking observations of the daily habits of primitive people, they came to see that the family was a universal institution or in other words, families are the universal norm.² Thus, through-

out history the family is always recognized and always has its distinctive and important functions in the human society. It is also that the family is not only a universal pracworship together, play together and of all the family should interact socially in the instruction or learning process together.

We believe that God intended for a person's earthly happiness to be fulfilled through God-given relationships (Eph. 6): life is not about things, possessions, or money, but about relationships (Prov. 15:17) and that real joy comes through relationships rather than purpose. In fact, it is the relationships that give meaning to their service, ministries, and their zeal. Foremost among those relationships is the one we have with Jesus Christ. Baptists believe every person is created for a purpose that God has a plan and will for every individual.⁷ No one is less important than another, and no one can be thought of as insignificant or purposeless. Every single person is important to God and to each of us (1 Cor 12). Thus, for us family is God's gift.

2. Marriage

Marriage is an historical given institution. However, today some radical critics argue that marriage is just an artificial social construction, as is the nuclear family. They seek to undermine marriage by propagating that it is socially constructed by male rulers to dominate women and other groups to keep them in their place.⁸ Marriage reflected upon here is not on same sex-marriage, but the traditional male-female marriage.

Evolutionary biologists like C. Owen Lovejoy acknowledged that the paleo-anthropological evidence makes clear that male-female bonding in lasting pairs was the critical step in human evolution.⁹ Marriage always has been defined by the male/female relationship, and children have almost always been raised within that unit.¹⁰ The raising of

children has in most cultures taken place within that male/female relationship.¹¹ Not only is marriage and family defined by the male/female relationship, but by a life-long commitment as well.¹² According to Mead: “No matter how free divorce, how frequently marriages break up, in most societies there is the assumption of permanent mating, of idea that the marriage should last as long as both live. . . . No known society has ever invented a form of marriage strong enough to stick that did not contain the till death us do part’ assumption.”¹³ Therefore, marriage was the norm throughout human history with children almost always raised by their biological parents.¹⁴ Thus, according to Zinmeister, the historical record is quite clear on the existence and importance of the institution of marriage and it suggests that marriage is the oldest and probably most indispensable of all human institutions. Furthermore, anthropologist David Gilmore says, “all societies have marriage - there are none that do not.”¹⁵

Marriage is the sacred and lifelong union of a man and a woman giving themselves to each other in love and trust. Sexual, emotional, physical and spiritual fulfillments are important goals of a marriage relationship that place God at its centre. It signifies the mystery of the union between Christ and His bride, the Church. Marriage is a gift given by God, so that with delight and tenderness they may know each other in love, and through their physical union they may celebrate and strengthens their oneness of lives while glorifying God as a living testimony. Marriage is a covenant between couples and God and as such cannot be broken. It is meant to be forever, “until death us do part.”¹⁶ It is not to be entered into lightly or selfishly, but responsibly and in the love of God (Genesis 1:26-28).

Therefore, a true marriage is to be between a man and a woman (Gen 2:18-25). To that end, they hold marriage as

the most sacred and basic of societal units and therefore, healthy marriages are important. In addition, marriage is viewed as a reflection of our relationship with Jesus Christ (Eph 5:23-32).¹⁷ In its most profound reality, love is essentially a gift; and conjugal love, while leading the spouses to the reciprocal “knowledge” which makes them “one flesh,” does not end with the couple, because it makes them capable of the greatest possible gift, the gift by which they become co-creators with God for giving life to a new human person.¹⁸ Thus the couple, while giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother as designed by God Himself.

3. Abortion

On the issue of Abortion we can agree that it is one of the most delicate issues among the Baptists as well as in the church and society in general today. The Baptists believe that it was God who created life and life is under His control (Job 12: 10, Jeremiah 7: 6). God gave man/woman the institution of marriage and family to have children. So the issue is when does life begin? Life begins at conception (Jer1:5). Therefore, having an abortion is murder - the killing of a human life. The Bible is very clear in this, “You shall not Murder” (Exodus 20:13). Therefore, taking the life of the unborn is clearly murder and God vowed to punish those who...ripped open the women with child (Amos 1:13). God speaks very clearly in the Bible on the value of unborn children. God says that He personally made each one of us, and has a plan for each life: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart” (Jer 1:5). Even before one is born, God has chosen him/her to be His (Gal 1:15).

What does the Bible say about murder? In the Old Testament God said that anyone who deliberately takes a life must die. As such, we can believe that God says ‘NO’ to abortion (Ps 139: 13ff). The psalmist is talking about a not-completely-formed baby in its mother’s womb, “All my days were numbered before I was even born.” If so, abortion is an outright act of disobedience to God’s will and destroying of God’s plan and purpose. The unborn child was granted equal protection in the law. Life is a gift created by God, and is not to be taken away by abortion. God is “pro-choice,” but He points us to the only acceptable choice that we are to make - “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live” (Deut 30:19).

4. Homosexuality and Lesbianism

In the Old Testament, God tells us that it’s not right for man to have sex with man and woman with a woman (Gen 19: 1-8; Levi18: 22; Jud 19: 22-26). The Bible is very clear that this is an abomination to God and that all homosexuals and lesbians will not inherit eternal life (I Cor. 6: 9-10; Romans 1: 26-27; 2 Peter 2: 6-10). Therefore, a homosexual and lesbian must confess his/her sin and turn to God. In the meantime, one can only try to love this individual and also being firm that this act is against God. The Bible also says that God loves all persons and his love extends also to homosexuals and lesbians. Just like any other sin that keeps us from God, we must confess it and turn from it, and turn to God (Levi 18:22, Gen 13:13, 1Ki 15:12). God wipes away all sins when we confess our sins and receive him in our heart (1 Jn 1: 9) and we will be a part of His family. Our old way of life will be forgotten and the life in Christ will become new.¹⁹ Therefore, the Baptist Churches adhere to the belief that the Bible denounces homosexuality and lesbianism as sinful. They believe that sexual preference is a choice, and that eventually can be overcome. Despite the

fact that the Baptist Churches see homosexuality and lesbianism as a sin, they do not classify it as an unforgivable sin (Rom 6:23). Having said this much on what the Baptist churches believe on the issue of homosexuality and lesbianism, we also cannot neglect the fact that today there are people even amongst the Baptist family who support the rights of same-sex relationships. They also rely on the Bible to validate their stance but the purpose of our present paper being the Baptist teachings on social issues, the writer has attempted to lay bare what our traditional Baptist position is, on the subject.

to be continued in the next issue...

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Living as one in God's Household

Mr Mhabemo Kithan, Mission Assistant, CBCNEI

Why is it important to live as one in Christ? The answer is simple, because Jesus came to make us one, to break down the barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles. The Bible makes it very clear that there shouldn't be any divisions among His people but to live as one (I Corinthians 1:10). Living together as one in the household of God with one accord, one faith, one love and one hope is the ultimate call of our resurrected Christ, a "Call" and "Vision" entrusted upon every individual and Churches to be united as one in Christ. In our present world, be it in the Church or society we come across daily the news of killings, fighting's, discriminations, gender injustice, oppressing one another, religious discrimination. Our present situations more or less are like the times in the Corinthians society. Living together in a society is not only about the community life. It requires the sacrificial of Christ-like-character in every individual. 'God's Household', is attributed to the metaphor of the reign of God in our personal and communal lives in relation to the whole creation, conveying the very core of our lives, starting from our home, to the Church, y and the whole universe. Jesus intention of forming a reconciled society can be seen in the Pauline mission communities in the togetherness of Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, man and woman. The call of living together in the

household of God is not only about the vision of forming a united Church of Christ but also to live together as one global family in the household of God.

Here, the phrase “living together in God’s household” means being in solidarity with the people in their struggles for life regardless of their color, race, creed, religion or ideology. This was well exemplified by the biblical story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37, who out of humanity and love ended up crossing the boundaries and breaking down barriers set by ethnic and religious differences in. Being human means reaching out in compassion and love, sharing life in its fullness with someone who has been deprived, and empowering them to live life abundantly. Thus, living together involves an active engagement that questions, overcomes and transforms the walls of separation, division, and hostility that prevent us from being in solidarity with one another.

As I was writing down these few lines, the song ‘Living for Jesus’ refreshed me with the importance of living together in an environment filled with the love of God as in Philippians 3:20, it says “*But our Citizenship is in Heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*”. The household of God should be viewed from a wider community perspective where we are not only chained by a certain bloodline or communal affinity or by our common religious identity. In the household of God, everyone and everything belong together. If we believe that God created everything and everyone, and that God affirmed that each created things are good and beautiful, then we all belong to God’s beautiful family regardless of the differences in our nature, sex/gender, race or religion.

How then can we just claim the household of God to be the small household of love or the slightly bigger house-

hold of faith? To live together in the household of God is to live as friends, sharing a common vision of peace for all, regardless of anything. As Jesus said, *“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends...”* (John 15:15). Friendship in the household of God means actively being in the work of Christ Jesus. Being in the household of God does not keep us at the level of friendship but promotes us to a higher level *as children of God* (1 John 3:2). This status of God’s family is not based on special family relationships, on our claim to be the inheritors of the “chosen race” or of having the best religion in the world. It is simply based on the fact of doing the will of God. *“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother”* (Matthew 12:50). And that will is very well demonstrated in the ministry of Christ in Luke 4:18-19.

As Christians we need to live in a society filled with love, faith and hope. We can truly participate in realizing this vision of *“Living Together in the Household of God”* if only we are able to love our neighbors and transform our society. And it is only through Jesus we can achieve it. Jesus Christ the only hope of our household had shown us the way to truth of life in the fullness of what God’s intended for all of us to have. Christ atoning sacrifice was for all the sinners to be united as *“One in Christ”* having with one faith. Let us all carry forward the vision of Christ to live together as one in the household of God and proclaim to all ends of the word with one accord as His people united and bonded in the love of God.



Biblical Justice in the context of North East India



Mr Atungo Shitri, Secretary, Justice & Peace, CBCNEI

What Is Biblical Justice?

The word Justice in the Bible; Hebrew, *Sedeq/mispat*; Greek, *Dikaioyne*, God, the Righteous Judge. Justice is rooted in the very nature of God (Isa 40:14). Heaven handedly rewards good, and he does not ignore the sins of any (Psalm 33:5 ; Psalms 37:6 Psalms 37:28 ; 97:2 ; 99:4). Human judges do well to remember God in their courts. God does not take bribes (Deut 10:17) or pervert justice in any way (Gen 18:25 ; 2 Chron. 19:7).

The Hebrew word for “justice,” *mishpat*, occurs in its various forms more than 200 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. Its most basic meaning is to treat people equitably. It means acquitting or punishing every person on the merits of the case, regardless of race or social status. Anyone who does the same wrong should be given the same penalty.

One of the clearest and most holistic words for justice is the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means both “justice” and “peace.” *Shalom* includes “wholeness,” or everything that makes for people’s well being, security, and, in particular, the restoration of relationships that have been *broken*. Justice, therefore, is about *repairing* broken relationships both with other people and to structures - of courts and punishments, money and economics, land and resources, and kings and rulers.

The deeply biblical idea of *shalom* is the reason justice always

has to be “social.” We can begin to imagine how the reform of our criminal justice system could be based on “restorative justice” rather than mere retribution. But justice is also about restoring our broken relationship with God to what he intends for us, which includes our role in God’s purposes for all of his creatures and for the world that he has made. The biblical words for justice all relate to the fairness, judgment, love, and healing of God. And it is clear that justice is also part of our *worship* of God.

A Christian principle that affirms the collective solidarity and justice resistance movement for celebration of life is found in the Trinitarian doctrine. Trinity is unity in community. They relate to each other, belong to one another, never insist on one’s own way, and despise “their outward appearance of diversity,” their foundational unity is still upheld. There is no dominion over another in the Trinity. Communion or togetherness is an integral feature in the very nature of God. Each divine person penetrates the other and allows himself/herself to be penetrated, each maintaining identity but sharing community in justice.

Socio and Political Justice in North East India Today

Within nation states, political oppression, militarization and all forms of ethnocidal attack take place every day in North East region. In search of a fuller life, justice and equality and to protect their identity; NE people have organized themselves to fight against the exploiters and oppressors. Results, violence, conflict and killing become an everyday affair and reality in the region. Everywhere we hear reclaiming and re-asserting their right to self-determination.

There is no biblical justification to reduce the burden of NE India today. Therefore, the challenge before us is to commit ourselves to struggle for the transformation of the poor, the weak and disfigured humanity and to curtail the over-exploitation of power in the region. Without restoring justice and equality, the North East community will not be able to attain peace and fullness of life in Christ.

Conclusion

If we are trying to live a justice life in accordance with the Bible, the concept and call to justice are inescapable. We do justice when we give all human beings their due as creations of God. Doing justice includes not only the righting of wrongs but generosity and social concern, especially toward the poor and vulnerable. In the Scripture, gifts to the poor are called “acts of righteousness,” as in Matthew 6:1-2. Not giving generously, then, is not stinginess but unrighteousness, a violation of God’s law. In the book of Job, we see Job call every failure to help the poor is a sin, offensive to God’s splendor (Job 31:23) and deserving of judgment and punishment (v. 28). Remarkably, Job is asserting that it would be a sin against God because, to not “share his bread” and his assets with the poor would be unrighteous, a sin against God and violation of God’s justice. In the Bible, we have seen many Christians ministering to the poor and marginalized, even challenging societal structures that weigh down upon them (Matt. 9:35-38; Acts 3-4, 5:12-16). We have even more opportunities to extend and advance that care in our North-East India society today.

“Justice delayed is justice denied.”

-William E. Gladstone

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Voice box



Balsrang A. Sangma

Pastor Cherangre Baptist Church, Association No. IV, Garo Baptist Convention

It has been two years since I personally have subscribed this newsletter and I find it really good and helpful for my ministry. Yes, it keeps us updated of the events that took place and that are about to take place, through which we are well informed of the ministries of CBCNEI and their progress.

The articles in the newsletter give me encouragement and strength for my ministry. It even helps me in my sermon preparations and gives me insightful reflection from the biblical perspectives.

Effective articles on life testimony like Mr. I Ben Wati and his ministry experience were great .I personally would like to read more of life testimony based articles and am sure the readers will also be encouraged and blessed by their ministry experience specially from pastor's, missionary and leaders.

This year we are planning to subscribe for the church library.

May God continue to bless this ministry.



Affirmation of diversity for life: Bible Reflection.

Rev Dr Wati Longchar, Dean, Serampore College

Galatians 3:1-14

In this passage, St. Paul is engaged in a controversy with the Galatian Christians over the issue of Gospel and Culture. The issue was: Should Galatians abandon their cultures and embrace Jewish law and custom to follow Jesus?

Let us ask another parallel question: Should we abandon our own culture and embrace western culture to follow Jesus? I am sure we will all say NO.

An early believer wrote a prayer encouraging people to receive baby Jesus.

Hoi, let all people hear

25th December Christmas will be celebrated

All people and families start taboo observance

Prepare to live a holy living

Jesus is coming to enter your home

Welcome him with sticky rice, meat and betel nut

Accept him with love

He will bless you all

I bring this message in the name of Highest God, Amen

The pastor said this prayer in a traditional way. After the

prayer, congregation sang “Joy to the World, the Lord has come”. The church was decorated very colorfully. Inside the church, there were Christmas tree, stars, many balloons, colour papers, Santa Claus and four candles were burning. Outside the church there were again five big Santa Claus dressed in red colour and all of them carrying big basket full of gifts, and in a corner there was baby Jesus in a manger, with shepherd and wise men. Interestingly, seeing all those beautiful decoration and giant size Santa Claus, one small body asked his father, “Dad, are we celebrating Jesus or Santa Claus birthday?” Some of the elders and deacons heard and they all laughed.

Surprisingly, pastor’s prayer created controversy among the members of the church. It was not the content, but the way he prayed was the problem. Some of them said, “it is more grant and it can draw attention and respect of the people, but our fore-parents prayed in that way to invoke evil spirit. We should not pray to Jesus like that. The evil spirit will hear and come back”. Some said, “If we start praying like that some members will go back to traditional belief system and start practicing evil customs. We should pray like how missionary taught us”. The pastor asked them, can I pray “Our loving Mother” instead of “our loving Father”. They said No because people cannot imagine God as mother! But he said God’s love is compared with mother’s love in the Bible. He asked them again, can I pray “Our earthly Father” instead of “Our heavenly Father” because God became flesh and dwelt among us; God created both heaven and earth. Again, they said it will not be good. Just pray like how missionaries taught us to pray.

Christians are confused. We often think that western culture is Christian culture. When it comes to western culture we do not question but just accept them as Christian culture. When we incorporate our cultural elements we question and resist.

I posted some pictures in Facebook of the worship led by Tayal tribe. One fellow wrote, “Is this worship or cultural performance?” I said we had a very meaningful worship. The fellow said No, pagan way of worship. We need to understand that Gospel is different from western culture. Christians often think that conversion to Christianity means one should abandon our rich traditional culture because they are pagan, evil and demonic. We should follow what western missionaries have taught us. What they said and taught are absolutely right, we should not change, or question but just follow. This is called colonized mindset or mentality. This is called distortion of gospel message and our rich cultural traditions.

See Galatians 3:1-14. Galatian were not Jews, they were followers of Christ from Gentiles background. (The ancient Galatian city is now the capital city of Turkey). They had their own rich cultural traditions. After they decided to follow Jesus they wanted to act like Jews, just as we want to act like westerners. They wanted to be circumcised, follow strict observance of Sabbath, and apply and follow Jewish laws and customs. This created conflict and misunderstanding among themselves and also spoiled their relationship with their fellow brothers and sisters who were not yet Christian. Just like the mentality of some Christians who think that by “adopting and following western culture, we become better Christians”, those Galatians also thought that by observing Jewish law and practices they would become better follower of Christ. So St. Paul challenged them, saying “You foolish Galatians! Who misguided you?” He pushed several questions further - Did you receive the Spirit by observing law? Did you not receive the Spirit by faith? Do you think that by mere observance of Jewish laws will change your life? Do you think that Jewish practices and customs will transform your life? Paul argued that mere observance of laws and rituals of some-

body else's culture has nothing to do in following Jesus. It will rather uproot people from their own people and culture.

Paul connects his argument citing the "Spirit" and "Faith". They are the basis in following Jesus; not the observance of Jewish laws and ritual practices.

In Old Testament, the 'Spirit' is compared to 'wind'. The wind blows wherever it wills. Nobody can control it. It does not make distinction between the Jewish and Gentiles, male or female, Christians or 'non-Christians'. It does not make distinction between humans and non-humans. The wind is also compared with the breath of God which gives life to all. God's Spirit was at work even before Abraham and ever before Israel as a nation came into being. Here, Paul wants to affirm that God as Spirit is present in all cultures from the very time of creation. Since it is so we should not abandon it but celebrate it. Galatian culture is also good and colourful because of the presence of Spirit. One must follow Jesus without forsaking one's own culture.

Diversity is God's structure of creation. It is like a rainbow. All colours are unique and different, and together with different colours make the rainbow beautiful. So also God who created all of us beautifully whether minority or majority traditions must be respected, protected and also nurtured. Not only western cultures, Asian/Indian cultures are also richly blessed by God. Not only majority culture, but also the smallest tribe tradition is blessed by God. The world will become richer when we celebrate together the differences with respect and love. Christian faith, worship and practices will be more colourful and meaningful when we incorporate our own indigenous traditions.

According to Paul, "Faith" in Christ makes our celebration of cultural diversity different and meaningful. Faith and

action always go together and it leads to transformation in love. Observance of law and customs without faith will just make routine ritual observance, duty for the sake of duty, or normal yearly celebration of Christmas without any meaning. It becomes just a merry making festival. Work without faith leads a person to bondage and curtails one's freedom. But faith makes our cultural diversity liberating and transforming. It leads to us respect others without condemnation and to value life more than mere ritualistic practices, like observance of Sabbath for the sake of ritual. But that does not mean that all our indigenous cultural practices are good and that we should go back to traditional customs and practices. Paul is urging that we should preserve and practice our customs and culture in a transformed or changed manner because of faith in Christ. Culture is dynamic. There is no fixed culture. Some cultures are destructive to life, misuse and manipulation of culture have led to domination and exploitation of many people. Faith in Christ leads us to discern human limitation and challenge us to transform, resist, and reject oppressive elements in our culture for the sake of saving life. Therefore, Paul is challenging Galatians not to abandon their culture. Instead, transform them into what Jesus Christ taught us and celebrate the diversity in rainbow colour to glorify God.

At the time when dominant society try to suppress minority culture and language and when superiority overrule inferiority, St. Paul challenge us to affirm the diversity as God's gifts to humanity and recommit ourselves to celebrate our cultural diversities with respect and love.



NEWS FLASH

Lungphu Baptist church Celebrates Platinum Jubilee (13-15 Jan)

It was a historic moment for the Lungphu Baptist Church, STNBA as they celebrated God's faithfulness for the last many years. The Mission Secretary of the Council was invited as one of the speakers for the Jubilee. During the celebration, the Pastor of the church, Rev. Somi Chithung was ordained

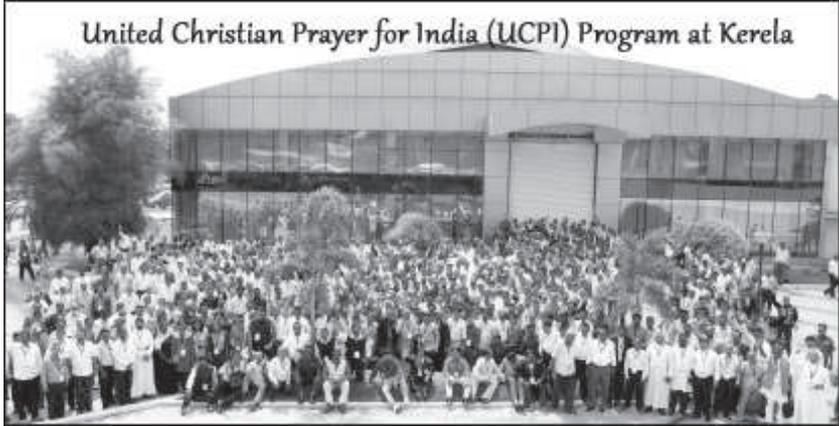
for fulltime Ministry of the church



United Christian Prayer for India (UCPI) Program at Kerela (20-23 Jan)

Organized by few committed individuals who have burden to pray for the Nation, a conference was conducted at Kerela. A huge





gathering of church leaders across the nation was witness where top church leaders of almost all churches in India attended the program. The churches in India committed that they will be united to pray for the Nation and win this nation for Christ. The next National program will be held at Bhubaneswar during 19-22 July 2016. Church leaders are invited to attend this program to experience the movement and participate as the churches committed to pray for the Nation.



16th Central Committee cum 53rd Biennial Conference (20- 23 Jan)

The central committee cum biennial conference of Dibang Lohit Baptist Churches Association (DLBCA) was held at Baptist Church, Rayang. The Director of Operations, North East Christian University, Mr Huzo Meru shared the Word of God on the topics, “Word of God for Churches today” and “Word of God for today’s society”.

Mr. Nathanael Basumatary, NEI Co-ordinator, Compass Ministry, led the morning devotions on the topic “Money and Marriage”. Mr Moa and Mr David of CLC,



Dimapur ministered during the conference by providing Christian Literatures and other essential articles for Church use. The delegates appreciated much of their participation.



Relief Camp (1 Feb)

A relief team jointly formed by the Justice & Peace Ministries department of the council along with the Church Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) conducted a relief camp to distribute materials to the affected family and victims of the 9 January Cyclone disaster at

Karbi Anglong district under Assam. The team distributed some relief stuff/material to 693 families in 34 villages.



Assam Baptist Convention Pre Jubilee Celebration (9-10 Feb)

The Assam Baptist Convention celebrated Pre- Jubilee celebration at Sibsagar. Over two thousand people attended the program where the theme of the Celebration was “Knowing God Deeper”. A rally of human chain was organized in the city to express God’s faithfulness in the life of the Convention. The Mission Secretary of CBCNEI was invited as the Speaker of the cel-

ebration. At the close of the program almost all of them made commitment that they will share the love of God to their family members before Jubilee comes next year. Convention. The Mission Secretary of CBCNEI was invited as the Speaker of the celebration. At the close of the program almost all of them made commitment that they will share the love of God to their family members before Jubilee comes next year.



First Quinquennial Fellowship of KomRem Baptist Churches Association and ChiruRem Baptist Churches Association (12-14 Feb)

The first Quinquennial fellowship of the Kom and Chiru Baptist Associations was held at Nungsai Baptist Church. Thousands of people attended the program. The Mission Secretary of CBCNEI was invited to be one of the speakers to challenge the churches on importance of “Unity in Mission”. On Sunday morning worship service, offering was collected for CBCNEI ministry to show their support for the work of the council. The Council expresses thankfulness for this gesture.

Assam Baptist Church House Church Movement Fellowship (12-14 Feb)

The House church movement started in Assam under ABC few years back and is growing very fast. The gathering of this year’s fellowship is indicative of the growth. We are thankful to God for this multiplication by faith. The joyous moment of the program was when the participants committed that they will be light to the world by holding lighted candles. We thank God for this committed believers.





Annual CBCNEI Mission Board meeting (16 Feb)

The annual meeting of CBCNEI Mission board was held at the CBCNEI Conference Hall, Guwahati. Reports from the Mission Secretary, CBCNEI, reviewing of previous meeting actions and minutes, Action plan 2016-17, Budget 2016-17, mission programs for the year 2016-17, self reliance mission building project and working together with other mission agencies in partnership were the agendas that were discussed.



Ordination (Feb 16)

Angam G. Chahong, Assistant Director Christian Literature Centre (CLC), Literature Ministry of CBCNEI was ordained for fulltime Minister of Gospel of Jesus Christ by his local Church Roudei (T. M. Kasom) Baptist Church & TBCA on 16th, February 2016. He have been serving in the Christian Ministry for more than 20 years.



Students' Ministry Board meeting

(24Feb)

CBCNEI Students Ministry board meeting was held at White Memorial Hostel, Sathribari, Guwahati commencing from 10:00 am till lunch time. Annual Reports from the Chaplains of Lewis Memorial Hostel, White Memorial Hostel and Shillong Tyrannus Hall, reviewing of previous meeting actions and minutes, Action plan 2016-17, Budget 2016-17 were the agendas that were discussed.



Farewell Program of Rev Joseph Lamkang (3 Mar)

The family of CBCNEI conducted a short farewell program for retiring Rev Joseph Lamkang, who was one of the senior most staff. He has long served in the council for over 23 years. Rev Joseph

first joined the ministry as the manager at the Conference Centre on 1st October, 1992. His rendered dedicatory service had been greatly appreciated and will always remain irreplaceable. We extend our prayers and best wishes to him and his



family. May almighty continue to shower His blessing in abundance to his family.



Children Ministry Training (23-26 Feb)

Nagaland Police Baptist Churches Association organized a three days training program for the Sunday school superintendents and teachers'. The topics covered were: 1. Importance of Children Ministry, 2. Child psychology, and 3. Importance of Media in the church.



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We the Readers

The Mouthpiece

“We The Readers: The Mouthpiece” is a new column introduced for the first time in *Baptist News* for the keen reader-contributors who not only read us but also come forward with their insightful articles. We have received an overwhelming respond.

Keeping writing to us at:
editor@cbcnei.in OR
lichenbenitungoe@gmail.com

1. The Amazing Grace

Dr Thang Khan Piang Hatzaw MS (AIIMS), New Delhi

It was on the fateful day of the 15th October 1998, while attending the last class of my 3 month’s training of Laparoscopic surgery, at the end of the class I got myself endoscopic examined by Prof. S.K. Acharia for prolonged upper abdominal pain with loss of appetite, and I told that a very big cancerous tumour was detected in my stomach. The result shocked me and left me worried with the only thought that I was surely going to die and had no hope of survival.



But then I began to pray to God and surrendered my life in prayers, with the song “have thine own way Lord, have thine own way Lord; you are the potter;, I am the clay, make me and mould me after thy will..” and that made me experience a wonderful sense of relief and peace in my mind. My Proffesor told me that I must be operated as early as possible. So I immediately rang up my wife who was in Churachandpur, to come back without having explained her of anything about what has befall me. But as I was to be admitted in AIIMS the next day, I had no other option but to let her know about my cancer stomach and waited her reaction anxiously. I was afraid she would react with uncontrollable emotions. But on the contrary, she reacted very calmly and said, “come on God wants to do a miracle in your life let `s praise Him” and also read John 9:1-5 about the man-born blind whom Jesus `healed. Instantly we joined our hands and praised God aloud. We enjoyed the peace of the Holy Spirit of God (John 14:27), a tremendous peace of mind came into our hearts that made us even forget my formidable cancer. The peace of God is wonderful it dispelled the fear and worries of the deadly disease. The peace of God is unlike what the world gives.

The next day I was admitted in AIIMS in the surgical ward s we waited for the operation. My daughter Hoih Cing and son, Siing Lian who were in their colleges in Delhi joined us in the cabin, we used to sing songs of praises in the morning and evening devotions an there were no fear or worry of the cancer disease.

VISION OF MY WIFE: While my operation was in progress on the 20th of October, my wife who was prayerfully waiting in the corridor with other visitors, saw a vision that Jesus was standing on my head side directing the surgeon.

NO HOPE OF SURVIVAL: A staff nurse of AIIMS, from my home town who happened to be in the operation theatre was so terrified seeing the extensive surgery, assumed that I may not survive spread the news to family members and relatives in Churachandpur which spread widely. She, out of sympathy said, “Brother has no chance of survival and the only hope was to take him home alive.” Thus, everybody gave up hopes.

THE RECOVERY: But by God’s grace my general condition unbelievable improved real fast unlike what was expected of my least chance of survival. Within 10 days of my operation, I regained my full appetite and became active enough to move and my chemotherapy started after a few days.

On the 23th Nov 1998, I was flown back to Manipur where many of my relatives and well-wishers were waiting in anxieties and fears expecting me to be carried on a stretcher. But contrary to their expectation, I walked down and greeted them and they were overjoyed to see me. Thus, the “tears of sorrow turned into tears of joy, praise the Lord! Because I called upon the Lord on my day of trouble and he had rescued me and I am much indebted to glorify Him’ (Psalm. 50:15)

On reaching home, a relative lady shared me the vision she saw where she dreamt of believers and the church elders were praying for me in which she saw that two men in white dresses descended from above and stood by me and pronounced, “Today we have healed Dr.Thang Khan Piang to help the poor, needy and the sick.

I was overwhelmed with joy and happiness and praised the Almighty God.

I improved progressively day by day and I was able to join the hospital doing all my normal duties. Infact, God

enhanced me with extraordinary skill and speed for my surgical works. Further, “the Amazing grace of God” is that a stomach less person like me can take as much food as I like. The word of Jesus in Matthew 19:26b said “With man this is impossible; but with God all things are possible”. This is quite true with me. God did make me taste his power and love through my fatal sickness by His divine healing.

My Testimony: God had rescued me from the clutch of dead and I am forever indebted to glorify Him and tell of His great wonders. Thus, I want to share the power of believing and trusting the Lord, who in His grace and power can heal all sickness, for nothing, is impossible for Him. We just need to believe in His power and have faith. Our human perspective may seem impossible like that of my least chance of survival but my life was in the hand of my creator and I trusted on His power and never doubted that He will touch my life with His divine healing and that everything that will happen will be in His hand. God has been so merciful to me and now it is on me to tell of His wonders through my testimony and I believe that God in His mercy will bless every reader and hearer abundantly. Praise the Lord!

Psalm 50:15 “ Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”



2. THE CHURCH AS A COUNTER CULTURE IN 1 PETER



Mr Willingson Shingnaisui, M Th Final Year, New Testament, Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture

Peter in his addressees used the terms *eklektois parepidemois*, (1 Pet 1:1) which can be translated as “elect foreigners” and also *paroikias* meaning “aliens or strangers” (1 Pet 1:17). The double expression “elect foreigners” sums up the central theme of 1 Peter: Christian existence between God’s election and society’s rejection. However, the foreignness of the addressees is not to be understood or interpreted in terms of “Pilgrim Theology” because it will not be coherent with the social situation in which the addressees found themselves, and also the purpose of 1 Peter (cf. 5:12). To be foreign is the sign of the Christian in society, for it is a sociological expression of the eschatological character of their existence.

The condition of the addressees of 1 Peter is one of geographical dislocation, social, cultural and religious dissociation and estrangement, political, legal, social and psychological inferiority or marginal social status, and physical and psychological deprivation and vulnerability. Their conversion to the Christian faith had exacerbated their already tenuous social position as *paroikias* [aliens or strang-

ers] and *parepidemois* [strangers]). It also led to sporadic outbreaks of social conflict.

Torrey Seland finds that the central aspects of leaving the polytheism for monotheism, leaving one's country, family, and kinfolk, becoming enemies of families and friends at the risk of their own lives, and entering a community of fictive kinship and brotherly/sisterly love were all categories and aspects valuable for illuminating the conditions of the recipients of 1 Peter as perceived by the author.¹

The addressees of 1 Peter are aliens and foreigners, not only metaphorically (as Christians) but also socially and existentially. Hence, in 1 Peter, *parepidemois* [foreigners], *paroikias* [aliens or strangers] and its related terms are not to be understood to construct a theology of an earthly pilgrimage of God's people. They reflect a socio-religious tension, not a cosmological one. They are conventional socio-legal Greek terms for describing the limited status and rights of "strangers" and "foreigners" in Greco-Roman society. The addressees' situation as "strangers" and "foreigners" become more pronounced not because of their nationality but because of their "election" by God (1 Pet 1:1-2) and their subsequent conversion to Christianity.

Although the word *ekklesia* [Church] is not used in the text of 1 Peter, nevertheless it is clear from the letter that the Christian community is of central importance in the objective of the letter. In fact the message of 1 Peter is ecclesially oriented and ecclesially determined, more than any other New Testament document.² The references to being sojourners, aliens, and strangers indicated the distance of these Christians from the society around them. They were not rescued *from* exile; they were rescued *into* exile. Their alienation is a mark of their faithfulness (1:17-18).³

They separated themselves from the rest of the society through a voluntary termination of, and conversion from

past familial, social and religious ties (1:3-5, 10-12, 18-21; 2:3, 4-10) and defined by a unique faith in Jesus as the Christ, as the agent of salvation for which they hoped (1:2, 3, 6-8, 13, 18-21; 2: 3, 4-10).⁴

Christianity as a sect was not only a religious but also a social phenomenon. As a sect, Christianity appealed to persons already in tension with the world. The transformation which was sought concerned not the structures of society but the attitude of the heart and conscience (2:19-20; 3:3-4, 15-16, 21) of persons desiring the experience of true humanhood. This naturally provoked counter-protest, as conversion to Christianity, symbolised as “rebirth” (1:3, 22-23; 2:2), “sanctification” (1:2, 14-16), or “purification” (1:22), clearly distinguished them from the achievement-oriented, cosmopolitan and secular mystery cults of the empire.⁵

The interrelationship of the words describing the addressees as *eklektois* [elect], *parepidemois* [foreigners], *diaspora*, 1:1, 17 reveals the author’s underlying convictions about the nature of the Christian community and its relationships to its surrounding world.⁶ A basic command is to be holy because the God who saved them is holy (1:15-16). But this holiness is not normative/passive but active holiness. Such holiness is found in Christ, principally in His behaviour during the Passion, which is the model for Christian existence.⁷

Christians find themselves in an inescapable situation of conflict and oppression. Their communal identity was marked by love for enemies and non-violence. 1 Peter is not offering its addressees a theological recipe for escaping their social situation but rather a rationale for continued social engagement. Over against the futile world of the unbelievers the Christians constituted an alternative and superior form of social and religious organisation.

Their divine “election” (*eklektion* imputes a unique status on them through selection, separation and choice (1:1ff). It also implies preference, elevation and superiority. The characterisation of the addressees as “*elect* visiting strangers of (in) the diaspora” (1:1) is a strategic way of both legitimating their distinction from the Jews and pagans while simultaneously attributing to these lowly *paroikoi* [aliens or strangers] special elite status in the economy of God.⁸

They also found themselves at the receiving end of the society simply because they were labelled Christians. However, in Christianity they found support and belongingness. The church also enabled the addressees of 1 Peter to counteract the demoralising and disintegrating impact of the larger world within which they lived by reassuring its members of their distinctive communal identity, reminding them of the importance of maintaining discipline and cohesion within the community as well as separation from the influences of the unbelievers, and by providing them with a sustaining and motivating rationale for continued faith and commitment. Though conflict was detrimental to the Christian cause, it helped in clarifying group boundaries and confirmed differences and distinctiveness of Christianity. The author of 1 Peter employs various images like rebirth, holiness, ransom and warfare (1:3; 1:18-19; 2:9, 11), as well as contrasts between proper and improper conduct, present and former allegiances (2:25; 4:3) to support and stress the injunctions to Christian and non-Christian separation. These images and epithets of socio-religious distinctiveness, particularly the stress upon the election of the believers, were also designed to underline their extraordinary status as the elect and holy people of God. And thereby foster their self-esteem over against the demeaning slander of their opponents. The church ultimately provided the *parepidemois* [foreigners] and *paroikias* [aliens

or strangers] the perfect place and environment to live and commune as genuine human beings.

(Endnotes)

¹Seland, *Strangers in the Light* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 77.

²Green, *1 Peter* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 217.

³Bartlett, *The First Letter of Peter* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 238.

⁴Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 75.

⁵Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, 77-78.

⁶Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 80.

⁷Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 38.

⁸Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, 121.



Obituary

We are deeply saddened by the loss of **Dr P. Rudra Tariang**, the former Medical Superintendent of Tura Christian Hospital, who has left us for his heavenly home on the 3rd of March, 2016.

We acknowledge his long dedicated service of more than 35 years to CBCNEI's healing ministry which has been a great blessing. Our hearts goes out to the bereaved family during this difficult time and it is our prayer that the Lord will grant strength to bear the pain.

We pray for the eternal peace of the one who was a man of humanity.

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(Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language)

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Only 20 seats are reserved and it will be on first come first basis

Last date of registration : 30th April 2016

For registration and confirmation kindly contact:

Mr. Mhabemo Kithan

mhabemo@cbcnei.in (8724068553)

Mr. Siamliana

siamliana@cbcnei.in (9859981628)

News from our Mission partners on “What Happened” in India

Avdesh brought a person named Sangam from Jalaun for a training program on his request as the person desired to learn the Word of God. However after the



training, Sangam went back and turned against BC Avdesh. This person had a link with the Bajrang Dal (militant wing of RSS) and made false reports to police and Media. On 29th Jan 16, Bajrang Dal activist abducted BC Avdesh and made a public spectacle by shaving his half the head, one eye brow

and half of moustache. Then they paraded him on a donkey and beat him. As church, we need to bring this act in the knowledge of the leaders of the nation, and pray for our brothers and sisters in mainline India who are facing this persecution.





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