

## **BUILDING SOCIAL COHESION: THERE ARE NO WALLS TO LOVE**

A stronger social fabric can be achieved in a variety of ways. A common economic stake in the nation, emotional ties, healthy families, the national school system, national service, grassroots organisations, a consultative style of government, charity and self-help programmes all factor in the equation.

Religion plays an important part too.

As Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, in his capacity as Deputy Prime Minister in January 2001, said to NTU students, "Religious faith is a source of strength in a society. For many people, religion answers ultimate questions on the meaning and purpose of life. Faith is the basis for their moral conduct, social conscience, and sense of compassion and humanity."

Indeed, our belief in Jesus Christ has given us an everlasting anchor for our souls. Jesus loves us unconditionally, and because of His great love, we love others. From this springboard of our faith, we seek to help others.

Through our Bible teachings, visitation programmes, counseling and prayer, many have been enabled to resolve their problems and better their lives. There are countless testimonies, from other churches too, of healings, mended parent-child relationships, revived marriages, blessed finances, and even restored sanity and peace of mind.

And in helping individuals and families, we benefit society at large. A happy person will be naturally more gracious, tolerant, giving and productive. Strong family ties provide security and care, translating into well-adjusted children and wholesome communities.

Besides helping those who come to our church, we reach out in friendship and love to those around us too. Our God of love cares deeply for all peoples, regardless of race, language and religion.

For example, a law in the Old Testament of the Bible states, “Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.’”

The “poor and needy neighbour in our land” would mean everyone who is in need, no matter the background. The 10,000-strong congregation of our church has been contributing towards various charity projects benefiting Singaporeans.

From 1998 to 2001, we raised \$1.8 million to set up the New Creation Church-NKF Dialysis Centre through a series of charity events. The centre was opened in December 2001 at Bangkit Road and since then, we have been giving regularly to its operating expenses.

This centre is open to people from all walks of life. We did not, and will not, specify any restrictions to the selection process. As a Christian children’s song goes, “Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight.” Religious, familial or ethnic backgrounds are irrelevant — we help all.

Last year, some of our giving included \$30,000 to the Tan Tock Seng Hospital Endowment Fund, \$30,000 to Yio Chu Kang Secondary School for its needy students, and \$20,000 each to the Down Syndrome Association and the Christian Outreach to the Handicapped.

In 2002, we gave \$100,000 to the NKF Children’s Medical Fund, \$50,000 to Tabung Amal Aidilfitri and \$50,000 to The Straits Times School Pocket Money fund. Besides all these, we have also given to orphanages, homes and other outreach programmes.

Giving and loving is a way of life for a Christian. All the more, as Singaporeans, we seek to give to our country, which has grown amazingly from the ashes of her independence in 1965 to her present success. Truly, we are proud of our country and her achievements, and regularly pray for our government, that wisdom, good health and protection be upon them.

As we celebrate our nationhood, our identity and our richness in diversity, we also remember that harmony is built on mutual respect. Given our disparate mix as a nation,

there is much potential for misunderstanding and discord. It is imperative then that we reach out with friendship, respect and understanding to all groups.

Religion should not be abused to create conflict and disharmony in our nation. We may have different practices, customs and beliefs, but a touch of love, a dash of understanding and a pinch of tolerance will go a long way in drawing us all closer together. For there are no walls to His love.