AIDS
Prevention and Care

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The Amity Foundation is an independent Chinese voluntary organisation. It was created in 1985 on the initiative of Chinese Christians. It has worked to promote education, social services, health, and rural development in the underdeveloped areas of China. Amity's work is grounded in the belief that all human beings share the same dignity. Abiding by the principle of mutual respect in faith, Amity builds friendship with both Christians and non-Christians in China and abroad. In this way, Amity contributes to China's social development and openness to the outside world. It makes Christian involvement and participation in meeting the needs of society more widely known to the Chinese people and serves as a channel for people-to-people contact and the ecumenical sharing of resources. Helping to develop civil society in China is one of the key aims of its work.

The Amity Foundation has about 40 full-time staffers at its Nanjing headquarters. Hundreds of volunteers work with Amity all over China. The foundation receives funds from partners abroad as well as in Hong Kong and mainland China.
God Breaks the Silence
by Li Xue

Following an invitation of the Amity Foundation, people from more than 10 different countries in Africa, Europe and Asia met in China to discuss ways of confronting the spread of AIDS and caring for the infected.

Judith Kamala Bukambu from the western shores of Lake Victoria in Tanzania traveled half the world to share her experiences on home-care for HIV/AIDS patients. First, there was the flight over Lake Victoria to the capital Dar es Salaam. There she boarded a plane to Paris and later Dubai and Beijing, at each stop presenting a new visa, until after days, she finally arrived in Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan province.

Judith went out of her way to join an international conference on AIDS prevention titled “God Breaks the Silence - the Churches and HIV/AIDS”, hosted by the Amity Foundation and attended by members of the Protestant Church in China, the United Evangelical Mission and Mission 21. It was held from 22 January to 2 February 2007.

Church workers from Africa like Judith, who are experienced veterans in fighting against the spread of HIV/AIDS, reducing stigma and caring for the infected, served as a resource group for churches and organizations from Asia during the conference. Since Asian countries now face many AIDS-related problems that Africa has been struggling with for a long time, the conference aimed at offering a platform for advice from the Africans and a mutual exchange of ideas among all members.

"China does not seem so poor after all"

Behind the neon lights

Like many other participants from Africa, Europe, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Hong Kong, Judith was amazed at how fast China had developed. There were wide highways, skyscrapers, flashy neon
lights, and masses of automobiles - all testifying to China's new wealth. Moreover, staying at a comfortable hotel makes anyone believe that China is not so poor after all.

Yet, a field trip during the conference to several so-called AIDS villages, where more than 50% of the population are HIV positive, changed this impression among conference members.

Visits to AIDS patients

As the bus with members of the conference left the highway heading for one of the AIDS villages the road became narrow and bumpy. Slowly, a village emerged out of the dusty air. The bus stopped at a tiny cottage beside the road where an old couple, the Wangs, lived. They had been infected with AIDS after selling their blood.

Their one-room home was dark and cold with thick blankets piled up on the bed. On one of the walls hung a big poster of Jesus with the sentence "God loves the world". The people who lived here were obviously Christians.

Mrs. Wang had tears in her eyes when she told their story: "When our children learned in 2003 that we were infected with HIV/AIDS, we were kicked out of the house. We had no choice but to wait for death." However life changed fundamentally for them when Pastor Yan from the church in Shangqiu visited them one day, suggesting that they try to raise pigs as part of Amity's income generating project. This, together with a monthly dose of antiretroviral medicine which
is provided free by the government, has greatly improved their lives.

The Wongs, too, became Christians during that time: "If it hadn't been for God," said Mrs. Wang, "we wouldn't have survived. We really thank the Amity Foundation. We can earn a living now, and we regained the hope to live." For a last goodbye, everybody sang "Lord of Lord and King of Kings" for Mr. and Mrs. Wang.

Home visits to Chinese AIDS victims who have received help made a deep impression on the conference members, especially on people like Judith, who cares for AIDS patients in her home country every day. Her long journey was worth the effort. For her and all the other conference members, one thing became obvious during the conference: no matter where people live, in Tanzania, Congo, Namibia, Indonesia, Germany, the Philippines or China, we are not alone in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Ms. Li Xue is currently working for the publicity division of Amity and is mainly concerned with the Chinese Amity Newsletter. Before joining the Amity Foundation in December 2006 she graduated from Hong Kong City University, where she studied Communication and New Media.

Are you interested in the church in China?

If you are interested in reading more about church-related issues in China, we have got something for you!

You may like to read the ANS, the Amity News Service. It is a quarterly publication which reports on recent developments and events in the Chinese Protestant Churches. Check out the ANS website for details at www.amitynewsservice.org or subscribe to its renewed printed issue at amityhk@pacific.net.hk

www.amityfoundation.org
"Stop AIDS - Keep the Promise"

by Zhang Liwei

The outbreak of SARS in 2003 made people suddenly realize that just one disease can deeply affect people's lives, the economy and even social stability and national security. In a similar way, AIDS, being a health disaster of global dimensions, has highly alerted the Chinese government. On 1 December, World AIDS Day 2003, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao paid a visit to AIDS patients at Youan Hospital in Beijing. Since then, AIDS prevention has become one of the key components of China's health sector reform.

As early as 1998, the Chinese government published its "Medium and Long Term Plan for AIDS Prevention and Control (1998-2010)". In 2006, the government published the "Regulations for the Prevention and Treatment of AIDS" and an "Action Plan for the Containment of AIDS in China (2006-2010)". Although the Chinese government took some steps relatively early, in contrast to other countries China has still not managed to bring the spread of AIDS under control.

According to some statistics, it took the United States and Thailand 14 and 12 years respectively to stop the increase in HIV infections. In China, over the course of 20 years, this has not been possible - on the contrary, it seems that year by year the increase rate is accelerating. At the same time, the situation in China has changed in some respects, for example: the number of female AIDS patients has increased rapidly, AIDS has spread from high-risk groups to the general public, AIDS has reached groups like students, migrant workers and the gay community.

Facing up to new challenges

According to official forecasts from the central government, the number of HIV-positive people in China was 650,000 at the end of 2005 and the accumulative number of people infected over the past 20 years or so was 1.04 million. Today AIDS is no longer just a problem of public health - it has developed into an increasingly serious social and political problem. Some parts of the country have paid a heavy price economically and socially.

If no decisive steps are taken, AIDS will pose an enormous danger to the stability, security and economic development of China.

In a special meeting in June 2001 to encourage and promote AIDS work among governments, international organizations, NGOs and academia, the General Assembly of the
United Nations confirmed the major role of both HIV-positive people and AIDS patients and of NGOs in the fight against AIDS. The Chinese government, too, has come to recognize the importance of NGOs in this field. China’s Vice Premier Wu Yi has pointed out that the help of NGOs is indispensable.

Amity’s three aims

Amity was one of the first NGOs to do AIDS prevention work in China. In the last 10 years Amity has started several projects in the worst-affected provinces of China (Yunnan, Henan, Guangxi, Guangdong and Hunan). These include AIDS education, care for HIV-positive people, income-generating projects, helping AIDS-orphanned children and psychological counseling. As regards the new aspects of AIDS in China which I mentioned above, Amity will focus on the following 3 points:

1. AIDS Education: The biggest challenge in the fight against AIDS is to overcome ignorance about AIDS and to deal with the stigmatization, prejudices, fear and discrimination which AIDS patients have to face. As before, Amity’s main focus will be to inform about how to prevent AIDS. We will put a lot of resources into education projects in rural areas, where 80% of HIV-positive people live.

2. Gender Equality: Gender equality, which is a human right, is the basis of Amity’s AIDS prevention work. We will run self-help projects for people who have been marginalized due to AIDS, especially women and children. We will help them regain confidence and self-esteem and empower them to resume self-determined, meaningful lives.

3. Reducing Poverty: One of the root causes underlying AIDS is poverty. Amity will continue to combine AIDS prevention and poverty relief in its projects, trying to encourage people in AIDS affected areas to actively participate in community-based support projects.

We will also still extend the scope of our work, for example into the area of reproductive health care, comprehensive and appropriate sex education and teaching of life-skills in schools.

AIDS prevention work is a long-term challenge. It needs a long-term commitment and the sustained use of resources if it is to yield maximum results. In 2005 and 2006, the United Nations took the unusual step of using the same World AIDS Day motto for 2 years in a row: “Stop AIDS - Keep the Promise”, calling on governments and people of all nations to continue their efforts in fighting AIDS. We sincerely hope that the four groups involved in this fight - governments, NGOs, academia and international organizations - will unite in a common effort to fight AIDS, and to contribute to creating a harmonious society.
AIDS Prevention

Life is More Important than Tradition

by Beate Engelen

A church musician in Henan is breaking with tradition while conducting HIV/AIDS prevention workshops among Christians, Muslims and non-believers with Amity’s help.

Zhang Qiankun is a tall and gentle man who likes to sing and dance. He is a member of the church in Shangaia, a town in one of the poorer regions of Henan province. But it is only on weekends that he pursues his “real” job as a choir director in the local church. On weekdays he trails along the dusty back roads of Eastern Henan committed to telling people in remote villages about the looming dangers of HIV/AIDS and bringing aid and hope to the infected.

For several years now, Mr. Zhang has been one of twenty trainers of the church who are engaged in an uphill battle against the spread of AIDS. In Henan, the major source of infection was blood selling during the early 1990s, when boisterous entrepreneurs trying to make a quick buck collected blood plasma from poor peasants. Tens of thousands became infected before the blood banks were shut down around 1995.

Since then, AIDS has not only killed many of those who sold their blood, it has also found new channels to spread. Among them are unprotected sex, unhygienic medical and dental equipment, mother-to-child infection or even dirty razors at the hairdresser.

Breaking with traditions

“At first,” Mr. Zhang says, “I didn’t believe that there is a pressing AIDS problem here. But Pastor Song of the Provincial Christian Council invited me to join him during a visit to a so-called AIDS village, where more than fifty percent of the population are infected.” That was in 2002. After that, Mr. Zhang started AIDS education through a training program supported by the Amity Foundation that has reached almost 5,000 people since its implementation five years ago.

Today, on a dry and dusty winter afternoon, Mr. Zhang is standing in a dingy little side room of a village mosque in front of a blackboard. Sixty men, all wearing white hats and red AIDS ribbons, have taken their seats on small green benches and are watching intently as Mr. Zhang draws a womb with a child on the board.

“Even for me, who has taught AIDS prevention classes for quite some time now, it is still embarrassing to talk openly about sex, condoms and related issues,” says Mr. Zhang. “Traditionally we don’t do this.” When he does people tend to become quiet and refuse to participate in the discussion. But he has no choice in the face of a rising tide of infections.
Initial challenges

There have been many challenges from the start. "The mentality of people is not easily changed," says Mr. Zhang whose work was met with open opposition by his congregation at the outset. "AIDS is always associated with sin and they believe that people who got it deserved it. Chasing people infected with HIV into the Taklamakan desert was considered the proper solution for them."

Apart from working on reducing stigma in the church, Mr. Zhang has been struggling with all kinds of myths going round about how one becomes infected. Some people in the church feared that a handshake would make them ill. Children were told not to play with HIV positive children in the neighborhood. And people were even afraid to call AIDS patients on their mobile phones for fear of catching the disease themselves.

The AIDS patients themselves proved to be an additional challenge. "When my colleagues and I arrived in an AIDS village for the first time," Mr. Zhang recollects, "the AIDS patients thought that we were making fun of them by offering unconditional help. Not until they were given flour, oil and clothes did they believe that we really wanted to help them."

The ecumenical spirit

Even though material and mental support is given to everybody, no matter if they are believers or not, many of the victims cared for became Christians. The church was changed by their AIDS work as well. Over time, the congregation of Mr. Zhang's church began to understand the need to support AIDS victims, and today, members of the church stand fully behind his work, donating food and clothes.

In dispelling myths about AIDS, reducing stigma and, eventually, slowing down the spread of AIDS by teaching facts and prevention methods, Mr. Zhang's AIDS education classes have played a crucial role. But that is not the only benefit of his work. The care for AIDS patients and the education activities give the church many opportunities to extend their impact far beyond its own church walls. By reaching out to other Christians, non-Christians and Muslim congregations in a joint fight against HIV/AIDS, the church becomes alive in a truly ecumenical spirit.

Fortunately, the Imam of the mosque thinks the same way. He encouraged his people to abandon traditional taboos and face the reality of AIDS. Even though Muslim congregations often shy away from closer contact with non-Muslims, they have agreed to invite Mr. Zhang to teach AIDS prevention classes, albeit men and women separately. Mr. Zhang is proud of the fact that the Muslim congregations now trust him.

The winter sun is setting. In the village mosque the class discussion on AIDS dissolves with the resounding call of the muezzin for late afternoon prayer. Next time Mr. Zhang comes back here for his AIDS prevention class he will teach the women. The date has already been fixed.

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Personal profile

An AIDS Patient’s Second Life

by Li Yang

Li Min is 51 years old and married a second time. This mere fact made him and his wife Wang Fang the talk of the town. Why? Because Li Min has AIDS whereas Wang Fang is a healthy person. One and a half years have passed since their wedding, but when villagers talk about what Li Min went through they still sigh.

"During the saddest time I would steal away from the house at night and, without my father, mother and eldest daughter knowing it, cry over my wife’s and younger daughter’s graves. I thought of eating rat poison to end my life," says Li Min, remembering the times 11 years ago. Today he works with the Amity project in Henan as an advocate of AIDS prevention.

A strange disease

Li Min was born in 1954 in Henan province. Since 1977 he worked as a village school teacher. He got married to Zhang Yan in 1982. They had two daughters. Their life was peaceful and happy. However, in May of 2002, Zhang Yan came down with a strange disease.

"All the time she would catch a cold, have a fever, cough, be short of breath. She was treated with IVs, swallowed medicine, but it was all no use. Eventually, she would lie on the bed, unable to move. I started to realize that the disease was very serious," Li Min remembers. In May 2002, Zhang Yan was admitted to hospital. Since some of her symptoms pointed to AIDS, the doctor asked Li Min in detail about Zhang Yan’s life, specifically whether she had ever been a migrant worker, donated blood, or received a blood transfusion.

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Li Min then remembered that in 1995, when she had been eight months pregnant, her husband had indeed received a blood transfusion. Now a blood test confirmed that Zhang Yan had contracted AIDS. Shortly afterwards Li Min and his two daughters were tested HIV positive, too.

One blood transfusion - four people ill

"This was when I thought of killing myself and my girl." But reluctant to inflict any further pain on his wife, he postponed this plan. Zhang Yan died very soon. Half a year later, the younger daughter died too. She was only 5. At this point, Li Min, ill himself and alone with a daughter to look after, had no choice but to give up teaching.

After Zhang Yan's death, Li Min went to court over the deaths of his wife and daughter. In November 2003, after more than a year, the court returned its verdict: the hospital where Zhang Yan had been infected was to apologize and to compensate Li Min for his loss.

The people in Li Min's village, however, had soon found out that Li Min and his whole family had been infected with HIV, and they were completely ignorant about AIDS. Their discrimination against him forced Li Min to live in complete isolation. In the villagers' eyes, AIDS was a result of having messed up one's private life: "Neighbours and other villagers who had had a very close relationship with us in the past now treated us as if we were tigers."

Free AIDS medication

While court proceedings were still going on, Li Min's AIDS flared up. Luckily, around this time the government started to offer free medication to AIDS patients, so Li Min could get medicine from the village clinic free of charge every month and his condition came under control.

The Amity Foundation has run projects in Li Min's home village for several years. In September 2004 he first got in touch with Amity and took part in an Amity AIDS prevention training session. This was the first time he felt respected as an HIV positive person. While at the beginning he had sat in a corner of the classroom, later he became more confident and told his own story to the other participants. He wanted to let more and more other people know about his experience, to make them understand the setbacks he had suffered and his periods of severe illness, in order to raise their courage to face life. After a year of training, he joined Amity's AIDS prevention team in Henan province himself.

A second life

During his work in AIDS prevention, he even fell in love once again. In April 2005 he got married to Wang Fang, a healthy woman, which made the wedding a very unusual event. Li Min's and Wang Fang's love actually started at an Amity training session. Here Li Min had often shared his experiences with everyone. His generosity and kind-heartedness had made a deep impression on Wang Fang.

In the summer of 2004, a teacher arranged their first meeting. Li Min remembers it so clearly as if it had taken place yesterday. The first thing she said during their date was: "I feel sorry for you, you need someone who loves you, someone has to look after the household, if you don't mind I can be your wife." She also knew about his condition, Wang Fang added. Her simple words broke the thick layer of ice around Li Min's heart. The two of them overcame all obstacles and finally came together.

Wang Fang always worries about Li Min's health. She has shouldered almost all the responsibilities of daily life. She not only takes care of the couple's fields, she also raises sheep and chickens at the house. For his part, Li Min, while he does his work in AIDS prevention, also helps his wife in the house in any way he can.

(Names have been changed for privacy and security reasons.)

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News

Grassroots Participation

Staffers from Amity's Integrated Development Division went on a month-long project visit tour through 4 provinces last November and December, evaluating existing projects and planning new ones. They visited project sites in Shannxi, Gansu, Guangxi and Sichuan. The purpose of this journey was to get a deeper understanding of development in rural areas as well as to find out what villagers' own ideas of development are and what they expect from projects.

Amity has long stressed grassroots participation in its work. During this trip, Amity conducted democratic polls so ordinary people could decide themselves which of all their needs are the most pressing.
Cooperation with Academia

The bottom-up approach of Amity's development work was highlighted during the first Amity Development Forum in December. This is a joint effort by Amity and the Center for Social Policy Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) to find out how the cooperation between academic researchers and field workers can be optimized. Researchers, field workers, journalists and government officials took part in the Forum.

The discussion started with analyzing Amity's work and later centered on questions of rural development policies. "We hope Chinese scientists will have opportunities to go to remote areas where Amity is involved to do more research," Amity General Secretary Qiu Zhonghui said. At the same time, academic research could contribute to Amity's work in a meaningful way by providing it with a theoretical framework.

Strategy Planning

Amity held its first strategic planning conference on 10 to 12 February. Almost everybody working for Amity at its Nanjing headquarters was present. The participants started to develop a strategy for Amity's work in coming years.

Stephen Ting, vice-chairman of Amity's board, pointed out that China was perceived more and more as a rich country, so making the case that donations for development projects were still needed was becoming more and more difficult. He therefore advocated stressing Amity's work with marginalized and vulnerable groups. The conference contributed a lot to participants' understanding of Amity's situation and the challenges it is facing.

Christian Art Exhibition

The 4th Amity Chinese Christian Art Exhibition was on display at the Nanjing Art Gallery in January. It had been prepared by the Amity Foundation and the Nanjing Amity Christian Art Centre. Over 200 people attended the opening ceremony. Among them were Bishop K. H. Ting, Elder Ji Jianhong (chairman of the National Committee of the TSPM), Reverend Cao Shengjie (president of the CCC) as well as provincial government officials.

The exhibition included works of art from all over China - a wide variety of drawings, engravings and etchings, calligraphies, oil paintings and watercolors, wood carvings and ceramics.

AIDS Conference

In January and February, Amity held a 2-week-long international AIDS conference in Henan province, titled "God Breaks the Silence - The Churches and HIV/AIDS". It was initiated by United Evangelical Mission (Germany, Africa and Asia) and Mission 21 (Switzerland). Amity has been involved in AIDS work for almost 11 years.

The conference focused mainly on the question which role the church can play in the fight against HIV/AIDS in China. It became clear that, if the church is to do more than just discuss the problem and provide help to victims here and there, it will have to engage in hands-on, effective HIV/AIDS education and awareness work. This is essential because one of the root causes of the rapid spread of the virus in China is ignorance.

Participants, who had come from 7 countries, visited Amity-sponsored projects in the region, which are run by local churches for the benefit of Christians and non-Christians alike.

Amity Teachers

This year's Amity Teachers Winter Conference took place on February 3-9 in Chengdu, Sichuan Province. 36 Amity teachers, 11 sending agency representatives and some Amity staff as well as a few friends of Amity attended the conference.

Workshops were conducted by and for Amity teachers; there was an introduction to the situation of the Protestant church in Sichuan, and the group attended a service at Euang Church in Chengdu. The group visited Amity-sponsored projects in Laxhou, which is a four-hour drive from Chengdu.

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Help Amity to help those who are left behind!

Dear friends of Amity,

China has seen great changes over the last decades. It seems to have grown rich. But millions of people are still left behind. Poverty, lack of education, diseases and environmental damage keep them from leading lives in human dignity.

Please help Amity to help them lead better lives.

Make a donation!

You can make a general donation or support individual projects of your choice. For detailed information on projects please contact one of our offices in Nanjing or Hong Kong:

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You can send a crossed cheque or a bank draft, payable to The Amity Foundation, to one of our offices.

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