With this issue, we begin publication of the Amity News Service (ANS), whose purpose is to communicate the news and views of the China Christian Council as a service to the international Christian community.

As contact and communication between Chinese Christians and Christians from around the world has grown over the last few years, the need for a regular English language update of information on church life in China, at both national and grassroots levels, has been expressed in many quarters. This bimonthly publication will attempt to meet that need, through articles and translations on the activities of individual Christians, local churches and Christian organizations in China, which reflect the perspective of the China Christian Council (CCC), the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) and related provincial and local bodies. The Amity News Service will not offer interpretation and analysis about the church in China. Rather we understand it to be a channel for news and information on the activities of Chinese Christians.

It is appropriate that we begin in this first issue with reports from the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference, which closed earlier this month in Beijing. Your comments and suggestions are most welcome.

The Editors

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Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference Stresses Pastoral And Church Concerns

The Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference (NCC) closed in Beijing on January 6th, calling for renewed emphasis on younger leadership, church order and commitment to the Three-Self principle of self-government, self-support and self-propagation. In the largest and most broadly based Protestant gathering since the beginning of the reform period in 1979, 273 delegates from 29 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions gathered in Beijing for the week long meeting, which had as its general theme, "Running The Church Well."

The work of the church over the last five years was presented in a report entitled, "Grace Beyond Words". The report noted that the number of Protestant churches in China has risen from 4,000 in 1986 to more than 7,000 today. More than 20,000 meeting points have also been established. Also during this time, Bible production has jumped from 2 million in 1986 to over 6.5 million today. Achievements in the areas ranging from Christian participation in society to theological education were also noted in the report delivered by Shen Derong, outgoing Secretary General of the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee.

Bishop K.H. Ting was reelected head of the two national Christian organizations, the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) and the China Christian Council (CCC). New standing committees and officers for these organizations were also chosen, and revised TSPM and CCC constitutions were approved.

An important new emphasis was the attention given to young people and a rejuvenated church leadership. "The higher proportion of youth delegates made the conference more lively," according to Li Yading, a young teacher at Nanjing Theological Seminary. Forty-two recent seminary graduates were ordained in an unprecedented service in a move designed to promote young people in leadership positions throughout the church. The average age of all delegates was seven years lower than at the last Christian conference, and younger delegates took part in every aspect of the conference. However, Jin Wei, Associate General Secretary of the Shanghai YMCA, observed that older colleagues spoke more than younger ones.

Women's concerns also received attention at the gathering. Wu Ai'en, an ethnic Korean woman from Shenyang, was happy that a young woman colleague was among the three ethnic Koreans ordained at the conference. Peng Cui'an, who has recently returned to China from studies overseas, commented: "I am very glad to see forty-five colleagues ordained, especially because most of them have "black hair" (they are young). I hope that there will be more with "long hair" (women) as delegates in the future." Women's representation at the Fifth NCC, however, was only somewhat higher than at previous meetings.

Delegates spent much of their time in small groups focusing on various aspects of the theme "Running The Church Well". They discussed leadership training, church administration, the rural church, self-support, Three-Self concerns, theological construction, and overseas exchanges. Their reports were shared in plenary sessions. The small group format made the discussions "more democratic," according to Fujian delegate Zheng Yugui. [OVER]
Fifth NCC/2

The conference also approved a "Church Order For Trial Use In Chinese Churches" which had been in preparation for more than four years. The order incorporates ecclesiastical perspectives from a variety of traditions according to the principle of "mutual respect." Termed by Bishop Ting "the crystallization of forty years" of work of the Chinese church, the new church order will be recommended as a model for local use all over China. According to analysts, this document marks a significant Chinese contribution to the broader ecumenical discussion.

Government officials including Ren Wuzhi, director of the Religious Affairs Bureau, and Qiao Shi, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China, also presented their greetings at the conference. Additional speeches were made on the general situation in China and the world.

Delegates had ample time for informal meetings and shared meals with one another during their week together. They were especially interested in new church publications. Said Ms. Sun Xianchun, who was in charge of the theological bookstore, "I am so pleased to have sold 14,000 books at the conference."

The National Chinese Christian Conference is the highest decision making body for Protestant Christians in China, and usually meets every five or six years. Both the TSPM Committee (founded in 1954) and the CCC (founded in 1980) are accountable to this body. Earlier NCCs were held in 1954, 1961, 1980 and 1986. [ANS]

Church Order For Trial Use Accepted

A "Church Order For Trial Use In Chinese Churches" has been accepted by the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference (NCC) at its meeting ending on January 6. The church order has been in preparation under a special church order committee, chaired by Rev. Peter W.H. Cai, that has been working on it since 1987.

Approved by the delegates of the Fifth NCC, the church order spells out basic rules for the life of the churches in China and calls upon the churches to develop their own regulations on the basis of this text.

In the opening chapters, the church is described both as the body of Christ and as a public organization under Chinese law. Local churches are encouraged to respect different expressions and traditions of faith and told to "neither struggle against each other nor to force unity." Christians, defined as baptized members of a congregation, are called to participate in the running of the church as well as to be good citizens who take up responsibility in society. [OVER]
In the chapter on sacraments, only basic rules are laid down, allowing for
great local differences. While the path towards baptism for new believers has
been well defined, leading them from regular church attendance through baptism
class towards full church membership, baptism and communion rituals are allowed
to vary according to theological traditions, and each local church is free to
adopt one or more forms for its own use.

A longer chapter on the clergy defines the roles of bishops, pastors,
teachers, elders, evangelists and deacons. Bishops do not have any special
administrative authority, but "will shoulder larger pastoral responsibility."
While pastors and teachers should have had formal theological training, elders,
evangelists and deacons "should have a long history of service to the church."

The final chapter of the church order spells out ground rules for church
administration, including regulations on setting up new churches and meeting
points, the election and duties of church councils, the management of church
property and disciplinary measures.

The church order is more specific concerning administration than theology,
which is clearly a sign of the immense differences between the traditions that
have shaped the church in China. Nevertheless, it marks a great step forward for
a church that is, according to its introduction, "on the road towards unity."
[ANS]

New Church Leadership Elected

New leaders for the Chinese church were elected by the Fifth National
Chinese Christian Conference (NCC) at its meeting in Beijing. Bishop K.H.Ting
was reelected President of the China Christian Council (CCC) and Chairperson of
the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant
Churches in China (TSPM). Bishop Shen Yifan, Senior Pastor of Shanghai's
Community Church was elected CCC General Secretary, and Mr. Luo Guanzong,
Chairperson of the Shanghai TSPM Committee, was named Secretary General of the
TSPM.

Separate standing committees for the two national Christian organizations
were elected from the new joint committee of the CCC and the TSPM. Women's
representation as vice-presidents and vice-chairpersons was significantly
increased in each.

Vice-presidents for the Standing Committee of the CCC are: Bishop Shen
Yifan; Rev. Wu Ai'en, an ethnic Korean woman who is Vice-President of the
Liaoning Christian Council; Rev. Chen Zemin, Vice-President of Nanjing
Theological Seminary; Ms. Phoebe Ruazhang Shi, Associate General Secretary of the
National Committee of YWCAs in China; Rev. Yin Jizeng, a senior church leader
from Beijing; Rev. Cao Shengjie, a prominent woman church leader from Shanghai;
Dr. Han Wenzao, General Secretary of the Amity Foundation; Sister Jiangu Peifen,
President of the Jiangsu Christian Council; and Rev. Peter W.H. Cai, President
of the Zhejiang Christian Council. [OVER]
The two Associate General Secretaries of the CCC are Rev. Shen Cheng'en, editor of Tian Feng, the Chinese Protestant monthly magazine, and Rev. Su Dece, Associate Dean of Studies at Huadong Theological Seminary in Shanghai.

Vice-chairpersons of the Standing Committee of the TSPM include: Bishop Wang Shenyan, President of the Shandong Christian Council; Ms. Wang Juzhen, a well-known scientist and inventor from Shanghai; Brother Ren Zhongxiang, a leader from the "Little Flock" in Shanghai; Ms. Liu Nianfen, President of the Hubei Christian Council; Mr. Shen Derong, outgoing Secretary General of the TSPM; Mr. Li Shoubao, General Secretary of the National Committee of YMCAs in China; Mr. Luo Guanzong; Rev. Zheng Yugui, President of the Fujian Christian Council; and Rev. Liang Fuhuan, Chairperson of the Guangdong TSPM Committee. Rev. Bao Jiayuan of the Nanjing Office of the CCC and TSPM Committee and Mr. Xu Minghan of Shanghai were named Associate Secretaries General. [ANS]

Forty-five New Pastors Ordained

Forty-five new pastors were ordained at an unprecedented service at Beijing's Chongwennen Church on January 5th, during the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference (NCC). Forty-two of these were recent seminary graduates, who traveled to the capital from fifteen different provinces for the occasion, and the remaining three were more senior delegates who were attending the national conference.

Rev. Peter W.H. Cai, President of the Zhejiang Christian Council, officiated at the afternoon service, and clergy from a broad range of theological traditions, including representatives from each of the Christian councils which had recommended candidates for ordination, participated in the laying on of hands. Bishop K.H. Ting preached the sermon, based upon the text from Psalm 136, "His Steadfast Love Endures Forever." Rev. (Ms.) Gao Ying of Beijing greeted the congregation on behalf of the newly-ordained pastors, saying that this service marked the beginning of the transition to a new and younger leadership for the Chinese church. When the new pastors faced the congregation after the laying on of hands, the people gave a prolonged and thunderous round of applause to welcome them.

According to one church leader, it is hoped that this service will give impetus to churches all over China to facilitate the ordination of a greater number of young people, so that they may be more quickly introduced into positions of leadership in the churches. Most ordinations in China are conducted at the provincial or local level, upon the recommendation of the church which the candidate serves. It is estimated that in the past ten years fewer than seventy-five recent seminary graduates had been ordained in China. [ANS]
Bishop Ting Sums Up Conference, Talks About New Regulations

New regulations concerning venues for religious activities will be issued soon by the Religious Affairs Bureau under the State Council. This was revealed by Bishop K.H. Ting, President of the China Christian Council (CCC), in his closing speech at the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference (NCC). Ting expressed his hope that this document would be "fair and reasonable" and would lead to the correction of "the excessive methods which have been carried out in some areas."

Summing up the conference, Bishop Ting expressed his satisfaction with the successful rejuvenation of the church leadership, demonstrated by the fact "that the average age of the delegates to this conference is not five years higher than that of the delegates to the Fourth NCC in 1986, but seven years lower."

Addressing the changed world situation, Ting called upon Christians to unite with the masses of the Chinese people in striving for reform, openness, modernization, and the building of a socialist culture.

With regard to the church, Ting stressed the importance of "running the church well," and called for a strengthening of pastoral work. "Some people think that it is enough if there are a lot of people in the churches and that nothing else is important, but this is not the way to build the church well today." Ting added that a church which took into account the needs and care of believers would not need to be afraid of foreign infiltration. "Running the church well means to do what the believers like - let us broadcast this message to Christians all over the country," he added.

Ting also praised the new church order for trial use as a major achievement. Though only a beginning step, it marked "a high point on the road towards unity that the Chinese church has been following over the last forty years."

In his closing remarks, Bishop Ting mentioned the delegates' deep concern about the recent indiscriminate closures of home worship gatherings in several areas. He then revealed that the Religious Affairs Bureau under the State Council was currently drafting regulations on venues for religious activities. Ting said that "views on the draft have been widely sought, including those of every religious organization." He added that the new regulations should be "a fair and reasonable document which seeks truth from facts and acknowledges that home worship gatherings are not all of a piece, and that treatment should differentiate among them." Ting expressed his hope that "once this regulation appears the excessive methods which have been carried out in some areas will be corrected." [ANS]
We, two hundred seventy-three delegates of (Protestant) Christian churches from twenty-nine provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities of China, came together in the name of Jesus Christ for the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference (NCC) which was held in Beijing, from 31 December, 1991, to 6 January, 1992. The theme of our conference was how to run the church well, and the spirit of wisdom and revelation bestowed upon us by our heavenly Father ensured that the meeting was conducted throughout in an atmosphere of faith, hope and love for one another. The success of the conference was also inseparable from the concern, prayers and support of our colleagues and fellow-Christians throughout the nation. Congratulatory telegrams and letters were also received from several church organizations and individuals at home and abroad, for which we express our heartfelt appreciation.

During the conference, the head of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council Ren Wuzhi came to offer his congratulations, and a government official delivered a report on the situation at home and abroad. This was deeply encouraging and educational for the delegates. Even though the world situation is at present in flux, our nation, under the correct leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, is following the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, a path appropriate to the reality of China and consonant with the fundamental welfare of the broad masses of the people. Last year some areas of China experienced the worst flooding of this century, but under the leadership of the Party and government, not only were these difficulties surmounted, but agricultural and industrial production for the nation as a whole achieved sustained increases, and our markets flourished. This gives ample evidence of the superiority of China's socialist system. We have confidence that by following the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the Chinese people, with one heart and one mind and united in the struggle, will be able to establish a strong and prosperous new China. Towards this aim, the conference solemnly calls upon all colleagues and fellow-Christians throughout China, to rally closely round the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government, and, together with the broad masses of the people, to dedicate our strength to the establishment of socialist material and spiritual civilization in our motherland; to social unity and stability; and to the overall development and unification of the motherland. We should also join with Christians and all people the world over in the common struggle for international justice and world peace.

The conference heard the work report of the Standing Committee of the Fourth NCC which was entitled "Grace Beyond Words," as well as an explanation for the revision of the constitutions of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) and the China Christian Council (CCC) by the small group entrusted with this task. Conscientious deliberation and enthusiastic discussion of both the work report and the revised constitutions ensued, and valuable opinions were put forward. In order to explore more deeply how to run the Chinese church well today, small discussion groups on specific topics were held and their findings shared with the plenary session. The topics of these small groups were: advancing Three-Self; leadership training; church administration; the rural church; exploring self-support; theological construction; and overseas exchanges. After full [OVRK]
deliberation, the conference elected new members to the standing committees of the TSPM and the CCC.

The conference was filled with joy and thanksgiving for the grace and guidance which God has shown for the Chinese church, as illustrated in the work report for the last five years presented by the previous standing committee. It is the opinion of the conference that the report's summing up of the achievements and experience of these past five years is a true and accurate reflection of the facts. It is also correct and essential in pointing out the future tasks of the church, and the results of discussions of each particular topic gave meaningful direction for our efforts to run the church well. This conference calls upon all three-self organizations, Christian councils and local churches throughout the country to undertake extensive and thoroughgoing transmission of the spirit and content of the conference to the broad masses of colleagues and fellow-Christians. From this time forward, they should strive in every respect to implement the spirit and content of this conference according to the concrete situation of their particular places, and to share widely all beneficial experience which results from their efforts. It is the hope of this conference that over the next five years, colleagues and fellow-Christians throughout the nation, under the guidance of our heavenly Father, will strive with one heart to uphold the Three-Self principle, to make further strides in running well a Chinese church worthy of our socialist country, so that we will make new achievements and open up new opportunities.

The conference welcomed the "Church Order For Trial Use In Chinese Churches," drafted after three years of work by the Committee on Church Order, and passed by the previous standing committees of the TSPM and the CCC. This document, following the Chinese church's passage into the period of post-denominationalism, incorporates different traditions in a spirit of mutual respect and marks our church's entrance into a new era of doing things decently and in good order. It is a trial church order, designed as a model for the churches. It is the recommendation of this conference that three-self organizations, Christian councils and local churches in China conscientiously publicize and practice this trial order, and make suggestions for additions and revisions, so that our Chinese church's order may be continually improved.

The conference is pleased to note that young and middle-aged delegates under the age of fifty at this conference account for upwards of one quarter of the total number. These delegates, full of vitality, youth and promise, represent the new generation of our church. We are particularly thankful for the fact that Christian councils and church affairs committees from 15 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities have taken advantage of the occasion of the Fifth NCC to hold in Beijing's Chongwenmen Church a solemn and united service of ordination, and that forty-two of the forty-five ordinands are young colleagues. We are thankful for the grace of God in our theological education, which in recent years has begun to bear fruit in supplying heirs for the work of our church. It is our hope that our young colleagues will redouble their humility, prudence and selfless dedication. We ask all colleagues and fellow Christians for their continued prayers, that God may prepare for the Chinese church more clergy from the younger generation who love their country and their church, and who will take up the tasks which our heavenly Father has entrusted this day to the Chinese church.
At this conference we are profoundly moved to remember the many Christians of the previous generations who initiated the Three-Self Patriotic Movement which has already achieved great things. Facts show that the Three-Self Patriotic Movement is God's call to the Chinese church in the present age, the basic path which Chinese Christians should follow in socialist new China. Without the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the Chinese church would not have seen a day such as this, a day in which it has been so blessed. It is the belief of the conference that the Three-Self Patriotic Movement has developed today to the point where we have already entered upon a new era of running the church well according to the Three-Self principle: self-governing and well governed; self-supporting and well supported; self-propagating and well propagated. The Three-Self principle must be implemented in a thoroughgoing manner in each area of a well-run church's ministry. It must be handed on from generation to generation, extended and developed without interruption. Many of the older generation of the church have already gone to be with the Lord, and this great task has been laid upon us Christians of this generation. Let our prayer be that of Elisha when Elijah was taken up to heaven: "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit" (2 Kings 2:9). Let us resolve to take up the unfinished ministry left to us by previous generations, so that with one heart and mind, relying on the Holy Spirit we may loyally serve the gospel of our Lord, that it may flourish during this new era in our nation. [ANS]