On Running The Church Well
Sun Yanli

How can we run our church well? Can constructing splendid and magnificent church buildings or thoroughly implementing our church order be considered as running the church well? Are eloquent evangelists who never stop talking to be considered good evangelists? Of course, all of this is not enough. The Pharisees seemed to be very earnest in following the letter of the law, but we all know that they were only pretending; the scribes knew their scriptures and had an unusual eloquence, but they were hostile towards Jesus who is the true path. To run the church well we first and foremost need good people, as Jesus taught his disciples: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness." Good spiritual training, good moral life and character, following God's guidance, acting in the interest of the people and receiving God's grace -- these establish the basis for running the church well. There is no good church without good church workers.

--- From a Bible study held at the joint meeting of the Standing Committees of the CCC and the TSPM.

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Joint Meeting Of CCC And TSPM Standing Committees Discusses Church Work, Religious Policy

At a joint meeting in Shanghai in May, the Standing Committees of the CCC and the TSPM discussed problems in church work and in the implementation of religious policy. In his work report, CCC General Secretary Bishop Shen Yifan told the committees that some church workers did not really care about the believers' spiritual needs; that some churches faced serious factionalism; that some churches had still not set up governing articles and were run in a chaotic way; and that in some areas, young people were not encouraged to take a leadership role in the church.

TSPM Secretary General Luo Guanzong, in his report about the implementation of the government’s religious policy, stated that there were still serious problems, among them the indiscriminate closure of home worship gathering points in some areas and the meddling of government cadres in the churches' internal affairs. Luo called on all local Christian Councils and TSPM committees to report such violations immediately to appropriate government bodies.

In their discussions, the committee members focused on the problem of cadres meddling in church affairs. Many reported that cadres only intervened in personnel and financial affairs, but even in church work. They expressed the hope that the central government would make its policies very clear to cadres on all levels so that such violations of the government’s policy would stop.

Members also discussed the problem of newly emerging denominationalism, stressing that differences in tradition and in the expression of faith should be respected without compromising the unity of the church. [ANS]

Renewal Campaign In Luoyang Area

A renewal campaign was recently held for the 140,000 Christians in the Luoyang area of Henan province. Twenty-eight pastors and lay church workers split up into seven teams of four members each, visiting all the churches and meeting points in the area.

The campaign addressed many concrete problems of living out the Christian faith in society which had cropped up in the Luoyang area. A report from Luoyang says that those who were weak in faith were strengthened; that superstitious practices and heresies which had influenced some churches were rooted out; and that the churches in the area were put back on the right track. The report adds that many non-Christians in the area now have a much better understanding of the church. [ANS]
Church Magazine Asks For Protection Of Normal Religious Activities

In a prominently displayed article in its July issue, the church magazine, Tian Feng, has demanded the protection of normal religious activities. Citing incidents of indiscriminate closures of home worship gatherings, and cases where believers had been detained and fined, the article proceeds to outline what "normal religious activities" are according to Central Committee Document No.19 on Religious Policy.

"Normal religious activities" are defined there as activities that do not serve as a cover for unlawful actions, that are not counterrevolutionary in nature and that do not run counter to the nation's and the people's welfare. The article states that according to this definition, home worship gatherings of Christian believers must be protected by law as they are an expression of the religious freedom every Chinese citizen enjoys. As the Christian faith discourages people from gambling, fighting, and other unlawful activities it causes no harm. The article decries the fact that local cadres often take part in superstitious rituals while at the same time oppressing Christian home meetings.

Taking up the question of "approved" and "unapproved" home meetings, the article states that even home worship gatherings that have not been approved are normal religious activities and must therefore be protected as long as they have not broken the law. Approval so far has been arbitrary, and can not be a criteria for the legality of home worship gatherings.

Finally, quoting reports from some areas where authorities do not allow believers to meet because there had not been any Christians before, the article demands that the policy of religious freedom and the protection of normal religious activities be implemented there as well. [ANS]

Set Of Educational Tapes For New Believers Big Success

A set of educational audiotapes produced by the China Christian Council to specifically address the questions of new believers has been a runaway success. Since its first publication in 1992, more than 180,000 sets have been sold to believers all over the country.

The set comprises 12 tapes, each of them addressing one theme by quoting scripture and outlining the basics of Christian faith. Topics include "God The Creator", "Christ's Cross", "The Second Coming" and "The Spirit And The Church." The tapes are often used for group study, particularly in women's or youth groups, and in some churches as Sunday school material.

Simple, battery-driven tape recorders are commonly used for teaching purposes all over China. [ANS]
Protest Against Cadres' Meddling In Church Affairs

In a signed article, one of the editors of *Tian Feng*, the national Chinese church magazine, has protested against party cadres meddling in church affairs.

The article cites a recent incident where a Sunday service with more than 100 participants was broken up by United Front Work Department (UFWD) cadres and police wielding electric batons. The article reports that the head of the local UFWD then mounted the pulpit and insisted that a new church work committee be elected. Threatening believers with an electric baton and banging on the table the cadre is quoted as saying: "What is Three-Self? This church stands here, so you have to do what I say." According to the article, most of the believers swallowed this humiliation silently and just tearfully left the church. About 20 believers remained and were then forced to go through the motions of a new election though nominations were neither called for nor ballots counted.

While admitting that such shocking scenes are rare, the author strongly denounces this behavior, demanding that Christians be treated as fellow citizens instead of being dealt with like criminals. The article insists that the election of church leaders is the prerogative of the church and that no outside influence can be tolerated in this matter. Government interference might result in the election of leaders who are not Christians and therefore split churches or drive them underground.

Quoting Li Ruihuan, a member of the Standing Committee of the Politbureau, and premier Li Peng as saying that religious believers must be respected, that the Communist Party's attitude towards religion must be based on the law and that UFWD or RAB cadres must not interfere with normal religious activities, the article goes on to insist that Christians are Chinese citizens who want to be united with all citizens in the task of building up the country, but who at the same time want to have their religious faith respected and do not want to be subjected to some cadre's whim.

The article ends with a reminder that incidents of cadres' meddling in church affairs are still common despite the party leadership's directives, and asks when local cadres will finally start following them. [ANS]

Cheap Loudspeakers For Churches

A simple but effective loudspeaker system has been developed by a retired Christian engineer in Inner Mongolia and is now being produced by a factory in Hohhot. Any church or meeting point can order the system, which at 230 yuan RMB for the amplifier and 35 yuan RMB for each loudspeaker is extremely cheap. [ANS]
Taiyuan Church Demands Return Of Its Property

Property belonging to the church in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, which was taken away during the Cultural Revolution has not been returned despite an eleven-year effort to get it back. As the Taiyuan Three-Self Committee reports in an article printed by the church magazine, *Tian Feng*, the property was taken over by the city’s condenser factory in August, 1966. In March 1982, the Taiyuan city government ordered the factory to return the site and buildings to the church. As the factory claimed they urgently needed the property for another two years, the church agreed to wait until March, 1984. In 1984, the factory claimed that they still had not been able to build new residences for the people living in the former church houses, so the church and the factory agreed to postpone the return of the buildings until 1987. In 1987, the church was pressured by the city government to accept a new postponement until September 1992. Strangely, at that time, the factory stopped paying rent to the church for the property. The financial loss for the church so far stands at well over 400,000 yuan RMB. In June, 1992, the church told the factory manager that they would not accept another postponement and again demanded the return of the property by September of that year. But instead of complying with this demand, in September 1992 the factory tore down one of the buildings on the site without even asking the church’s approval. The factory, which still holds the church property, has now changed it into a guest house.

The report from the Taiyuan Three-Self Committee states that the church is in dire need of this property as they do not have adequate space for church programs and church offices. They also urgently need the outstanding rent to finance necessary repairs to their church building. The report says that Christians in Taiyuan are no longer willing to tolerate the factory’s actions. It accuses the factory leaders of just dragging their feet over the issue and adamantly demands that the property as well as the outstanding rent be returned to the church immediately. [ANS]

New Churches, Ordinations For Yi Christians

Many Christians from the Yi minority are concentrated in Longyin township area in Pu’an county, Guizhou province. Meeting since 1980 in three large home worship gatherings, the Christians are held in high esteem by their neighbors because of their constant display of public spirit. The Christians’ plan to build two new churches was therefore encouraged from all sides.

With many Christians offering money as well as labor, the churches were recently finished in Xincha and Erdunyan villages. Soon afterwards, one pastor, three elders and seven evangelists were ordained in Xincha. [ANS]
Christian Witness In Red Flag Village Changes Party Secretary’s Attitude

Red Flag village, a famous model village situated in Jidong county, Heilongjiang province, had no Christians until 1988. In April of that year, a group of more than ten people became Christians. As there is no church in the village, they have to ride their bicycles for about 40 km to attend a worship service. The group also meets for Bible study and prayer in homes.

As the party secretary of Red Flag village was afraid the village might lose its model status because of the new Christian converts, he started to harass them. Even intervention by Three-Self officials from Jixi city did not change his attitude.

Christian families in Red Flag village did not take any action against the party secretary. On the contrary, they were always the first to sign up for public labor. During road repairs last year, the Christians not only did the work assigned to them, but repaired an extra 300 metre stretch that had been neglected. Since that time, the party secretary’s attitude has changed and all harassment has stopped. [ANS]

Korean Churches In The Northeast: Many Believers, Few Pastors

Of the 2 million ethnic Koreans who live in the Northeastern provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning, about 65,000 or a little more than 3% are Protestant Christians. In Heilongjiang, the 25,000 Korean Christians worship in two churches and about 500 meeting points, served by two ordained pastors, two elders and three evangelists who have had one year of theological training. The large majority of the more than 30,000 Korean Christians in Jilin live in the Yanbian Autonomous Region. They worship in 40 churches and about 700 meeting points, served by one ordained pastor, two teachers, seven elders and four evangelists with one year of theological training. In Liaoning, 10,000 Korean Christians worship in 16 churches and more than 100 meeting points, served by four pastors, nine teachers and ten elders. Twenty-three ethnic Koreans are currently studying at the Northeastern Theological Seminary in Shenyang, and three at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

According to a recent report from Rev. Wu Ai’en, an ethnic Korean pastor from Shenyang, Korean and Han Chinese congregations are usually separate, but cooperate well and help one another with church buildings and the exchange of preachers. [ANS]
Two New Churches For Shanghai Suburbs

Of the approximately 100,000 Christians in Shanghai municipality, more than 50,000 live in suburban counties. To satisfy their needs, two more churches were recently built. The new church in Nanhui county was opened in April, and a four-day retreat was held there soon afterwards. The newly-built church in Jiading county was opened in May with a festive service that had more than 2,000 believers packing the pews. [ANS]

Short Training Class Held In Ningxia

A twelve-day training class was recently held at the church in Shizuishan, Ningxia province. Initially only 28 people were enrolled, but in the event more than 60 participants attended day sessions, with the audience swelling to more than one hundred in the evenings. A report from the church says that the training class greatly strengthened the participants' desire for unity in the church, their evangelistic zeal and their biblical knowledge. [ANS]

Retreat For Believers And Seekers Held in Gansu

A one-week retreat for believers and seekers was held by the church in Jiuquan, Gansu province in the spring of this year. Elders and lay church workers spoke on topics that included "The meaning of Jesus' suffering and resurrection", "The meaning of being reborn", and "How to live as a Christian." Seventy people participated in the retreat, many going to great lengths to be able to attend. The Jiuquan church reports that some workers changed to night shifts so that they could attend sessions during the day, while some peasants from outlying villages rode their bikes for some 10 kilometers every day to come into town for the retreat. [ANS]

International Exchanges

A delegation from the Lutheran World Federation, led by its General Secretary Rev. Gunnar Staalsø Alden, visited Beijing and Nanjing May 29 to June 2.

A 16-person delegation from the Hongkong Chinese Christian Churches Union visited Hangzhou, Yangzhou, Shanghai, Nanjing and Beijing May 31 to June 10.

Nine representatives from the Hongkong Lutheran Theological Seminary visited Nanjing Union Theological Seminary on June 6 to discuss future cooperation.
The General Secretary of the Netherlands Missionary Council, Dr. Van Butselaar, visited churches and seminaries in Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Shanghai, Nanjing and Beijing, June 9 - July 4.

The General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea, Rev. Kwon Ho Kyung visited churches and seminaries in Beijing and Northeastern China, June 16-26. A nine-member delegation from the NCC-K mainly visited Korean churches in Northeastern China in July.

Bishop William Swing and Rev. Rick Fabian of the California Diocese of the Episcopal Church in the USA visited churches and seminaries in Beijing, Xi’an, Nanjing and Shanghai, June 29 - July 13.

A six-member delegation from the German Bible Society, led by its General Secretary Dr. Siegfried Meurer, visited Nanjing and Shanghai July 1-5, discussing the possibility of holding an executive meeting of the United Bible Societies in China.

Invited by the International Lutherans Laymen’s League, Rev. Wang Xiaoyin from Guangdong Theological Seminary participated in the the League’s General Assembly in Spokane, Washington, and also visited the League’s headquarters in St. Louis, July 15-30.

A 14-member delegation from the Korean Association of Accredited Theological Schools visited seminaries and churches in eastern and northeastern China, July 19-27.

Rev. Gao Ying from Beijing and Dr. He Qi from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary participated in the biannual High Leight conference of the Friends of the Church in China in July.

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Abbreviations used in this issue: CCC, China Christian Council; TSPM, National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China; UFWD, United Front Work Department; RAB, Religious Affairs Bureau; RMB, Renminbi.
Bishop Shen Yifan, General Secretary of the China Christian Council, recently visited Hong Kong and spoke with Philip Wickeri of ANS on a number of issues and concerns of the Chinese Church. Excerpts--

ANS: How does the China Christian Council speak out to defend the rights of the Chinese Christians?

SYF: We speak out in many ways. Quite a number of church leaders are represented in our People’s Congresses and in our People’s Political Consultative Conferences at different levels. At these meetings, we address certain cases and we ask that the government pay attention to them. Sometimes we will submit written proposals which are passed on to higher authorities who see to it that violations of religious freedom are investigated and corrected according to policy. As we receive quite a number of letters from different churches and individuals about violations, we organize teams to visit certain areas. Last year we sent two teams to visit the provinces of Henan and Anhui. We published our findings and impressions in our church journal Tian Feng and also there are extensive discussions about religious freedom in the same journal. Such discussions are very welcomed by our people, and it is one reason for the increased circulation of Tian Feng. This year circulation has reached 75,000, up from 56,000 last year. Government officials pay great attention to what we write because Tian Feng is so widely read.

ANS: Can you think of a specific case in which you made an appeal to the government that was successfully dealt with?

SYF: There are cases where government officials or even local public security officers go to a meeting point which has not been registered or approved by the local government and they confiscate Bibles and hymnals or even fine those who attend. We ask the authorities to investigate and return the books and fines, and then the cases are often redressed.

ANS: What does registration mean for the churches in China?

SYF: There has not yet been a national policy of registration. Since there is to be such a policy, we want the requirements to be open, reasonable and fair. Whether a meeting point can be registered or not must not be decided at the whim of some local cadres. There must be some objective standard in law.

ANS: Do local cadres interfere with the work of the local church?

SYF: Yes, some do. Of course, they are not authorized to do so. Religious Affairs Bureaus (RAB) are only to be concerned with administrative affairs affecting religious organizations. Yet there is an ambiguity in some documents about the government official’s role in administrative leadership.

ANS: What does that mean, "administrative leadership"?

SYF: It has not been clearly defined. We are asking for a clearer definition of the role of RABs because people have different understandings. Some cadres insist that they [Over]
Interview With Shen Yifan

must know how religious bodies spend their money because financial affairs come under administrative leadership. In some places church appointments have even been interpreted as administrative. These interpretations are incorrect. It seems that something is now being drafted to define the authority of government officials.

ANS: Will this be a new national law?

SYF: I don’t think it will be a law, but the government is drafting regulations that will regulate the role of officials, not only in religious affairs but also in other sectors of society. On the whole the government is playing less of an administrative role, especially in economic life, to build up more local autonomy.

ANS: Some people have said that the CCC cooperates too closely with the government and that this works against the interests of Christians in home worship gatherings. Is this true?

SYF: This of course is not true. The CCC serves all Christians in China not only those who are related to us. We try to defend the right of religious freedom for all Christians in China. We speak up for them with the local authorities. All Christians must enjoy religious freedom regardless of the places they worship.

ANS: What are the prospects for the future of church-state relations in China?

SYF: I think relations will continue to improve. Things have already changed greatly since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Church-state relations are conducted on a new level though we still have difficulties with local cadres. Relations can be improved if there are more regulations or laws concerning religious matters, though this will take some time. This will provide us with a legal basis for appeals to the government.

ANS: And what is the future of Christianity and the church in China?

SYF: There are good prospects for the future of Christianity in China. In the years following the end of the Cultural Revolution we didn’t expect the Christian churches to grow so rapidly. This growth is the work of the Holy Spirit and it has opened the doors for our mission and evangelism.

The future of Christianity in China will depend on two factors. One is the church in China running the church well. If we cannot give better Christian nurture to the people who join the church so that they grow better in their understanding of the Christian faith, if we cannot train more young leadership and promote young leaders to more responsible positions in the church, or if we cannot provide enough Christian literature, then I think there is less chance for Christianity to grow in a healthy way in China. The other factor is the better implementation of religious freedom, as I have been saying here... The church must grow so that it can bring the gospel to our people, serve God, and make a contribution to the spiritual and material welfare of China.

[ANS]