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Date For National Christian Conference Set

(ANS) The Sixth Chinese National Christian Conference will be held in Beijing from November 26 to December 2, 1996. The Conference is the highest decision-making body for Protestant Christians in China, and usually meets every five years. Both the TSPM and the CCC are accountable to the Conference. The Fifth Chinese National Christian Conference was held in January 1992.

The 1996 Conference will elect a new president of the CCC, since current president Bishop K.H. Ting is due to retire, as well as a new CCC general secretary. The Conference will also decide on revisions to the Church Order For Trial Use. [107 words]

To our readers: Due to technical difficulties, this print issue of ANS has been delayed more than one month. The next issue will be published as a double issue in early December, carrying news and reports of the Sixth National Christian Conference. We apologize for any inconvenience caused.

Monthly news updates will continue for ANS online (see inside this issue for details), with updates scheduled for the middle of each month. Reports on the Sixth National Christian Conference will be available on ANS online within a day or two after the close of the conference.

The Editors
Church Growing In Qinghai Province

(ANS) Church growth has been rapid in some areas of Qinghai Province in recent years, reports the church magazine, Tian Feng, in its July issue. From about 400 Christians in the 1940s, the church in this province has now grown to about 15,000 members. The Qinghai Provincial Christian Council was established in 1994.

In 1981, there were only about 50 Christians in the provincial capital, Xining. But their numbers increased quickly, as church activities became public once more. When a new church building was opened on Christmas Day 1984, more than 300 Christians celebrated the fact that they now had a proper place to worship. The old building soon proved too small and had to be considerably enlarged in 1992. The church now seats 1,200 and is still far too small: The number of Christians in the Xining area is estimated at 6,000-7,000, most of whom gather in one of about a dozen small meeting points.

Says Rev. Meng Zhaohan, the 88-year old president of the Qinghai Christian Council: "We plan to build a second church in Xining, one that can seat at least 2,000 to 3,000 people. And thinking of the Christians in the surrounding areas, we need to build at least another 10 churches."

Alltogether, there are only four registered churches in the province; a fifth is currently in the process of registration. They are located in Datong, Guide, Huangyuan and Gonghe Counties, respectively. There are six ordained pastors, four of them in Xining, and two theological graduates who have not yet been ordained. Another five students from Qinghai are currently at Beijing and Nanjing Seminaries. Qinghai Christians have also benefited from the three-year correspondence course run by Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. Ten church workers have already graduated, and another 20 are currently enrolled. [302 words]

 Churches Affected By Yangzi Dam Project

(ANS) The planned Three Gorges Dam on the upper reaches of the Yangzi River in Sichuan Province will necessitate one of the biggest resettlement programs China has ever seen. Over the next few years, more than 800,000 people will have to be moved to higher ground in Wanxian Prefecture alone to give way to the rising waters of the Yangtse River. Behind a 170-meter dam, a newly created lake will stretch upstream for more than 600 kilometers.

According to the Wanxian Religious Affairs Bureau, 14 places of religious worship will also have to be resettled. Among them are five Protestant and four Catholic churches. The central government has earmarked 2 billion yuan in support of all private households and institutions which will be forced to move. Compensation will cover the provision of a plot of land of equal size to the one previously owned, as well as the market value of present buildings.
As all affected churches were built before 1949, and therefore have a very low market value, Christian congregations face severe financial difficulties. According to the Sichuan Christian Council, the new church buildings will have to be much bigger than the old ones, as congregations have long outgrown their old buildings anyhow. This means that in addition to state compensation funds, the five Protestant churches together are still in need of an estimated 10 million yuan (1.2 million US$). It is unclear how these funds can be raised. [246 words]

Facts And Figures About The Church In Sichuan

(ANS) The number of Christians in the province is estimated at about 400,000, less than 0.4% of the population. There are 119 churches and a large number of meeting points affiliated with the Sichuan Christian Council, in which about 250,000 Protestants worship.

The province has over 100 ordained pastors, 17 of whom are female.

The provincial Christian Council runs the Sichuan Theological Seminary which trains students from the province as well as Yunnan and Guizhou. The seminary, which was opened in 1984, has offered three-year courses since 1986. There is only one class at a time. Altogether, there have been 157 graduates who have to serve in the church for a minimum of three years before they can be ordained. But of the 72 young theologians who graduated between 1986 and 1992, only 27, 11 of them women, have been ordained.

The Sichuan Christian Council has established a fund through which finances are shared between richer and poorer churches in the province. According to their economic strength, local churches contribute one, two or three percent of their annual income from donations.

Registration of churches and meeting points is ongoing in Sichuan. According to the provincial Christian Council, registration fees are low in most areas. In some places, though, they may be as high as several thousand yuan.

Several local churches in Sichuan have established or plan social service projects. The church in Mianyang City is currently setting up a home for the aged, while the church in Luzhou and the YMCA in Chengdu have been running kindergartens for several years.

The church in Zhong County, Wanxian Prefecture, runs a little, extremely modest clinic with eight Christian doctors. This clinic, which was founded in 1987, will soon move to a new 11-storey building currently under construction, where it will occupy two floors. The county is poor, with an average annual per-capita income of only 500 yuan. Doctors in the Christian clinic earn 150 to 200 yuan a month. [337 words]
Grassroots Democracy Called For In Church

(ANS) The church cannot be run well unless it is run by democratic means. This claim by Song Yongsheng, a student of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, was published in the August issue of the church magazine, Tian Feng.

Quoting Bishop K.H.Ting, Song says that it is necessary to focus on the grassroots level which has been neglected, and that democratization is needed there. Song suggests a system of integrated representation and control in four areas:

1) The believers of each village or city district should be represented by a group of people elected from among them. Their duty would be to communicate the needs and interests of that group to the parish church as a whole, as well as to look after the needs of individual believers. Such representatives should be elected for a limited term, and then replaced by a newly elected group.

2) Every church should be led by about seven to ten church councillors who are elected for a five-year period. Election should take place after a preparatory process of shared prayer and open debate. The church councillors should look after all church affairs.

3) The church councillors should elect the church leader/director by secret ballot. This leader would chair the church council and also deal with government bodies as the church representative. Together with the church councillors, he would set up church committees for different fields of work including finances, preaching and social services.

4) Two of the believers' representatives and two church councillors should form a supervision team to oversee the leadership and supervise the implementation of regulations.

Such a leadership structure of the local church, commonplace in many countries, is still rare in China where many local churches are run by one or two leaders without any democratic supervision. [303 words]

We would like to inform our readers that monthly updated news and reports about the church in China are now available on our site on the World Wide Web.

ANS online at http://www.hk.super.net/~amityhk
Building The Church Well: The Example Of Longgang

(ANS) Longgang in Wenzhou Prefecture is China's first "peasant city", a new town built completely from scratch. Christians started to meet in the city as soon as building was begun, and a congregation of more than 2,000 now assembles at the beautiful Grace Church, right in the middle of town.

According to Chen Dingtong, a church worker from Longgang, there is much that can be learnt from the Longgang congregation about building up a church. Chen, who stresses that good church organization is a necessary basis for good church work, reports that Longgang has committees for pastoral work, finance, Christian education, youth, books, church music, reception of guests and visitors, cleanliness and hygiene, electrical maintenance, and video filming (the sacristy is on the second floor, and church worship services are broadcast to a ground floor room via closed-circuit TV).

Pastoral work plays an important role in Longgang, and is carefully planned. Besides the Sunday service, there are Bible studies and prayer meetings, youth fellowships, revival meetings and evangelistic functions. The 1,000 or so Christian households in Longgang have been divided into subgroups, with each subgroup receiving a pastoral visit once every three months. Within the subgroup, church workers visit each household once a month, and members visit each other frequently, especially if someone is sick or needs special help.

In terms of finance, transparency is of crucial importance, insists Chen. Records of all church income and expenses are open to church members, and church savings are kept in the bank. No one can borrow church money for personal use.

It is important to resolve conflicts by democratic means, Chen says. To ensure full representation of each believer in church affairs, Christians are divided into groups of 30, according to where they live. Each group chooses one delegate for the church assembly, which then elects the church council, directors, accountants etc. Democratic election means that the average age of church council members has dropped from over 60 to under 40 years.

Church workers in Longgang have a vision that goes beyond their own church. A dozen of them have formed an evangelistic team, which goes out twice a year to visit mountain villages and isolated islands on the Zhejiang coast, cooperating with local churches there in organizing revivals and evangelistic meetings. When these churches need financial help, e.g. to build a church, the Longgang church is ready to assist them.

[406 words]
Theological Graduate Calls For Help

(ANS) "Senior pastors, take responsibility for young theological graduates, do not add to the cross they are already bearing!" This anguished plea by a recent theological graduate was published in the August issue of the church magazine, Tian Feng, under a pen name that could be roughly translated as "Adding More".

"Adding More" describes how he was told to wait again and again when asking to be assigned work in the church. Even on his graduation day, he did not know where he would be working. He was not alone in this quandary, even though the church is desperately short of trained pastoral workers.

As a new group of graduates is now waiting to be assigned, "Adding More" implores senior pastors to treat graduates "like their own children", and not to destroy the trust the young students place in them. "Do not place a cross on their back, they are your future co-workers", he pleads.

When he was finally assigned to a church, "Adding More" was told by a senior pastor: "Conditions there are somewhat lacking, but we all have to make sacrifices, so let's not talk about the conditions." "Adding More" now has to live in a dark and dank room, trying to stretch his salary of 200-300 yuan so that it will last him the month. Still, he tries to keep up appearances, because he doesn't want to be pitied or gossiped about for the hardships he has to endure because he chose to study theology. But alone at night, he often cries bitter tears.

"Adding More" says that he has often wanted to open his heart to the senior pastor, but didn't dare to do so. "I was afraid you would say that I have no faith... But I need your encouragement and your help!" "Adding More" adds that only with an open and trusting relationship between young graduates and senior pastors can church work be done well.

"Adding More's" situation is typical of the circumstances of many young graduates, who may be viewed with suspicion by senior pastors, are given very little responsibility and often have to live on extremely low salaries. A number of graduates have quit church work in recent years because they found themselves unable to continue working under such conditions. [385 words]

Christian Women in Guangzhou Raise Their Status

(ANS) Chinese Christian women need to abandon their submissive nature! So says Lin Xuan in the August edition of the church magazine Tian Feng. Commenting on developments for Christian women in Guangzhou, she cites four main areas where improvements are obvious:

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(1) It used to be thought that a woman could not be married and be an evangelist at the same time, so in the past most women evangelists remained single or else only became evangelists upon widowhood. Things began to change after 1958 and figures for 1994 show that out of 11 young female church workers, eight were married with families.

(2) In the past different denominations in Guangzhou paid their workers at different rates but all were alike in paying female workers considerably less than male staff. In one denomination in 1950, men received a monthly salary of 60 yuan compared to 35-40 yuan for women. In another denomination, the salary difference was 90 yuan for men, 15 yuan for women. In 1982 and 1984, the Guangzhou church revised salaries and made them equal for both men and women.

(3) Before Liberation, it never even occurred to women that they themselves might be ordained. Actually, Guangzhou already had an ordained woman minister, Li Tianyuan, possibly the only ordained woman in the world at that time. However, as the Anglican church refused to recognise her ordination, she did not advance the cause of women's ordination much. Only with the "Opening Up and Reform" policy has the Guangzhou church seen the ordination of six women, three in 1985 and three in 1987. The main reason for ordaining these women was a practical consideration - providing enough pastors for congregations which had none.

(4) With the establishment of New China, women stood up but Christian women made little progress in status. Representatives to national political bodies drawn from the Guangzhou church continued to be all men. Only after 1982 did conditions exist for women to take part in politics. In 1994 the Guangzhou church sent 12 women to take part in political meetings, representing 24% of all church co-workers in the city. The number of women voted as model workers rose from 39 in 1991 to 79 in 1994. Women made up 55.9% of Guangzhou city's church councils, 47.05% of Guangzhou's CCC/TSPM Committee and 30.3% of its Standing Committee. More Christian women are thus taking part in decision-making bodies within society than ever before.

Lin Xuan goes on to suggest how Christian women should consolidate and further their position in the future:

Firstly, women must rid themselves of the mindset that dictates a need to be pushed or moved by others in order to act. They have to transform a submissive attitude in to a courageous, resourceful one.

Secondly, Christian women workers need to develop their own unique political, cultural, spiritual and moral thinking. This will allow them to meet the new demands and questions in today's changing society, such as greater unemployment among women, and problems that affect the family, such as gambling and drug-taking. Christian women workers need to develop their own ways of thinking about and dealing with these issues, rather than having recourse to traditional, male-inspired methods and modes of thought.
Thirdly, women church workers can encourage other women at all levels within the church to meet together regularly. They should work together to re-examine their own worth in the light of Biblical teaching, as well as taking part in social welfare projects. Furthermore, they can liaise with Christian women abroad, learning from each other's strong points and promoting world peace.

Finally, a plan needs to be adopted to train certain numbers of women theologians and to arrange "Feminist Theology" discussion groups, women's editorial groups, and to publicize Christian women's achievements. In this way, women can gain the same depth of support in their spiritual development as men enjoy. [654 words]

The "Four Don'ts" Of Preaching To The Sick

(ANS) The healing of illnesses is one of the main reasons why rural folk in China become Christians. How to properly deal with praying for the sick is therefore a topic much discussed within the Chinese churches. An article in the August issue of the church magazine, Tian Feng, sums up the theological consensus under the title "Watch Out For The Four Don'ts When You Preach To The Sick."

The article is meant as a warning against wrongly understood evangelism, writes its author, Sang Wei. Jesus cured the sick and cast out evil spirits to demonstrate his authority, but although many people are turning to faith during a period of ill health or suffering, health of the body is not the main content of the Gospel.

Four mistakes should be avoided in preaching to sick people:

1) Healing should not be guaranteed. Faith in Jesus is not a warrant for healing. Humans depend on God's mercy. So if one preaches about the healing power of faith, nothing should be said that sounds like the preacher already knows God's will.

2) A sick person should never be told to discontinue medical treatment. Prayer for healing should accompany the taking of medication, not replace it.

3) Illness and possession by evil spirits should not be confused. Most illnesses are just illnesses, and have nothing to do with evil spirits. Sick people should therefore not normally undergo an exorcism.

4) The sick person should not just rely on the prayers of other people. While all Christians should include their sick brothers and sisters in their prayers, the sick person's direct contact with God is most important. [280 words]
Mixed Reports On Return Of Church Property

(ANS) When it comes to the return of church property taken over by government work units since the late 1950s, congregations' experiences are decidedly mixed.

In Xiamen, a former treaty port in Fujian Province, 94 out of slightly more than 100 church and missionary properties have been returned to the church, and the government has issued regulations about the preservation of historic church buildings.

In Heze, Shandong Province, two large tracts of land originally owned by the church were recently handed back.

In some cases, local RAB officials have shown themselves extremely helpful, and their efforts are appreciated by local Christians. In Lingshui County, Sichuan Province, there had been six venues of worship for more than 2,000 Christians in 1949. Until earlier this year, the same number of Christians could only assemble in two places. But local RAB officials took up the matter and called two conferences with the local authorities, who then agreed to pave the way for the restoration and reopening of the Dingpingzhen Gospel Church.

But often, the process of regaining church properties can be long and protracted.

In the case of the South Road Church in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, a lawsuit that has gone on for ten years has finally been settled. The property in question, assigned to the church in 1985 as compensation for the loss of another building, proved to be partially developed. As the buildings on the property were used for commercial purposes, their demolition seemed to be impossible. Only in 1991, when the local authorities claimed this piece of land for a public parking lot, were the buildings finally torn down. South Road Church then appealed to the local court demanding that the property be reassigned to the congregation. The court passed the case to the city council, which referred the decision to the local building authority. In February 1995, plans for the extension of the parking lot led to an organized protest by the congregation. When South Road Church repeated its claim in October 1995, the local authorities finally took a decision in favor of the church, citing an article in the Hohhot Municipal Statutes of 1992 which states that "no working unit or private person is allowed to occupy or use property belonging to places of religious activity."

But in Ping Township of Tiantai County, Zhejiang Province, things are different. The church compound there, comprising six buildings and a courtyard, was taken over by the county's building brigade in 1959. In 1983, the local government permitted the establishment of a venue for Christian religious activities in Ping, and local Christians applied to get their property back. But after negotiations with the local government, only the ground floors of three buildings were returned for church use, while the top floors and the other structures remained occupied by the county building brigade. According
to a report by the Tiantai County Three-Self Committee, "10 years of complaints, reports and dossiers to provincial, prefectural and local governments, consultative conferences, religious affairs bureaus and to the national TSPM" have not brought this case to conclusion. The church will now sue for the return of its property and hopes that the publication of its case in the church magazine, Tian Feng, will help.

Similarly, whether the Chengguan Church in Shouning County, Fujian Province, will be returned is still uncertain. Christians in Shouning are appealing to the local government for implementation of the regulations on religion. In the 60s and 70s, the church grounds served as lodging for a production brigade and as a retirement home for a former soldier. Later, the retired soldier sold the house he was occupying even though he did not have a certificate of possession. The buyer is still living on the property.

According to Document No. 188 adopted by the Communist Party in 1980, Chengguan Church should have been returned to the Christian community in Shouning. It was not until the end of 1994 that a court decision was made to restore the property to the church. Nevertheless the buyer successfully appealed. The church is still claiming for the enforcement of the official regulations which guarantee legal stability and secure the needs of the believers. [701 words]

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Local Christians Take Religious Affairs Officials To Court

(ANS)"Twenty years ago, if somebody said that a group of Christian were taking their local Religious Affairs Bureau to court then you would think they were joking." So comment Xu Shengyi and Liu Tiancang in the September edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church. However, as they report, this is exactly what happened at the beginning of this year.

In its annual inspection of places designated for religious activity, the Neixiang County Bureau for Minority and Religious Affairs did not renew the permits of the five meeting points in and around Dongchuan Village, Neixiang County, Henan Province. Therefore, Christians there sought the help of the local People's Court in order to investigate and settle this matter. The case began on 28.12.95.

The Christians in Neixiang County maintained that there was no reason not to grant renewal of the permit, and that such a move went against religious policy and regulations. They cited a 1994 provincial religious affairs ruling (No.42) which states that the inspection of religious meeting points must be carried out in the first quarter of every year, that is, by the end of April. The Neixiang County RAB had still not finished its inspection of Dongchuan village meeting points by December. Secondly, the government not only did not renew the permit but also called the police to close down the meeting points. The Christians believe this violates the legitimate rights and interests of the believers there.
In reply, the Neixiang County government said that not granting a renewal of the permit was fair and reasonable: Firstly, according to its understanding of the 1994 No.42 ruling, inspection work should actually be completed before September. The inspection of the Dongchuan meeting points was already completed by 25.9.95. Secondly, in the course of the inspection some problems were discovered concerning the believers there changing the nature of the meeting points without permission. State RAB "Regulations For Granting Registration [...] To Places For Religious Activities", Section 3, Article 5 state that, "If any circumstances or questions are left unclear, or other problems exist which make the granting of registration inadvisable, the registration should be deferred." State RAB "Suggestions For The Carrying Out Of Registration Of Places Of Religious Activity", Section 2, Item 3, Article 4 goes on to say that "After giving reasons why registration has been deferred, a time limit should be set during which the problems should be settled, or else believers should go to another place already registered and take part in the religious activities there." Therefore, the decision was taken not to grant a renewal of the permit and to halt activities at the Dongchuan meeting points.

The court declared that it seemed the Christians in Dongchuan did change the nature of their meeting place without permission. However, the authorities concerned also seemed to have gone about their work in an oversimplified and casual manner. Therefore, the court wanted to further inspect the evidence and documents presented by both sides and reconvene on 15.1.96.

On 14.1.96, the authorities sent the local Christians a revised report on the Dongchuan meeting points and the Christians agreed with recommendations made in the report. In return, the authorities agreed to renew the permits for the meeting points. On 15.1.96, when the court reconvened, it was proposed and accepted that the case had been settled and could therefore be closed.

This particular case is the first of its kind and, according to the Tian Feng article, has certain implications:

(1) Ordinary people's consciousness and understanding of the law has been enhanced, especially that of believers. In China, there has always been a deep fear of the law and a feeling that one should never go to court. Now this is changing. People are becoming familiar with the law and learning how to use it. The law can be used to measure the actions of officials and judge them right or wrong. It can be used as a weapon to protect honour and rights. This case represents a new step in the mode of action of religious workers. In the future, if religious workers meet with difficulties, they should not, as before, try to reason things out with some local bureaucrat. Instead, they should appeal directly to the law.

(2) This case also shows that the rough, almost discriminatory treatment of religious groups by some officials is not acceptable. "Everyone is equal under the law" - this applies to all believers too.
As compared to our 1995 figures, the lowest estimate of the total has gone up from 8.55 million to 9.15 million. As we do not have low estimates for three provinces, two of which have considerable Christian populations, this figure is definitely very low.

In adding up the highest estimates for each province, it has to be kept in mind that there are no high estimates for seven provinces. In these cases, the lowest estimates were figured into the total.

The total of the highest estimates has gone up from 12.63 million to 13.32 million, a less dramatic increase than in previous years.

Readers should be reminded that all figures quoted here are rough estimates, and that the margin of error may be as high as 50%.

### How Many Christians Are There In China?

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**Totals**        | **9,155,000**   | **13,317,000**   |