Reports Of Poverty Elicit Compassionate Response

(ANS) "Go and see those poor mountain people, who attend worship in the snow and the wind in their bare feet. Build them a church building that can keep out the winter. Improve their barren land, that it may become rich, fertile soil and yield good crops. Give their school-less kids the means to study. Build mountain villages a school and let their children at least have a happy childhood. Send clothes and food to enable these starving hungry people to get through the winter. How can you not go and see? These are our brothers and sisters, and they need our help..."

Last year, the Chinese Church magazine, Tian Feng, published a series of articles reporting the chronic poverty and hardships faced by believers in the remotest and poorest parts of China. This included an article by reporter Min Xin in July of last year on the desperate situation of the churches in Guizhou Province, from which the above quote is taken. These articles have stirred many believers within the church in China, and people have written in with offers of help and suggestions as to how these problems may be tackled. In its January issue this year, Tian Feng, published a selection of these responses and commented on the huge difficulties faced in dealing with such a large problem.
After reading reflections on a trip to Gansu Province by church worker Li Jianguo in *Tian Feng* of October last year, a believer from Shanghai, Zhang Weiqi, wrote how some of the problems are obviously difficult to handle but others seem to be resolvable with a little thought. Situations described in the article, such as graduates from theological colleges not being used, or church organization being so neglected that meeting points are scattered and not in contact with each other are things which could be avoided, Zhang claims. As to a lack of Bibles, hymnals and devotional materials in many churches, Zhang suggests that *Tian Feng* set up a "Help Those In Difficulty" Project, and also that individual churches across the country install special collection boxes. The proceeds from these could then be used to provide the devotional materials lacking in poorer areas of the country. A system of partner churches could also be set up, with richer churches partnering poorer ones and helping provide for them.

Liu Yi from Wuhan, Hubei Province, on reading the articles about poverty in the church, was reminded of the words of Jesus: "Whatever you do for the least of your brothers, you do for me". Liu encourages all believers in the church to make themselves aware of the plight of their brothers and sisters, not only in the remote areas of China but also in the poor mountainous areas of the otherwise affluent coastal provinces. Liu cites the case of a theological graduate who gave up the chance to work in the big city in order to serve in just such a poor country area. This graduate has not been paid for one year because the church is simply too poor to find the money for her salary. Her life is very hard as a result. Liu believes that care for the members of God's family and care for workers who dedicate their lives to the Lord is the most outstanding and important way of expressing one's own love for God. Otherwise, often repeated phrases such as "bring glory to God and benefit the people" sound hollow and lose their meaning.

Liu would like to see a foundation set up on a national level to help church workers in poorer areas. Helping the poor within the church is one part of society's efforts to help the poor in general.

Another believer, Zhou Yongzhen, was so moved by reports on the poverty in the church in Gansu and Yunnan Provinces that she decided to do something practical about it. With other sisters in her area, she wants to buy several dozen Bibles to be distributed in those areas. She also wants to send 1,000 yuan (US$122) to villages in Yunnan to supplement the living allowances of workers there. Furthermore, she has blankets and quilts in her family which she is willing to donate. Zhou is happy to make these donations, despite the fact that she herself is retired on a barely adequate pension and is suffering from cancer now. Zhou believes that only printing articles in *Tian Feng* is not enough to enable the majority of believers in China to know the plight of their brothers and sisters in the poverty-stricken areas within their country. She would like to see preachers and evangelists addressing this topic during worship services. She is confident that there are many people who can and would give money, clothes and resources to help these churches, if only they knew about them and if only the church on a national level would coordinate this effort.
In responding to the suggestions made by believers above, Tian Feng magazine points out the difficulties that implementing them would involve. The idea of a national foundation or "Help the Poor" project is a fine one, but the church simply does not have the staff and resources on a national level at the moment to coordinate and manage such schemes. The magazine believes that hope for help really lies at the regional level - provincial, city and county levels. These levels of the church know the situations in their areas intimately, and can channel aid from other areas most effectively. However, according to Tian Feng, many regional Christian Councils, especially on the provincial level, are just "empty shells", "paralysed", and "organisations in name only". They need to be changed so that they can fulfill this task and truly serve believers in need.

Tian Feng magazine supports the idea of churches becoming "partners" with each other, the richer ones supporting poorer ones and providing for their needs. It encourages readers who wish to help or donate to these poorer churches not to send aid to the magazine, thereby causing the magazine to incur forwarding costs to the churches involved. Rather, believers should contact church organisations directly in the poor areas they particularly wish to help. Addresses for all churches within China are available in yearly church almanacs or on application to Tian Feng itself. [1054 words]

Young Church Workers In Poor Churches Severely Underpaid

(ANS) ** The young county town pastor is committed and cheerful. But when asked about his salary by a visitor, he bursts into tears. He and his wife, also a pastor, each earn 130 yuan (less than 16 US$) a month. Even in a poor county town, this is simply not enough to live on, let alone raise a child. To make ends meet, the young pastor drives a pedicab several nights a week - and is deeply embarrassed that he has to do this.

** "Our church is so poor that we only have 10 or 20 yuan (US$ 1.2 - 2.4) in the offering box every week. So my salary is only 70 yuan (about US$ 8) a month." The woman pastor stops to wipe away some tears. "My inlaws are giving me a hard time, because I have to rely on my husband's income. They keep nagging me for making so little. They think I should leave the church and find some other work. But I am the only pastor in the whole county!"

**The young church worker - he isn't ordained yet - is recently divorced. His wife, a businesswoman, left him because he wasn't making enough money. She now lives more than 1,000 km away, in the South. What pains him most is that she took their son with her: "Because you don't make enough to raise him on your own."

Among young church workers all over the interior and western provinces of China, stories like these abound. They know that their call to full-time church work means they have to prepare for self-sacrifice. And their commitment and willingness to give up financial security are deeply impressive.
But it is troubling to learn that older pastors, many of whom are better paid than young church workers, seem to expect their younger counterparts to just put up with hardship and suffer in silence. Few provincial Christian Councils are making any effort to secure a minimum salary for all full-time church workers, leaving the matter to local churches which simply may not have the funds to provide properly for a pastor. (Many churches are actually so poor that they cannot even consider sending someone to seminary, and have to rely entirely on unpaid lay workers.) But churches which have one or two young full-time church workers do not always do everything in their power to ensure these are at least paid enough to live on. In some cases, funds are put aside for a new church building, rather than used for workers' salaries.

"This is a problem which we have to give attention to," comments Dr. Wenzao Han, President of the China Christian Council. "There is an old Chinese saying which goes like this: 'One can not expect to raise a strong and beautiful horse without feeding it.' We will work together with the provincial Christian councils to solve the problem step-by-step." [493 words]

Incultrating The Gospel Message: Spring Couplets

(ANS) There is not much color in the wintry northern Chinese countryside. The ochre earth lies naked and devoid of any growth, and grey tree trunks stretch out their barren branches. Houses are built from mud, and from a distance it is hardly possible to distinguish them from the surrounding countryside.

But Spring Festival, or Chinese New Year, brings a burst of color into this monochrome landscape. Women and children wear new clothes in the brightest reds or pinks. Red and gold lanterns are on sale, lying by the dusty roadside in huge crimson heaps. And the front door of each house is decorated with freshly written spring couplets, black Chinese characters on bright red paper.

Spring couplets are made up of three parts: A four-character phrase sits horizontally atop the door, while verses of seven or nine characters are pasted vertically on the left and right of the doorway. Spring couplets are supposed to bring luck, and they often center on the themes of wealth or long life. A typical couplet runs like this:

_Happiness enter our house._
_May heaven increase the years and days, that people live long lives._
_May spring make bright heaven and earth, and luck fill our house._

Walking through a village, Christian homes can easily be identified now. Of course, Christians don't display the gaudy-colored prints of "door gods" that can be found, again, on many wooden front doors. But the content of spring couplets on Christian homes also distinguishes them from their neighbors.
Christian couplets may, for example, talk about the joy of God's love:

    God's love is eternal.
    Joy in the Spirit is better than everything going according to one's wish.
    Peace in the Lord is better than all kinds of pleasure.

Other couplets simply praise God for his salvation:

    Hallelujah.
    God has set two covenants, and they are proclaimed all over the earth.
    The Lord's blood was shed on the cross, and he is praised for a million years.

And, on the door of a little church, this couplet was found:

    Prclaim the Gospel.
    Gladly sacrifice everything for the Lord's use.
    God's grace richly fills beyond all hope.

Spring couplets are traditionally written by the head of a household, or, if he is illiterate, by a writer at a country fair or market. They may follow ancient sayings or can be made up according to the situation. For Christians, a little booklet was published some years ago with suggestions for couplets featuring a Christian message. In such small ways, the Gospel is inculturated in the Chinese countryside. [433 words]

Shaanxi Churches Struggling

(ANS) Shaanxi, a rugged inland province with a harsh climate, has seen a lot of church growth in the last 15 years. While Christian churches were only found in some parts of the province before 1949, new churches are now springing up in areas where there were no Christians before. But as most believers are extremely poor, churches' incomes are low, leaving many congregations struggling to survive.

In recent years, many new congregations have come into being, especially in the countryside. A large percentage of new believers have become Christians due to faith healing experiences, while others were converted due to the witness of friends and neighbors.

There are probably about 350,000 Christians in Shaanxi, though hard figures are impossible to come by. In many places, only a small fraction of the believers have been baptized. There are only 45 pastors in the province, and most of the 170 or so seminary graduates have not yet been ordained. The 600 or so churches and meeting points are scattered widely in often difficult terrain, and many believers live as many as 30 kilometers away from the nearest gathering place. For this reason, church attendance varies enormously over the course of a year: While most believers are able to come to
worship during the agricultural slack season, few can afford to lose a whole day during spring planting or harvest.

To train more church workers, the provincial Christian Council runs a Bible school, which offers a three-year program, as well as a one-year lay training course. Classes are currently held at an old church compound in Sanyuan City, about an hour's drive from Xi'an. Conditions are very cramped. A new, large seminary building is currently being built in the outskirts of Xi'an, and classes will move there with the beginning of the new school year in September.

The poverty of most Christians means that congregations have very little money to spend. Church buildings are extremely simple, and many meeting points on the loess plateau in the north of the province have been set up in caves. In many of the larger cities, church property has not or has only partly been returned to congregations. Many congregations cannot afford full-time church workers, and lay workers rarely have more than a Bible - Christian literature is too expensive and too hard to get. For some church workers, some of the Christian radio broadcasts from abroad also represent one possible source of spiritual education and edification.

Due to the fast growth of Christianity, the lack of trained church workers and the poverty of many congregations, heretical teachings are a big problem in the south of the province. In Ankang and Hanzhong Prefectures, there are only a few churches and meeting points with a relatively small number of believers. They are vastly outnumbered by independent groups in the countryside which do not relate to the local Christian councils. According to the director of the Ankang Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), all of these groups - labelled mentuhui (Disciple's Church) by the government - are considered illegal and therefore a matter for the Public Security Bureau rather than for the RAB. But Christian workers in the area point out that many rural believers are probably not hard-line sectarianists, but simply erring believers lacking Bibles, literature, and pastoral workers. Such people are easy victims for sectarian preachers like Ji Sanbao, who has proclaimed himself the new Christ. Local training classes are sorely needed to better train and equip rural lay leaders, but not many have been held so far.

The provincial church leadership is badly equipped to deal with these problems. Lack of funds means that the provincial Christian Council has few staff, tiny offices, and not even a car to make traveling to rural churches easier. The general secretary of both provincial Christian Council and TSPM, Rev. Wang Huairen, is over 70 and of frail health.

Nevertheless, there is hope. "God still lives", says a young church worker from the provincial CC office, "and the believers at the grassroots have great commitment and love. Meeting with them always encourages me to go on, regardless of all difficulties." [692 words]
Shanghai Church Features Prominently in Beijing Periodical

(ANS) The Beijing Review is a weekly English-language publication printed in China's capital and distributed widely abroad. Its aim is to bring news of developments within China to the attention of the wider world. Reflecting a growing openness in China toward matters of faith and religion, the magazine chose the "Protestants in Mu'en Church" as its cover story in February this year, calling them "a thriving Protestant church in Shanghai".

The article starts out by giving a brief history of Christian mission to the city, tracing its roots back to the 1840s. It explains the unique historical and cultural circumstances of the time which allowed the Mu'en church to be built in 1929 and flourish thereafter. The city of Shanghai now has 120,000 Christians, served by 30 churches. According to senior pastor, Shi Qigui, membership at Mu'en church now stands at 5,000 and grows annually by 300 new members. The article points out that, given its large membership, the church can nevertheless only accommodate 1,000 members at a time. This is a common problem for all churches in the city and within China as a whole.

70 percent of the church members at Mu'en are women. The article remarks that many women "find it inconvenient to speak their mind to male pastors." Yet, out of the city's 44 pastors, only 12 are women. One of these is Pastor Lin Weici of the Mu'en church. She is concerned about the low educational level of the women in her congregation. She thus teaches them to read and copy biblical texts, thereby improving their literacy. Through her efforts, some former illiterates are now able to read newspapers and write simple letters.

The article stresses how the church in China has managed to get rid of Western religious influences and become "China's own religion." Nevertheless, foreigners visiting and working in Shanghai are welcome to attend services at Mu'en church, and many foreign pastors and religious organizations have also been invited to visit. Pastor Shi goes on to point out that "Chinese Christianity is also free from factionalism...this is what none of the foreign churches or countries dare dream of." Shi also states that "The CPC (Communist Party of China) fully recognizes the role of religion and never regards Christianity as 'fierce floods and savage beasts'."

The article concludes that, as Shanghai constantly changes, the Mu'en church stays the same and is a constant in the city: "Modern Protestants come in and out of the church like their predecessors, listening to and spreading the Christian faith." [429 words]
ANS Documentation:
Interview with Dr. Wenzao Han, President, China Christian Council

In his first interview since becoming President of the CCC, Dr. Wenzao Han spoke with Dr. Philip Wickeri for ANS on a variety of issues concerning Christians in China and overseas.

ANS: When you became interim General Secretary of the CCC two years ago, you said that among your goals were the improvement of the situation of the rural church and to elevate more young people to positions of church leadership. To what extent have you been able to realize these goals?

Han: With regard to rural church work, I think that in some small ways we have helped to improve the situation. We have emphasized the training of rural lay workers, and we have sent teams from the CCC’s Rural Work Committee to the countryside to get a better picture of what is happening. They have evaluated the situation in some areas, especially remote areas. On the basis of their recommendations, we have improved the content of our curriculum for lay leaders.

As you know, 80% of Chinese Christians are from rural areas, and they are important to us. We need to improve the training of rural church workers because most believers are new Christians, not very well educated and easily misled by strange and heretical teachings. We have called attention to this problem in Tian Feng, our church magazine.

I myself have visited rural churches in northern Jiangsu province. I went as part of a Jiangsu Provincial People’s Consultative Conference, but I specifically wanted to meet my fellow Christians in rural villages. Jiangsu is relatively well developed, but even here there are problems with the training of rural church leaders. And so I have seen with my own eyes the need for more theological and pastoral training of lay leaders.

ANS: And the second area, the need for more younger church leaders?

Han: Here, we have had only mixed results. You have seen that the average age of delegates to the Sixth National Christian Conference was significantly lower. This was obvious to all of us who met in Beijing, and it shows we have made progress.

But I cannot say that our work in this area has been a success. My dream has been to bring up a new generation of leadership, beginning with positions as executive secretaries of our various commissions. But this has not worked out very well, because these were not full time jobs, and the young people have had so much work to do in their own local churches. Also, it has not been easy to call meetings of the executive commissions because of the pressures of local work, and because the membership is scattered all over the country.

We will try to improve the situation. I am determined to work closely with colleagues in our two national Christian organizations, to gradually put younger people into leading positions. We need to identify young men and women who are committed to building up the church in China and who are able to work with us. I expect some kind of spiritual revival as a result of the introduction of more young people into leadership positions.

ANS: Will the CCC be sending more young people overseas for theological training?

Han: Many young people are interested in going overseas for theological study, and we will continue to send them. But we cannot just send anyone who is recommended by his or her provincial Christian organization and who passes an examination. We have to ask in each case, “What is the goal of further study?” This goal must be clear, for we need to build up the church here in China.

We also intend to invite more Chinese speaking theologians from Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas to come and lecture at our seminars. We have already invited people including Wilson Chow, Chou Lien-hwa and Peter Wong to give short courses here. But we want to do more in this area, for it is very helpful to our theological education.

ANS: What are some of the immediate tasks for the new China Christian Council and Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee?
We need to make adjustments to the working structures of our two national Christian organizations so that we can do the work as outlined in our report to the Sixth National Christian Conference. We need to plan our work carefully, giving greater attention to the commissions we have set up, and encouraging them to play a more active role.

I believe that the work of theological and pastoral training is especially urgent. We will continue to concentrate on grassroots leadership in rural areas. We must also strengthen our publication work. We need more study Bibles, reference works, and devotional literature for lay Christians. We want to encourage theological and devotional writing by pastors and Christian scholars so that they can develop materials for use in our churches. We can also make use of some of the good Christian literature which has been published overseas.

ANS: You are a layperson, and the only other president of the CCC was Bishop Ting. Will the fact that you are a lay person limit your effectiveness as a church leader in China?

Han: The president of the CCC is only one person, and I am not the only leader of the church in China. We have a group of leaders, with different talents and different gifts who will work together. My role as CCC President is to coordinate the efforts of all, so that the church as a whole may be built up.

ANS: You speak of the whole church, and yet there are reports that denominationalism and regionalism are on the rise. Is this true?

Han: I do not think this is true to the facts. We know that there are some groups in Hong Kong and overseas who want to promote a return to denominationalism in China. But I don’t think their efforts can succeed.

Here on the mainland, denominationalism is mainly an issue for some former Seventh Day Adventists, and some members of the former True Jesus Church and the Little Flock. Our policy in the CCC is to practice mutual respect in matters of faith and worship. We want to include all former denominations in the Body of Christ. On the one hand, we wish to respect minority traditions, but on the other hand we ask them not to put too much stress on their particularities. This is the way we can keep moving in the direction of forming a united church.

Regarding regionalism, I think that there is an awareness of this as a problem, but regionalism itself is not increasing. At one recent meeting, younger church leaders from the provinces urged us to exercise more direct national leadership. But we said that this is not the role of the two national Christian bodies. We are a coordinating body and a serving body, not a centralized structure. We receive many requests from provincial churches to help resolve their internal disputes, but we are not able to do very much about this. If there is a rise in regionalism, it could possibly be related, to a certain extent, to what has been done by overseas organizations, consciously or unconsciously.

ANS: Has there been a tightening of the government’s religious policy in recent years?

Han: I don’t think so. We regularly receive reports from churches in different parts of China complaining about government interference or inadequate implementation of religious policy. But during the last six months or so, there have been far fewer reports on the violation of religious policy. More letters speak about the internal conflicts of the church.

At the end of our Sixth National Christian Conference, Li Ruihuan, Chairperson of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and a leading member of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, met with delegates and spoke with the newly elected leadership of the CCC and the TSPM. He told us that religious freedom was an unwavering policy of the government. Even though there were illegal activities in the name of religion, the policy of religious freedom would not change. His speech was encouraging to us.

Illegal and heretical teachings are a problem in the countryside, and that is why the education of rural leadership is so important. I have just read an article written in Hong Kong on the “persecution” of house churches, and it contained many distortions. If you speak of a ‘tightening’ of religious policy, that is not the case, according to our experience. If someone speaks of tightening restrictions against illegal activities, that could be the case. But, illegal activities in the name of religion should be restricted. This is the practice everywhere in the world, so why not in China?

We say that a good Christian should be a good citizen. If one is a good Christian, he or she should stick to the Bible’s teaching and elevate his or her spirituality. If one is a good citizen, that
is also a good witness. And it will help to create a better external working environment for the church, by making Christianity better understood by the general public. We are still a minority, and we need to promote sympathy for Christianity.

We also need to educate our local church leaders about the legal system in China. Of course, grassroots level government officials also need such education, but that is the responsibility of the government. Our responsibility is to educate church leaders, and this benefits both the church and the society.

ANS: Do you think the recent death of Deng Xiaoping will have any effect on Chinese religious policy?

Han: We mourn the death of Deng Xiaoping, and our thoughts and prayers are with his family. He helped to bring order after the chaotic years of the Cultural Revolution, and he was the architect of the policies of openness and reform. The reimplementation of religious policy in China is related to this. We Christians regard Deng Xiaoping as our friend.

We are confident that the policy of religious freedom will not change with his passing, and we are hopeful that unity and stability will be maintained.

ANS: Some overseas organizations churches are increasingly critical of human rights abuses in China, and speak out on the issues of Taiwan and Tibet. How would you respond to their criticism?

Han: I would say that they should have a threefold sense of respect: a respect for history; a respect for reality; and a respect for our Chinese national feelings. Overseas, there has been a great deal of discussion about human rights problems in China, but there has not been respect for the rights and feelings of the Chinese people.

Taiwan is historically an inseparable part of China. This is why I just said we must respect history. In Tibet, the situation is improving. This is why I say we should respect reality. There are complaints from Tibet about the cultural revolution period and some criticism of religious policy violations, and this is understandable. But overall, the situation is improving.

I would urge that those who are concerned about the issue of Tibet go there and see with their own eyes, and then draw their own conclusions. The situation in Tibet is not perfect, but it should be compared with where the people have come from. Tibet is not easily compared even with other places in China, for example Shanghai, and much less with the situation on the West.

In addition, churches overseas which wish to address human rights issues or the question of Tibet should first consult with us. This should be a matter of courtesy and mutual respect in the international Christian family. They will not help the church in China if they make irresponsible criticisms of China. It is important to be prophetic, but one should not be prophetic for the sake of being prophetic, especially when you are talking about someone else's country.

ANS: On July 1 of this year, Hong Kong will be returned to China. As we approach this important event, what do you have to say to the people and churches of Hong Kong?

Han: We Chinese rejoice that this date marks the end of colonialism. It is an important issue of social justice, for Christians and non-Christians alike.

I understand, however, that some Christians in Hong Kong are worried about what this will mean for their future. I can understand this and sympathize with their concerns, but I would urge them to stay in Hong Kong and continue to serve the church there.

In 1949, many of us on the mainland were worried about what it would mean to live and work under the new government. But we have realized that God called us to work here where we were living. Moreover, we learned the Chinese Communists had the support of the broad masses of the people. The Cultural Revolution era was a terrible tragedy, but since that time, things have changed. We have a great deal of freedom to move, to grow and to develop. And we have a framework in the Chinese Constitution and the rule of law. So, to our friends in Hong Kong, I would say, fear not.

We have already had much contact with friends from Hong Kong and I believe that after July 1, our contact and relationships will develop further. We want to have partnership with Hong Kong churches under the principles of "mutual respect, mutual non-subordination and mutual non-interference" laid down in the Joint Declaration. We want the co-operation of Hong Kong Christians in our mission work here. But I also
want to remind Hong Kong churches that Hong Kong itself is a very important mission field.

ANS: What can churches overseas do to support the work and witness of China Christians?

Han: Many things. First, to promote mutual understanding so that Christians in China and overseas can pray for each other in a more informed way. We need to learn more about each other.

Second, I hope that churches overseas can educate and advise their congregations not to get involved in illegal China ministries and "Bible smuggling". This will only deepen the impression that some government officials have, that Western Christianity is hostile to China. It will jeopardize our international Christian fellowship.

Third, we should work to develop true partnership in Christian work and ecumenical sharing for our church work here in China. This partnership should help us to meet our needs and our priorities. We should work as equals, and we should be open with one another. We welcome overseas churches to consult with us, to help us and to give us advice.

ANS: What are your hopes for the future of China and the Chinese Church?

Han: China has suffered from feudalism and semi-colonialism for a long time, and I believe that the Chinese people should have the right to enjoy a better livelihood. Materially, we should enjoy a common prosperity. The problem today is there is an increasing polarization between rich and poor, between developed areas and underdeveloped regions. I hope that our government can help address these issues.

This Spring Festival, I took a trip to Zhangjiagang, and I was deeply impressed by the common prosperity of people there. The difference in income between the richest and the poorest is only three times, and almost everyone enjoys a relatively good livelihood.

Second, I hope that culture and morality in our country can grow so that we can become more highly civilized. As a Christian, we want to see a deeper level of spirituality and morality.

As for the Church, I hope that the Church will be built on a rock, on a firm foundation. This requires a deeper level of spirituality, theologically sound preaching and better church organization.

We hope that Christians can be bound together in a fellowship of love, that they can practice love in action. I often say that the cross is formed of two rods, one vertical and one horizontal. The vertical rod is of primary importance, for it represents our relationship with our Lord. But without the horizontal rod, there can be no cross. The horizontal rod means that we must share the relationship and the grace we have received from above with our neighbors. This is love in action. If our Christian groups, no matter how small, can be a fellowship of love, then they can be a yeast or a catalyst for the whole community.

I cannot say that we have a great plan to convert all the 1.2 billion Chinese. We do not speak in such grandiose terms. But without a strong foundation, without a loving and caring Christian community, we can do nothing at all. If the church can be built up as the Body of Christ, then God will bless us even more in the years ahead.

[2822 words]

To our readers: Due to staff transitions due later this year, ANS publication may become somewhat irregular during the summer and fall months of this year. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause. To make up for possibly slimmer issues during that period, this issue as well as the next printed issue will have more pages than usual. The editors
Since ancient times, Tibet, like Hong Kong and Taiwan, has been an inalienable part of Chinese territory. Historically, successive Chinese central governments have exercised effective jurisdiction over Tibet. The feudal titles of the Dalai and Panchen lamas and their religious and political status in Tibet have been conferred by the central government of China.

Prior to the peaceful liberation of Tibet the Dalai Lama controlled Tibet by means of a theocracy founded on a feudal serf system. In darkness, savagery and deception of the populace, this system surpassed even that common in Europe during the Middle Ages. Following its peaceful liberation, Tibet became one of the five provincial level autonomous regions of China, and as a part of the larger Chinese family, during the last forty-odd years, in addition to abolishing feudal serfdom, enormous changes have taken place in the Tibetan economy and society. An unbiased view of the situation there must acknowledge this fact.

However, biased groups do exist. Such people view the current world situation through cold war eyes. They are hostile to new China, they spread all sorts of misinformation and are capable of vilification and insults. Unfortunately, some churches and church groups overseas have been influenced by such views and have felt the need to echo them, churning out opinions and wishing to pass some sort of resolution on the Tibetan question and to make accusations against New China.

The "facts" on which these accusations are based are anti-China propaganda and a complete distortion of reality. They slander the peaceful liberation of Tibet as a "Chinese invasion" which "led to the deaths of 1.2 million Tibetans". They further claim that "in an effort to uproot Tibet's own cultural and religious traditions a great number of Han Chinese immigrants were brought in who outnumber the native Tibetans." The facts are: In the early 1950s, the 14th Dalai Lama reported the Tibetan population to the central government as one million. But now the population of Tibet Autonomous Region stands at 2.38 million, of whom 2.23 million are Tibetans. The slander claims that there are now "only twenty-four Tibetans remaining in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. In fact there are over 1700. They claim that "compulsory abortion and birth control" are enforced to reduce the size of the Tibetan population. In fact, family planning has never been applied in the vast nomad population, but healthy birth was called for only among the government cadres and workers of Tibetan origin. These claims state that approval by the Chinese government of the 11th Panchen Lama last year was "interference in the traditions of Lamaism" and "laid the foundations for the control of the selection of the next Dalai Lama." The facts are thus: Historical precedent shows that the identification and confirmation of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas has always been presided over and approved by the central government. Two years ago, Lamaist circles, following their religious rituals and historical institutions, sought to identify the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama in a young boy, through "a lot from the golden bottle", announcing his succession as 11th Panchen Lama to the central government for their approval. This method was entirely in accord with religious ritual and historical institutions. Yet the present Dalai, far off in India, undertook to make his own selection, transgressing the religious rituals and historical institutions of Tibetan Lamaism, a completely illegal and invalid process. The Dalai Lama is the one whose actions should be censured.

We sincerely hope that insightful persons in churches and church groups overseas, relying on their God-given wisdom and sense of justice, will oppose this detrimental current of opinion among international Christian circles, offering no support to the Dalai clique's plot to split the Chinese nation, and that God's justice may truly prevail. If this dark trend wins out, it will greatly offend the sensibilities of Chinese Christians and do great damage to relations between the Chinese Church and churches and church groups overseas.

We welcome visits from our brothers and sisters in Christ from overseas, to facilitate greater understanding and so that unfounded statements not be made without a clear picture of the facts.

We pray God will remove obstacles in our relationship with the Church ecumenical.
Yellow China. Since my recent trip to the northern Shaanxi loess plateau I finally know where it got its name from.

On this bleak February morning, everything is yellowish grey, as far as the eye can see: the barren hills, torn by deep erosion ravines. The terraced fields, bare, without the tiniest blade of green. The houses, made from yellowish mud. The caves, cut into the steep hillsides to provide living space for those who cannot afford a house. In the mild light of the afternoon sun, everything glows in a deep, warm yellow. But under a grey sky, the landscape just looks arid and forbidding. It doesn't help that it is freezing cold, with a biting wind blowing through the narrow valley.

This is Sunday morning, and we have come to Yingwang to share in a worship service with the rural Christians of this area. Yingwang is a small township in Yuchuan County, not far from the Yellow River. On the valley floor there are a few stone buildings: the local government, the school, the clinic, a shop. Most people in Yingwang live in caves dug out from the steep hillside behind the government quarters.

We leave our car at the government building entrance and climb up a steep path, creating large clouds of yellow dust with every step. Our approach doesn't go unnoticed: We are soon surrounded by a large group of village children. And then a man in a black woolen jacket and cap comes running down the hill to meet us. This is Han Chuang, who together with his wife Chen Qiju is responsible for the management of the Yingwang Christian Meeting Point.

Only the large red cross above the cave entrance tells us that we have reached our destination. Otherwise this row of four caves with a big yard in front looks just like any family home in this region. Except, maybe, for the little Christmas tree discarded outside, already dry and bare, but with colorful paper roses still attached to it.

Even though it is not yet ten o'clock, and the worship service will not start until twelve, a group of Christians is already here and at work. The congregation bought the caves only a few months ago, and much renovation work is still needed. Only the main cave is ready: A surprisingly roomy sanctuary with a barrel-shaped ceiling, a raised platform in front over which a bare light bulb dangles, and narrow wooden benches. A little stove is already being fired to provide some warmth.

Next door is another finished cave, into which we are invited. There is a table and some benches, and a clay hearth with some cooking utensils. But most of the space is taken up by an enormous kang: a raised clay platform laid with mats, and heated by leading the smoke of the kitchen fire through a flue underneath. In cave homes, the kang serves as a bed for the whole family. In this cave, it will probably sleep at least 20 people. Han Chuang explains: "Sometimes, we have worship services that last all day. Many believers live too far away to go home at night. They bring their bedrolls and sleep here."

The Yingwang congregation is a new one. "We started four years ago, with 20 women," says Chen Qiju. "A year later, there were 70 of us, and now there are almost 180 believers." Even with such a number, building even a simple church is out of the question. Yingwang is a poor area, and people barely have enough to live on. To raise the 780 yuan (US$ 130) to purchase the caves was already a huge project and took over a year.

As most of the Christians have little cash income, they pledge goats to the church. For several years, the income from selling wool and dung of this goat will go to the church. When the goat is finally slaughtered, the proceeds earned from meat and hide are also donated.

While we are talking and warming our cold hands on hot glasses of tea, the congregation is slowly assembling. By twos and threes, women and men with weatherbeaten faces are slowly climbing the steep path to the meeting point, some of them bringing ruddy-faced children in colorful clothes.

"Worship services usually begin at noon in this area," explains Chen Qiju, "because many people have a long walk to get here. Some live 15 or even 20 kilometers away." Christians are
scattered widely in northern Shaanxi, which is thinly populated. While there are a few believers in almost every village in Yichuan, meeting points can only be found in each of the 13 townships.

When enough people have arrived at the meeting point, the singing starts. Hymns aren’t very popular on the loess plateau; most people prefer the spirituals that are passed on from congregation to congregation, and not found in any hymn book. While new spirituals are practised, more and more people are arriving at the meeting point. By twelve o’clock, the cave is packed with maybe 120 people, and warming up nicely thanks to so many bodies. Latecomers cannot squeeze in, and have to watch proceedings from outside the cave, peering in through the latticework of the yet unfinished windows which will later be covered with thin paper.

The children, except for small babies carried in their mothers’ arms, are playing in the courtyard outside. Whenever they get too noisy, someone will hush them. Inside the cave, people follow the service with rapt attention. Most have brought their Bibles, and though some have visible problems keeping up, follow the Biblical readings.

The preacher in Yingwang is a young peasant woman, Xie Jinghua. With her weathered face, she looks much older than her 33 years. Her sermon, "How To Grow Up In The Faith", is well thought out, concrete and at times witty. It is also thoroughly biblical. I am astounded by so much theological insight, especially as church leaders often complain about the "low quality of faith" of rural believers.

So after the service, I sit down with her on the wonderfully warm kang in the cave next door, and listen to her story. Xie Jinghua only became a Christian three years ago. "Many people here became believers because their illnesses were healed, but for me, there was no such reason. It was just that people told me how good it is to believe. They kept urging me to become a Christian. So I started to believe, and slowly my faith developed." Xie was finally baptized in 1996.

Shortly after, to her great surprise, people in the congregation suggested her name when selecting a participant for a lay training course in Dongchuan Prefecture, several hours away. "There was nobody else who could go," says Xie, "so I ended up going even though I have little knowledge, no great faith, and I can’t even get my household organized very often. But I went because I care for this church, and we needed someone with training." Xie couldn’t finish the whole course, because she was needed back home to do farm work. All in all, she had only 50 days of training. After coming back, she was formally installed as preacher.

Life isn’t easy for Xie Jinghua. For starters, she has a family of seven to take care of, with three children and her old parents-in-law. Farm work is plentiful and back-breaking: "We have to sow a lot to reap just a little", says Xie. And finally, she doesn’t live anywhere close to the meeting point. To get there, she has to push her bike over mountain paths for about an hour, and then ride for another 15 kilometers. As a preacher, she makes this journey every Sunday, even though only 15 or 20 people will show up at the service if it is the planting or harvesting season. For all her labor, she doesn’t receive any salary or compensation.

But Xie Jinghua knows how important trained pastoral workers are in meeting points like this: "Our church has been growing in numbers, but there are many people who don’t understand much. Some of them can’t even read, so they cannot read the Bible and have to rely on what they hear in church. They are so happy that I can now preach to them, they are so eager to hear and listen!"

Xie is warming to her subject. She hopes that another person will be willing to attend the next training course, so that she will not be the only preacher. "Pray for our church", she urges me, "we are still so weak. We need God’s help."

While we are talking, food has been prepared over the open fire. We sit down to a simple meal, which is still a feast for the poor people here. Most of them will eat meat and egg only a few times a year. Their normal winter diet consists of noodles, steamed buns, radish and pickled vegetables.

We have to leave. We climb back down to the valley floor, still surrounded by great clouds of dust, because many of the believers are coming with us. Our short visit has meant much to them. But I am coming away humbled by their spirit of commitment and sacrifice. Their understanding and knowledge may not be great, but their love warms and lights this barren place.

[1589 words]
Ordinations: Chaozhou City, Guangdong Province, three pastors and five elders ***
Yuxi District, Yunnan Province, two pastors (one woman) *** Wuchang City, Hubei Province, seven pastors (four women).

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Church Buildings: Many new church buildings were opened and dedicated last year, and include the following: Shi'en ("Bestow Favour") Church in the Baoshan district of Shanghai, where believers have moved from an underground meeting room in a disused air-raid shelter to a new four-storey building *** a 270 sq.meter, three-storey church in Fu'an City, Fujian Province *** Five new churches opened within the past year in Wudu County, Gansu Province after the first church was opened there in Hanlin Township.

The believers in Baotou City, Inner Mongolia started work on a new church in the spring of 1995 and completed it by the autumn of the same year. The church has the capacity to hold 1,000 people. In May last year, an earthquake measuring 6.4 on the Richter scale hit the region. All the houses and buildings in the city were damaged to a greater or lesser degree, only this church building remained completely unscathed.

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Last year a company in Yibing City, Sichuan Province seized one part of the property (around 500 sq. meters) of the church there without any apparent justification or reason. The matter came to the attention of the city's Political Consultative Conference. Last September the city government requested the company, on the church's behalf, to compensate the church for the seized property according to its current market value. This is the first case of its kind in the area since the implementation of religious policy in 1980. Through this incident and its handling by the authorities, local believers have more confidence that church property rights will be respected in the future.

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The number of meeting points and believers in Wangcheng County, Hunan Province has increased greatly in recent years. This situation has forced believers to consider how they can manage and maintain the development of church activities at each meeting point in the area. Since 1992, the church has been raising funds to select and send more than 40 people to training classes both within and without the province. In 1992 a training class was held for the people responsible for each meeting point in the county. In 1993, two believers were chosen to attend Jinling Theological College and the provincial Bible school respectively. In 1995, 19 people were sent to Changsha Bible school. In these ways, those responsible for each meeting point have been able to deepen their understanding of faith.
Newsflash: 15 Millionth Bible Published

(ANS) On Wednesday 2nd April 1997, the 15 millionth Bible rolled off the presses of the Amity Printing Company Limited in Nanjing. The event was witnessed and celebrated by guests from within China and also from abroad.

The Printing Company is a joint-venture between the Amity Foundation and the United Bible Societies (UBS). It was set up largely with capital from UBS but also through the donation of modern printing equipment and funds from Christian churches and individuals throughout the world. Production of the first batch of Bibles began in September 1987, and by September 1994 the company had printed 8 million copies of the Bible, reaching 10 million by July 1995.

With a further donation of a second high-speed press in November 1995, the company now has a capacity to produce over five million copies of the Bible per year. Regular meetings are held with representatives from all over China to discuss the supply and demand of Bibles within the country, and for this year an initial order has been placed with the company for 2.3 million Bibles according to current demand. Once printed in Nanjing, the Bibles are distributed at 45 regional distribution centres, with the number of such centres rising continuously.

Besides printing the Bible, the company also prints hymnals and other books and literature for the China Christian Council and for seminaries within China. [234 words]

"Evangelists Have Needs Too!": Two Church Workers Speak Their Minds

(ANS) "Train them but don't look after them." This is an all too common attitude towards evangelists within the Chinese church, according to Tian Feng, the church magazine. While there are tens of thousands of evangelists, it is a huge challenge for local congregations to provide for them. Church workers therefore often live in great poverty.

How the church should deal with this challenge is debated, and differing opinions have been published in church publications. Two such voices can be found in the March issue of Tian Feng.

Cai Huiyun, an evangelist from Yichuan in Henan province sees two sides to the problem. On the one hand, she admits that evangelists suffer and face hardships because local churches often have limited funds, and spend all that is available on church building rather than on salaries for church workers.

On the other hand, Cai stresses, evangelists choose to become full-time church workers. They follow a call, but they make a free decision, knowing full well that an evangelist's life includes material poverty, psychological burdens and pastoral
pressures. They could have chosen instead regular careers in factories, businesses, or farming. As she points out, "The reason we serve God, spread the Gospel and shepherd the Church is the Lord’s holy love for us on the cross, not because of living expenses."

Furthermore, Cai points out, their own experiences of hardship allow evangelists to better understand and sympathize with those of their flock who face the same difficulties. She asks how anyone can preach about "faith", "looking to God", "the Lord will provide" and "seeking God's kingdom first" in times of distress unless they themselves have known God's grace, mercy and provision at such times. Only when evangelists can bear witness to Goc's miraculous provision for them in their own lives will their words ring true. Such personal knowledge of God's work in times of hardship provides a powerful witness to believers, Cai claims.

Cai concludes that the Church should try and provide its workers with what they need, but if it does not or cannot do so those workers should still trust that God will not overlook or neglect them. They should believe that God will arrange in their lives one of the miracles about which they so often preach, and allow them to live on. Their attitude should be that of St. Paul’s: "I know what it is to be in need and what it is to have more than enough. I have learnt this secret, so that anywhere, at any time, I am content, whether I am full or hungry, whether I have too much or too little. I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me." (Phil. 4:11-13)

Zhong Xin, a theology graduate who has worked in the countryside for over three years now, agrees that being evangelist does mean accepting a life of hardship and being willing to take up one's cross. But, he points out, this does not take away from the fact that church workers face real difficulties and needs at the moment. He feels that neglecting to pay church workers' salaries does not save the church any money but actually results in a big loss to the church.

Zhong believes that the main problem lies with the balance between rich and poor within the church as a whole, and the fact that resources are not distributed evenly. Some evangelists complain when they only receive 200-300 yuan (US$ 24-36) a month, but there are many who only receive a "preaching fee" of 20-40 yuan (US$ 2.4-5) a month from their congregations! As he points out, evangelists are "servants of the most high, not beggars who should be expected to scrounge for their food!" Throughout the church, Zhong sees people of the same age with the same training receiving vastly different salaries. He calls this unfair and a "cross of human making". Zhong believes the solution of this problem rests with the church leadership.

Zhong hopes that the church will work hard to reduce the inequalities between its different parts. He believes the Chinese church has a "herd" of young evangelists, trained in theology like "crack troops", ready to face hardship and bitterness, to labour patiently and work hard. But, this "herd" currently needs more "fodder" and can only then grow from strength to strength. But instead, there is a danger that this "herd" will "collapse with hunger". Zhong hopes that the parts of God's church which are already full and satisfied will show care and consideration for their young co-workers and at least think to ask them occasionally, "Brother or sister, do you have enough to eat?"

[787 words]
(ANS) Where the growth of the church in China is concerned, no two areas offer a sharper contrast than Zhejiang province on the east coast and the central northern province of Shaanxi. The former is flourishing in terms of numbers of believers and provision for them in terms of churches, church workers, financial and official support. Contrast this to Shaanxi province, where believers are much fewer in number and providing for even this smaller number of believers is difficult at the best of times. Churches are few, poor, and face problems from within and without.

In an effort to improve this situation, the CCC’s Rural Church Work Commission initiated a training course for church workers in southern Shaanxi last year. Pastors Shi Chenghui and Gac Jianguo from Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, were invited to participate in the final two weeks of the program, and Rev. Shi reflects on this experience in the March edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church.

The training course ran from July to September and was open to workers from the three southern Shaanxi counties of Hanzhong, Ankang and Shangluo. It was supported by the provincial TSPM/CCC joint councils and also the Religious Affairs Bureaux of the three counties. Around 50 church workers attended, along with 10 auditors, ages ranging from 20 to 60 years old and the average age being 43. Most of the participants had only previously completed Junior Middle School education.

The students were taught by six local pastoral workers. Three of these were old brothers who had suffered and come through the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution years. The others were three young female co-workers. Rev. Shi comments that by sharing the responsibility for teaching this course, this team embodied the spirit of unity and cooperation between young and old within the church and also the hope of safely handing the direction of the church over to the next generation.

Areas covered during the course included Bible-knowledge classes, classes on how to be an evangelist, lectures on the Three-Self movement and also education about the legal system. Because southern Shaanxi churches are mostly spread out and isolated from each other they are easily influenced by heretical forces. During the training course, students were divided into regional groups and taught concrete measures for refuting such heresy, based on Biblical principles.

Rev. Shi learned that the three districts in southern Shaanxi are not only poor economically but also spiritually. The three areas combined have only seven or eight large churches and ten other meeting points, with the number of believers reaching a mere 50,000. In contrast to this, the Wenzhou city area alone has 600,000 believers and over 1,000 churches. Southern Shaanxi covers a vast area of land and thus the need to train workers there is all the more urgent. This training course was only the first one of its kind in the area. Shi suggests that prosperous areas where the Gospel is thriving should seek out poor partner churches to support and help see the Gospel flourish there too.
Both Shi and Gao found an unparalleled thirst for knowledge and truth during their time in Shaanxi. They discovered that the students' Bible knowledge was very shallow compared to that of believers in Wenzhou, and therefore they were forced to teach much more slowly and give many more examples than they otherwise might do with students back in Wenzhou. Because Shi was only with the program for one week, he found he had to give five hours of classes every morning for a week in order to cover all his prepared material. Yet students never showed signs of weariness, and could be seen throughout taking notes furiously and urging him to give even more classes. Shi writes that he had never before experienced such a thirst for knowledge.

The eagerness of the students was made even more remarkable to Shi when he witnessed the students' harsh and difficult living conditions. Their classroom was in a tiny church room with 20 small battered tables in it and hardly any light. At each small table two large adults would sit, often having to position themselves awkwardly in order to write without bumping elbows. Despite having six classes each day, plus morning prayers and evening study, the students still did not grow tired and wanted more. The clothes they wore were simple and would have been looked down on by people in Wenzhou as "old-fashioned" and "from the 70's". People did not eat noodles but only coarse steamed bread, and meat and fish dishes were scarce. Students' monthly food allowance came to only 75 yuan which, as Shi comments, doesn't even equal a small child's monthly candy money in Wenzhou! There were few tables available at the canteen, so students would just sit on the floor to eat. Similarly, Shi found the dormitory a simple and crude building, where during the autumn rains the floor was always damp and wet.

Shi was also greatly impressed by the support given to the program and the students by local churches. In southern Shaanxi the July weather is very hot indeed, like a blast furnace. Local churches sent cart after cart of watermelons, cold bean jelly, steamed buns, vegetables and fruit and donations of money to the students. The Hanzhong Religious Affairs Bureau also contributed 1000 yuan toward students' daily living provisions. In September the weather turned cold and rainy, and many students from far off had not brought enough clothes or blankets. So, Chenggu County church sent a supply of quilts and Hanzhong church sent clothes. On top of this, lots of local individual believers gave themselves tirelessly and selflessly to the day-to-day running and supervision of the program. [970 words]

**CCC/TSPM Joint Committee Meets, Plans Work**

(ANS) The Joint Committee of the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee met in Shanghai, March 12-14, for its first session after the national Christian conference in January. The Committee decided on job descriptions for the ten commissions and two working groups set up by the conference, and passed a work plan for the years 1997/98.

The new commissions and their chairpersons are:

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Theological Education Commission
Rev. Sun Xiwei

Rural Church Work Commission
Rev. Zhao Zhien

Publications Commission
Rev. Shen Cheng'en

Church Administration Commission
Elder Ji Jianhong

Bible Publication Commission
Rev. Peng Cu'an

Minorities Church Work Commission
Rev. Wu Ai'en

Women's Work Commission
Ms. Wang Juzhen

Tianfeng Publication Commission
Rev. Shen Derong

Ecumenical Relations Commission
Rev. Bao Jiayuan

Church Music Commission
Rev. Shi Qigui


The Committee also passed a resolution on Tibet (see ANS 97.3.7).

International Meeting Welcomes New CCC Leadership, Bids Farewell To Bishop Ting

(ANS) Church representatives from almost a dozen countries gathered in Shanghai on March 15 to meet with the new CCC/TSPM leadership and say their farewells to the retired president of the CCC/TSPM, Bishop K.H.Ting. Among the guests of the meeting, all of which had been invited by the CCC/TSPM, were Rev. Park Kyung-Seo from the WCC, Rev. Dr. Feliciano Carino, General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, Rt. Rev. Peter Kwong, the Anglican Bishop of Hongkong and Macao as well as representatives from churches and China programs in Europe and northern America. The CCC/TSPM were represented by the new presidents, Dr. Wenzao Han and Mr. Luo Guanzong, and the general secretaries, Rev. Su Deci and Rev. Deng Fucun. Several other members of the Joint Committee of CCC and TSPM also participated in the gathering.

In the meeting, new CCC general secretary Rev. Su Deci stressed that the Chinese church was part of the church universal, and said he hoped for more reflection about the relationship between the Chinese selfhood of the church and her belonging to the worldwide body of Christ.
Bishop K.H. Ting also spoke during the gathering, saying that he had left his successors two big problems which urgently needed a solution. The first problem, according to Ting, was the unity of the church. Ting said that there were now 10-20 million Christians, but that they were not very united. While there was little denominationalism, there were many splits and disagreements. Ting added that staff of some of the 17 seminaries and Bible schools were extremely fundamentalist, and they questioned the faith of others who did not agree with them.

The second problem, according to Ting, was the need to develop the ethical content of Christianity. Ting said that too many Christians felt that their priority was to go to heaven, while they did not pay much attention to giving witness in society.

Ting also thanked all his friends inside and outside China for their support during the 45 years of his work.

The meeting closed with a Thanksgiving Service at Shanghai’s Community Church. [360 words]

NEWSBRIEFS

In Hunan Province the vast majority of church meeting points are in the countryside. However, 80% of the believers in these meeting points do not have any pastoral workers to serve them. Training a new generation of evangelists is thus an urgent task. A provincial Bible college was re-established in 1990, but its buildings and facilities simply cannot meet the current needs of the churches in the province. Therefore, the provincial CCC/TSPM have started preparations for a new teaching building and hope to start construction later this year.

Despite the poor and inadequate conditions, the Bible college has already pressed ahead with training church workers. In addition to its two-year program, It started a three-month advanced training course for workers preparing for ordination. After last year’s course 48 pastors, teachers and preachers were ordained, an unprecedented event in the recent history of the church in Hunan.

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Church buildings:
** Huma County in Heilongjiang Province recently celebrated the opening of Jiagedaqi church. 200 believers were also baptized at the service of dedication. For many years, there was not a single church building in this county.
** The church in Bianfang town, Xuzhou city, Jiangsu Province has a history of almost 90 years. The congregation there added a new chapel in 1983 but, because of crowding, decided to build an extension. The believers raised 15,000 yuan (around US$ 1,900) and, together with donations of labour and materials, managed to complete the extension within two months. The building can now hold an extra 2,500 people.
** Inner Mongolia saw two major church building projects completed recently. In Fengzhen city renovations were completed on an 80 year old church, enabling it to hold as many as 2,000 people. Elsewhere in Tumotezuoqitiemao township a new church seating 1,000 believers was dedicated.

** The believers in Ninghai County, Zhejiang Province, completed a new 1,200 m² church building on the site of an church over 100 years old. The new Changjie Church is now the biggest in the county and seats 1,200 people.

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Qixiu church in Tianlou township, Guannan County in Jiangsu province last year set about establishing a comprehensive management system of church property, belongings and finances. After having the accounts checked thoroughly, the church set up a small group to manage church money matters. This group will meet regularly to discuss the church's finances and make decisions on basic expenditure. Any major decisions on large expenses will be made by collective decision after discussion and research into the benefits such expenditure might bring. The aim of these reforms is to make the church more open and accountable to its members. Under the new system, the church budget areas are in better order and savings have been made, allowing the church to extend its sound system facilities. In this way, Qixiu church has become a model to other churches in the area.

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The 40 km-long road between Linshui and Jiufeng counties in Sichuan Province used to be pot-holed, bumpy and uneven, and the relatively short distance took three to four hours to complete. Many vehicles use the road, so the Liangban township church in the area decided to take action. In scorching hot weather over 30 believers from the church toiled under the blazing sun to repair a 30km stretch of the worn-out road. This attracted much praise and gratitude for the Christians from the people of the area.

ANS Documentation:
New CCC General Secretary Talks About The Tasks Ahead

Rev. Su Deji, the new general secretary of the China Christian Council, recently spent some time talking to ANS editor Claudia Oblau, spelling out the tasks he sees ahead for the CCC. Here, we excerpt some of his reflections.

The nature of the church:

I believe that the church has two aspects: On the one hand, the church is on earth, within society, a human institution. But on the other hand, the church is also the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit. The church has both a material and a spiritual nature. When we talk about running the church well, we must have both sides in mind. If we overlook one of them, the consequences for the church will not be good. But we must also understand that the church's spiritual nature is basic to it. Of course, within society, the church is a social body, but she is always formed by her spiritual character, by being under the Holy Spirit. The church is called
to live according to the Lord's guidance. And when we talk about running the church well, we have to consider how we can do this guided by God.

As for our church in China, I believe that there was a time when we had to stress her being in society. This was especially so in the early 1950s: At that time, we had to make clear that we were part of the great Chinese nation. We had to make clear that we were standing with our people, that we loved our motherland. That was necessary because the church is in the world. We live within society, so we have to witness within this society. Through this witness, other Chinese could see that Christianity was not a foreign religion, but that it could be Chinese as well.

But this was not all. The basic character of the church is still spiritual. So now we have to ask ourselves how we can run the church well according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When we talk about building up the church, we really mean that we have to spend more time looking at the spiritual character of the church. When we talk about running the church well according to the Three-Self principle, the spiritual character of the church is the framework.

Looking back at recent church history:

The Protestant church in China has a history of about 200 years. But for reasons everybody knows, 17 or 18 years ago the church in China was completely invisible. So whatever you can see of the church today was built up within these few years. Of course, our God does not sleep. At the time when the church ceased to exist in China, God was still at work. But only since 1979 has the church again been able to exist legally and publicly, and the number of believers has grown greatly. We have printed more than 18 million Bibles, we have 17 seminaries and Bible schools, and tens of thousands of churches and meeting points. We have published many books and materials. We have ecumenical relationships with many overseas churches. If in all of this we had just relied on our own strength, we would not have been able to accomplish anything. It is God's own great power that helped us to start a new chapter of church history on Chinese soil.

The task ahead:

As I have said, in our work building the church, we have to listen to God's will and work according to his guidance. We still have a long road ahead of us. The biggest task is pastoral work, and here we have not been able to do a lot. When Jesus gave us the Great Commission, it encompassed two things: To proclaim the Gospel and bring people to the Lord, and to teach those who have become believers, so that they understand all that God has done. As far as the proclamation of the Gospel is concerned, many people have been added to the church. We have grown very fast. But in pastoral work, we have great limitations. This is why we must make a much greater effort to improve our pastoral work. Of course, it is important to proclaim the Gospel, but we should not become one-sided by concentrating on numerical growth. Our church has grown very fast, but because our pastoral work is so insufficient, many Chinese Christians do not have a good understanding of the basic tenets of Christian faith. This is very dangerous, and so I believe that we should be stressing pastoral work.

We need to train a large number of church workers, and this is where we are lagging behind. Currently, we have only one pastor for every 7,000 believers. This is just impossible. It is very clear that we need to train more people. We have to pray for God's power, wisdom and grace, so that we can do the necessary work well. We need to train pastoral workers on all levels, because most Christians are in the countryside or in small towns. Our eyes must clearly be focussed on the countryside and on the needs of the Christians there. They are the ones we must serve.

The CCC:

I think that we at the China Christian Council should put the needs of the local churches uppermost on our agenda. We cannot issue orders, we must serve the local churches.

In our society, there are different levels, and the church needs to be developed in all of them. We need to train evangelists for people at the grassroots, but we also need to publish Christian literature. For literature work, we need people who have a high level of general knowledge and writing ability. We need to train good musicians, because Christianity is a religion in which music is very important. We need to train people in foreign languages, so that they can help us in our ecumenical relationships. All of these skills are rather advanced skills.

Even more importantly, we need to train theologians, people who can do theological research and writing. If a church doesn't have theology, it can only exist at the most basic level of society. But in our Chinese church, we want to
be able to have a dialogue with people on all levels of society. We want to be able to preach Christ to all of them. So we need to develop theological thinking that can keep up with the society that we find ourselves in. We need to work on this now. We cannot wait until some time in the future.

On church governance:

We need to do some serious thinking about how our church should be developing. That also means that we need to think about the organization of our church, her structure and her administration. There needs to be a more democratic system of church governance; the church should not just be run by pastors. There are plenty of devoted and capable lay people who can do this. All of them have to play a role in the building of the church.

Rich and poor churches:

The CCC is trying to help poor churches in rural areas. About one year ago, we started a fund to supplement the salaries of young theological graduates. We cooperate with the provincial Christian councils in this area, because they know how many new graduates cannot work in the church at all, because nobody can pay them enough, and how many graduates have to exist on very low salaries. Of course, we hope that the provincial Christian councils also try to come up with solutions for this problem. But if they don’t have enough funds, the CCC will come to their aid, through our national fund. Right now, Christian councils in eight provinces are receiving financial help from us, but we may have to develop this further.

The most basic problem, though, is that poor churches are poor because they are located in poor areas. When an area is rich, the churches in this area are also well-off. Therefore, I hope that our country can develop. If you look at the cities in China, they are, for the most part, already well developed. They have a market economy. But in remote rural areas, the economy is not very developed. The majority of churches are in such areas, and many of the believers are old. They rarely use money; they just have what they need to feed and clothe themselves. Such believers may be able to give some food to a preacher, but they don’t have money to pay him or her a salary. The reason for this is the economic situation of these local areas: It is really a subsistence economy, a natural economy, not yet a market economy. To change this situation, we have to see that our country and our society develop towards a market economy, so that all these areas can also become better off. Only then can the problem of poor churches really be solved.

Richer churches helping poorer churches is simply not enough. You have to realize that most of the richer churches are not that rich themselves. Certainly, if churches have enough funds to fulfill their own needs and still have something left over, we should encourage them to help poorer churches. This is already happening, especially when churches have been hit by natural disasters like floods or earthquakes. Similarly, in the area of church buildings, something should be done. In some areas Christians have lots of money, and they build large numbers of very fancy churches. In other areas, believers cannot afford to build a new church at all, and their old building may be ramshackle or even unsafe. It is our job to make this better known, and to tell churches in richer areas that they should not go out all when they build a new church, but rather build a simpler building, save some money and with it help another congregation in a poor area.

On raising a new generation of church workers:

We hope that local churches will take the task of raising a new generation of church workers seriously. You do not just raise young workers by training them at a seminary, but also by giving them meaningful work and responsibility within the church. This is something the local churches have to do themselves. Similarly, the power to ordain a pastor rests with the local churches, not with the CCC. But there are some things we can do to encourage the rejuvenation of local church leadership: For example, we have changed the church order. Originally it said that young people should work for at least three years before they could be ordained. This has now been changed to two years. We really want to encourage churches to ordain young people earlier. In addition to this change in the church order, we can only rely on meetings and visits to promote younger people. We can use the examples of churches that take younger people seriously, that give them a bigger role to play, and use their experiences to encourage others. We can let local churches know that we hope that they will promote young people, but we cannot give executive orders. Local churches must understand that giving young people more responsibility is for their own good, for only then they will do it.

[1866 words]