Dear Reader,

due to an unexpected delay in the production process, this edition of ANS reaches you later than usual. In the hope that we will be back on schedule for our next issue, we apologize for any inconvenience caused.

Apart from our usual coverage of important Tian Feng articles, this edition of ANS is particularly rich in exclusive feature articles. On p10, we continue our series portraying church leaders with an interview featuring Gao Ying.

In late 2002, the Amity Printing Press celebrated the completion of its 30 millionth Bible. Turn to p13 for our report on the event. And finally, we offer you a glimpse at the re-opening of a church in rural China on p11. Find out more for yourself inside...

With kind regards from the editorial desk,

Katrin Friedler

If you read Chinese, check out the Chinese Protestant Church's new website. Surfing to

http://www.chineseprotestantchurch.org.cn

will give you access to latest news and views from the China Christian Council and the National TSPM Committee.
New Church Leadership Sends Delegation To Hong Kong And Macao

As reported in our last issue, a CCC/TSPM delegation involving top church leaders visited Hong Kong and Macao from November 22 to 30, 2002. A first for the newly elected church-leadership, the visit to Macao was also the first official visit by CCC/TSPM leaders to churches in the former Portuguese colony.

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Led by Presbyter Ji Jianhong, Chairman of the Three Self Patriotic Movement, and Rev. Cao Shengjie, President of the China Christian Council, the 14-strong delegation included representatives from all over China. Hosted by the Hong Kong Christian Council and the Chinese Christian Union, the delegation visited churches, seminars and church organizations on their nine-day tour of Hong Kong and Macao. The delegations' visit to Hong Kong generated a lot of media attention, the high point of which was a forum held at the YMCA, which attracted around 300 persons.

For Cao Shengjie, the trip to Hong Kong marked a special occasion, her first official visit to Hong Kong having been in 1981 as an ordinary member of a delegation led by Bishop K.H. Ting. This time, she visited the Special Administrative Region [SAR] in her new role and as the first female leader of the Chinese church.

At the forum, Cao started her talk by highlighting the different social, historical and cultural conditions that continue to prevail in Hong Kong and on the Chinese mainland respectively. She also underlined the principle of "one country, two systems" under which Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule. Accordingly, churches from both sides deal with each other following the principle of mutual non-interference.

However, there are also things mainland churches and churches in Hong Kong share, above all the fact that they belong to God's church in China. At the same time, they are an equal part of the church ecumenical. As Cao pointed out, adherence to the principle of the Three Self does not mean that the Chinese church wants to set itself apart from the church ecumenical. Rather, by upholding these principles the Chinese church wants to stay free of foreign control, engage in building theology, and maintain good relations with society and the people.

With this visit, the delegation was seeking sincere friendship and a spirit of unity in God, Cao explained. They were hoping to build future exchanges on an "open, legal, and unconditional" framework. She also expressed her hope that Hong Kong churches would not engage in illegal activities on the Chinese mainland.

In the question and answer session, a Hong Kong church worker posed the question of when it would be possible for churches from the SAR to spread the Gospel on the mainland. "God has entrusted this task to the church on the mainland," Cao replied, adding that this was an impression shared among all mainland Chinese church workers. However, she said, spiritual exchanges were already taking place between church workers from Hong Kong and the mainland.

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In his talk, Presbyter Ji explained the ongoing efforts to reconstruct theology. Highlighted in his speech was the idea that today's work of theological reconstruction in China is part of a normal process of adapting theology to changing times. It also marks a special effort to adapt Chinese theology to fit China's unique historical experience. Both in the past and in the present, theological thinking from outside China has often served the interests of outside groups. Consequently, it has tended to distance Chinese believers from the Chinese people, often feeding strains of thought that are anti-rational and anti-social. Examples of such thought would include a heavy stress on the view of the world as evil, or the idea that Christians are "citizens of heaven" who do not need to have any allegiance to earthly governments. Reconstructing theology will help the Chinese church rid itself of such erroneous theological views.

The delegation's visit was also an opportunity for Hong Kong scholars and theologians to share their opinions regarding recent church developments on the mainland.

The Anglican bishop of Hong Kong and Macao, Peter Kwong, assured the delegation of his unconditional and full support for the Chinese church.

Dr. Lam Tak-ho from the Lutheran Theological Seminary took up the topic of reconstructing theology. "We fully applaud your efforts to contextualize theology so that your work will meet the needs of Chinese society," Lam said. "We trust that China will make a theological contribution to the whole world and give a good testimony to our faith."

The president of the Hong Kong based Graduate School of Theology, Wilson W. Chow, pointed out the specific social and historical experiences the mainland Chinese church had gone through, and concluded that this would necessarily lead to the construction of its own theological thinking.

At the Chinese Christian Literature Council, the General Secretary Fung Sau-chung expressed his hope for better theological education on the mainland in the future, a development that would allow pastoral workers to be better skilled and more effective in their work.

During their visit to Macao, which was hosted by the Macao Chinese Christian Union and the Baptist School, Cao and Ji introduced the situation of the church in China and spoke about the reconstruction of theology.

The visit to Hong Kong and Macao left the delegation with a feeling of God's love for God's children in China and a feeling of unity among them.

Members of the delegation were: Ji Jianhong, Cao Shengjie (Ms.), Mei Kangjun, Chen Melin (Ms.), Bao Jiayuan, Lin Zhihua, Hua Yaozeng, Fan Chengzu, Gao Feng, Chen Shunpeng, Xu Xiaohong, Wang Aiming, Hu Ziming, and Ou Enlin.
Changing Society, Eternal Faith: Reconstructing Theology Once More

(ANS) In the following article, Cai Tongwei from China Eastern Theological Seminary in Shanghai examines the meaning of theology, faith, and the relationship between the two. The original version of this article was published in December's edition of Tian Feng.

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With the decision to strengthen theological reconstruction that was taken at the Ji'nan meeting in 1998, the Chinese church has opened a new page in its history. When we are talking of reconstructing theology, we first need to understand clearly what is theology, and why we need to build it. Secondly, it is important to grasp the relationship between theology and faith, and the difference between the two.

According to its Greek roots, theology means "word about God". The early church fathers used the word "theologia" to distinguish assertions about the nature of God from those related to God's work. Later on, the meaning of the word "theology" was widened to encompass more. Today, it comprises notions of what Christians believe, the nature and actions of the God they worship, and systematic analysis and reflection regarding God.

And, while the notion of theology may seem very abstract, indeed unrelated to the lives of ordinary Christians, this is not the case. On the contrary, theology is closely related to the faith lives of every single one of us. A healthy faith will always include some reflecting about that faith, and that is the moment where theology begins.

Whether consciously or not, every Christian will produce a number of theological ideas, for example regarding the doctrine of the all-knowing, almighty and all-loving God. And so, theology has developed until today and now falls into five big different categories: biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology, philosophical theology and practical theology.

Theology springs from the human need for explanations, "The origin of theology is man's absolute feeling of dependence," as one German philosopher once remarked. Therefore, theology needs to be in dialogue with believers, and it continues to develop as believers react to the changes and challenges of their time.

It is of great meaning that the Chinese church is now seeking to reconstruct its theology in these times when the whole of Chinese society is experiencing tremendous changes, changes that affect each and every area of life. Likewise, the church is going through changes such as the increase in believers and meeting points. That means the church is growing and it needs theology.

The object of theology is God. Theological classics describe theology as "faith seeking understanding", and this indicates that faith and theology are actually two different things. "To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see." (Hebrews 11,1) Faith is a living relationship established
between a person and God, and affects at least two levels: the behavioural level (somebody trusts in and worships God) and the cognitive level (somebody recognizes God).

As Martin Luther already pointed out, being faithful does not mean to believe in certain doctrines, but is a much more complex thing; it is not a "belief", but a "belief in". Thomas Aquinas' understanding of faith reflects a similar view. Faith is a consciously taken decision, something that cannot be seen or proved. Therefore, it is of a non-absolute, subjective nature. Still, faith cannot be separated from elements such as enlightenment and inspiration.

The essentials of the Christian faith are summed up in the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed. No matter what denominational background they come from, all Christians will take these creeds as the basis of their faith.

Theology and faith are two different things: One is expounding, the other one is being expounded; one is constantly changing and developing, the other one is eternal. As we engage in theological reflection, we have to recognize this basic relationship. Society is constantly developing, and it is the church's duty to transmit our eternal faith in this changing environment. This means that we have to continuously adapt, correct and complement our theological thinking. The efforts of the Chinese church to reconstruct its theological thinking constitute our reflecting on theology, and express our hope and optimism that we will succeed in spreading the faith and running the church in ways suitable for our Chinese environment.

2003.1/2.3

Living Out Christian Faith Through Love To One's Neighbour

(ANS) During the Seventh National Christian Conference in May of 2002, the Chinese church leadership affirmed its commitment to social service as one form of Christian witness. In a new Tian Feng series subtitled "This also is Christianly", the church magazine explores the relationship between the Chinese Protestant Church and social service. Below, you find a summary of the first part of the series written by Wang Rongwei.

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In December 2002, a representative from Free Wheelchair Mission attended a wheelchair distribution ceremony in Zhengzhou. 200 wheelchairs were given to handicapped people from all over the city. For the American association, Zhengzhou was only a first stop on its current wheelchair mission in China.

That the representative made his way from California to central China was not only a joyful occasion for the American side, but also a success for the newly established Social Service Department of the China Christian Council and the National Committee of the TSPM, which was instrumental in getting the wheelchair effort rolling.

In fact, a number of local churches in China are already running their own social service projects, mostly homes for the elderly, kindergartens and clinics, but also
rehabilitation for handicapped children and support for the school-less. According to CCC statistics, 45 such projects currently exist.

The need for the Chinese church to get more involved in social work had already been recognized a few years ago by Bishop K.H. Ting. In his 1997 remarks on social service, he had underlined that people should not only be Christians in their hearts, but also express their faith through actions. He called on the church to immerse itself deeper in society by engaging in social work.

Bishop Ting also suggested that Christianity should further develop ethical teachings regarding the close relationship between the Gospel and social service, as social services provided by churches still are a rare phenomenon in China.

In spite of this earlier call, no concrete steps followed until recently, the reason being the lengthy period of exploration and implementation necessary before the Social Service Department could be set up. With this department, the China Christian Council hopes to immerse the church in social work and help alleviate poverty at the same time.

The abovementioned wheelchair distribution effort shows how the church aims at serving different social groups in the 21st century, hoping to respond to the weaker segments of society directly and make human relationships in society smoother and more harmonious. Another example of this strategy is the centre for handicapped children Tian Feng reported on in a recent issue. (see ANS 2002.7/8.6)

A successful expansion of the church's social work could also become a beautiful testimony and help the church to influence the public through actions born of Christian teachings. This will be particularly necessary in order to complement the material and cultural development that social service is intended to promote, author Wang Rongwei notes.

2003.1/2.4

Are Chinese Churches Living Beyond Their Means?

(ANS) The Chinese church is poor, not only because of China’s relative poverty in comparison with other nations, but also because of the particular demographics of Chinese Protestant congregations. As a largely rural church with sixty percent or more of its members being elderly women, the Chinese church is rooted in the poorer segments of the population. In the following article, taken from December 2002’s edition of Tian Feng, Qiu Ming from Zhejiang calls on local congregations not too overestimate their economic power in their ventures.

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Inspired by an article titled "We should not spend poor days like rich times" that was originally published in Liaowang Zazhi, Qiu sets out to explore his own understanding of this topic. As he points out in his introduction, this kind of modest attitude is rarely to be found in contemporary China, where annual GDP has risen to a trillion US dollars, and living standards continue to rise. On the other hand, China is still a poor country in terms of per capita GDP. There are still tens of millions of people who live in poverty, most of them in central, western or eastern China. Accordingly, "We should not spend poor days like rich times."

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This is also true for the church. During the past twenty years, the number of believers has increased manifold, and churches have been reconstructed and newly built. Many churches have also erected homes for the elderly. All of this stems from the genuine love these believers have for the Lord and for the church.

As everybody knows, the majority of churches and believers are located in the countryside, and older people and women make up the bulk of congregations. This means that building a church is not an easy undertaking. Often, believers exceed their means and have to receive support from fellow congregations. In some cases, moving stories about the "widow who gave her last penny" can be heard. When they see pictures of congregations huddled under umbrellas for their worship service, many city dwellers are only too willing to give a helping hand. According to information from provincial theological training institutions, most rural trainees are not able to afford the 50 yuan RMB [US$ 6.2 approx.] living expenses per month, and 95% of pastoral workers who come back for advanced studies cannot afford living expenses of 100 yuan RMB a month. On the other hand, various forms of waste and extravagance have entered the church:

Many congregations try to outshine each other when building new churches, erecting huge constructions in Gothic, Roman, Greek or Corinthian style. Many of these buildings are later underused, having been built by a relatively small congregation.

In some rural churches, the person in charge is quite often an elderly, ailing evangelist supported by his son. In spite of an insecure financial situation, they build a big "pastor's building" next to their new church and complete it with luxurious fittings. A few weeks later, when the construction company sends the bill, they are shocked and run around trying to find a solution. Finally, the construction company nearly closes the church.

In order to secure donations for the building project, many evangelists give weekly pleas from the pulpit, while the congregation has already a heavy burden to carry.

After finishing the new church, many congregations hold lavish opening receptions, complete with red carpet, music and fireworks.

While building a new church, many evangelists also develop the conviction that an ordinary piano is not good enough for their new church, and collect extra donations to buy a grand piano. Meanwhile, some in the congregation start to wonder whether this is really necessary.

When receiving guests from abroad, many congregations have doubled the amount of hosts than guests. Even in affluent foreign societies, this kind of lavishness is rarely to be found.

Sometimes, congregations ask preachers from outside to preach or teach, and later on, the church worker from outside receives huge rewards. Some believers already joke: "They are more expensive than professors."
On their way to business outside, some evangelists do not use the cheapest means of transport: Instead of taking a bus, they take a taxi, or instead of riding a bus or train, they fly, knowing that their expenses are taken care of.

Finally, some pastoral workers take group trips to Malaysia, Thailand or Singapore, spending huge amounts not only on related church exchanges, but also on sightseeing.

The abovementioned situations are not exceptions, but rather mark a trend. This trend needs to be curbed for the sake of rural believers. Besides, the church is a non-profit organisation that derives its income from donations. This gives the church an obligation to pursue a modest, simple life style, in line with its ambition to provide nourishment for the soul. Apart from a few highly visible churches in the cities, congregations should build churches that match their financial capacities rather than exceeding them.

Some people say that "glamorous" church buildings, where financially feasible, will help to attract people to our faith. In fact, spreading the Gospel has never relied on outside appearance, but on setting an example through the truth or the Holy Spirit. And in those cases where the church has money, it should be put to the greatest use for all and not wasted on unnecessary building projects. A proper accounting system is a prerequisite for the proper use of church money.

The donations made by believers belong to God, and they ought to be used in a way that serves believers and society rather than a few selected individuals. The church should become more involved in social work, and support poor congregations in China's west in their building projects.

2003.1/2.5

**Chinese Protestant Church Launches Own Website**

In January this year, the China Christian Council launched its own website, which can be found on the world wide web at [http://www.chineseprotestantchurch.org.cn](http://www.chineseprotestantchurch.org.cn).

"In this age of flourishing scientific advances, the church has no reason not to use the fruits of technology to spread information it wants to pass on to others. Today, the Chinese Protestant Church has itself launched a website. On behalf of Chinese Protestantism, I proclaim to the world that we will lift up the word 'honesty' on high and will certainly not use the fruits of technology to tell lies to the world. In this way, through such behaviour, we will bear witness to Christ and give all honour and glory back to him." So writes Bishop K.H.Ting, Honorary President of the China Christian Council and Honorary Chairperson of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, in a message on the homepage of the new website.

The homepage of the new website currently contains links to Chinese New Year messages from Presbyter Ji Jianhong, Chairperson of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and Rev. Cao Shengjie, President of the Chinese Christian Council. There is also a link to a brief introduction to Christianity in China, as well as links to "latest news". Links on the website also lead to sections covering different aspects
of church life, such as sharing pastoral care and church-work experiences, sharing faith testimonies and witness, discussion of theological issues and information about church publications.

Having just been launched, the new church website is still a work in progress. Currently, website content is only available in simplified Chinese characters, though links are already in place on the website in preparation for future content in unsimplified Chinese characters and in English.

2003.1/2.6

Filling Stations For The Soul

(ANS) A large number of Chinese Protestant believers are women over sixty. In spite of this, "youth meetings" are offered by almost all congregations on a weekly basis, even though "youth" may sometimes comprise believers in their forties. In December 2002's edition of *Tian Feng*, the magazine of the China Christian Council and the National Committee of the TSPM, Qian Qi from Shanghai reflects on the character of youth meetings and how they could be improved.

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For believers who want to follow the path of a Christian life, weekly youth meetings are a source of strength for the soul, they are a spiritual "filling station". By sharing parts of their spiritual journey with each other, participants encourage each other. In that sense, sharing and exchange are the core elements of youth meetings.

It is difficult, however, to combine current youth meetings with their overall objective, because this kind of exchange between members of the congregation seems to be extremely scarce. Instead, it is replaced by "sermon-cum-teaching" style meetings that often nearly put the assembled group asleep.

In fact, the term "meeting" (*jihui*) does not prescribe any special format at all, although it does imply an active mode of getting together. Participants should be subjects, not objects of the reunion, which should never turn into a numbing lecture and study session.

If presented in a lively way, a revision or study session would probably even be acceptable, but unfortunately some (certainly not all) pastoral workers present "lessons" that are not at all helpful. In a preset pattern, they first give a few related Bible readings, and then proceed with a totally uninspiring interpretation of the passages. Sometimes they even revert to some very bizarre secular stories in order to grasp the audience's attention.

At this point, prayer as one important source of inspiration for our pastoral workers needs to be brought back into the picture. A spiritual meeting will always have a truly spiritual leader, who will manage to influence the group and invigorate the meeting as a whole.

Yet many times, the prayers we hear in those meetings have become empty formulas, often following a set pattern of opening remarks, requests or praise without having a real focus. How can such prayers move people's hearts?
Looking at the people who join youth meetings, they very often give the impression of participating in some kind of party rather than a holy meeting, whispering to each other or to themselves or even snoring as if asleep. There even are incidents where members of the congregation criticise the testimonies being given by other participants during the youth meeting...

While such behaviour is primarily the fault of the persons concerned, the pastoral workers in charge should ask themselves how such phenomena can develop. Where does the cohesion for our youth meetings come from? Do the sermons of our pastoral workers nourish people? To arrive at genuinely lively and fruitful youth meetings, we ought to take evergreen trees as an example. They may not blossom, but they remain green and bear fruit.

ANS Feature:

"Making Friends, Promoting Oneself": An Interview With Gao Ying

A graduate from China's first batch of theology students after the reopening of churches in the 1980s, Rev. Gao Ying is now senior pastor of Chongwenmen church in Beijing. She is the CCC representative to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the largest international ecumenical organization in the world, with its headquarters in Geneva. The CCC has been a member of the WCC since 1991. The interview was conducted by Theresa Carino during a WCC assembly in Geneva in September 2002.

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Can you give us a brief history of your involvement in the life of the church in China?

During the Cultural Revolution, I was a junior middle school graduate. As a Red Guard, I was sent to the countryside west of Beijing where my time was spent studying Mao's "Red Book" and engaging in all forms of manual labour including planting rice, fetching water, cutting grass and feeding pigs. I worked very hard, and earned the highest income among women students. Much of my money was saved to buy a bicycle for my mother. I worked in a factory between 1974 and 1978, then in a government office for two years. My friend's father worked in a church and so she had access to the church in Chongwenmen. I was drawn by the sermons, the scriptural teachings and the love of the community. The experience filled the spiritual longing in me as I had experienced a faith crisis after the Cultural Revolution. I was converted to Christianity in 1980. It was not easy since I tend to be very rationalistic.

From 1981 to 1985, I studied at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary for a bachelor's degree in theology, then spent two years at the Institute of Religious Studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. Between 1987 and 1991, I studied for my Master of Theology at the Berkeley Graduate Theological Union in California. Upon my return, I was ordained in Beijing in 1992 at the 5th National CCC Assembly, together with more than 40 other young seminary graduates. I served at Chongwenmen Church until 1997 and then worked for a year as an intern at the WCC in Geneva. On my return to China in 1998, I became the chaplain at Nanjing seminary and assistant to the president, Bishop K.H. Ting. In 2001, I returned to Beijing to serve as senior pastor at Chongwenmen, which, with a congregation of 4,000, is the largest church in Beijing.

You spent a year at the WCC as an intern. What did you learn which you consider relevant to you now, as CCC representative to the WCC?

I am grateful for the experience of working for a year in Geneva, at the WCC. I was able to learn and observe and to serve as a bridge in building up the relationship between the Chinese church and the ecumenical movement. I gained a lot and was enlightened.
It raised my ecumenical awareness and I became interested in the ecumenical movement to which I am now personally committed.

What have been the highlights of your encounter with the WCC and what concerns or areas of activity would be common to the CCC?

For me, the personal challenge is how to interpret my knowledge of the ecumenical movement into the life of the church in China. How can I facilitate ecumenical understanding in the Chinese context at the local level? So far, the entry point is difficult. Many of the issues discussed at the WCC may not be so relevant to the church in China. Take, for instance, the relationship between the Orthodox churches and the Protestant churches. The discussion is very intense and a priority for the WCC. This is not seen as relevant in China. There are other issues such as racism, or overcoming domestic violence, which are not closely linked to the life of Chinese churches at the moment. On the other hand, the Chinese church could become more involved in issues related to evangelism, theological education, women in the church, and social service. We could find some common ground and a common agenda with the Church in China.

Here, at WCC meetings, I find a strong sense of belonging to confessional “families” among members of the WCC, which is ironic since the WCC is a symbol of “unity in responding to God’s call.” As someone from a post-denominational church, I feel a contrast since denominational awareness is weak in China.

The life of the Chinese church is quite unique. It may not be appreciated by the ecumenical movement, but we have enjoyed and benefited from the unity of the churches in China.

Denominationally, we are very inclusive and I am ready to join in any kind of confessional worship and not have any uneasy feelings. In this sense, we are ecumenical. Post-denominational reality can lead us into ecumenical life more easily. There is a structural and theological readiness in accepting ecumenism. Outside China, even churches that declare themselves “independent” still belong to “mother churches” in terms of their liturgy and ecclesiology.

How will you be able to promote stronger ties between the CCC and the ecumenical movement?

Chinese church youth could be one entry point in relation to the ecumenical movement. They could serve as stewards during Central Committee meetings or WCC assemblies. I am very impressed with the continuing commitment to ecumenism that I find here despite the difficulties in areas such as finance and orthodox participation. I have been encouraged by this, as well as the broader inclusiveness towards the understanding of the nature of the WCC as a Christian fellowship, for instance, having Quakers lead the worship, which is very unusual.

The tie between the church in China and the ecumenical family is not close enough. The church in China is very independent, which is an achievement. But this independence could lead us to a vulnerable position if we are not aware of our independent identity. We do not have many links, so to speak, with other confessional bodies. It is not easy to dialogue with other confessional bodies since we are outside of the life of these confessional families. The church in China needs to get more involved in ecumenical fellowship. In China there is a saying: “Making friends, promoting oneself.”

2003.1/2.8

ANS Feature:

Re-Opening A Church In Rural China: "Cold, Confusing And Unforgettable"

(ANS) The following article was originally published in The Observer, a magazine for the United Church of Canada. Georgina Baisley, the author of the article, is an Amity teacher currently serving in Sanming, Fujian Province.

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When I was invited to attend the reopening of the church in the little village of Yangxi, I didn’t know how meaningful my participation would be, both for the congregation and for me.

Li Lanfeng, President of the Liedong Christian Council which sponsored the project, hustled me off the bus and through a narrow alley into a courtyard. The rays of the morning sun reflected brightly off the white walls of the newly restored church. At the unusual sight of a foreign western face, there was a hush in the babble of voices and many outright stares. The brass band, in white uniforms, soon struck up the music, taking the attention off me.

The Yangxi Church has an interesting history dating back to 1920. The Methodist Episcopal Church of Fujian Province held a meeting in Yanping, now Nanping City, and decided to set up five churches in the Shaxian area: Yangxi was one of them.

A parson, Wang Enlai, was sent to begin work. Translated, the archival record recalls: "Parson Wang saw that the people were influenced by superstition, and that they did not know the true God. He preached to awaken them, and after great efforts, there were finally 12 converts who accepted his preaching." I observed that those 12 had multiplied many times in the intervening years.

Three years later, another clergyperson, Zhang Jianchu, came to preach and was put in charge of establishing a parochial church. He helped complete the construction of a "Christian-style" church and a seven-room rectory, and assisted in the training of a clergyman and a clergywoman.

Funding came mainly from the United States. Local Chinese parishes, however, also contributed. These collections, it is recorded, included the donation of 1,280 jin, or half-kilos, of rice.

The inventory of furniture and equipment included a pulpit, two pulpit chairs, 20 benches, a cross, an organ and communion ware. There were also six Sunday school desks, a clock, a blackboard and, not surprisingly, kitchen furniture, pots and dishes.

It became a very active church. Early on, religious services included worship and church school on Sunday, Bible Study on Tuesday, a women’s service on Wednesday, and a prayer meeting on Thursday. I was standing on holy ground.

The church continued holding services until 1951 when it was closed by the government. From 1958 to 1995, the building served as the village headquarters of the People’s Commune. After it was abandoned for three years, the government issued an order in 1998 to return it to the Meihe Christian Council. Three years later, on December 30, 2001, it was my good fortune to attend the reopening of the restored church.

President Li ushered me briskly to the front row together with an entourage which included Zhou Danxue, a teaching colleague, who translated for me. The Chinese characters behind the pulpit read "Emmanuel".
There was an expectant hush. Suddenly the deafening cacophony of the ubiquitous celebratory firecrackers filled the sanctuary, simultaneously issuing enough smoke to set up a wave of coughing. People rushed to open windows, letting in a blast of winter wind. Until then the unheated building had been reasonably comfortable, sheltered from the wind and warmed by sunlight coming through the windowpanes. Even with my insulated long johns under two layers of winter clothing, I began to tremble. Cheng Lanying, the student sitting beside me, was shaking so badly she could barely hold her hymnal.

Eventually the smoke cleared, the windows were shut and the choir processed up the centre aisle. Following the enthusiastic singing of "Holy Holy Holy" in Chinese, and a very long prayer accompanied by loud congregational "Amen," I was invited to the platform. My task was to represent the wider church and bring greetings and congratulations from abroad. Although it was a short, off-the-cuff speech, the congregation clapped exuberantly after each English sentence as well as its Chinese translation. Their acceptance of this stranger in their midst was generous. Pride and joy shone in their faces.

Pastor Lu Zejian, whose preaching I enjoy despite the language barrier, spoke on the prophet Haggai. With his expressive face and dramatic gestures, I felt that it must have been a very moving, relevant sermon for those who fully understood the language. Haggai had encouraged the returned exiles to rebuild the temple.

Yet for me, the real message that day was in the instant bonding of strangers. I was just as proud to be shivering in that little church as they were proud to have me.

On that day, in that place, the barriers came down. Racial divisions were erased. Past and present merged. Cheng Lanying, a third-generation Christian, is the fruition of the labours of foreign missionaries who once reached out to China. New Chinese Christians, in turn, reached out to me, the foreigner in the front seat. I was awed by this concrete example of the unity of the faith. The Word became flesh, incarnated in trembling bodies and thankful spirits. Familiar words took on fresh meaning: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

2003.1/2.9

ANS Feature:

30 million Bibles printed in China

In late 2002, the Amity Printing Press celebrated the printing of its 30 millionth Bible. Theresa Carino, Coordinator of Amity's Hong Kong Office, reports from the event.

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30 million Bibles already printed in China? "It's a miracle!" according to Dr. Jen Li Tsai, chair of the Board of Amity Printing Company, a joint venture between the Amity Foundation and the United Bible Societies (UBS). The occasion was the thanksgiving service and celebration marking the completion of the 30 millionth Bible by the Amity Printing Company on December 11, 2002. To emphasize his point, Tsai estimated that at least 6,000 vans covering 60 kilometres would be needed to hold
30 million Bibles. It was a milestone of the 20th century for the United Bible Societies, Tsai noted. According to Dr. Tsai, no one could have imagined it would have been possible when the printing company was established in 1987.

Dr. Wenzao Han, General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, agreed that the press is now flourishing after having overcome numerous early obstacles. Located in the suburbs of Nanjing, it had survived much, including the 1991 floods. It now boasts of having some of the most sophisticated printing equipment in China and a staff of 280. He expressed appreciation for the support extended by partners overseas and the presence of around 100 guests from around the world. In his congratulatory speech, Neil Crosbie, General Secretary of UBS, recalled the history of the relationship between the Amity Printing Company and UBS, acknowledging Dr. Han’s contribution to the development of the press.

Meeting the need for Bibles among Chinese Christians remains the primary goal of the printing press and a major challenge given the rapid growth in numbers. In addition, with China’s entry into the WTO, the prospects for more printing opportunities abound. Sompon Sirikolkarn, the newly appointed Deputy General Secretary of UBS, noted that the Amity Printing Company will increasingly have greater access to markets overseas and can be a supplier for other partners of UBS. In order to operate globally, the press needs to be competitive and will have to improve its management and services to cope with international demands.

The most moving testimonies during the celebration were the accounts from Chinese Christians about what it meant to have Bibles available in China. Rev. An Xinyi, chair of the Jiangsu Provincial TSPM, said that having the 30 millionth Bible reminded him of the time he first received a Bible. It was 20 years ago, when the China Christian Council started publishing Bibles. For him, it was a deeply moving experience to hold a Bible in his hand. Quoting Bishop K.H. Ting, he said that "Chinese Christians love the Bible and are familiar with Scripture. Many Christians keep the Bible in their hearts and in their memory. It is like salt and life. Christians in China believe that the Bible is inspired by God and is a gift from God. In the past, I was a little worried that with too many Bibles, Christians will not cherish it. I should not have worried."

Recalling his own experience Rev. Wang Weifan, a faculty at the Nanjing Union Seminary, said: "For Chinese Christians, the Bible is more precious than their lives. In Wenzhou, Christians circulated handwritten copies of the Bible during the Cultural Revolution when Bibles were prohibited." These handwritten Bibles are now treasured testimonies to the faith and courage of Chinese Christians. Ms. Li Enlin, Associate General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, said that on the day she left home to join Nanjing Seminary, her father, a pastor, sent her off with an apology: "He had very much wanted to give me a Bible as a parting gift but since the family only had one Bible, he could not give it to me. He was very sad."

The success of the Amity Printing Company has brought a sea change in the situation. Today, it produces close to two million Bibles a year which the China Christian Council disseminates through 70 Bible distribution centres throughout China. Celebrating this achievement, Rev. Li Lancheng, General Secretary of the Nanjing Christian Council, remarked: "In Nanjing alone, there are over 300 churches and meeting points, with over 100,000 Christians. In Mochoulu Church, we have 700
NEWSBRIEFS

Upgrading Facilities. Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, China's foremost Protestant seminary, has plans to expand and relocate to a campus on the outskirts of town in the future. Construction of the new facilities will commence in July 2003, and the new campus is projected to house up to 1,000 students.

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Theological Education. After two years of hard studies besides a normal workload, a 30-strong batch of pastoral workers graduated from Nanjing Seminary, having finished a course aimed specifically at theology graduates with working experience. The programme had been initiated in 2000 in an effort to strengthen theological education. Apart from theological studies aimed at bringing students closer to theological developments abroad, courses touched on philosophical, cultural and historical aspects.

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Students Wanted. Nanjing Union Theological Seminary is offering positions in its regular four-year and graduate programmes. In January's edition of Tian Feng, the school outlines the procedure for potential applicants. Candidates for the four-year BA programme must, amongst other qualifications, be baptized high school graduates and have been actively involved in their home church's activities for at least a year. Potential students of theology are expected to feel a clear calling, have a good moral character and must be willing to serve the Chinese church. Applications must be endorsed by the candidate's local church, and no individual applications are accepted.

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Conference On Social Service. In preparation for its task, the newly established Social Service Department under the National TSPM/CCC committee held a first conference dedicated to the topic of social work. The meeting, which was held from January 13-15 in Shanghai, drew representatives from virtually all Provincial Christian Councils, as well as members of the Amity Foundation. Presbyter Ji Jianhong, chairman of the TSPM movement, and CCC president Cao Shengjie called on delegates to bring the church as a social actor into society.
Places Mentioned In This Issue Of ANS

1) Hong Kong
3) Zhengzhou (Henan)
5) Nanjing (Jiangsu)

2) Macao
4) Liedong (Fujian)
6) Shanghai