Dear Reader,

Like many of their brothers and sisters worldwide, Chinese Christians watch the war in Iraq with dismay. Before the war started, the Chinese church magazine Tian Feng voiced two urgent calls for peace in its issue that came out in early March. We summarize one such article on p2.

Facing the more practical challenges of China's social development, more and more churches are now starting to set up small social service projects such as kindergartens and homes for the elderly. The new Social Service Department set up by the China Christian Council and National TSPM aims at supporting such efforts. Find out in more detail about the plans for the CCC's social work in our interview with Rev. Deng Fucun, head of the Social Service Department (p2).

Meanwhile, life within the Chinese church goes on, with the church as a whole and also many individuals trying to define their roles in the country's modernizing society. Rapid social and technological change brings about numerous moral and ethical challenges. What contribution can the Chinese church make in this context? Several pastors give their opinions on p6.

With kind regards from the editorial desk,

Katrin Frieder

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.
A Christian Call For Peace

(ANS) Like many of their sisters and brothers worldwide, Chinese Christians observe recent international political developments with concern. Besides news on church-initiated peace efforts abroad, March’s edition of Tian Feng also carries the following reflections on peace by Sun Yanli.

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We believe that God created humankind. God placed humans into this world to enjoy it as good stewards of his creation. Unfortunately, though, disasters are part of this world, too, many of them human-made. Among these, war is particularly traumatizing and harmful, killing thousands each year. Do we not all know somebody who has gone through the ordeals of war?

Human beings abhor war, they strive for peace. And indeed, war is against God’s will and Christ’s teachings.

As we can see from the descriptions of paradise, ideal human relationships are harmonious; without hatred or terror. God is a creative and loving God; the creator of the world, of humankind and all that is beautiful. God does not want his creation to be destroyed - God wants peace.

Likewise, Christ is an ambassador of peace. Jesus came to save and change this world; as the Prince of Peace he guides men and women towards peace. This guidance is not only restricted to external behaviour, but is also intended for interior moral and spiritual cultivation. Christ wants to achieve harmony between people, but also between people and God. Both relationships require each other; there can be no harmony between humans if they are not at peace with God, and there can be no peace with God if humans do not live in peace with each other.

Finally, the apostles also call on us to be harbingers of peace. They teach us that we have to strive for peace wholeheartedly if we really want to achieve it. The apostles also encourage us not to lose hope in the light of ongoing conflicts and wars, but to continue in our struggle to bring peace into God’s world. To prepare people for this, we need to spread the Gospel of peace and lead our fellow human beings towards repentance and the path of righteousness.

2003.3/4.2

"Being Salt and Light"

In February 2003, Theresa Carino, head of the Amity Foundation’s Hong Kong office, interviewed Rev. Deng Fucun, Director of the newly established Social Service Department of the National CCC/TSPM, about his plans for the department.

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Can you explain why there is a need for the CCC/TSPM to set up a Social Service Department?
After the Cultural Revolution, the CCC concentrated on restoring churches so Christians could have places of worship. New churches were built. In other words, the church focused on the "hardware" for more than ten years. However, Christian faith is not only expressed through worship, it is also expressed through social service. Now that we have established the infrastructure of churches, some churches have, here and there, started becoming engaged in social service. Most of their projects consist of homes for the elderly and health clinics. This is growing among the churches.

Part of "theological reconstruction" is emphasizing the need for Christians to be "salt and light" in this world. The church needs to do this as part of its mission. It should be a concern of the whole church, not just a local church. As more churches become involved, we need a national department to push this and to provide guidance. We have to pay attention to our social responsibility. According to the Bible, Christ said "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." In the parable of the feeding of the five thousand, Christ challenged the disciples to respond to the immediate needs of people.

From your perspective, what will be the relationship between the Social Service Department and the Amity Foundation? Will there be competition between the two?

During the 1980s, Bishop K. H. Ting and Dr. Han Wenzao realized that the church should serve society's needs. At that time, though, the church as a whole did not have this idea. Therefore some church leaders came together with some non-Christians to set up the Amity Foundation.

In the 1980s, it was possible to set up an NGO (non-governmental organization), not necessarily a church-based organization, even though it was seen as linked to the church. Then, the country was not yet as open as now and the church could not engage in social service. Amity is registered under the Civil Affairs Department, not the Religious Affairs Bureau. With the liberalization of religious policy, the church now has more space for many activities. In the 1990s, Jiang Zemin said that religious organizations should contribute to society. This constitutes a radical departure from the past. Today, a church organization can also be a "social organization."

Amity has church-run projects. In 1995, Ms. Gu Xiuhui, who is now the Assistant to the Director of the Social Service Department of CCC/TSPM, had a hand in developing these projects under Amity. I do not envisage competition at all between the Social Service Department and Amity. After all, I am also a board member of Amity. We never thought of the department being in competition with Amity. The two are mutually cooperative and complementary.

Much of Amity's funding comes from overseas. We also welcome funding from overseas but we must generate funds domestically, especially tapping rich churches in coastal areas such as those in Zhejiang. In Wenzhou and Wenlin (in Zhejiang Province), churches have financial resources that are now in the hundreds of thousands of RMB. Many do not know how to use these resources effectively.
Wealthy churches and individual Christians should serve the people. Christ has said that the rich have to give up their riches in order to follow Him.

In Wenzhou, for instance, there is already a "Light and Salt" Christian fellowship consisting of business people. They donated to flood relief several years ago and are involved in community service. Our service should be locally rooted and the Three Self Principle should remain intact. We welcome foreign partners but, even without outside help, we will do what needs to be done, even if it takes us longer to accomplish it.

**What are your plans for the Social Service Department?**

First, we need to promote the idea of social service among Chinese Christians, through the CCC/TSPM magazine *Tian Feng*, for instance. Secondly, we will need to raise local funds and support for projects. Thirdly, we will work in partnership with churches overseas. Fund raising should be done in a proper manner and resources should be carefully utilized. Projects should be appropriate to the capability of churches. Most churches will not be able to undertake rural development projects, for instance, since these will require working with government departments. Churches do not have the capacity to do so. The Amity Foundation should continue to do this. On the other hand, churches should undertake projects that they are already familiar with such as running health clinics and homes for the elderly. After all, these projects require patience and a caring attitude, qualities associated with the church.

In the Social Service Conference convened by our department in January 2003, one of the projects we have identified is working with autistic children. There are 600,000 known cases of autistic children in China and nothing much has been done for them. This is an area where the church could make a contribution. We will need training and advice from overseas since there is very little expertise in this area within China.

Our stress should be on educating church members on social service so that Chinese society will know more about Christians and Christianity. Projects should go through provincial councils and have their endorsement. We will function as a bridge but not implement projects ourselves. For example, we are presently involved in a wheelchair distribution project with the Henan Christian Council which works with the Henan Provincial Government in this.

We lack experienced personnel, social workers, for work with the elderly; we lack rehabilitation equipment. We should cooperate with Amity in AIDS education and in providing training to care-givers and managers of homes for the elderly. In some cases, the CCC’s Social Service Department can refer projects to Amity and vice versa. There can be cooperation with Amity teachers in the teaching of English.

**In your projects, will you make any distinction between Christians and non-Christians?**

In homes for the elderly, priority will be given to Christians but we will also accept non-Christians. In the past, many social service projects were used by mission boards for purposes of conversion and evangelism. Our projects will not be used in
this manner. Of course, some people may be converted in the process, that could also happen. Social service is an act of love. Just as God has loved us, we should give to others what has been given to us. Bishop Ting has said, in our evangelism, we should not use fear to convert people. We must share God's love. Our God is not a fearsome God. God loves all human beings. He is a loving God.

Small Is Beautiful: Visiting Churches In Xinjiang

(ANS) As a province of heavy Muslim flavour, China's autonomous Xinjiang Province is a rather small spot on China's Christian map. Spanning a territory four times the size of Japan and with a population of 17 million, there are no detailed figures about Christians in Xinjiang available; estimates range from 30,000 to 100,000 believers. Small as the province's Christian communities may be, they are very much alive and flourishing, as Zhejiang-based Chen Xiaolang reports from a trip to Wulumuqi [Urumqi] and Changji in November of 2002.

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Chen Xiaolang was travelling together with Rev. Shen Cheng'en, a Vice President of the China Christian Council and former chief editor of Tian Feng. Upon their arrival in Xinjiang's provincial capital Urumqi, they were greeted by their hosts, who immediately made them feel at home.

Chen and Shen started their local itinerary with a visit to Changji, where they attended the consecration of the newly constructed church as honorary guests. When they arrived in Changji the next day at 8 a.m., the beautifully decorated church was already brimming with activity. Believers had gathered from the surrounding areas, some of them having travelled up to 50 kilometres to witness this special occasion, give thanks for the new church building and listen to guest preachers from China's eastern coast.

Before Changji's new church was completed, believers had to gather in a tiny building that measured only 200 square meters. Meetings regularly spilled over to the adjoining rooms and the courtyard. Even on a cold winter day with temperatures hovering around minus 28 degrees Celsius, there would be believers outside, listening attentively to the sermon that was being given inside.

Thanks to the congregation's commitment and the supportive attitude of the local government, Changji's believers can now meet in a new church building. Construction of this 1,483 square-metre, three-floor complex with a capacity to seat 2,000 persons was started in July 1999. Altogether, the new building cost more than 1.3 million RMB [US$ 162,500 approx].

When the consecration service finally started at 11 a.m., led by four pastors and graced by two choirs - Changji's local church choir had been joined by a guest choir from Urumqi - , some believers used cameras to capture this exceptional moment.

In his sermon, Rev. Shen Cheng'en preached on the topic of "What does 'belonging to the Spirit' mean?" Following the consecration ceremony, a local Religious Affairs representative congratulated the congregation on the new building. After the
benediction offered by Rev. Shen, the 4,000 believers who had gathered for the consecration service finally dispersed.

Yet for Shen and his travel companion the programme was not to be finished soon, as local believers and church leaders wanted to make most of this rare opportunity for spiritual formation. In the afternoon, they continued with a series of lectures on topics like "Running the church well under the Three Self Principle" and "What the spiritual person strives for."

During the next few days, Shen and Chen had more opportunities to share their wisdom and knowledge with local believers, both in Changji and as they continued their journey back to Urumqi.

Before liberation, only around two hundred believers would attend church services in the provincial capital, and during the Cultural Revolution church activities came to a complete halt. Today, there are two churches and 16 meeting points in the city, which are served by three pastors, three elders and seven theology graduates, plus a number of pastoral personnel. In Urumqi's Minde Road Church alone, 2,500 believers regularly attend the three Sunday worship services.

For the visitors from the coast, the trip to Urumqi also included a visit to two newly established meeting points as well as discussion meetings with church staff before they left "full of gratitude," as Chen concludes his report.

2003.3/4.4

Chinese Christians Attach Importance To Ethics: A Discussion Among Pastors

(ANS) In a new article format, Tian Feng invites readers to discuss matters of common interest. Replies are then reprinted in the following issue of the magazine. In March's edition, pastors discuss the meaning of Christian ethics.

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"Modesty can bring people to actively think about other's needs"
(Ms.) Zhang Shuilian

According to Christian belief, God made human beings in his image. He is the measure of everything. Together with the knowledge of having been created by God, this brings about an attitude of modesty. We feel our own cognitive and moral limitations vis-a-vis this God. Only with this kind of modesty can we judge others in a friendly way and dialogue with them from a position of equality. "Do for others what you want them to do for you: this is the meaning of the Law of Moses and of the teachings of the prophets." (Mt 7:12)

Modesty can bring people to actively think about other's needs, to love God and their fellow human beings.

An attitude of modesty would also curb human arrogance towards creation. God calls on human beings to be good stewards of his creation, not to subjugate nature.
We need to guide believers towards this attitude so as to create a harmonious relationship between humans and creation that will glorify the Lord.

"Develop the positive function of Christian ethics and morals"
Dan Weixiang

Social life does not allow any "moral holes." We need ethical guidance for a morally good, meaningful life. Currently, the development of values in China is facing numerous challenges due to the change in lifestyles created by economical, scientific and cultural developments. In this setting, the Christian ethical and moral message that has gone through the baptism of modernization may well turn into an important ethical contribution to China's modernizing society.

The ongoing technical revolution creates challenges like questions regarding the ethical use of the Internet or biotechnology. At the same time, we are facing the problem of how to reconcile economic development with cultural and humanistic values. Of course, religion is one possible source for strategies aimed at directing these developments in a healthy way. Therefore, strengthening the social function of Christian ethics can be an important contribution to establishing socialist ethics and morals.

"The Chinese church must attach importance to ethics and morals"
Chen Tianyuan

Christianity is a religion that attaches importance to ethics and morals. On several occasions, Bishop K.H. Ting has pointed out "The Bible also emphasizes morals. You see, six out of the Ten Commandments have to do with morals."

In the Chinese church today, there are some people who think that morals are not important as long as we have eternal life. It is not correct that some people within the church give importance only to individual morals, but not to social morals. Jesus' teachings of God's kingdom are meant for the poor and suppressed. Morals are not equivalent with the Gospel, but the Gospel has never eschewed morals either.

For a church that does not give importance to morals, there is also the danger of slipping back into the stage of a "primitive" religion. However, apart from God's grace, one important factor in the continuing attractiveness of Christianity over the past two thousand years has been its moral force. Therefore, we need to attach importance to ethics and morals and spread this idea.

"Christian ethics and morals are in line with the demands of spiritual civilization"
Xu Xiaohong

Christianity is an ethical religion with a loving God at its centre. If we develop this Christian spirit of love, we will gain the love of believers and the masses. Demands like "Whatever you do, do it from your hearts, and do it for God, not people"; "People say that beautiful things ought to be done with the heart"; "Giving is more blessed than receiving" are all in line with the demands of socialist spiritual civilization.
Although the idea that morals are useless or not necessary is not commonly held within the church, there are some heretical groups that use this paradigm to attract people. However, there are also many Christians who contribute significantly to building China's spiritual civilization, and the idea that "a good Christian is a good citizen" has also become common knowledge among a large number of Christians, many of whom engage in social work like support for the widowed, orphans or the school-less.

Editor's Note: To keep up with China's rapidly modernizing material civilization, the Chinese government has repeatedly voiced the need to develop a [socialist] spiritual civilization.

"Develop moral notions for human relationships"
(Ms.) Li Yajie

Christianity teaches people to love each other and to love God. "Do for others what you want them to do for you: this is the meaning of the Law of Moses and of the teachings of the prophets." (Mt 7:12) This Golden Rule calls on people to actively think about the needs of others. In this sense, it is even more active than Confucius' teaching: "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you."

Following rapid material development, including increased competition and a faster pace of life, many people experience a weakening of human relations, they lack friendship and mutual trust. We ought to develop ethical relations in the spirit of Christian love, and to strengthen the idea of human equality in the face of God. We also ought to call on people to develop harmonious relationships and encourage service, respect, civilized behaviour, harmony and politeness as well as support for those in need, to serve the development of socialist spiritual civilization.

Harmonious families and a stable society and an optimistic, striving outlook are all basic demands of socialist spiritual civilization. Christianity ought to raise its own moral standards to give good witness to the Lord and to contribute to the building of socialist spiritual civilization.

"Strengthen individual Christian moral formation"
Tang Weimin

The Bible, the Christian classic, is full of moral teachings and emphasizes moral cultivation of the individual. In the Bible, we find examples of very virtuous people as well as stories of people who choose not to listen to God's moral call. Jesus teaches us to love God, love ourselves and love each other wholeheartedly. Without a moral life, Christian faith is not complete. We need to understand Christian ethical and moral teachings fully, and then internalize them. The story of the man who was caught crossing a red traffic light teaches us that we cannot rely on laws and regulations to control human behaviour. When asked by the policeman whether he had failed to see the red traffic light, he answered: "Oh, I saw the traffic light, but I did not see you." Religion helps people to develop a conscience and stops sinful behaviour at its roots.

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Mending The Church's "Fishing Net"

(ANS) A good fisherman does not only spread his net expertly, he also mends it regularly to keep it fully functioning. In his article in February's edition of Tian Feng, Fan Aishi from Zhejiang reminds his readers of some of the holes in the church's fishing net that urgently need mending.

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Holes in the church's "fishing net" are nothing new. Throughout its existence, the church has had to struggle with the problem of locating these holes, and mending them in the right way. Likewise, the Chinese church today is facing the need to amend some of its structures and practices.

The first area of concern for the church are sects and heresies. From the "Shouters" of the 1980s or the group of the "Established King" in the 1990s to the current threat of "Eastern Lightning", heretical groups have lingered at the fringes of church life. With the help of eclectic and erroneous Bible interpretations, these groups divert believers from the right path.

Within the church, there are a number of believers whose foundation of faith is weak because they are new believers from a low educational background. It is these pure-hearted believers who fall prey to heretical teachings most easily. The problem of sects and heresies is a big "hole" in the church's fishing net.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the problem of church unity. A harmonious, united church where members love each other, is the church's biggest witness. Following its resurgence after the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese church has experienced many developments to be happy and proud of, but there are also some problems. Currently, the church's problems do not come from outside, but are of internal nature. A church with inner strife will hurt believers and the Lord, a church that is not united will harm the work of the Gospel.

The church cannot engage in a paternalistic system where one person has the final say, nor can it allow factions or the forceful suppression of people. Only true democracy, rational discussions and civilised behaviour will bring about unity in harmony.

A third "hole" in the fishing net of the Chinese church are problems associated with its pastoral workers. Today, old and young pastors and other church workers share the burden of their work side by side, and most of them are solidly grounded in their faith, education, commitment and dedication. However, some unfortunate situations do exist, where people of little commitment and with unclear motivations join the ranks of church workers. There are also those who, after entering the church, become distracted and change, maybe even become criminal. The church lacks an effective system of control; besides, there is a culture of unconditional love, a kind of love-ism, which allows these people to keep swaying back and forth while maintaining an image of spirituality. Let us hope that in the future, the church will be able to strengthen its body of pastoral workers so as to match its own needs with the demands of time.
Finally, structural problems at the grassroots constitute a problem that needs the church's attention. This has, of course, to do with the severe shortage of trained pastors, which leads to the phenomenon that there are whole counties without a single pastor. What is more, many meeting points do not have a proper management structure, or finances are controlled by single individuals.

The church's fishing net needs to be mended, otherwise, small holes will turn into big trouble. We all can help to mend the net; let's start today!

ANS Feature:

Heeding The Call

"How do the seminaries attract students?" a recent German visitor to China asked, surprised to hear that most Chinese Protestant Christians are first generation believers and often alone in predominantly non-Christian families. Yet, many young people feel called, and some seminaries have to refuse applicants because of insufficient capacities. Katrin Fiedler witnessed an ordination ceremony at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in February 2003.

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On this occasion, eight pastors were ordained under the auspices of Jiangsu Provincial Christian Council. As is often the case in China, some of the candidates had already served the church much longer than the required two years before being ordained. Presided by Bishop K.H. Ting, President of Nanjing Seminary, the whole ceremony was unusually short for a Chinese worship service, lasting little more than an hour.

"It is not enough to feel called, you must also be prepared for your work," Rev. An Xinyi, head of Jiangsu Provincial Christian Council, started his sermon on the topic of "Lift your eyes to the fields" (John 4, 34-35).

At the centre of the ceremony were, of course, the vows of the candidates, followed by the formal ordination.

"Do you want to heed the holy call of a pastor, sacrifice yourself for your whole life, lift up your cross every day, serve the Lord loyally, and be a pastor to the sheep of the Lord?"

"Do you believe that the Bible was bestowed by the Lord, and that the saving teachings in it are the principles of our faith and actions?"

"Do you want to expound Biblical truths eagerly, spread the Gospel of Christ, administer the sacraments in a reasonable way, respect the regulations of the Church, and protect the Church of the Lord with true teachings?"

"Do you want to dedicate yourself to the Chinese church and lead believers towards managing a church that is self-administering, self-supporting and self-propagating?"
"Do you want to respect the holy teachings of the Lord for your whole life, observe holidays, respect good deeds, and be a model to believers in every way?"

After affirming their vows, one by one the candidates stepped into the circle of senior pastors for the ordination proper. When the group finally presented itself to the congregation, the newly ordained pastors all with an elated smile on their faces, they were greeted with huge bouquets of red roses.

ANS Feature:

Reformed Roots, Post-denominational Shoots: A Portrait of Xiamen’s Bamboo Church

The annual winter conference of the Amity Teachers Project was held at the end of January in Xiamen, a port on the southern coast of Fujian province. This city was one of the first treaty ports open to Westerners, hence has some of the oldest Protestant churches in China. Don Snow had the opportunity to visit one of these, Bamboo Church.

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Bamboo Church was first built in 1850 by missionaries from the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Southern Fujian was the main area in which RCA missionaries worked, and was also the focus of much Presbyterian effort. Though it has been rebuilt several times, the current church is a direct descendant of the 1850 church, thus making it one of China’s oldest Protestant churches. Its Reformed roots can still be seen in its governance by a board of 7 elders and a committee of 14 deacons.

Today Bamboo Church has a pastoral staff of three, and a growing congregation of 2,500 members. About 100 people go through the church’s baptismal classes each year to be baptized in its twice-yearly baptismal services. In addition to weekly worship services (three each Sunday), Bible studies, prayer groups, and youth fellowship meetings, the church also carries out an impressive range of other kinds of ministries. Among the various committees of the church are groups dealing with music, pastoral visitation, greeting, and even one for pre-marriage counseling. The Sunday school has 40 volunteer teachers working with almost 300 children. Many home meetings also take place under the auspices of the church.

One of the church’s more unusual ministries is an effort to help rural pastors in Fujian province. While many of Fujian’s coastal cities are relatively wealthy, Fujian’s interior regions are much less well off, and the conditions for evangelists and pastors in these areas are often quite difficult.

In China, the term "evangelist" would be roughly equivalent to "assistant pastor." Evangelists are full-time church workers who have received formal theological training but have not yet been ordained. In China, seminary and Bible school graduates are normally not eligible for ordination until they have worked in the church for some years, and it is not unusual for church staff members to work as evangelists for much or even all of their careers.

Many rural pastors and evangelists in Fujian make less than 500 RMB [US$ 62.5 approx.] a month, only somewhere between a half and a quarter of what their city counterparts receive.

Aware of these difficulties, for the past five years Bamboo Church has administered a fund to provide assistance to poor pastors and evangelists in inland parts of the province. The fund is managed by a church committee, under the leadership of one of the elders, and has a formalized process through which rural pastors who make less the 500 RMB a month can apply for assistance. The fund also offers help to survivors in cases where a rural pastor or evangelist passes away. To date the fund has assisted over 100 people.

Another recent development in the life of this church is the establishment of a second fund
to provide financial assistance to poor people who cannot pay health care costs. China is currently in the process of moving from a socialized health care system, in which health care was essentially free, toward a system in which patients are expected to cover more of the costs. At present, those whose income is lower, especially migrants from the countryside to the city, often fall through the cracks. One woman in Bamboo Church became increasingly aware of this problem through her work on the visitation committee, and last year decided to offer the church a contribution of 20,000 RMB [US$2,500 approx.] to establish a fund to provide assistance to those who could not afford to pay hospital bills. The church not only accepted her offer, but also took her cause on as a regular part of the work of the church.

Bamboo Church is somewhat unusual both because of its long history and also because of its position in the heart of one of China’s wealthier cities. However, these advantages have allowed it to become a pioneer in finding ways through which China’s more established and wealthier churches can begin to assist others.

2003.3/4.8

ANS Feature:

Dishing Out Baozi And Bibles: Christian Entrepreneur In China

"It is really not my doing, it’s all thanks to God’s grace." With these words, Chen Zhongli, a Christian living in Nanjing, dismisses any notion of her amazing story being a personal success. In any case, Chen’s way from being a laid-off factory staff to a businesswoman presiding over a restaurant empire with over 200 employees is worth retelling. Chen’s astonishing success aside, her story is also an unusual form of Christian witness in a society where most believers give testimony through direct evangelism rather than more secular ways of affirming their faith. Katrin Fiedler reports.

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When Chen Zhongli was laid off from her work in the finance department of a state-run enterprise, she had much to worry about: Not only had her family income shrunk dramatically, but also the job opportunities for her grown up children looked dim. Like most young people of their generation, they could not take government-supplied employment for granted. To solve their problems, Chen and her husband decided to open a small restaurant. "We started with only eight tables and six employees," Chen remembers. That was in 1989.

Slowly, Chen and her husband expanded their business. Their Northern Jiangsu specialities such as "soup dumplings" (tang bao) were popular, and after setting up a larger restaurant and taking over a second one, they were owners of two big eateries in prime settings of Nanjing. In January of 2003, just before Chinese New Year, they finally opened a third branch of their Golden Eagle restaurant - a huge building, elaborately decorated and home to 100 waitresses, cooks and other staff.

Perhaps the most unusual feature of Chen’s latest enterprise is its Christian flavour, not only in the decoration, but also the way the restaurant is run. Visitors to the fourth floor dining rooms, for example, are greeted by a row of Christian images, including the Virgin and Child and Jesus Christ on the Great Wall. "We helped her select the images," reveals a close friend of Chen’s, who has witnessed the progress of her latest restaurant project in her prayer group. "My church group has been very supportive," affirms Chen, "whenever I encountered a problem, they would encourage me, and remember me in their prayers."

Chen, who is 57, has been a Christian for six years. Unlike many Chinese believers who initially come into contact with the Christian faith in times of personal problems or frustration, Chen felt attracted by Christianity although her life at the time was mostly smooth sailing. "A young lady introduced Christianity to me, and later took me along to the Christmas service. It was wonderful, I felt so elated and free of all worries when I heard the music."

The restaurant’s employees call Chen "Auntie", not "General Manager." Yet watching the modest manager interact with her staff, it becomes clear that her concerned and warm management style only enhances their respect...
for the boss. Chen also makes a point of giving a Bible to new employees, instructing them to familiarize themselves with Christian thinking.

"When we were discussing the option of opening up a third restaurant, I only had one condition," Chen recalls. "I wanted this to be a Christian place, and I told my husband and children that I would not have any of the traditional Gods of Wealth - in fact, idols - placed in this building."

Chen clearly sees this enterprise as a place to reach out to people who under normal circumstances would never step into a church building. "Cadres will probably not go to church services, but they do frequent posh restaurants," Chen observes. With this aim in mind, she sees her work as a calling: "If you really believe, you will appreciate the meaning of every day at work."

Chen's social involvement does not stop at work, though. Through the Amity Foundation, she also supports a child that was on the point of dropping out of school for lack of money. And in the midst of numerous work related duties, she still finds time to visit this little girl. "I plan to go and see her again in spring," she smiles.

2003.3/4.9

**NEWSBRIEFS**

Relief work: Disastrous hail in combination with a tornado struck villages and towns around Huaian city in Jiangsu Province in late 2002. The icy storm left one person dead, destroyed houses and killed numerous livestock.

In response to this disaster, local TSPM representatives called a meeting and decided to participate in food donation activities. More than eighty church meeting points joined these relief efforts, collecting more than 300,000 jin [approx. 150 tons] of grain in less than ten days. The food was handed out to the needy between December 10 and 12, 2002. The emergency assistance left a deep impression on local villagers and received great praise from disaster victims.

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Prayer for Peace: Nangang Church in Haerbin, Heilongjiang Province conducted a thanksgiving service on December 29. Accompanied by piano and violin music, believers joined in thanksgiving for the year passed and prayed for world peace.

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Building Democracy: In efforts to strengthen democracy, churches in several provinces changed their leaderships after holding elections. In Shandong, for example, the seventh plenum of church representatives met in Ji'nan from January 7-8, 2003. More than 120 delegates had come from 17 locations all over the province. Rev. Gao Feng was elected head of both the Provincial Three Self Patriotic Movement and the Provincial Christian Council.

As local church structures in the provinces were established at different times, this current round of elections was a rather new experience for some of the TSPM/Christian Councils concerned, while others met to elect their seventh or eighth leadership.

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1) Wulumuqi [Urumqi] (Xinjiang)
3) Nanjing (Jiangsu)
5) Huaian (Jiangsu)
7) Ji'nan (Shandong)

2) Changji (Xinjiang)
4) Xiamen (Fujian)
6) Haerbin (Heilongjiang)