**Chinese Religious Affairs Delegation Visits North America**

(ANS) From February 15 to 27, a Chinese religious affairs delegation visited the United States and Canada. Chen Meilin, Director of the CCC/TSPM's Overseas Relations Department, reports in May's edition of *Tian Feng* about the trip.

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The delegation of 12 persons consisted of officials, religious leaders and scholars of religion. Led by the head of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, Ye Xiaowen, the delegation shared responsibilities, with Rev. Cao Shengjie, president of the CCC, acting as the vice leader of the delegation and Catholic Bishop Fu Tieshan acting as consultant.
The mixed delegation with shared responsibilities was a first for the parties concerned, and the results were extraordinary, providing rich and open exchanges in many different places. The delegation also embodied the spirit of mutual respect between believers of different faiths and non-believers. Ye Xiaowen often led the religious leaders into the "front row", leaving Bishop Fu Tieshan and Rev. Cao Shengjie full of gratitude and respect.

The delegation's stops included, amongst other cities, Ottawa, Toronto, New York and Washington. On several occasions, Rev. Cao and Bishop Fu attended local worship services. A meeting with a North American artists group on human rights and religious freedom ensued in a lively discussion which served as an eye-opener for the hosts, as delegation representatives shared their different viewpoints.

The trip schedule was tight, allowing only one or one and a half days in each place. More than 30 meetings with different parties were held, including religious leaders, government officials, scholars, representatives from social movements and finally journalists. Driven by the common hope of enhancing understanding and cooperation, the delegation worked ceaselessly.

In Canada, actions organized by zealous Falungong adherents were a nuisance to the group. In one case, Falungong activists even resorted to leaving threatening messages on delegation members' hotel phones. Reacting to these activities, the delegation held an improvised press conference to point out the harmful nature of Falungong.

One important element of the Canadian talks were exchanges regarding the situation of human rights. The delegation met with the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and representatives from the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Dwelling on her own experience, Rev. Cao used this opportunity to illustrate the situation of religions in China as well as religious policy. Once more, this was an opportunity that left the whole delegation with the feeling that this was an "ice-breaking" journey. The Chinese-Canadian dialogue on religious freedom was initiated in 1999 and goes back to efforts by then prime ministers Zhu Rongji and Jean Chretien.

Apart from meeting representatives from the United Church of Canada and the Catholic Church, the group also had an opportunity to talk with individual pastors engaged in social ministries such as Aids work, and met with many old friends of the Chinese church.

One of the most successful parts of the US leg of the visit was a presentation on religious policy given by Ye Xiaowen at Azusa Pacific University. Further visits to universities and church bodies completed the trip. The delegation returned home with a deep feeling of gratitude for the friendship and respect the Chinese church has won in the ecumenical family over the past few years, not least a result of its policy of autonomy.
Exploring The Past, Envisioning The Future: CCC/TSPM Delegation Visits Europe

(ANS) From April 22 to May 8 of this year, a high-ranking CCC/TSPM delegation visited Germany, Switzerland and Great Britain. For the current CCC/TSPM leadership, it was the first visit to Europe. Below are excerpts from Tian Yu's report in June's edition of Tian Feng.

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The tour started in Germany, where partner organization EMW (Evangelisches Missionswerk) had organized a number of activities for the Chinese delegation with the cooperation of EKD. The guests used meetings and seminars to present aspects of Chinese church life to their German audience, such as reconstruction of theology, social service, and theological education.

Among the most frequently asked questions in Germany were questions regarding the rapid growth of Chinese Christians, and the post-denominational nature of the Chinese church. The German hosts felt that the Chinese experience could contribute to their own reflections, in particular the ongoing process of unifying churches in a united Germany.

On the subject of church unification, Rev. Cao Shengjie emphasized church unity as a teaching of Christ. However, unity is not equal to "total unification," Cao underlined. Instead, the principles of mutual respect need to be observed in the process of unification. The most important thing is to maintain unity in the Holy Spirit.

Presbyter Ji shared experiences regarding rapid church growth with his German counterparts. Such an increase in believers brings about its own problems, Ji explained, as there are not enough pastoral workers to take care of all the "sheep" in their growing flocks. Inadequate pastoral care, though, can help cults and sects to make inroads. The Chinese church is trying to strike a balance between "quantity" and "quality" in believers in various ways, one of which is the recent emphasis on social service.

One of the highlights of the delegation's visit to Germany was a visit to Wittenberg, hometown of Martin Luther, where the city mayor hosted a banquet for the Chinese guests.

In Switzerland, a tight schedule kept the visitors busy. The visit to the World Council of Churches included a prayer meeting followed by a seminar on the church in China. The delegation also met with representatives of the Lutheran World Federation, the World YWCA, WARC and the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey. The Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches hosted the delegation in Geneva and Berne, while Mission21 was the host in Basel.

Apart from exchanges at various ecumenical bodies, Geneva held a special attraction for the delegation as the hometown of Calvin, offering once more the opportunity to explore the roots of Protestantism. And, although Swiss and Chinese churches developed different histories, they are now united in their efforts to give
praise to God and serve the people. In recent years, Swiss and Chinese churches have built ties of close cooperation, especially in the field of social service. Swiss churches support the work of The Amity Foundation and have also greeted the establishment of the CCC's Social Service Department with enthusiasm.

Arriving in London on their last leg of the European tour, delegation members immediately were mesmerized by the special mixture of old and new that Britain's capital offers its visitors. After the reopening of churches in China after the Cultural Revolution in the 1980s, British churches were among the first to establish ties with the CCC/TSPM. From the British side, various organizations are involved in China contacts, including Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), Friends of the Church in China, and the Scottish Churches China Group, all of which received the Chinese delegation.

One highlight of the visit to England was a meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury. Once more, Rev. Cao and Presbyter Ji used the opportunity to interpret the ongoing efforts of reconstructing theology to their hosts. In his reply, the Archbishop Rowan Williams stressed the benefits such efforts will have for the spiritual growth of Chinese believers, adding that faith and deeds, theology and prayer give impulses to each other.

The trip to the UK was rounded off with a visit to the United Bible Societies, where further cooperation in the field of Bible production was discussed.

The tour to Europe left the delegation touched by the willingness for cooperation and further contacts encountered everywhere. According to Rev. Cao, "The visit was very significant on two counts: it was an encounter with the historical roots of the Protestant Church and an encounter with the ecumenical movement."

Delegation member were composed of: Presbyter Ji Jianhong, Chairperson of the National TSPM, Rev. Cao Shengjie, President of the CCC, Rev. Mei Kangjun, Executive Associate General Secretary of the National TSPM, Ms. Chen Meiling, Executive Associate General Secretary of the CCC, Rev. Wang Aiming, Vice-President of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Rev. Chen Yilu, Associate General Secretary of the CCC, and Ms. Lin Manhong from the Overseas Relations Department of the CCC/TSPM.

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Ye Xiaowen: Respect National Sovereignty And Implement Religious Freedom

(ANS) Ye Xiaowen, Director General of the State Administration of Religious Affairs in China, delivered the following address to a group of Christian leaders assembled at Azusa Pacific University in February 2003. The meeting was part of the 5th China Symposium organized by Christian Leadership Exchange.

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In his address, Ye Xiaowen underlined the necessity for friendly relations between China and the US. In today's global village, friendly relations between China and the US are of particular importance, he underlined, quoting the theologian Emilio Castro:
"He who does not have a normal relationship with his neighbour will not develop a normal relationship with God." Unfortunately, Ye said, in the case of China and the US, misunderstandings still clouded the relationship and hampered mutual understanding.

He recalled a past visit to a church in the US, where many believers greeted him with the words: "How lucky you are to have escaped from Red China!" Such an attitude was partly due to biased reporting in American media, creating the impression that the Chinese government showed no respect for the freedom of religion.

Ye underlined the government's respect for the freedom of religion, saying that only in this way can the Chinese people unite to build a better future for their nation. However, he conceded, in a country the size of China it was unavoidable that problems did occur in parts of the country. "This is why we emphasize the need to administer religion according to the law."

Chinese and Americans perceived each other in different ways, Ye explained, much like looking at one another through opposite ends of a telescope. While Chinese tended to see a clear and beautiful picture of the US, calling it the "beautiful country" (Meiguo), Americans were looking at China through the wrong end of the telescope, seeing China in a distorted and ugly way.

Ye also talked about the need for Chinese religious organizations to stand on their own feet and run their affairs independently. While he knew that preaching the Gospel was an indispensable part of Christian faith, he reminded his audience of the context in which Christian mission had largely taken place in the past. In China, like in many places elsewhere, mission had accompanied colonialist and imperialist movements that made Christianity seem an accomplice of aggression.

It was against this backdrop that the Three Self Movement had emerged, Ye explained. Chinese Christians had begun to manage their church independently, and this path had proved right. Today, Chinese Christians have proven that they are patriotic and love their fellow human beings: they adhere to a religion that serves society.

Coming back to the idea of mission, Ye asked his audience to respect the historic conditions of the target people and country, and asked them instead to shower their fellow Chinese brothers and sisters with prayers. He added that rules and stipulations regarding alien religious believers provided space for friendly exchanges between religious communities as well as opportunities for foreign believers to practice their faith while in China.

Ye also underlined the principle of peace and harmony, treasured in China today as it was hundreds of years ago. He closed his speech with a five-point proposition, calling for (1) the strengthening of the legal and administrative framework related to religion, (2) concerted international efforts aimed at curbing religiously motivated terrorism, (3) dialogue instead of confrontation when dealing with contentious issues in an international setting, (4) mutual respect and tolerance between religions, and finally (5) abiding by the principle of "Seeking the common ground, while setting aside the differences."
Women In The Chinese Church: A Few Facts & Figures

(ANS) Chinese Protestant churches used to be dominated by elderly women. While the average age of congregations is slowly coming down due to the influx of new, younger believers, women still make up the majority of Christians. In March's edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the China Christian Council and National TSPM, Rev. Gao Ying reports on the situation of women believers. A graduate from China's first batch of theology students after the reopening of churches in the 1980s, she is now senior pastor of Chongwenmen church in Beijing.

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While the number of Christians has increased in unprecedented ways over the past few years, the number of women believers rose faster that the number of male Christians, causing a huge gender imbalance. Today, 70% of believers are women. The Chinese church is not unique in that respect. Many churches worldwide are numerically dominated by women. Experts believe that women, being often marginalized as a result of political or economic circumstances, are particularly susceptible to the comfort and help they receive through religion.

As a result of the growing number of women believers, the ratio of female applicants for seminaries and Bible schools has increased, and more than half of the students enrolled are female.

According to incomplete statistics, there are 378 women pastors in China today, 370 of whom were ordained after the Cultural Revolution. These 378 pastors represent 24% of pastors. Moreover, there are 415 ordained women elders, who were mostly ordained during the past twenty years. Of China’s 18 seminaries, two are headed by women, and one third of the teachers are female.

Women are the backbone of church life at the grassroots, both as ordinary participants and helpers. 70 to 75 percent of lay workers are women. They spread the Gospel, receive visitors, prepare communion, visit believers, lead the choir and much more. In 1993, the China Christian Council and National TSPM Committee established a Women’s Commission to serve the needs of women in the Chinese church. Until today, several CCC/TSPM committees have followed this model to enhance women’s work within the church.

Following the massive participation of women in church activities, female church workers are increasingly represented in the church leadership on all levels of church administration. And many grassroots activities such as women’s Bible groups, prayer meetings or women’s choirs are in fact organized and attended by women.

The status of women in the church has increased tremendously when compared with the past, and in particular our openness towards the ordination of women has earned us envy and gratitude among ecumenical friends. However, some problems and challenges remain, among them the strengthening of theological reconstruction. The growing number of women theologians does not only reflect the high number of women believers and their willingness to heed the call, but also highlights social changes that make the full participation of women in church life possible. At the
same time, the heightened status of women within the church is not reflected in our theology. One of the tasks lying ahead of the new Women's Commission could be to enhance discussions on feminist theology and feminist Bible interpretation.

Although the status of women has increased, they are not as strongly represented within the leadership as their overall numbers would suggest. And, although the president of the newly elected China Christian Council is a woman, the percentage of female representatives in the new church leadership has gone down, not up. This shows that efforts to raise the number of women in leadership roles, an issue that receives wide attention elsewhere, is still lagging behind in our church. Experience teaches us that the more embracing and inclusive a church becomes, the better it will reflect the richness of Christ, and the participation of women in decision-making is one important criterion of this inclusiveness. With its current flourishing, the development of women church workers offers bright prospects for the future.

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The Chinese Church In Vision

(ANS) In February of this year, several Chinese church leaders, including Rev. Deng Fucun, Rev. Mei Kangjun, and Rev. Wang Aiming, attended a meeting in Azusa, USA, organized by CLE (Christian Leadership Exchange). This year's seminar focused on the topic of "Church Ministry in China" and was aimed at bringing together Chinese church leaders with representatives from churches, mission bodies and other evangelical organizations from North America. Below you find excerpts of a presentation given by Rev. Wang Aiming, Vice-President and Dean of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

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A clear observation of the growing Chinese church today will lead to some legitimate concerns. An outstanding issue is: How to establish a system to ensure the healthy development of the Chinese church? [...] We must always admit that the growth of the Chinese Church is a response to the sacred event of the cross. It is therefore an event of divine grace. In observing and describing the phenomenon of the Chinese church, we must always insist on the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 18-20) as the central theme. [...] The current situation of theological diversity will, if not viewed critically, be disadvantageous to the continual growth of the doctrine of the church as required by the theological development. Therefore many voices emerged to form a forum and context for discussion. Yet a proposal that contains the ultimate message of the Great Commission will be a definite theology for the Chinese church. This theology should be studied and thought through by church theologians. The process of discovering this "definite theology" is what Bishop Ting refers to as "Theological Development".

The understanding of the motivation for theological development is the most critical point for understanding the whole process. The reality was: With the Chinese church growing daily, concerns with the quality of her ministry were also growing. Many diverse voices adversely affected the improvement of the church ministry. These were the passive, pessimistic and conservative voices that increasingly dominated the pulpits of the Chinese church. In order for the Chinese Church to make use of
the good timing to rid herself of the 'infant church' mentality pertaining to her former colonial status, the Chinese church should not only stress independent administration and independent association in overseas relationships, but also establish her own formulation of faith that advances Christian mission in China and proclaims the universal truth of Christian faith. Therefore the starting point of theological construction was the proposal that the Chinese church should have her own theology. After 50 years of service to the Chinese church, Bishop Ting has foreseen the great challenges facing the Chinese church in the 21st century. If the Chinese church is not prepared to face these challenges, Christianity will lose the prestige and positive image newly established among the Chinese people. [...] 

We are at a critical moment in developing a theology for the Chinese church. We need to be very calm and rational. Any extreme way of understanding the struggles of Chinese Christians as a result of the recent suffering of the Chinese nation and of the patriotic passion that gave legitimacy to the Chinese Christian church after 1949 will harm the Chinese nationalist spirit in the modern era and the selfhood of the Chinese church. The problem is: how to avoid extreme nationalism and anti-rationalism while insisting on love for the country and for traditional Chinese culture?

In order to study the ecclesiastic dimension for the future Chinese church we need to deal with the issue of church polity. This theme is so important that it affects the relation of Christian faith with the state and Chinese society. The reality is: There has been no ecclesiology in the history of the Chinese church. Yet on the grassroots level the impetus of the past 20 years of church growth remains active and continues to compel the church to expand in its basic ministry and practical sphere. If we observe the Chinese Christian Church with academic objectivity, we will find that the structure of the Chinese Christian Church is closer to that of civilian social organizations than to the traditional Christian church. The structure of authority and accountability on the national level is actually in discontinuity with authority structures on local levels. The same discontinuity even exists in the relation of provincial or municipal level church organizations with local churches. The most pressing issue is not the administrative structure, but historical tradition of the church. How are we going to understand the different denominational traditions resulting from different missiological paradigms in the 19th century? [...] 

I believe that the future Chinese church in our vision should have the following qualities:  
A church that, through theological construction, continues to serve the Chinese people and uphold the "Three Self" principles;  
a church that, having resolved such critical issues as "marginalization" and "non-ecclesiastic" church polity, has become an integral part of the advanced Chinese culture;  
a church consisting of and led by clergy with modern mind and ideals and laity with clear civil awareness;  
a church that has a clear theological grounding and thinks independently.

The theology of the Chinese church should be concretized in the following six ways:

The catholic tradition of the church, including the classic models, the heritage of the church ecumenical, and the origins of modern Protestant churches;
proper interpretation and understanding of the tradition of Reformation and its principles. The Chinese church should be able to use Chinese language and Chinese culture to understand and present the intent and principles of Reformation theology centered on "Sola scriptura, Sola Gracia, Sola Fide" ["Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone"]; understand the existential meaning of the Bible and Christian patristic tradition on the dimension of classical Chinese literature; the ideals of democracy and rule of law as valuable heritage of the illumination and common spiritual wealth of humankind; the painful lessons of suffering of the Chinese nation starting from the Opium War in 1840; the witnesses, frustrations and reflections of the Chinese church after 1949.

Chinese Christians will soon discover that when the church becomes the social conscience of Chinese society, she has grown out of her childhood and into her flourishing youth.

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**Chinese Churches And The Challenge Of Urbanization**

(ANS) The vast majority of China's Protestant Christians live in the countryside, but city churches also continue to grow. Because of their comparatively diverse social make up, city congregations - though often better equipped with personnel and financial resources - face particular problems. In its newly established discussion series, April's Tian Feng deals with the question of urbanization and the challenges this trend poses to China's churches. Below we reproduce excerpts from the discussion.

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Rev. Liang Ming (Guangdong):
The progress of urbanization and the building of the church body
Increasing urbanization is accompanied by an increase in the number of city churches and by a plurality of lifestyles that brings up new questions for the church. City churches have a number of advantages that facilitate their growth: They have more personnel and can engage in better pastoral work; they are financially stronger and can undertake more projects, believers are generally better educated, which raises the general profile of the church; and rapid changes take place which can produce a force for self-renewal within the church.

When facing the developmental trends of urbanization, we need new thinking and new experiments.

While the church needs to respect tradition as one of its foundations of faith, we must not let traditions limit our progress. The pluralization of lifestyles will certainly bring about a pluralization of thinking, and we should respond to this with an open attitude. Likewise, we need to adapt our methods of evangelism to the new times. Traditionally, evangelism was largely a "one-way affair" of one evangelist expounding the Bible to the listeners. With better educated believers, who demand a variety of different things from the church, ways of evangelism have to be diversified, too.
Church administration is another area of church work that needs to be reformed. Management can be decisive for the survival of an organization. The church always emphasizes democratic leadership, but this does not mean to let things take their own course. And finally, we need to improve the appearance of the church, starting from every single believer. Urbanization is an unavoidable trend, and the earlier we analyse its challenges, the sooner can we adapt accordingly.

Rev. Sun Bin (Shandong):
**Do pastoral work according to the special needs of urban believers**
Because their educational backgrounds, working experiences, incomes and other factors vary greatly, urban believers pose a particularly difficult challenge to the church.

The educational make-up of urban believers varies from primary school graduates to university professors. Accordingly, their understanding of the Bible also varies. In general, believers from a relatively simple background will put more emphasis on spiritual experience, while intellectuals attach more importance to rational thinking. Pastoral workers should try to balance both tendencies and not let one of the two modes of thinking dominate one believer. At the same time, the pastoral worker should try to avoid conflicts among believers of different backgrounds.

The mobility of urban believers is rather high, causing them to move between different churches. This poses special difficulties for pastoral care and administration. A Qingdao church now tries to solve this problem by dividing believers according to street committees. This enables church workers to find out about their needs or simply get in touch with them in a very convenient way.

Because of the diversity of their spiritual and work experiences, different believers have different expectations towards meetings. We conduct different styles of youth meetings - such as praise meetings, Bible study, or sharing sessions - in the hope that each believer will be able to find something for his particular spiritual need.

Rev. Tang Weimin (Henan):
**Looking at urban pastoral care from the perspective of evangelism**

Following continual social change, urban churches face ever new challenges. Jesus says: "I am a good shepherd; I know my sheep" (John 10:14). Only if they know a believer's background will pastoral workers be able to relate the biblical message to that particular believer.

Because of the lack of pastoral workers, it is impossible for church personnel to take care of every single believer. This leaves the task of pastoral care to every single believer - believers have to take care of each other. Such an arrangement does not mean that pastoral workers are to be replaced by ordinary believers, but is just an expression of believers' concern for one another, and will contribute to a warm and loving atmosphere within the church.

Home visits are part of the church's care for believers. Alternatively, pastoral workers can take part in believers' sorrows and joys through the telephone. As for home visits, city dwellers prefer rather short visits of 15 to 20 minutes.
Jesus' Second Calling To Peter

(ANS) In April / May this year, a high-ranking CCC/TSPM delegation visited the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, Switzerland, as part of a wider European tour. Rev. Cao Shengjie, President of the China Christian Council, gave the following sermon during a worship service at the WCC.

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At Easter tide, we often think about the extraordinary experience of Peter that is recorded in John 21:1-23. The resurrected Jesus appears to Peter and gives him a new calling.

We find the situation quite similar to Luke 5:1-11 and Matthew 4: 18-22, where Peter first answers Jesus' call. Both stories take place on the seashore at Galilee. When Peter is helpless and exhausted, Jesus orders him to cast his net into the water again, and a large quantity of fish is caught. The story symbolizes how Peter is called to work for the Kingdom.

After Peter followed Jesus, he became the leader of the twelve, the first one to make a public confession that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the eternal God. For this he was highly praised by Jesus himself. Yet, it was also Peter who denied Jesus three times. After the resurrection, however, Jesus calls him again. At this point, Peter's feelings must have been very different from those he felt three years before.

Jesus asks Peter three times: "Do you love me?", and each question is followed up with the call to "Feed and tend my lambs and sheep". To God, "love" is not an empty word, it is closely related to God's mission and divine responsibility. Though Peter once failed, Jesus still trusts him and sends him out to serve the church-to-be with confidence.

According to my understanding, Jesus' second calling of Peter reveals three important aspects:

1. The simple call of "follow me" is over. The incarnated Jesus will no longer be with Peter all day long: now it is Peter's turn to carry God's mission on to the next stage, to find out by himself, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the new way to put Jesus' mandate into practice.

2. We often interpret fish or sheep in this Scripture text as Christians in the Church. If the first calling and the first part of the second calling put much emphasis on the catching of "fish", i.e. evangelism, then the detailed part of the conversation between Jesus and Peter in John 21 is on the topic of feeding the "sheep" and tending them, that is, pastoral care of the Church. Both of them are the tasks of the Church but, once the Gospel has been spread, the latter becomes more important.

3. Jesus asks Peter to take care of the different needs of God's people. There are young "lamb" as well as old "sheep". Some need milk, while others need solid food. All depends on whether the help we provide is appropriate and healthy.

The Chinese church has also experienced resurrection. We not only survived in the 1950s after breaking away from foreign control, but we also changed our "foreign image" through the development of the Three-Self Movement. In the 1980s and 1990s, the church flourished after the Cultural Revolution. Currently, our church membership of 16 million is twenty times more than that of 1949 (700,000); around 50,000 churches and meeting points have been resumed or newly built; 18 theological seminaries at different academic levels have been established; and 30 million copies of the Bible have been printed.

I entered theological seminary in 1949, the same year New China was founded, and joined the work of the China Christian Council as an Associate General Secretary after its founding in 1980. I have therefore witnessed the historical changes which have taken place in the Chinese church during the last fifty-odd years.

The Chinese church is still striving for her independence and selfhood on the path of the Three-Self principle. We will never isolate ourselves from the Church Universal. But we
have to unite our Christians and not go back to the old times of relying on other's help or merely duplicating other's models. What we are doing is developing our own post-denominational church in our own social context.

The Chinese church is very much aware that increasing Christians' understanding of faith is more important and more difficult than quantitative growth. In particular, most of our Christians are located in the countryside and their education level is low. Our trained ministers are far from enough. It is a huge task for us to watch over the flock, not only to keep them away from heretical teachings but, more positively, to enable them to bear good witness through their example in society.

The Chinese Church is engaged in the reconstruction of theological thinking in order to provide fresh and healthy food for our "lambs" and "sheep", and to meet their spiritual needs with a theology fitting the times and our particular situation. Our vision, as Bishop K.H. Ting has stressed, is to build the church on the rock of Jesus Christ, compatible with the requirements of reason and morality. We hope we can thus make a better contribution to the Church Universal.

Thousands of Chinese ministers and lay workers have heard the second calling of Jesus, as Peter did, and have borne their responsibility in China with fervent love for our Lord. Please pray and support us. Let us work towards a common goal - to build up the Body of Christ in the many different parts of this world.

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Xinjiang Churches Help After February's Disastrous Earthquake

(ANS) 268 persons died and thousands were left homeless in the worst earthquake to hit the Xinjiang region since 1949 on February 24, 2003. Jiashi and Bachu, two cities severely affected by the tremor, are both situated in a region where in the past ten years alone, several earthquakes measuring more than six on the Richter scale were recorded. In response to this latest disaster, local churches have initiated a number of relief efforts. Wang Rongwei reports in April's edition of Tian Feng.

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Relief efforts to provide victims with food, tents and cotton quilts started immediately after the earthquake, but the extent of the disaster will make long term assistance necessary to help locals with the reconstruction of their villages. Seven villages at the epicentre of the quake were virtually destroyed, and buildings in numerous other locations were partially damaged, including schools and clinics.

However, fellow Christians from churches in Xinjiang's capital Wulumuqi [Urumqi] are already stretching out their hands to help. Mrs. Zou Shuhua, who works for the CC/TSPM committee in Wulumuqi, explains that the church in Urumqi is a geographically marginalized, very young church that started to grow in the 1980s. "Apart from offering pastoral care according to the teachings of the Bible, we also serve society and care for the weak members of society inspired by our faith."

Apart from discussing the question of how Christianity can adapt to socialist society, church workers in Wulumuqi also take the national church leadership's call for more social involvement of local churches seriously. Christians are not only children of heaven, but also citizens of the Chinese state and members of society. They should not only have demands towards society, but also give, since "giving is more blessed than receiving". The church should not only be concerned with the spiritual growth of

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believers, but also care for society. And in this multi-ethnic area, the church must pay particular attention to service to reflect God’s love and make society understand Christianity.

Xinjiang has not yet set up a provincial CCC/TSPM committee, but the city CC/TSPM committee encourages believers to actively take part in social activities organized by street committees, the Religious Affairs Bureau and other bodies.

In early March, the Wulumuqi CCC/TSPM committee gave more than 26,000 RMB [US$ 3,250 approx] to help disaster victims and also called on believers to pray for the inhabitants of the region struck by the earthquake. After giving out the appeal for financial help, more than twenty thousand yuan were collected in less than two days. Among the money collected were a lot of bills in very small denominations, showing that even the poorest were eager to give. Many believers who came to donate money or gifts did not utter a single word, and left without registering. They knew: good deeds and sympathy do not need to be registered. And, although not all believers were well off, some of them actually just having been retrenched from their jobs, they did not forget to love their neighbours.

For several congregations in Wulumuqi, this year is a year of construction work, as they are in the process of planning and building churches. 16 churches have already been erected with money collected from local believers. But Wulumuqi pastors also know that constructing church buildings is much easier done than building the church as the body of Christ.

Editor’s Note: On May 4, another severe earthquake struck the Bachu region, further destroying buildings while the region is still struggling with the damage brought about by February’s earthquake.

2003.5/6.9

NEWSBRIEFS

Helping China’s West. Churches in the western city of Xi’an joined hands in an effort to raise funds for an afforestation project. All churches under the city’s CC/TSPM committee participated, with each believer giving one Yuan RMB. The resulting sum of 80,000 RMB [US$10,000 approx.] was used for the purchase of trees, which were then planted on mountains in Qianyang county.

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Fighting SARS. In Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province, the local CC/TSPM committee donated 3,000 RMB [US$ 375 approx.] for the fight against SARS. In previous months, Christians in the port city had already supported poor peasants as well as school-less children.

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Places Mentioned In This Issue Of ANS

1) Jiachi, Bachu (Xinjiang)
3) Lianyungang (Jiangsu)

2) Xi'an (Shaanxi)