Dear Reader,

China is a country of extremes. When browsing the national English newspaper China Daily, the news items report record droughts in southwestern China causing shortages of drinking water for millions of people and livestock in the middle of the rainy season. At the same time, some areas in the eastern parts of the country have been ravaged by the eighth typhoon this year, leaving millions of people without a place to live or crops to harvest. The headlines also highlight immense economic growth, but simultaneously, the developed regions are dealing with a growing migrant population.

It is estimated that 140 million rural dwellers are on the move (to put the numbers into perspective, the current population of Japan is about 127 million, and that of the Russian Federation about 143 million). These people have left their country villages because the economic growth of the cities, especially in Eastern provinces, means growing opportunities for employment. The article “In Christ, We Are Family” in this ANS issue (p. 2), presents a survey conducted among the migrant population of a city church in Jiangsu, one of the most developed provinces in China. The writer of the article exhorts the churches to react to the needs of the migrant population in their midst. Nevertheless, this “desertification” of country villages also leads to a skewed demographic structure in poor rural areas, leaving behind the old and the very young. According to the China Daily, the number of ‘leftover children’, that is, children who have been left in the care of grandparents or other relatives, totaled more than the entire population of Australia in 2004.

Therefore, poverty alleviation of the regions which the able and the healthy abandon for a better life cannot be forgotten. The Social Service Ministry of the TSPM/CCC has initiated various programmes (Newsbriefs p. 15), and individual churches have taken measures to help the needy. This ANS issue gives an account of how the Yunnan Christian Council has addressed the issue of rural poverty through their women’s ministry (p. 8). Nevertheless, the scale of poverty in China is immense and no doubt support in meeting challenges the size of Australia and Japan would be welcome both by the church and the government.

With kind regards from the editorial desk,
Zhao Zhong conducted a survey to find out about the needs of his own congregation of which 80% are non-locals. According to the survey of a hundred non-local church members (aged mainly 20-59; 40 men and 60 women), 69% come from northern Jiangsu province, the remaining percentage from other provinces. 26% of the migrant population came to do business, 68% are job-seekers while the remaining 6% consists of family members taking care of the children and household. The majority of those surveyed have some degree of junior middle school (43%) or primary school (35%) education, while the percentage of immigrants with senior middle school or two-year college background amounts to 10%; only 2% have 3-year college education or above. 10% of those surveyed were illiterate.

Although the major part of the migrant believers have been Christians for a long time (2-10 years: 50%; more than 10 years: 34%; Christian family tradition: 12%), 40% have been baptized. 78% attend church services regularly although 85% of these Christians regard themselves as busy or very busy (44% and 41% respectively). 52% read the Bible and pray regularly at home while 30% hardly ever do so, and 18% do not practise their religion at home. As for the reasons of going to church, 42% responded that they hoped to find peace in their hearts and lives. Some attended the church services for spiritual growth (22%), eternal life (12%), or for experiencing God’s grace (17%), while others went to church to express their gratefulness (6%) or ask for help in some areas of their life, often in health problems (the remaining 1%).

Mr. Zhao also explored how the church could help these migrant believers. On the basis of his survey, he is urging the church to organize community activities and literacy classes using the Bible as their means of education. Since most of these church members do not possess a sound understanding of the Christian faith, he also suggested that the church would have training sessions on basic Christian beliefs. The activities should be held in the evenings since most of these church members work during the day. According to Mr. Zhao, the church has a duty to shepherd these brothers and sisters well so that they could become salt and light, good Christian witnesses, wherever they go. The church could even set up a network to help the migrant church members in acquiring information on available jobs, legal matters and other services.

Mei Kangjun points out in his article that “this is the first time in our history that so much agitation arise from prosperity.” In the past two, three decades, Chinese society has undergone huge changes. The Chinese people have been trying hard to keep a balance between their pursuit of material abundance and a peaceful heart. Young Christians from rural areas, doing odd jobs in the cities, are no exception. The relationships they build in the
often do not include the sign language in these calculations. I remember while I was still at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, our foreign teacher took us to visit a school for the hearing impaired. Most of us felt deep pity when looking at those innocent and lively children whose outside appearance did not differ from normal children. One of the teachers explained to us that the only difference between these children and a normal child is the hearing, in fact, some of their abilities are more developed than a normal person's. We should actually regard sign language as a foreign language which we have to learn in order to communicate with this group of Chinese speaking a different language.

Despite my visit to the school for the hearing impaired and the immediate answer to my deaf-mute catechumen's question, I had not realised how far apart the worlds of the hearing and the deaf were from one another. Initially, I imagined the impairment of my student would not become a problem if only I spent a lot of time with her, helping her and exploring her ways of thinking, but I was wrong. The difficulties of communication do not lie in the lack of a common language but in the lack of common experience. Because the reality on which I base my judgements differs radically from her silent reality, I will never be able to understand her life, her ways of solving problems or imagine her experiences in society. Nor do I know if in her quiet prayer, she has the written characters for God in her mind, or perhaps the romanized form of the word or the sign language equivalent? Simplistic views and superficial understanding are not sufficient for building bridges between the "voiced" and "voiceless" worlds.

The question "Does God understand sign language?" reminds us how seldom our inner being and our emotional needs are understood by others. As for the disabled, they become very early accustomed to other people's ignorance and partiality, regardless of their hopes of being accepted and understood. I am inclined to think that before asking her question, the catechumen had reasoned out an affirmative answer but her hesitation with regard to God's impartial treatment of human beings was a reflection of people's discrimination and of her position at the margin of society.

How do the churches treat the disabled? Do the congregations respond to them in the same way as the rest of the society, or are they merely taken as targets to imbue with the idea of Christianity? According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life Together, a Christian's first responsibility to his/her fellow believer is to listen attentively to their ideas and needs, not to impose one's own ideas. A believer wanting to share the gospel with someone else, is often more concerned about spreading his own views of Christianity instead of proclaiming the Word of God. In doing so, he does not carry out God's work but run ahead of God.
church building nor trained evangelists to teach the congregation, where the elderly, women and people with low educational background are in a majority. The Christians met occasionally in homes but the activities were very loosely structured. Such a weakly equipped Christian community was easily thrown into disarray by general socio-political complications and by heretic groups targeting the church. People sought spiritual guidance on the other side of the Yellow river, in Guan Zhaying Church, but because of the time-consuming and cumbersome journey across the river, the believers in Dazhuang started praying to God for a church of their own.

It seemed that God acted according to His promise to be "near to all who call on him" and to fulfil "the desires of those who fear him" (Psalm 145: 18-19). Namely, in spring 2003, the members of the local TSPM/CC committee started to negotiate with Dazhuang village committee about the construction of a new church. The negotiations resulted in an agreement to build a church on a 30 by 18 meter plot of land in the northern part of the village called Shen Shuiwan, Deep Water Bend. The believers in the area received the news with joy and thanksgiving, committing their entire households to the future construction work of the church.

Initially, fundraising seemed a major obstacle to the plan, but Christian brothers and sisters in other regions stretched out their helping hand. Guan Zhaying Church, the home church of many Dazhuang believers, collected an offering in each of its meeting points for the building project, and soon, enough funds were raised for the project to start. Guan Zhaying Church also mobilised its members to help in the actual construction work. In addition, believers from Hebei joined in and Christian migrant workers returning from other cities sacrificed their income to assist in building the church in their home region. A construction team, headed by an outside contractor, planned the work schedule and the assignment of the duties to the volunteer workers. After twelve days of hard work, the foundation work was finished. The people in the neighbourhood were amazed to see volunteers of all different age groups working day and night in such an orderly manner.

'Immanuel's blessing', God's presence, followed the construction process. After six months, the main church building was finished, but so were the project funds. The believers, locally and in neighbouring villages, opened their purses again so as to complete the remaining sections. Finally, the dedication service of the Dazhuang church was held on November 16, 2003.

These two years since the completion of the church have been a period of training for present day church workers. The choir was set up a year after the dedication, and subsequently, the content and extent of the other ministries were mapped out. Apart from two lay training courses, a special seminar was held to solidify the evangelists' theological
when training sessions are organised for country people, men attend the classes and
women literally stay in the kitchen, catering for the training course."

During the course of the work, pastor Yang has visited many training centres for women.
She has helped to establish them and has trained women herself. She is a third generation
Christian whose father was a pastor. He convinced his daughter to abandon the
revolutionary cause and study theology. Pastor Yang followed her father’s advice, and
graduated from a theological seminary in the early 1950’s. Due to the turmoil in the country,
her career in the church was cut short but she obtained a position in a hospital and worked
there for 38 years.

"Because of my long medical experience, it was only natural that I was responsible for
training women in health issues. Rural women do not pay much attention to hygiene, so
classes on basic hygiene were needed. I have also taught maternal care and how to deliver
babies, and distributed medication to those in need. Women also learnt how to manage
personal finances, to bring up children and take part in church work. Literacy classes were
organised in some places."

"Being a woman and a pastor, I was actually a curiosity to many of these women. They came
from far away to see me. In particular in one area, women were excluded from church work,
but after the training, the male members of the congregation agreed to women’s
participation in the church. The church door was opened to women, and hence, women’s
liberation started in that place."

"I have been deeply touched by these women whom no one has cared for before. They are
eager to learn and extremely grateful for everything we have done to help them. In one area,
about 200 women from villages around the training centre attended the first training classes.
After some time, 700-800 women, carrying their children on their backs, flooded the place.
Many of them came from several hours’ walking distance. They were eager to study the
Bible."

Women, even if they are poor, are asked to contribute 1 yuan (0.13 USD) a year to covering
the expenses of the training centres and their women’s ministry. The amount sounds truly
nominal, but these people are extremely poor. According to official statistics, in 1994, seven
million people in Yunnan lived below the national poverty line of less than 300 yuan (37.60
USD) of annual income. Currently, the poverty line has been set to approximately 700 yuan
(87.75 USD) of annual income, but the investments of the government have paid off: the
amount of the poor in official terms has been reduced in Yunnan to less than 2.9 million.
graduates were trained in other seminaries, in particular in Sichuan Theological Seminary where 60 Yunnarese students studied at the time of the interview. "The number of trained church workers is still low, because there are altogether more than 3,000 churches and meeting points in our province. It would take a hundred years to train pastors for every site", calculates pastor Li. "Unlike public schools, the seminary does not receive funding from the government, neither are the students, coming from poor areas, capable of paying high tuition fees. Consequently, the seminary has limited funds to increase student intake."

In Spring 2006, there were students from 18 different minorities at the seminary. "This ethnic variety is one of the unique features of Yunnan Theological Seminary", explains pastor Li who is a Yi nationality himself. Like pastor Li, many of the minority students come from Christian families with a long Christian tradition. Therefore, students' faith has a reasonably sound basis, but the diversity of their ethnic and social backgrounds sets special requirements for the curriculum. "First of all, because the students come from very different areas, some gaps in their general education need to be made up for." Basic knowledge and literacy in Mandarin are a prerequisite for entering the seminary, but Mandarin is still included in the course syllabus. Mandarin is the language of education, even if in some autonomous minority regions, primary schools may offer mother tongue education at the lowest grades. Even so, the local languages are the main means of communication in the minority areas, and thus the students from ethnic minorities may have a restricted knowledge of the national language.

"Secondly, the seminary wants to focus on pastoral qualities of the students, rather than theoretical knowledge, so as to prepare them for meeting the pastoral needs of their congregations", continues Li Congming. "The church workers need to take care of a wide range of practical issues and formalities, for which they need training. In addition to the morning worships and evening prayer meetings which are an integral part of the daily schedule, the students can practise their pastoral skills in two Sunday worships at the seminary chapel and in two of the three protestant churches in the city of Kunming. The Sunday services at the seminary are open to the general public." In particular, the music ministry is an intrinsic and vivid part of the worship among the minority Christians.

"The students and teachers in our seminary are extremely perseverant. There are 8 full-time and 8 part-time teachers in our school at the moment. They do not get a salary nor accommodation at the school but thanks to donations in the form of daily necessities, they can at least have their meals at the seminary. Some students are the main earners of their household and thus their theological education is a burden to the entire family. After their graduation, the students usually have no difficulty in finding a place to work, but a bigger problem is that the poor country churches are not able to provide any salary for their workers."

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While in Nanjing Seminary, we started praying to God that more people would be saved and Pengzhou church would grow. Amidst our prayers, we were encouraged by the word given to Joshua entering Canaan: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9) Strengthened in our faith, we trusted that God would give us work wherever we would go.

On October 7, 2001, Wang Hong and I finally arrived at Pengzhou, the place God had entrusted to us for "casting our nets". Pengzhou is located about 40 km from Chengdu, in a region which resembles a Chinese landscape painting, attracting travellers by its natural beauty and cultural heritage. The beauty of the place reminded me of a passage in Deuteronomy 11:11-12: "But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end." We were truly thankful to God for showing His grace to us.

Since our arrival, the congregation with 20-40 believers attending the Sunday services has doubled, and the overall number of Pengzhou church goers, including seekers and catechumens, has risen to 500. We are particularly delighted to see that the congregation consists of people of all age groups and the proportion of male and female believers is fairly even. In addition, 30 couples have become Christian, and now, we watch husbands and wives devoutly attending Sunday fellowships and walking their Christian path hand in hand.

In September 9, 2001, the formal church rules and regulations of Pengzhou church were passed and administration and financial structures were established. Core groups were set up for different ministries, such as pastoral work, choir and welcome team. The church activities were expanded by three weekly meetings: a weekly prayer meeting, Sunday morning Bible Study, and the Saturday night youth fellowship, which was reopened after its closure in 1950's. Financially, however, the church struggled. Providing salaries for two evangelists without support from higher levels of the church seemed like a mere fairy tale, but within a year, the church had managed to raise the funds for the evangelists' salaries and daily expenses, and an additional income of 10,000 yuan (1,254 USD).

After our arrival, we had a monthly salary of 180 yuan (22.50 USD). After deducting the expenses (rent 50 yuan (6.30 USD), offering 20 yuan (2.50 USD), water and electricity 20 yuan) we had 90 yuan (11.25 USD) each at our disposition. According to human logic, 90 yuan may not seem sufficient for living in a city, but God's logic is different: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2. Cor. 12:9). God used a number of people to encourage us. The principal and teachers of the provincial theological seminary together with brothers and
widening market on book sales, the attitude towards pirated books and copyright, and efficient, independent and professional management of the distribution of Christian literature.

**Social Service Ministry.** A group of 40 people from 25 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities of China and from the Amity Foundation attended a symposium on Social Service Ministry held in Shanghai on May 11-13, 2006. Rev. Deng Fucun, Director of the Social Service Ministry of the Chinese Protestant Church, introduced the current developments in his department, such as rehabilitation centres for autistic children, HIV/AIDS prevention and education together with other programmes responding to various needs in society. Dr. Cesar M. Mercado from the Development Centre for Asia, Africa, Pacific (DCAAP) - a Philippine NGO specialising on training and consultation on human resource management - gave lectures on overall programme management, that is, planning, testing and evaluation of social service programmes. The participants all acknowledged the social impact of such programmes and their value in Christian witness to society.

**International Women’s Prayer Day.** Grass-root churches responded widely to the national TSPM/CC appeal to participate in the International Women’s Prayer Day. Different activities were organised in more than 3000 meeting points in 33 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, including churches in remote country villages. In Guizhou province, members of a small Zhaiba village church walked for several hours to attend “the miracle of the intercession”. The theme of the prayer day in 2006 “Miracles of Our Time” was dedicated to women in South-Africa. Believers worldwide were called to intercede for increasing Christian contribution to the fight against racism, discrimination, violence and spreading of HIV in Southern Africa.

**Echos of Society.** Churches in Hubei and Henan provinces have responded to Hu Jintao’s appeal called “Eight Honours and Eight Disgraces” for anti-corruption efforts and cultivating high socialist morality. In the city of Wuhan (Hubei), a one-day training class was held in April on the theme of “Socialist View of Honour and Disgrace”. Yicheng Church in Zhumadian city (Henan) elaborated a Christian equivalent of Hu Jintao’s programme and organised a training class on Christian ethics. The Yicheng training programme focussed on “three homes” (church, country, private home), “four relationships” (Christians and God, society, other religions and non-believers) and “five roles” (roles as a disciple and as a citizen, roles at work, at home and in the neighbourhood).

**Course on Financial Management.** The Hubei Provincial TSPM/CC committee organised a four-day training session in April to improve financial administration in the churches. The topics presented by speakers with sound experience on financial management included biblical foundations of managing financial matters, property and financial management of
Wilson came in person to attend the official ceremony held on March 13, 2006 to celebrate the donation.

**Bible Revision.** The dedication of the Revised New Testament of the Chinese Union Version was celebrated on April 24, 2006. The Chinese Union Version was first published in 1919, and subsequently, several translations have appeared. The revision process of the Union Version began in 1983; in 2000, the four Gospels and Paul’s letter to Romans were ready to be printed. Chief Editor, professor Zhou Lianhua and TSPM/CCC Vice-President, reverend Deng Fucun among others attended the dedication ceremony hosted by the Anglican Archbishop of Hong Kong Kuang Guangjie (Peter Kwong).

**Ecumenical Encounters.** The consecration ceremony of the Anglican Bishop Paul Kwong was held at St. John’s Cathedral in Hong Kong on March 25, 2006, on the same date that Archbishop Peter Kwong was consecrated 25 years earlier. The ceremony was conducted in three different languages, English, Mandarin and Cantonese, in order to mark the multicultural nature of the Anglican Church in Hong Kong and to respect the guests representing different linguistic backgrounds. Presbyter Ji Jianhong presented the congratulatory message on behalf of Bishop K.H. Ting and the Chinese Protestant Church. Bishop Ting met Archbishop Peter Kwong and Bishop Paul Kwong in person during their visit to Nanjing in February 2006.

An **official delegation of the Church of England** paid a visit to the TSPM/CCC headquarters in Shanghai on April 3, 2006. The visit was an occasion of mutual sharing and preparation for the coming China visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury in October 2006. Archbishop Rowan Williams will be the third Anglican Archbishop after Most Rev. Runcie and Carey to visit China. President of the CCC Cao Shengjie attended Archbishop Williams’s installation ceremony in Canterbury Cathedral in 2003.

**Anglican Archbishop John Neill from the Church of Ireland** visited Shanghai with an Irish delegation on March 17, 2006. Rev. Neill was the first Irish Archbishop to pay a visit to China.

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