Many among the Lisu ethnic minority in Yunnan have become Christians. Their churches are very simple, like rough shelters. They possess no organs, no stained glass, no pews, no fonts and no bell towers. The congregation is called to worship by striking the stainless steel hub of an old tire.
Dear Reader,

The images of pain and destruction from the Sichuan earthquake have long receded from our television screens but survivors continue to suffer from its aftermath. In a visit to Gansu and Shaanxi, where the impact of the earthquake received less media coverage, a CCC/TSPM team found that these provinces suffered severe and extensive damage as well. In Gansu alone, 5.2 million people were affected, with 365 lives lost. In Shaanxi, many churches and meeting points on mountain slopes between Gansu and Shaanxi were damaged. (p. 3)

The earthquake failed to dampen Chinese enthusiasm for celebrating Beijing's hosting of the 29th Olympic Games on August 8, 2008. One of the earliest advocates of China's participation in the international event was Zhang Boling, a Christian educator and YMCA leader. Christians are proud of his achievements and the strong links he established with the international Olympic movement. (p. 8) For many in the Chinese church, the participation of Chinese pastors in the Olympic torch relay symbolizes the full acceptance of Christianity and Christians in China. It "demonstrates that the party and government see religion as an active force" in Chinese society and signals that Christians can make valuable contributions to the building of a harmonious society. (p. 6)

The Lisu Christians of Yunnan have been models of cohesive and productive communities. Christianity was introduced to the Lisu people in Burma and spread to China in the early 1900s. Bao Jayuan celebrates and inspires us with his account of their deep faith in God. (p.10) In similar vein, the account of Pastor Ma Jianhua's experience in Sichuan provides insights into the endurance and faith of Christians in the face of tremendous personal loss and pain. (p.12) They find strength and solace in their faith but also great comfort in the solidarity and compassion shown by their neighbours. In his sermon "Weep with those who weep", Xu Enbei observes that the "burden of sorrow is halved when it is shared." (p. 14)

Whether it is studying the Bible or teaching oral English, Christians from different parts of the world have found opportunities to work in partnership with Christians in China. Teena and Hugh Anderson spent a fulfilling summer in Huangshan teaching conversational English to young Chinese pastors and church leaders. (p. 16) David Clements, an Amity teacher, describes in detail his experience in studying the Bible with Chinese Christians in Lanzhou, Gansu Province. (p. 17)

In China, there has been a heavy reliance on lay workers to sustain the work of the church. It is not unusual to find that relations among co-workers can be conflictive and Wang Lei offers helpful suggestions on how friction or disagreements among co-workers in church should be approached to avoid "splits in the believing community." (p. 18)

My heartfelt thanks go to Janice Wickeri, Anita Sieh, Robert Soong and all those who have helped in one way or another with the production of this ANS issue. I am also grateful to the CCC/TSPM for permission to reprint photos from their website www.ccc/tspm.org.cn.

Finally, dear reader, we need your comments and suggestions so keep those letters coming!

With warm wishes,

Theresa Carino
Two provinces neighboring Sichuan province, Gansu and Shaanxi, were also hard hit by the May 12 earthquake. The quake hit areas of Gansu were about 200 kilometers from the epicenter in Sichuan and 100 kilometers from Beichuan. In Gansu, 10 cities, 70 counties, 941 towns, 10,946 executive villages, 1,298,034 families, and 5,266,106 persons were affected. There were 365 deaths and 10,158 injuries. Direct economic losses totaled 44.28 billion yuan, making Gansu the second most affected province.*

A CCC/TSPM group led by TSPM General Secretary Rev. Xu Xiaohong visited churches in areas of Gansu and Shaanxi that sustained damage resulting from the May 12 earthquake centered in Wenchuan, Sichuan, from June 3-6, 2008 to assess the situation in churches there that had sustained damages. They brought expressions of care and concern to Christians and colleagues there on behalf of Elder Fu Xianwei, Chairperson of the TSPM and Rev. Gao Feng, President of the CCC, encouraging them to find strength in faith and in unity, and to rebuild homes and churches. Tian Feng reporter Wang Rongwei accompanied the group on its visit. Wang was impressed by the attitude of Christians there in the aftermath of the quake: “they showed an indomitable spirit in their relief work.”

Arriving in Lanzhou (Gansu) on the afternoon of June 3, our group met with officials of the Provincial TSPM and CC, who accompanied us to the Gansu Religious Affairs Bureau where we were briefed on the situation in Gansu and damage sustained in the city of Longnan, and Kangxian and Wenxian counties by the bureau head and three section chiefs in the Christianity Section. Bureau officials told us that prayers and donations had come in for affected areas from religious circles, including Christians and expressed their own gratitude for the concern shown by of the TSPM and CCC. Rev. Xu noted in his turn that Christian churches nationwide had donated over 119,870 yuan through the Chinese Red Cross, other charitable organizations and civil government departments.

Our group then set off to visit churches in the affected areas, accompanied by Rev. Kou Jianguo of the Provincial CCC/TSPM. The road to Wudu District in Longnan was lined with relief tents and the traffic heavy with trucks overflowing with aid. No CCC/TSPM has been set up in Wudu District yet, but the local TSPM Committee reported that of 33 churches and meeting points in Wudu District, 17 were unusable, a direct financial loss of

550 wheelchairs from an American organization was donated through the National CCC/TSPM and Gansu Provincial CC/TSPM to those injured in the earthquake in Gansu on August 14th in Lanzhou City.
230,010 yuan. In spite of this, the Wudu District TSPM Committee donated 3,000 yuan to the District Religious Affairs Bureau for earthquake relief and bought tents for distribution to victims to show that Christians always stand together with victims of disaster.

The Wudu District of Longnan city, located in the southeastern part of Gansu Province borders Kangxian county (Gansu) and Ningqiang county in neighboring Shaanxi province. There are 36 towns and villages, 684 villages, 15 communes under its jurisdiction, covering 4,683 square kilometers with a population of 548,400 and 123,600 families. The district is home to many ethnic groups, including the Han, Hui, Tibetan, Man, Zhuang, Tujia, Korean, Naxi and others. Longnan itself covers an area of 27,900 square kilometers and is home to 29 ethnic groups. 85.3 percent of the population is rural.

Three Christians had died in the district, all at the hardest hit meeting point in Dujiawan, Wenlin Township. The group visited Dujiawan meeting point, traveling thirty kilometers into the mountains along narrow, precipitous roads. When the road became impassable, we left the van and walked the remaining distance. The brothers and sisters at the meeting point were overcome with emotion to see us. They were so heartened to think that representatives of the CCC/TSPM had made the effort to come and bring them greetings in the Lord. “We saw the doorframe of the tiny church split from top to bottom and walls thrown down. A tent had been set up beside the building to serve as a temporary place of worship. A motley collection of stools stood before the temporary altar. In that setting, the bright red cross on the front of the altar seemed to shine with a special brilliance.” As everyone prayed together, Rev. Xu asked God for strength that the Dujiawan meeting point might be rebuilt, and that the earthquake victims here might soon rebuild their homes.

We descended the mountain safely, in the last rays of the setting sun. After a simple late meal with colleagues from the district as well as from Wenxian and Kangxian counties, we heard further reports of the discouraging situation in those areas. Rev. Xu offered words of comfort, saying “The CCC/TSPM holds this situation in the highest priority and will mobilize more churches and Christians to send funds and supplies so that people in these areas can soon worship normally once more.”

In Wenxian County, we learned that there were 3,500 Christians in 30 churches and meeting points located in over 20 townships and over 200 mountain villages. Since most of the churches were up in the mountains and were constructed of wood, the landslides caused by the earthquake had a tremendous impact on them. Three churches were severely damaged, while the remaining 24 suffered cracked walls and roof damage. The entire mountainside behind Chengguanzhen church had collapsed and all four of its walls were cracked, making it unusable. In Qingshuiping Village the homes of over 30 Christian families had collapsed, leaving them homeless. Five elderly believers had died and five others were injured. In spite of the severe effects of the quake on churches there, 42 volunteers had been organized and 5,700 yuan collected for the purchase of flashlights, candles, cloth and medicines, to complement aid being distributed by the government. They brought boiled water and food to the victims, working as one with the soldiers in their relief efforts.

Kangxian County is located in the southeastern part of the province where Gansu, Sichuan and Shaanxi provinces meet. County jurisdiction includes 8 towns and 13 villages, 350 administrative villages, 1,640 villagers’ groups.
for a total population of 202,200, of which 177,800 live in rural areas.

In Kangxian County we met with the Bureau of Ethnic Religious Affairs. 1200 Christians live in the county, which has one church and nineteen meeting points. There were varying degrees of damage in the county, but no deaths. We visited a meeting point in a believer’s home in Anmenkou township, which had sustained some cracks, but was still usable. Some Christians had lost their homes, however, and were living in tents.

The next stop was in Guozhen Township, Shaanxi, near the border between the two provinces, where colleagues from the provincial TSPM/CC briefed the group. Damage to church and meeting point buildings had been extensive in surrounding counties. The Shaanxi Bible School also suffered serious damage to the classroom building and faculty residence. Two meeting points belonging to Yongtao church in Xianyang city were severely damaged, as was the encircling wall of the church in Xingpingcheng District.

In Lueyang County we met with leading officials of the provincial TSPM and CCC and their counterparts in Hanzhong city, who accompanied us as we visited two meeting points in the county. Though there is no county-level TSPM in Lueyang, there are four meeting points with about 2500 Christians. The old church at the meeting point in Guozhen had sustained severe structural damage, but the new church had been better constructed and was little affected. The church in Xiakouyizhen was badly damaged when its roof beams fell, but believers who had been praying in the church when the quake hit managed to escape without injury. Some structural damage was sustained by the two meeting points in Ningqiang County. In Hanzhong City, the final stop, the group met officials of the City TSPM and CC, where we saw the damage to a church building which had been the southern Shaanxi Lay Training Center and clergy training center.

Natural disasters strike without mercy, but love abides among people. This earthquake stands out not only for its ferocity but for the love shown by the victims and by those who came to their aid. During this disaster, Christians were able to identify with the suffering of churches and people in the disaster areas; they were not mere observers, not outsiders. By their actions and their love they demonstrated the Chinese Christian view of God and faith: God is love and love never ends. This is an expression of what Theological Reconstruction has achieved in its ten years. Moving examples of people’s loving actions toward each other were found throughout the churches, a witness to the fact that all human goodness, truth and beauty comes from God. All churches and colleagues should play an active part in helping Christians in the disaster areas rebuild their homes and places of worship.

Article in Tian Feng No. 337 July, pp 2-4. Translated by Janice Wickeri.

The theme of the 2008 Olympic torch relay was “harmony brigade” and the slogan “Light the Passion, Share the Dream.” From March 24 to August 8, 2008, the torch traversed nations and regions in five continents and 31 provinces, autonomous regions and directly-administered cities in China for a total distance of 137,000 kilometers. 21,888 torchbearers and 5000 relay guards took part. It was an event on a grand scale, said to be the longest relay with the most varied and most numerous group of torchbearers ever. Five Chinese Protestant pastors were honored to be chosen as torchbearer.

Rev. Lin Delai (b. 1971) studied in Fujian Seminary from 1991-1993. From 1993-2005, he worked in the Lianjiang county TSPM/CC and in August, 2008, began serving the Huaxiang Church in Fuzhou. Of his selection as a torchbearer, Rev. Lin says: When I received word on April 29, 2008, that I was to be a torchbearer for the Beijing Olympic flame during its Longyan stop in Fujian, I was filled with inexpressible emotions and gratitude. On May 13, came the best 200 meters of my life! At 10:32, I was the 120th torchbearer, raising the torch to the heavens, praying to God for world peace and for blessings on the victims of the Sichuan earthquake. With a bright smile and genuine zeal, I passed on the Olympic spirit. Taking part in the torch relay was a great honor for me as a pastor. It shows the inclusive nature of those chosen as torchbearers, and this made me feel an even greater sense of my responsibility to do well to the glory of God and the benefit of others.

Rev. Ding Jianghua (b. 1975 in Dazhi, Hubei) is from a family which has been Christian for four generations. In 1995 he entered Zhongnan Seminary, going on to serve the Shaoshi Church in Jingzhou following his graduation in 1999. He was ordained in 2002. Rev. Ding is president of the Hubei Provincial CC, chairperson of the Jingzhou city TSPM, president of the Jingzhou city CC, and head pastor of the church in the Shaoshi district of Jingzhou city. He is also a delegate to the Jingzhou City PPCC and a member of the Standing Committee of the Jingzhou City Youth Federation. He told Tian Feng: “I was extremely moved and happy to be able to take part in the Olympic Torch Relay. To God be the glory. For human achievement comes from God. What the Olympic torch passes on is peace, friendship, hope and unity. And I believe all these good things come from God. This historic moment will live in my memory, encouraging me in future to lead Jingzhou Christians in making a greater contribution to building a harmonious society.”

Rev. Xue Lianxi (b. 1963 in Dangshan, Anhui) was baptized in July, 1987 in the Dangshan County church. He graduated from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in July, 1990 and went to work in the church in Hefei. On January 5, 1992, he was ordained during the Fifth National Christian Conference in Beijing. In 2005 he graduated from the post-graduate special course for pastors at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. Rev. Xue has been a member of the Eighth Standing Committee of the TSPM/CCC, chairperson of the Fourth Anhui TSPM, chairperson of the Hefei TSPM, and head pastor of the Hefei Church.
Rev. Xue Liangxi has also been a member of the Tenth and Eleventh Standing Committees of the Anhui Provincial People’s Congress, a member of the Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Standing Committees of the Hefei People’s Political Consultative Conference and a member of the Board of the Anhui Province Overseas Friendship Association. Rev. Xue said, “I’m extremely happy to be able to participate in the Olympic Torch Relay as a Christian pastor, because this demonstrates that the Party and the government see religion as an active force in China’s economic construction and in the building of a socialist harmonious society. It also illustrates the fact that the beautiful witness of Christians in society is acclaimed by that society. As an honored torchbearer, I take as my task to love country and love church, and to run the church well.”

Rev. Jin Yunpeng (b. 1966) graduated from Yanjing Theological Seminary (Beijing) in 1988 and was ordained by the Hebei Provincial CC in 1997. In 2002 he graduated from the post-graduate special course for pastors at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. Rev. Jin is Associate General Secretary of the TSPM, chairperson of the Hebei Provincial TSPM, a delegate to the Eleventh NPC, a delegate to the All-China Youth Federation, a delegate to the Hebei Provincial People’s Political Consultative Conference, and was named an “Outstanding All-China Youth Federation Delegate from Hebei Involved in Earthquake Relief [Operations]”. Rev. Jin told Tian Feng: “I was moved and honored to be able to pass on with my own hands the symbol of unity, peace and friendship as an Olympic torchbearer. I felt [in this] the Party and government’s care for religious circles, demonstrating the vigorous implementation of the policy of religious freedom and the fact that the Beijing Olympics is a historic event where everyone, regardless of race, skin color, faith or nationality can come together and enjoy the fruits of our common civilization. I pray for God’s special blessing on China and that God will bless the Beijing Olympics with complete success.”

Rev. Zhang He (b. 1957) completed the pastoral training course at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in 1989 and was ordained by the Hebei Provincial CC in 1992. In 1993, he completed the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary correspondence course. He was elected Associate General Secretary of the Qinhuangdao city TSPM in July, 1994. He was elected chairperson and president of the Qinhuangdao CC/TSPM in October, 2001 and re-elected in March, 2003. In March, 2008, he became a delegate to the Hebei Provincial People’s Congress. Of his experience as a torchbearer, Rev. Zhang said: “As a Christian pastor, I am fortunate to represent religious circles in Qinhuangdao as an Olympic torchbearer. I am so moved, but all glory be to the Lord. A hundred years of Olympic history have ignited both the Chinese people’s dreams and the feelings of God’s sons and daughters, encouraging us Christians to continue to lift up the banner of love of country and love of church, to run the church well on three-self principles, and to contribute to building the harmonious society and a strong economy.”


If you are interested in Chinese theology, read the Chinese Theological Review (CTR). CTR provides an excellent follow-up of theological discussion in China. Find details on the Amity News Service website: www.amitynewsservice.org
The 29th Olympiad opened on 8th August 2008 in China's capital city of Beijing. This event fulfills long held aspirations of all Chinese people, lifting up their history and highlighting links between Christianity and the Olympic spirit.

Mr. Zhang Boling, a Christian and a renowned pioneer of the Olympics in China, was also a Christian educator and YMCA leader, as well as the founder of Tianjin's Nankai University. In 1908, he attended the 4th Olympiad in London, England. He returned to tell about the spirit and concept of the Olympics, and became the earliest promoter of this worldwide movement in China. Further, he actively encouraged Chinese people to exercise and train. As Zhang tirelessly promoted this cause, General Zhang Xueliang came to his financial aid. In 1932, China participated in the 10th Olympiad in Los Angeles, represented by only one athlete.

The advent of Christianity in China and the Chinese movement for the Olympics followed similar paths. In 1908, the Tianjin YMCA magazine Tianjin Youth published three challenging questions to rally the Chinese people: When will China send her first athlete to the Olympics? When will China send her first delegation to the Olympics? When will China host her first Olympiad for the world? This was the prelude to China's participation in the Olympic movement of today. That historical momentum gave rise to the Olympic hopes and dreams of the Chinese people.

A full century has gone by, but in this 2008 Olympics in Beijing, the Chinese people's dream for one hundred years has come true. We prayed and offered blessings for the complete success of this year's Beijing Olympics.

The Olympic Movement began in ancient Greece, the intellectual cradle of Western history. Hence, today's Olympic standards are derived from the Greek heritage, shedding light on the Western world. Now for the first time, at the feet of the Great Wall in the 21st century, we were delighted to have Beijing and its 5,000 years of Chinese civilization meet Athens and the Western world. It is our sincere hope that the Beijing Olympics will serve as a window of equal opportunity to enhance mutual understanding and harmony. Our wishes are to nurture mutual respect, enjoy exchanges of perspectives and truly appreciate differences without conflicts. Therefore, we especially appreciate the International Olympic Committee's remark that the Olympic movement needs China. In our Chinese sentiment, “China also needs the Olympics.”

In thirty years of liberating reforms, China has become a world class nation. What a contrast to a hundred years ago, when China was abused and humiliated by the West, violated to the extent of Chinese territorial concessions to foreign occupation, and forcibly made to pay for war indemnities. China was made subordinate to foreign rule, and was jeered at and disparaged as the “Sick Man of Asia.” China has today come of age in terms of world recognition. The world views China as responsible and strong, having a self-respect and confidence of spirit and temperament suitable to such a grand occasion as the Olympics. China watched the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, when Japan exemplified her post-war standing to rejoin the world community. The Seoul Olympics in 1988 highlighted Korean success in its socio-economic transition, keeping abreast of international standards. Therefore, when the 29th Olympiad was awarded

Parishioners cheer on their pastors taking part in the Olympic torch relay.
to Beijing, the ecstatic outpouring of the Chinese people swept across the whole country. Overcome with hope and patriotic exuberance, the Chinese people were filled with genuine pride, joy and overwhelming gratitude. The excitement spread far beyond the Great Wall. These efforts were far above ethnicity and divisions, and without narrow-minded nationalistic propaganda and publicity.

China has walked steadily on the path of peace, since China’s own rise is contingent upon the rise of peace. Much as each person, each group and each nation can make a difference in this world, China needs to and should be a part of the global family. China’s progress matches the Olympic spirit in two ways: We want to get “higher, faster, stronger” by opening up, competing, progressing, all the while emphasizing “participation” as a nation whose commitment to the principles of equality and friendship leads to world peace and progress through cooperation. This is also the Beijing Olympic motto which conveys the ideal of “One World One Dream.”

Chinese Christians are one and same with our whole nation’s people, filled with hopes and blessings for the success of the Olympics. This year in January, the 8th National Chinese Christian Conference met and unanimously passed a resolution “in support of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.” The resolution called for Chinese Christians to not only offer prayers with thanksgiving, but to extend practical support and promotion of the Olympic spirit, to positively enlist in all kinds of service to enrich friendship with people of all nations, to offer everyday aid and assistance to Christians visiting China, and to share the Chinese Christian witness. May the Olympics spirit shine on our path, challenge us to be upright Christian disciples and strengthen the journey toward our heavenly reward.

Having been granted without charge the use of the distinguished logo of the Beijing Olympic Committee, the China Christian Council and Three-Self Patriotic Movement jointly published the “Beijing 2008 Olympic Commemorative Bible” (Four Gospels of The New Testament). These were freely distributed to athletes of all nations, their coaches and officials, adding blessings to commemorate the Olympics. At the same time, churches in Beijing, their pastoral staff and volunteers provided religious programs and services in the Olympic Village, making arrangements and offering language assistance for the Olympic Committee. During this time in Beijing and throughout the country all churches welcomed brothers and sisters from all corners of the earth by worshipping together and sharing experiences. It was especially rewarding to see five pastors and several faithful lay Christians honored as they carried the Olympic torch on relays into the stadium.

From the world athlete’s standpoint, entry in the Olympics is an opportunity that comes only once every four years. Winning a race, and being awarded a gold medal are significant moments of a lifetime. From the spectator’s viewpoint, it is an opportunity to watch the stars, and enjoy the bustling excitement of athletic competition. Yet from the Christian disciple’s perspective, it is more than all of these. We glean from the Apostle Paul’s teaching on the Christian lifelong pursuit in spirit and in truth: ‘Forgetting those things which are behind, and stretching forward for the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of high calling of God in Jesus Christ’ (Philippians 3: 13-14). Our primary goals are to seek God’s guidance, to live in Jesus Christ, to be his good witnesses and to glorify his name.

At this writing, China has just suffered an 8.0 magnitude earthquake, an extraordinary natural disaster entailing massive loss of life and property. As of this moment, people throughout our nation are involved in search and rescue, rebuilding home and hearth while grappling with preparations for the Olympic Games. This leads me to think of the devastating 1985 earthquake in Mexico City. Yet, after a few months of hard work, Mexico City gave the world a fantastic event to remember-- the “World Cup.” We are together in this belief, that through the solidarity and efforts of the Chinese people, China will offer the world a most successful Olympiad. Such is our hope and our prayer.

“This article by Gu Mengfei appeared in Tian Feng No. 339 August No.1 pp. 4-5. Translated by Robert Soong.”
God’s Faithfulness to Lisu Christians

Faith and Service

Rev. Bao Jiayuan is Associate General Secretary of the China Christian Council and Director of its Bible Commission in China. For many years, he has been involved in ecumenical relations with churches overseas and with church ministries among ethnic minorities in China. In August this year, he organized the Summer English Program for Chinese pastors at Huangshan in Anhui Province where he shared his reflections (summarized below) on the Lisu minority, many of whom are Christians.

In this week’s readings I shall share with you stories about the Lisu ethnic tribe in China, whom I got to know during the Chinese Bible Ministry Exhibition in the USA in 2006 when the China Christian Council brought a Lisu choir on tour. I have been touched by the ways in which God has expressed his faithfulness in their lives. Our Lord is a faithful God. Just as he led the Israelites with his ropes of love throughout their forty years of desert wandering, so today God keeps the promise that his love will never fail. As you read, and as the whole world turns its eyes on Beijing for the 2008 Olympic Games, remember the mystery of God’s work among this great nation of China.

Many of the Lisu ethnic group live in Fugong County, located beside the Nu River in the mountainous area of Yunnan Province in Southwest China. Amongst the 90,000 living in Fugong, some 60,000 are now Christians, worshipping in 339 churches. Jibude Village, where our choir came from, started a Christian gathering with only two families back in 1984. Now there are 250 Christians, from 50 out of 70 households in the village.

One of the earliest missionaries to work among the Lisu was Rev. James Outram Fraser, a Scot working with the China Inland Mission in the early twentieth century. He used 40 letters from the Roman alphabet and variations on these letters to improve on the written language of the Lisu. This form of the written language won acclaim among the Lisu, and has been popular ever since. Fraser’s translation of the New Testament into Lisu was completed in 1936.

After converting to Christianity, the Lisu Christians gave up the unhealthy elements in their culture and tradition, such as gambling, drinking and idolatry. Harmonious relations and true fellowship marked the life of their congregations, and their peace is such that they can fall into a sound sleep at night even with their doors and windows open! They have no fears about people breaking in or stealing their minimal possessions. Jesus lives among these people. The Lisu love him, and their churches have become community centers in their villages. Most of the Lisu churches look very simple, like rough shelters. They possess no organs, no stained glass, no pews, no fonts and no bell towers. Baptism ceremonies are conducted in the Nu River and the congregation is called to worship by striking the stainless steel hub of an old tyre.

The Lisu Christians fear God and give Christ first place in their lives. They have three worship services on Sundays, and gather for fellowship again during the week. They pray for strength when they are weak, they share joys when their troubles are overcome.

Hundreds of Lisu churches collapsed in the spring of 2005 after a heavy snowfall. Jibude Church was one of those destroyed. How did they find the money to reconstruct their churches? Their fervent prayers, mixed with tears, never ceased. A huge donation was received from a group of widows, and a total of 6,000 yuan (around 750USD) was collected. With support from the emergency disaster fund of the China Christian Council and the Amity Foundation, Jibude Church was given 30 bags of cement, a hundred pieces of asbestos tiles and a thousand steel bars.

It was a huge job for church members to carry all these construction materials up the mountain. Weighed down with heavy bamboo baskets slung over their shoulders, their uphill journey on foot took as long as three hours at a time. Despite obstacles, the dedication of the new church took place at the start of the Chinese New Year of 2006. On a 

“Our Lord, you are so good and your love endures for ever. Your faithfulness continues through all generations.”
day of thanksgiving in 2006, the six churches around Jibude Village received sets of sound equipment given by congregations from the east coast. It was the first time in history Lisu preachers could preach the word of God through a microphone.

Attention is given to the children. A school in Jibude Village was set up next to the church. The building looks very humble but it can accommodate 40 children. Village children are sent there to receive their basic education before they move on to another school down the mountain, where they have to live in dormitories for two years in order to complete their primary education. Most of the village children attend church with their parents and join the children's choir where they learn to worship with hymns and dances. The children attending Bible recitation class looked so excited. In fact, this was their first lesson in language study.

The Lisu people have beautiful voices. Sitting on the floor, watching the choir's beautiful dances, listening to their hymns and looking at their smiling faces, one would never believe that they are living with extremely limited resources today. Food and fruits abounded in the surrounding hills when their ancestors first came a hundred years ago but, in more recent times, their booming population has put a strain on these resources, and now it is common for the people to live on two meals of corn a day.

The material poverty of the Lisu people reflects the growing gap between the rich and the poor in a rapidly globalizing world. In this process, the marginalization of ethnic tribes has become a priority issue. In such a context, what can the church do?

The Amity Foundation, created in 1985 on the initiative of Chinese Christians, works together with other NGOs to bring Christian love to the needy in the minority areas of western China. Quite recently, the China Christian Council has also established a social service department aimed at encouraging church involvement in society. For the sake of sharing the love of God, many are working on projects which will promote integrated sustainable development that will in turn provide poor Lisu villages with food, water, agriculture and alternative energy. A few years ago, a retired doctor in her eighties from Zhejiang province climbed the hills to Lisu villages, where she started medical training classes to teach the Lisu about basic healthcare and preventive medicine. All want to be involved in creating God’s dream of justice.

The Lisu Christians have endured a painful past. During the Cultural Revolution, many faithful servants of God were put in prison because of their faith. Today God has brought the Lisu to a bright tomorrow, as they experience changes both materially and spiritually.
Build up your strength in union with the Lord

From June 20-26, Tong Su, staff of the Amity Foundation Hong Kong Office, brought 14 members of the HK Diocesan Youth Committee of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui to Huangshan and Nanjing on an "Amity Tour". Below, she shares her reflections on the trip and what she learnt from Rev. Ma Jianhua about her own visit to quake-hit areas in Sichuan Province.

It was a memorable trip for us all. During our 2 days in Huangshan and 3 days in Nanjing we were blessed with very mild weather and extremely kind hosts. In Huangshan, we visited with local pastors and parishioners from surrounding rural areas and also had the opportunity to visit the famous Yellow Mountain (from which Huangshan derives its name).

We were impressed not only by the church and its congregation, which included very lively youth, but also the pervasive spirit of mutual sharing and help. I am sharing here snippets from my conversations with Rev. Ma Jianhua, the only ordained pastor in Huangshan.

"I had to go there and be with them." Rev. Ma insisted when I asked about her trip to Sichuan. From 13th to 16th June, she had traveled with 3 other church members to visit churches and victims in An Xian, Mianyang and Jiangyou--three of the worst quake-hit areas in Sichuan. A graduate of Nanjing Theological Seminary, she tried to contact former classmates who were now serving in Sichuan. When she finally did get through on the phone, she was told not to go to the affected areas as large scale emergency rescue work was being carried out by tens of thousands of army and medical personnel.

But she did not give up the idea of going to quake hit areas to provide help. She kept in regular phone communication with churches in Sichuan and updated her congregation about the situation. At first, some of her parishioners asked: “Such a big disaster must be a punishment from God. If it is God’s will, should we not accept it?” However, these doubts were soon muffled when the majority of church members agreed that they should go all out to help the quake victims.

"God is love. And this love is for every human being. Our compatriots are suffering. No one, whether Christian or non-Christian, should stand aside and do nothing," Rev. Ma told her congregation. "Our area suffers from frequent floods. Every time we experience these devastating floods, we always receive help from kind people from other provinces. Now that Sichuan people need help, it is our chance to give something back.” Some of the church members responded with a fundraising campaign. After making arrangements with the Sichuan Christian Council, Rev. Ma boarded a plane on June 13th for Chengdu, carrying with her 150,000 yuan from the many warm hearted parishioners of Huangshan Church.

"Many churches and clergy in Sichuan had similar experiences. I am a curious person. I asked one pastor, also a Nanjing Seminary graduate, what he did when the quake struck. He told me he rushed into the washroom and prayed. He prayed for the quake to end, prayed that he could continue to serve the church, prayed for the congregation, prayed for the people. He laughed when his wife reminded him that he had not prayed for her!"

In An Xian, the main church was still standing, though badly damaged. Recently built, the church still had an outstanding construction debt of 40,000 yuan. Its pastor, Rev. Liu, and his wife were left homeless by the quake, but was living in a cozy Mongolian tent when Rev. Ma visited. "The tent had been provided by a Christian lady from Liaoning. She had driven 20 hours from her hometown and had spent two days erecting the 6 Mongolian tents she had brought along. The larger ones served as meeting places, allowing An Xian Church to continue worship and other services," Rev. Ma said. "The Christians in An Xian suffered greatly from the quake, but they are doing every bit they can to help others." They went to visit a local Christian whose home had completely collapsed. But when they arrived at his temporary tent made of wet plastic woven sheeting, they were told that he had been out all morning fetching water for other villagers.

Rev. Ma was told that Rev. Luo’s wife had suffered a miscarriage on the day of the earthquake. But what she saw was a lady ceaselessly preparing and cooking food to be sent to refugee centers for quake victims. The An Xian Church also extended its helping hands to other religious groups. When the local Buddhist Association was in need of tents, parishioners did not hesitate to send over five of them.

At a refugee center near Beichuan, the worst hit county, Rev. Ma met the only Christian there—there were fewer than 10 Christians in Beichuan. Four families, including hers, were living in a 15 square meter tent. The floor was wet from the recent ..
Pastor Ma Jianhua, 5th from right, with youth group from Hong Kong

rain and there was grass at the corners. Fortunately, water and electricity had been restored and simple toilets and bath rooms had been built. Across from their tent, the government was already building temporary homes and she was hoping she could move into one of those within the next three years.

Rev. Ma also visited Mianyang, where quake lakes had threatened the lives of tens of thousands. Now that the danger had passed, people had begun to return to the affected areas.

The church at the center of Mianyang City was an old one, built by Anglicans in the early twentieth century. It had not suffered much from the quake. “I was invited to preach there on Saturday morning and was worried if I would be able to do it well. The night before, I prayed hard to God for courage and wisdom.”

The next morning, Rev. Ma preached about the need to “Build up your strength in union with the Lord.” The congregation was noisy at first, but after a while, everyone began to listen carefully. Some even came up after the service to Rev. Ma to thank her for the good sermon.

The old church building in Jiangyou was a sorry sight. Built almost a century ago by Anglicans, it had lost all its tiles, its walls were cracked and its frame was in danger of collapsing. Like those in the churches of An Xian, its parishioners and pastors went all out to help the victims even though they themselves were homeless. They had set up a distribution point for relief goods sent in from different areas and had already distributed about 2 million yuan worth of goods.

“I was very frustrated when we were refused entry into the largest refugee center in Mianyang,” said Rev. Ma. The center was located at the Jiuzhou Sports Stadium where many volunteer groups, including local Christians, had been sending cooked meals. The security guards informed them they had received orders not to let any religious groups in. The reason given was that some groups had been trying to use the distribution of relief goods as an occasion to proselytize, causing complaints from many quake victims. Said Rev. Ma, “I am sorry for other Christians and religious groups who, over so many days, have been witnessing with their love. I hope they will be allowed in again soon, to provide the help that is needed.”

Rev. Ma showed us all the photos she had taken during the trip and could not stop talking about it. She did the same with her congregation and friends. “We were given the best they had when we were there. They cooked the last chicken they had for us. They offered the most comfortable tents to us. Even shoppers on the road treated us to free cakes,” Rev. Ma said, tears welling in her eyes. “They had lost so much but they are still so optimistic! I believe they will recover soon.”
A little boy saw his next-door neighbor crying over the death of his wife, so he got up onto the man’s lap and sat with him. When he got home, his mother asked him what he had said to the grieving man. “Nothing,” the boy replied, “I just cried with him.” The boy may have felt he hadn’t said or done anything to help, but in fact he had brought a great deal of comfort to the man in his grief. When others meet with a great calamity we want to do whatever we can to help, but then we discover how small and helpless we are. But if we go as quickly as we can to the person’s side, and weep with them, that is a thing of great value.

On May 12, an earthquake of magnitude eight on the Richter scale hit Wenchuan, resulting in serious casualties. This was the worst disaster to hit China since the 1950s. Premier Wen Jiabao was among the first to appear on the scene in Sichuan. We saw him directing relief efforts, not stopping for a moment as he moved from one disaster area to the next. But what moved us most was to see him weeping with the people in the disaster areas. We all saw his tears. This was an expression of true feeling: the Premier of the State Council crying with disaster victims shows a kind of strength. Under his influence many others risked their lives, competing with one another to get to the disaster area and join in the relief work. The People’s Liberation Army, fire officers and soldiers, security forces and medical personnel all rushed to the scene in the first hours...this earthquake did not crush the Chinese people, but joined them heart to heart, united in overcoming this hardship.

The earthquake reminded us that human life is precious... “Or what will they give in return for their life?” (Mt. 16: 26) There are many people today who in the normal course of things are not able to perceive that busying themselves for material things is vanity. Faced with great disaster these people discover what they have worked for and what they really need for their lives. A young brother named Wang who had experienced an earthquake in Jiangyou City told me that the manager of a supermarket there took the responsibility to open the store to the public following the earthquake, saying they could take what they wanted, with one caveat: they must leave some food and drink for the next person. This was love in the midst of this great disaster and gratitude for having come through it. I think that supermarket manager has been able to sublimate his life. I don’t know whether he was a Christian or not, but he was near to God.

We know that we were not created for nothing. We were created for love. God created us to love us and God hopes we will respond with love for God. Love for God is concretely expressed in love for our brother, our neighbor, our compatriots, our friends, in love for those we know and for those we don’t know, even love for our enemies. If we follow God’s command to love others as we love ourselves, we will...
look not only to our own interests but to the interests of others as well. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2: 4,5). We have seen so many moving things in the aftermath of this earthquake, so many people who have not simply looked to their own interests. Recently 12 people were chosen as heroes of the quake by a website. The first is Tan Tianqiu, a teacher at Dongqi Middle School in Deyang (Sichuan) who gave his life to protect four students. During the earthquake, he bent his body and spread his arms over the classroom desk and, as noise thundered, bricks and dust rained down like hail, trees crashed down on his head, hands and back, and he began to bleed heavily, he grit his teeth and clung desperately to that desk, like a mother hen guarding her chicks. Four students survived huddled under that desk and the image of his wings spreading over them will remain in our memories.

The story of another young heroine is also very moving. He Cuiqing, a 13-year-old student from Muyu Middle School in Qingchuan, had just left the dormitory when she realized there was an earthquake. She didn't run for her life, but ran back into the dorm to wake a dozen others who were still asleep during the afternoon rest period. She missed her best chance to escape and was caught in the collapse of the building. Fifty hours later, thanks to her tremendous desire to live and amazing willpower she was pulled alive from the rubble by rescue workers. She was the last survivor to be saved at Muyu Middle School, but because of the long pressure from the rubble on the muscles, she lost her right leg. A reporter asked this strong child whether she regretted her actions. She shook her head. "I don't regret it. What I regret is that I wasn't able to save more of my classmates."

We see clearly in the Bible that as long as we have Jesus with us, no matter how great the adversity or suffering that befalls us, it is nothing, for Jesus' love is unlimited, while suffering can always be measured. "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal" (2 Cor. 4: 17-18).

Weeping with those who weep naturally shrinks the distance between us and the one who is weeping. When adversity strikes another, there isn’t necessarily anything we can do. But if we weep with that person, like the little boy I mentioned at the beginning of my sermon, this naturally draws us closer. And that person doesn’t feel so alone and without help, but feels that there is someone there who experiences that adversity with him or her. This is why the church stresses visiting the sick in the hospital. It’s not that we can do anything by going, but by our presence we can bring them some comfort. All of us need love and concern. When adversity or illness or disaster strikes, we need it even more. This concern is not necessarily expressed in words or action. All that is needed is someone to be with us and weep with us. This is true friendship.

It is extremely hard when loved ones are taken from us by a sudden disaster. In such circumstances, Jesus himself wept. When Jesus visited Mary and Martha following Lazarus’ death, he felt Mary’s despair at the death of her younger brother, and he wept with her, sharing her sorrow. John 11: 35 says: “Jesus wept.” This is the shortest verse in the Bible, but it tells us of the Savior’s great empathy. When bystanders saw Jesus weeping, they said: "See how he loved him!” Sometimes the best help we can give those experiencing the pain and solitariness of life is to “weep with them.” Jesus showed us the importance of this by his actions. Is there someone today who needs your tears? We must hurry to seek those who are in need of us to weep with them. Weeping that comes from the heart transmits love more effectively than any words. Tears seem to say: “I want to share your pain; I understand what you are feeling.” The burden of sorrow is halved when it is shared.

Not only is our church involved in aiding the victims of the Sichuan earthquake, churches throughout the nation—throughout the world—are doing this work, work that is good in the sight of all. Last week our churches in Suzhou raised over 200,000 yuan for the earthquake victims. When we enthusiastically doing work that is good in the sight of all, we very naturally become part of the larger society. We can no longer be marginalized. Christianity does not advocate separation from the world. What we advocate is a life that is of the world and enters more fully into it. We must go into the world to spread the moral virtue of the one who brought us out of darkness and into the light. Though we cannot go to the front lines to take part in the rescue work, we can continue to pray for those involved, continue to care for them, and do whatever we can.

Finally, let us say that when disaster befalls us, we should not be afraid for Jesus will not leave us. The Lord is our strength, our rock and refuge and He is our salvation. And when we see those disaster has befallen, no matter what kind of people they are or what the disaster is, we must not become bystanders or mere onlookers, even less should we make things worse. First of all, we must have sympathetic hearts. Next we must lend our hands to help them. We ask God to continue to help the victims of the disaster, that homes may soon be rebuilt, that they may be comforted. And we ask God to help those rescue workers who have gone to their aid, and grant them peace. ■

This is an abridged version of a sermon that appeared in Tian Feng No. 337 July No. 1, 2008 pp. 16-18. Translated by Janice Wickeri.
Teena and Hugh Anderson spent their summer teaching English to church pastors and lay workers. Below they share their reflections on the experience.

We had fallen into a comfortable pattern of teaching English to thirty Chinese church leaders in the ancient town of Tunxi, China. The Xin'an River is a quiet presence in this town. It gently glides by like a silent companion as we walk day after day to our teaching accommodations at the Huangshan Christian Church Conference Center. We climbed to our second floor classrooms and didn’t give it a thought.

Our first class in the morning was English Grammar. We started drilling verb tenses. But something was different about this morning. It had been raining now for three days (the after effects of the most recent typhoon). We four teachers were all feeling the effect of waking up to rain and going to sleep with rain pounding on the windows. I took a quick look out the window before trying to explain past perfect verb tense. The river, usually drifting quietly by carrying a few fishing boats, had noticeably risen. My first thought was the ladies who went down to wash their clothes in the river would have to wait until tomorrow. I went back to my small classroom and finished the class by assigning homework.

Our second class consisted of five students and we settled into reading and memorizing John 3:16. Ninety minutes later we dismissed the students and prepared for the last class of the morning, Writing and Pronunciation. It was now 11:00 o’clock in the morning. There was no denying that the river had come up as far as it could without overflowing the banks. We all stood and watched from our second floor classrooms. Some students ran back to the dorm rooms for their cameras. How had the water come up so high, so fast? We were all like kindergarten students waiting to see if school would be called off. But it wasn’t.

We continued with our afternoon session on Cultural Communication. By 6:00 in the evening it had stopped raining and the river had started to recede. We were amazed at how fast it had risen and in the same way fallen.

Mother Theresa once said “What we are trying to do may be just a drop in the ocean, but the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.”

The four of us had been teaching three weeks. We had three more weeks to go to impart as much English as we could before these Chinese church leaders went back to their congregations, their seminaries and their council offices and to rejoin their families. They have made a major commitment of coming to Huangshan for six weeks each summer for three years to learn English from native English speakers like ourselves. We were volunteers, teachers and ministers from the United States who had come to China to share with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We hope that their English improves. We have imparted just a drop of English into their lives. But their lives would be less if that drop was missing. We pray that it amounts to much more than a drop.

Just as the Xin’an River rose to almost overflowing because of each drop of rain that made its way to the river, we pray that the lives of the students [and our own] will overflow as well. A flood of love was created at Huangshan this summer. We taught, we learned, we sang, we prayed, we preached, we talked and we loved. The love and goodness of God was a river that flowed through us every day like the Xin’an River that flows through the city of Tunxi.

“*What we are trying to do may be just a drop in the ocean, but the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.*”
Studying the Bible with Chinese Christians

David Clements was sent to teach English in China with the Amity Foundation by the BIATG (British and Irish Amity Teachers Group) in 2006. He currently teaches at the Northwest Normal University in Lanzhou, capital of Gansu Province in Northwest China. Since his arrival in China he has been worshipping at the local church in Lanzhou and has been helping to lead a course in Bible Study at the Shanzishi Church every Sunday. Below, he shares his experience.

A primary goal for me in coming to China was to get involved and be part of a local Chinese church. In the early days I was getting concerned that this may not happen but God opened up this wonderful opportunity for me. I think it has been mutually rewarding and meaningful for both the Chinese and foreign participants. I hope to be able to stay another year here and develop it further.

The Shanzishi Christian Church in Lanzhou, capital of China's northwestern province of Gansu, is the largest and most central church in the city. Gansu has an estimated 70,000 Christians but, like many areas in China, suffers a shortage of trained pastors. This particular Bible study course has been running at Shanzishi Church since 22 October 2006 and appears to have become well known and established as a regular ministry. I have been involved from week 2, originally with Ruth Klavano and now with Mary Fraser. We work with the Senior Pastor, Rev. Ruthie Xia, and one of the lay volunteers, Ms Linda Li, who jointly initiated this Bible study project. Both attend most weeks.

For our Bible study course, we use a multi-purpose room which can seat about 80 people comfortably and is located in the main church building. Besides serving as an overflow chapel during worship services it is used as a training room during the week. It is equipped with a whiteboard and a piano.

We meet every Sunday afternoon from 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. during the academic year for schools, colleges and universities. The first half hour is devoted to singing hymns and songs in English; normally accompanied by a piano and sometimes a guitar. The lecture takes about 20 to 30 minutes and the balance of time is spent in groups discussing questions related to the scripture and lesson. There is a prominent notice board located in the main entrance to the church proper during term time announcing this ministry and it is also announced at the Sunday morning services.

The focus of our study has been the Gospel of Matthew from the very beginning to end! The length of scripture passage studied each week depends on its theme and its usefulness as a simple lesson capable of being discussed after being read and explained. As at the close of the Autumn Semester 2007/08 we have reached Matthew Chapter 14.

In the early weeks, a large number of college students were attracted to the study, expecting a free oral English class. They had both limited knowledge of, and/or interest in the Bible or Christianity. The attendance was erratic, real interest was limited and little meaningful purpose was achieved.

Over time, the attendance mixture has changed. Whilst the attendance dropped initially from about 50 to between 27 to 40, the mix of people attending and interest and progress has improved. Attendance has been much more regular and this has given more momentum to the studies. We now have people from middle school through to middle age and a range of professions and Christian maturity. Most of them have their own bilingual Bibles and the church makes available a sufficient number for those that do not have personal copies.

At the moment, due to only Mary and I being available regularly, we normally split into two groups. The split is usually on the basis of English speaking proficiency and we alternate with each group. There is normally no time left for feedback to the full class. Occasionally we get someone from outside to present a lesson and
we have had more native English speakers attending but only as participants, not as teachers. The study is far too dependent on Mary and I and the limited number of teachers involved is perhaps the biggest inhibiting factor to the Bible study’s long term future. If someone is sick or absent we normally stay as one large group. The advantage of this is that there is wider spread of comment and feedback.

**Changing approaches**

For the first few months, Pastor Xia would prepare a lesson in Chinese and Linda would translate it into English. The scripture passage would be read in short sections by members of the class in English and by the full class in Chinese. The lesson was translated paragraph by paragraph by Linda as it was delivered. Pastor Xia, who has reasonably good English but is shy to use it, would then pose two questions on the scripture and lesson which we would discuss in the groups. Ruth and I then facilitated discussion in English.

We still retain the reading- and scripture-based question activities but now do the translation in reverse from a lesson prepared by the native English speakers. Early in the Spring Semester, Ruthie asked us if we could prepare and deliver lessons in English and Linda would translate into Chinese. This we felt was a major breakthrough! Ruth Klavano and I would share preparations and teaching but, in this Autumn Semester, I have done most of the preparation and lesson delivery and Mary has ably assisted with group facilitation.

My approach has largely been content teaching using my biblical archaeological education and I have tried to make it as culturally relevant and understandable to Chinese “students” new to Bible studies as I can. Fortunately, the climate and topography plus the economic activity of farming make comparisons between Ancient Palestine in New Testament times and Gansu very feasible. I have avoided the heavy spiritual stuff, but aspects of this have surfaced in group discussions later. Copies of the prepared lesson in English were for a while duplicated by the church and distributed to attendees, but this was discontinued on a general basis and I now only give “core” members copies.

Although we have been given a lot of freedom with lesson planning and delivery, we have largely retained the original approach taken by Pastor Xia. The regulars seem fairly happy with it but it has become somewhat stereotyped and confined to very basic concepts and information sharing. I would like to see some of the regular attendees going away and doing some “homework” and presenting to the “class” the following week, plus more activity in the “class” by “class members”. Now that the attendance has stabilized and matured, I hope to share some ideas with Pastor Xia next semester. There are also other competent people attending who could relieve Linda of some of the translation duties. The immediate requirement is to attract more English speakers to do some teaching, but I’m sure God has that in hand and all will happen in His time.

In the August issue of Tian Feng No. 340, Wang Lei writes about the importance of maintaining good working relationships among pastoral workers, as well as about some of the problems that can arise in the daily course of serving the churches and Christians of China, given the tremendous development and growth of recent years. As the church has grown, so has the number of its pastoral workers. As with any group working together, both harmony and friction can result. The term pastoral worker is used to refer in general to those who serve the church in a variety of capacities, from those who have been ordained (pastors and elders, for example) to seminary graduates and lay workers. In Chinese, the term for “co-workers” here is tonggong, co-worker, or colleague, and can be used either as a term of identification or as a form of address between colleagues.

The implication of the term, Wang says, is that of cooperation, as colleagues or partners. The existence
and development of the church depends on colleagues working together, being of one mind. All the daily work of the churches, from preaching to the logistics that keep things going, depends on the efforts of persons with a variety of gifts. Even the most talented of pastoral workers cannot run a church alone.

As persons working together in the church, Wang writes, co-workers should share the joys and hardships of their work, look out for each other and come to each other’s help. This is true not only within the daily work of the church, but applies to co-workers’ family and personal problems. In times of illness or disaster, co-workers should look on their colleagues’ difficulties as their own and offer help in concrete ways: visits, financial and other kinds of aid, filling in at work, etc.—all that can be done to help the affected colleague put his/her mind at ease and concentrate on recovering health or solving problems. Wang has witnessed church colleagues pitching in to build houses and furniture, harvest crops and donate funds in times of disaster. Such aid is mutual but not formulaic, payback is neither required nor expected. Quoting Bertha Von Suttner (winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, 1905): Outside of “love,” “help” is the most beautiful verb. When co-workers help each other they fully express Christ’s love.

The union, unity and cooperation among co-workers are true fellowship and friendship in the Lord and the foundation for this is mutual understanding. Mutual understanding is the only way to achieve mutual trust and respect. We don’t attack or belittle someone because their personality is different from our own. We must not demand that another person be like ourselves in every way or thought. Wang quotes Thomas à Kempis in saying that we should not be angry because others are not as we wish, they back: for neither are we ourselves as we would wish to be. Problem-solving requires the viewpoints and efforts of many different people. We must learn to look at those around us with appreciation for their talents. It is difficult to avoid friction between co-workers, but disagreements should not be allowed to develop into hostility. Sometimes colleagues hold different interpretations of faith, theology or liturgy, but as long as there is no question of heresy, we should have mutual respect and not attack or disparage each other. Differences among co-workers are not a bad thing; differences often enrich the spiritual life of the church.

Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses. We are all limited and this is why we cannot do things solely on our own. On the other hand, much can be accomplished through collective effort. Just as the different limbs and organs of our bodies have different functions, so people have different roles to play. No one is perfect. Co-workers need to strengthen each other, complement and supplement each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Each one has his/her own role to play, but each is also part of the whole.

Wang quotes Mao Zedong’s “Combat Liberalism” to indicate the wrong way to deal with differences. Mao had strong criticism for those among the revolutionaries who “say nothing to people to their faces but gossip behind their backs, or to say nothing at a meeting but gossip afterwards.” This happens at times in the church too. Some people wait and criticize others fiercely behind their backs without regard for the truth, even twisting the facts to accomplish their aim. In their mouths, rice chaff becomes gold and vice versa. If they like someone, that person can do no wrong; if they don’t like someone, there is nothing good to be said of them. This kind of thing should not exist in the church.

Co-workers in the church, especially those in charge in a congregation, should have both “the mind to cherish talent” and “the ability to be tolerant.” When a leader sees another co-worker whose talents surpass her own and who is praised by others, she should not give in to petty jealousy. The resentment between Saul and David should be enough to warn us. The church needs persons of talent, but sometimes when such a person emerges in the church, they are pushed aside or never live up to their abilities. Some people look at those who are better than they are with red-eyed jealousy and look with disdain on those who are less able than themselves. Neither of these is desirable. Co-workers should always begin with the interests of the church and welcome people of talent into the church to work together. Of course, all of us should seek to do better and be useful to the church. Co-workers should not look down on each other; we must learn to look at each other with appreciation for our various talents and abilities. Ability needs to be respected in the church, so that “talent finds opportunity.” A modern church needs all kinds of talented people in order to adapt to the needs of the age and to progress in society.
For some time now, there has been a phenomenon in the church that has no place there: infighting among co-workers, including minor squabbles that create factions within the church and serious disagreements that splits the believing community. It is tragic when even church members who don’t know all the facts are drawn into the fray. “Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. Has Christ been divided?” (See 1 Cor. 1:10-13)

Some co-workers in the church are used to doing things their own way, following the dictates of their own ego without regard for the larger picture or for anyone else’s opinion. Such behavior is unsociable and disrespectful of others. Someone has said that the greatest humiliation is not being beaten or scolded, but being ignored as if one did not exist. Wang suggests two ways to remedy this situation: Listening to the opinions and suggestions of others, and working diligently at communication; and self-reflection on one’s own words and actions to identify biases and errors. As St. Paul teaches us: “Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord” (Rom. 12: 10-11).