In this issue:

Editorial
A Journey Enriched By Grace - 30th anniversary of the reopening of Centennial Church
The Church’s Response to the Global Economic Crisis
Churches in the Pearl River Delta
Mutual Aid among Churches

News
Award to Suzhou Church Design at Recent Seventh Biennial International Interior Design Awards in Beijing
CCC/TSPM holds Training Course for Secretaries General and General Secretaries in Provincial Level Christian Councils and Three-Self Organizations
“Freedom of Religious Belief” Part of China’s Human Rights Action Plan

Temple Lane Church, Suzhou between services on a Sunday morning in May 2009. The church stands in the midst of a busy shopping district.
Dear Reader,

The year 2008 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. This meeting initiated the renewal of the policy of freedom of religious belief after the end of the Cultural Revolution era. At Easter, 1979, Centennial Church in Ningbo, Zhejiang became the first Protestant church to formally reopen for worship and normal church life. Others quickly followed and the rest, as they say, is history. Chinese Church leaders like to point out that the churches of China have flourished as a result of the reform policies over the past thirty years. During this anniversary year, Tian Feng, the church monthly magazine, has carried numerous articles about individual churches as they reflect on the past thirty years of church growth and development. This issue of ANS highlights Centennial Church, Ningbo.

Church growth is also evident in the new, modern churches that are being built as older buildings become too small for current needs. Included in this issue are a photograph of an old, historical church in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu and a new church built for an existing congregation in Beijing. Our first news item in this issue focuses on a new church being built in Suzhou—Dushu Lake Church—an impressive and now award-winning construction that I was fortunate enough to visit during a trip to the area in May this year.

The global economic crisis has seriously affected churches and their members and Zhou Yu and Wang Congyou ponder what the churches’ response should be. They begin with the importance of prayer and pastoral counselling, as well as practical measures to help those out of work and in need. The overall response, they conclude, should be one of love and concern for one another: among sisters and brothers in the church and for those in need in the rest of society.

Churches in the Pearl River Delta, an area in South China near Hong Kong and Macau, have developed in the midst of great economic growth. They have also been faced with the effects of the global economic crisis, and may be more vulnerable to these effects than most. They experience many of the same problems of urban life, financial and family pressures as believers elsewhere. The ways in which location in an economically developed, urban area have had an ongoing influence on these churches is particularly interesting, especially the impact the influx of factory workers from other parts of China has had on the church, and the challenges of being part of this rapidly developing economic region.

The authors of these articles on the economic crisis all mention the disparity in finance and development between churches in urban and rural areas, north and south, the more developed coastal regions and the interior. All feel that churches should help one another. “Mutual Aid among Churches” looks at ways churches can practice mutual aid today. This includes calling on skilled and professional people in the churches to play a broader role in their own congregation and in sharing their talents with churches in need, in some ways an echo of the increased interest among individuals in making a difference in society that became so apparent in the response to the Sichuan earthquake.

I would like to mention here, with thanks, our dedicated volunteer translators, on whose fine work this issue of ANS rests: Derrek Arce, Emily Clare Dunne, Cinde Lee, Suzanne Rowe, and Robert Soong.

As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions.

Janice Wickeri

ANS June 2009   Page 2
A Journey Enriched By Grace
-30th anniversary of the reopening of Centennial Church

By Fang Yin

The decision to commemorate 100 years of Anglican mission in Ningbo, Zhejiang, with the construction of Centennial Church was taken in 1948, shortly after the end of the war of resistance against Japan. The ravages of that war were still apparent in the area, the struggle for Liberation was being fought in the North, the KMT government was collapsing, and currency devaluation and skyrocketing prices posed a huge difficulty for the Chinese people as well as for construction of the new church. Rev. Xu Taitang, newly arrived from Shanghai, shuttled between Ningbo and Shanghai in his quest to raise funds. In May 1949, when Ningbo was liberated, the church floor was not yet finished. In 1953, Rev. Xu went back to serve in his hometown of Taizhou and the Zhejiang Diocese appointed Rev. Sun Jinwei to succeed him at Centennial Church. In 1958, the church entered the period of post-denominationalism with unified worship and Centennial Church was the city’s only church until all religious activities were halted with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in July, 1966.

“Centennial Church exemplifies the happy changes and progress in China today.”

The last 30 magnificent years of reform and opening in China have been one of the most important chapters in world history. Over these 30 years, a changed scene in China and in the world has gradually unfurled. The defining moment came with the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, when the Chinese people embarked on a new long march toward national strength and prosperity for the people. A new policy implementing religious freedom arrived like a fresh spring breeze and Ningbo was the first place to enjoy its effects. On the eve of Easter, April 8, 1979, Centennial Church was reopened, the first church to open after the Cultural Revolution.

Thirty years later, on April 8, 2009, Ningbo’s Centennial Church, banners waving and music echoing, welcomed nearly 2000 people, including pastoral co-workers from every province (municipality, and autonomous region) as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan, and brothers and sisters from local and surrounding churches at a service of thanksgiving and celebration.

At 8:30 A.M. the service of thanksgiving to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the reopening of Centennial Church began with a solemn musical prelude. Officiating at the worship was Rev. Gao Jianwei of the Ningbo City Christian Council. The Chairperson of the Ningbo City TSPM, Rev. Dan Weixiang, offered the opening prayer. Following the choir anthem, “Here I am, Lord.” Rev. Gao Feng, Chair of the China Christian Council, preached an inspiring sermon on Psalm 90:1-2, and 17. He urged his listeners “to always give account of God’s grace, be of one heart and mind, so the gospel of the Lord may flourish and Christians be light and salt, glorifying God and benefitting the people.”

The thanksgiving celebration began with the Rev. Dan Weixiang’s warm and exuberant welcome to all participants, with many thanks to colleagues and co-workers. He said, “One spring day 30 years ago, the policy of reform and opening opened China to the world and restored order, enabling Centennial Church to open its doors to believers. Thirty years later, as we assemble here once more to witness and give thanks, there is not one heart that is not filled with thanksgiving and praise!” The chairperson of the Ningbo City CC/TSPM, Rev. Fan Aishi, spoke of the Centennial Church’s experiences over the past 30 years. Many older believers literally choked up as he recalled the service of reopening all those years ago. “Centennial Church had been closed for 13 long years before hymns of praise rose here once more; 200 believers came to that first service, surprised, shedding tears of joy, they gathered ... Centennial Church was the first church to reopen for Sunday worship.
following the Cultural Revolution, the first fruits of the restoration of church life, known throughout our nation..."

Mr. Lu Lixuan, the head of the Ningbo City Religious Affairs Bureau said that, Ningbo’s steady Christian support of Three-Self Patriotism for 30 years is due to the believers’ contributions for the good of the society. Centennial Church has become a role-model for all five religions for harmony and socio-economic progress, and a credit to the whole city.

The Rev. Deng Fucun, Chair of the Zhejiang Provincial TSPM, also expressed his deep gratitude, saying, “Since this Centennial Church took the first step forward, Chinese Christianity has now established over 50,000 churches. From my father-in-law – first pastor of Centennial Church – who was involved in planning the construction of the old church, to the rebuilding of this new church, Centennial Church exemplifies the happy changes and progress in China today.”

Elder Fu Xianwei, Chair of the national TSPM, said April 8 was a day of thanksgiving, because it represented a new chapter in Chinese Christianity. Centennial Church has witnessed the great and good events in Chinese Christianity over these 30 years: Chinese citizens regaining their freedom of religion, the changes and development brought about in the church by reform and opening. For 30 years Chinese Christianity’s development has kept pace with reform and opening, and with changes in people’s thinking. Today, we recall the journey of 30 years to encourage ourselves to strive for tomorrow. We all have to pluck up our spirits, unite and redouble our efforts that the Chinese church of our times can make an even more beautiful witness to the Lord.

In closing, Mr. Xing Yuesheng of the Zhejiang Provincial Religious Affairs Bureau said, “These 30 years have seen the continuous implementation of the policy of religious freedom, 30 years in which the lawful rights and interests of Christians have received continuous protection, 30 years in which Chinese religious believers’ hearts have been at ease. Over these 30 years, because Chinese Christians have been unwavering in following the of loving country and loving church, they have advanced the harmony between Christianity and society, between Christianity and the nation and within Christianity itself. Not just Centennial Church, but indeed all Zhejiang Christianity, should continue to run the church well according to the three-self principles and strive to build the harmonious society.”

During the celebratory gathering on the evening of April 7, nearly 1500 people filled the church, including: members of the Joint (Enlarged) Standing Committees of the CCC and TSPM, pastoral colleagues from Hong Kong and Taiwan, heads of related government departments and Christians from all around Ningbo. In an atmosphere of happiness and thanksgiving, all enjoyed the evening concert prepared by the Ningbo churches.

Many beautiful hymns were enjoyed and the crowd broke into wild applause when a group of young pastors in clerical vestments sang “Where he leads I will follow.” These young pastors had all been ordained during the past 30 years; they are the hope of the Ningbo church for the next 30 years.

Thereafter, the well-known Taiwan pastor, the Rev. Zhou Lianhua, opened his remarks with repeated “Congratulations,” preaching with humor, wisdom, and deep feeling, impressing everyone there.

Videos were included in the program, including footage of several Ningbo churches which had been among the earliest to reopen, and scenes of 30 persons from Centennial Church sharing their witness...
and expressing thanksgiving for the reopening of their church, as well as church leaders from America, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the interior of China, sending their blessings. Our beloved Bishop Ting had written a special dedication for this 30th anniversary, encouraging everyone to “spread the gospel of peace and build up a harmonious society!”

The evening of thanksgiving celebration reached its climax with the “Hallelujah” chorus sung by a choir composed of choirs from Ningbo churches. When the “Hallelujahs” rang out, everyone present got to their feet to join in offering sincere thanksgiving to the high glory of God! Hallelujah!

Thirty years ago, people were weeping with excitement in this church! Those long parted embraced, hymns long unsung were sung with increasing fervor! Today, 30 years later, we give thanks here together, and the tears flow! As we see our nation prospering, the gospel flourishing, and look for a better tomorrow, how can we not burst into song?

*Translated from Tian Feng No. 353 May 2009 by Robert Soong*

The New Testament in Ningbo dialect was first published in 1868. The portion shown is from Revelation.
Zhou Yu and Wang Congyou address the question of the church’s response to the financial crisis. As an integral part of the world economic system and one of its fastest growing economies, the effects of the crisis on China have been quite extensive. Christian entrepreneurs and business owners, believers in all walks of life, look to the church for support and reassurance. How can pastoral workers help them? Wang Congyou begins with a framework for understanding the situation.

The world has responded nervously to the current economic crisis because it not only influences the development of a country and its society, but can also influence the development of specific companies and industries and even the living standards of individual families. Countries are watching because, in this era of increasing economic globalization, they interact a great deal, thereby significantly affecting one another, be it directly or indirectly. Workers are paying careful attention to the economic crisis because the bankruptcy of an industry can directly affect people’s employment, income and daily standard of living, and indirectly the material and psychological pressures of their daily lives.

A ‘crisis’, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, is “A time of great danger, difficulty or uncertainty when problems must be solved or important decisions made.” These days, it is also understood by many as ‘The turning point at a time when things are going bad’. However, management expert Steven Fink believes that “A crisis is the lead-up to a decisive change, a period accompanied by instability or volatile conditions.” The Chinese phrase for ‘crisis’ is weiji, and is composed of two characters, wei, meaning ‘danger’ and ji, meaning ‘opportunity’. Together these point to two completely different possible outcomes of crisis: danger or catastrophe (wei), an untimely or inappropriate response to crisis; and opportunity (ji), a timely response to a crisis that is handled well.

Zhou Yu sees prayer as the first response

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1-4). According to the teaching of the Bible, we should ask God to guide market rescue plans and stabilize the economies of all nations. We should also pray for the continued steady development of China’s economy. We should ask God to grant wisdom to those in authority in governments, and enable them to perceive opportunities and emerge from this crisis; we should ask God to grant the same wisdom to company directors, so they can lead their companies out of difficulty; we should ask God to teach us and change our hearts through this economic crisis, that we no longer place our sense of security and trust on earthly wealth, but seek instead our true and sure foundation in Jesus Christ. The Church must particularly pray for those brothers and sisters who have been affected by this crisis, that their faith may be strengthened.

Wang outlines some very practical ways of encouraging believers to share their burden through prayer:

At prayer meetings, more prayers should be offered for the crisis: prayers for the whole world, for the country and for each person experiencing the...

...this is a great opportunity to witness to, as well as test, our faith. Only genuine love is an effective weapon against difficulty.
A prayer box could be made into which those in particular need of prayer could drop slips of paper describing their situation and feelings; church workers could be organized to offer up prayers especially for them, pray for them specifically in the prayer meeting, or set up a prayer chain asking for prayer from the whole church (if they agree). People can write down their pain, frustrations, worries and hopes, and even write out their own prayers to God, all of which could be put into the prayer box. Every day, church workers would lead brothers and sisters in reading these slips in detail and praying for them.

The Bible tells us that the word of our God can comfort us. The burden of such a crisis is indeed too heavy for some. The Church should spread the word of God to comfort those who are troubled and weakened by the economic crisis, and strengthen their faith.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33). “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). “Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labour” (Jer. 22:13). “The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none” (Deut. 28:12-14).

There are many messages in Scripture which may guide Christian lives, serving as the lamp before their footsteps.

Both consider pastoral care a form of crisis intervention:

Wang Congyou: Ministers should visit church members who are sick or whose families begin to experience discord or particularly great pressure – this is a regular part of pastoral care offered in a church. This is a sort of “crisis intervention,” bringing comfort to Christians. In times of economic crisis, increasing numbers of people will need such help, and regardless if it involves individuals or is addressed from the pulpit, both function as “crisis intervention” strategies because this can help those who are in difficulty turn to God, finding strength in faith to face their difficulties, and avoid incurring serious harm from the economic crisis as a result. In this sense, the function of crisis intervention within pastoral care is already integrally present in the church’s role. Such an understanding makes the responsibility of the church in the economic crisis even greater, further increasing the workload of pastoral care workers in the church.

Zhou Yu: Unemployment weighs heavily on its victims, subjecting them to many negative thoughts and emotions. When a person is under the constant pressure of being made redundant, a sense of security will be lost, and the person will worry about making ends meet. Hence, clergy and counselling professionals should be most attentive and sympathetic to brothers and sisters who are unemployed and in debt. Those who are unemployed easily lose their sense of self-worth, thinking they are good for nothing, and becoming more and more depressed. Pastoral care and professional counselling should remind them that they are not alone, that many are experiencing similar circumstances, and that opportunities will surely come their way. There is no need to panic; God walks with us; although we may not know what will happen tomorrow, God is the Lord of the future. Pastoral counselling may also offer guidance to the family members of the unemployed; they should rally around the unemployed in difficult times to give them support. It is better if the whole family can face troubles together and pray together. “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

Wang feels pastors should help believers understand the nature of the crisis – both danger and opportunity – in order to deal with it. It is not so much the crisis itself that is to be feared, but its indirect psychological effect on people. Understanding can bring hope as they face the issue head-on, for they are then somewhat mentally prepared for the ensuing psychological pressure, and build up their courage to face things. Through pastoral care, we can help believers understand the crisis as objectively as possible. City churches with access to resources can invite experts or Christians working in relevant fields
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

In times of crisis, in all times, Christians should love one another.

Jesus said, “By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn. 13:35). The more intense the economic difficulty, the more Christians should experience the love that comes from unity. The greater the degree of economic difficulty, the more brilliantly should Christ’s love shine. For if you give a small child a cup of cool water to drink, it is like giving it to the Lord. This is Jesus’ teaching for every Christian, as well as a responsibility which members of society are duty bound to accept.

In Philippians 4:11-12, Paul writes, “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” Paul relied on God in every matter; we also need to trust God and so overcome difficulty, moving towards towards an even better future.

The Church must care for and help each other, encouraging those who are in good economic standing to help out those who are unemployed. “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 Jn. 3:18).

Both authors recommend lecture series to deepen people’s understanding of the crisis, to learn ways of dealing with the problems it has created, to improve their skills for future job-searches. Pastoral visits should be increased and help for those in need, in and outside the church, should be given. People should be encouraged to live more frugally and to help others more. Wang identifies an area of concern that is a direct result of the effects of the crisis in China:

In some rural areas, the church should broaden the range of youth work, since many young people who had gone away to work have now returned. This gives young people a platform on which to serve by sharing their understanding of and experiences in the city with other church youth. It also helps them make the change from constant busyness to having plenty of spare time and nothing to do, thus avoiding the sense of loss and the confusion that might otherwise ensue. If pastors and elders lead well, potential problems can be resolved.

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Churches in the Pearl River Delta and the Global Financial Crisis

By Zhang Yuanlai

The Pearl River Delta is found where the Pearl River flows into the South China Sea. It is the major manufacturing center and most dynamic economic region in the south. The region covers nine prefectures of Guangdong province, including Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Zhuhai, as well as Hong Kong and Macau. The eastern part of the PDR is the most economically developed (as well as the most polluted) and has seen a large influx of foreign investment. The western part has relied on local investment and is so far less economically developed.

The financial unrest presently engulfing the whole world has impacted the Chinese economy in many ways. It has had a particularly significant effect on the economy of the Pearl Delta, which is comprised mainly of the manufacturing, trade and service industries. So how have churches in the Pearl Delta responded to the financial instability?

The Church in the Pearl River Delta

The Pearl River Delta and the Yangtze River Delta are China’s two most famous economic regions. The Pearl Delta has been at the forefront of China’s reforms, and was also where Protestantism first entered China. With urbanization and the influx of workers, Guangdong has become China’s most populous province. Its permanent population is almost 100 million, of which approximately 220,000 are Protestants. There are 720 churches and a theological seminary.

More than half of Guangdong’s Protestants are located in the Chaoyang, Shantou area, in the east of the province. Churches in these areas have a long historical tradition, and Protestantism has been adopted by many families as their traditional religion. The Sunday school and music ministries of these churches have had considerable success, and have brought up a generation of young Christians in their religious traditions. Together with the evangelists trained up and sent out throughout the province by churches in Chaoyang and Shantou, they have had a significant impact on churches in the Pearl Delta.

The dynamic economic development of the Pearl Delta has had an impact on church development as well. In cities such as Shenzhen, the proportion of Protestants is quite high, but the development of churches outside the economic region is sluggish by comparison. There is often a direct correlation between an area’s economic development and church growth. This said, a stagnant church structure may encourage additional believers to meet in small groups rather than going to larger churches to worship, such as is the case in some industrial cities in the eastern portion of the Pearl Delta.

There is also a clear division between urban and rural churches, with urban churches thriving and rural churches struggling. While churches in the Pearl Delta have generally been experiencing rejuvenation, churches in rural areas have begun to wither. As more and more of the rural population - including Protestants - have moved to the cities to make a living, urban churches have experienced unprecedented growth. Between 2000 and 2008, for example, churches in Guangzhou maintained an annual growth rate of approximately 10%. With the mass migration of Protestants from rural areas to the cities, however, financial contributions to rural churches have decreased and many preachers in rural...
areas have had no choice but to move to the city for work themselves, causing rural churches to wither.

The revival of churches in the Pearl Delta began with the influx of workers and this has led to a majority of Mandarin speakers in the urban churches. From the 1990s, more Protestants spoke Mandarin than the local Cantonese dialect. Churches in Guangzhou began trial Mandarin worship services in the 1990s; today most services are conducted in Mandarin, and in developing cities such as Shenzhen there is next to no worship in Cantonese. Believers in urban areas of the Pearl Delta are mainly from other parts of the country. In Guangzhou, for example, approximately 20,000 people have been baptized since 2000 and 2005, 8242 people were baptised, of whom 15.63% were native residents or held household registration (hukou) in Guangzhou city; while 84.37% were from places other than Guangzhou. This proportion is even higher in developing cities in the region such as Shenzhen and Dongwan.

There is a gender imbalance in the Pearl Delta churches. Of the 8242 people baptized in Guangzhou between 2000 and 2005, 2055 (24.96%) were male and 6187 (75.04%) were female – a ratio of 1:3. Many new Christians are from non-Christian backgrounds.

The churches around Chaozhou, Shantou and Xuwen county are over one hundred years old. They have retained some of the customs of their former denominations, thereby creating their own distinctive church cultures. The first hymn in worship services in the Chaozhou and Shantou region, for example, is always chosen from the first few songs in the New Hymnal, and must be sung with great solemnity. The style of preaching there is also quite traditional, and in some places robes which demarcate the status of the preacher have been introduced in recent years. Because there are so many new churches in the north, churches there are less influenced by family traditions, and are more spontaneous and flexible.

Churches have set up Sunday School ministries in 100 of Guangdong’s 120 or so counties. There are usually two or more congregations in Pearl Delta churches. Churches in northern Guangdong place a strong emphasis on preaching. Sermons in the north are more passionate, emotionally powerful, and longer than in the Pearl Delta (45-60 minutes versus 30-45 minutes), but the congregations are not growing.

Some Protestants hope to secure career success through their reverence for Christ, and are not particularly enthusiastic about traditional Protestant doctrine. Prosperity theology has had an undeniable influence on both clergy and ordinary believers through media like CDs, DVDs, the internet and training sessions. The combination of prosperity doctrine and charismatic theology has given rise to something akin to fast-food culture in which believers no longer turn to the Bible to seek truth, but to seek the laws of and strength for success. They ask not whether something is right, but whether it works! For these Protestants absolute truth has lost its authority, while the utility of their faith grows increasingly important with each passing day.

Many public figures in the Guangdong church migrated to Hong Kong and Macau around 1949 for cultural, geographical and historical reasons. Hong Kong and Macau, like Guangdong, are also Cantonese-speaking. For these reasons, churches in the Pearl Delta have been influenced more by churches in Hong Kong and Macau than by mainstream churches inland. Churches in the Pearl Delta generally have more contact with churches in Hong Kong and Macau than with other churches in the mainland, and the customs and traditions of
these now Special Administrative Regions (SARs) have had a greater influence. Churches in the Pearl Delta cooperate and collaborate with churches in Hong Kong and Macau more frequently than with other churches in the mainland. Some Pearl Delta churches take on trainee students from seminaries in Hong Kong and Macau each year, and churches from Hong Kong and Macau often hold retreats in churches in the Pearl Delta region. It is often the case that when some churches hold large celebrations, distinguished figures from churches in Hong Kong and Macau attend, but there are no representatives from mainland churches. This illustrates the close relationship that churches in the Pearl Delta share with those in Hong Kong and Macau.

**Church Management**

Churches in the Pearl Delta generally adopt one of two structural frameworks. The first is influenced by congregationalism, and has at its core a Church Management Group (usually a Church Council, Committee of Elders and Deacons or Church Management Team). Under this model the finances, staff and administration of each church are managed directly by its own organization, and the CCC/TSPM has relatively little influence. The second is an episcopal model, which is compatible with a system of elders. The local CC/TSPM has greater authority and unified management of staff, finances and even administration of its member churches. In general, the former is more dynamic, democratic and lively, while the latter has a clear system of management and is conducive to the pooling of resources. Each has its own strengths, weaknesses and historical background. Compared to the rapid development of the Pearl Delta’s culture and economy, church structures remain quite weak, to the extent that in many places they have impaired church growth.

**Composition of the clergy**

Another structural issue facing some churches in the Pearl Delta is mismanagement of clerical orders – specifically, indiscriminate granting of clerical orders and the secularization of ordination. The former is manifest in the capricious nature of ordination – people who are not necessarily capable of fulfilling pastoral responsibilities have been ordained to pastoral positions. If these people have been true pioneers in the church they often have a strong spiritual experience and cohesive force, but some “church despots” have come to effectively have a hold on power. The secularization of ordination has come about mainly through churches attaching mystery, privilege and material gain to clerical positions such as pastor. Clerical positions are part of the most important thing in the churches’ organizational system – ministry – but they are often treated as jobs by churches whose social consciousness is guided by economics. Pastoral positions become ranked “offices” which determine one’s status and treatment in church work. Many clergy who are seminary graduates, possess real pastoral abilities, are popular with church members, and have worked in the church full-time for many years have been unable to be ordained into ministry as pastors. Secularization in the ordination of clergy has become one of the largest obstacles to standardizing the administration and institution-building of quite a number of churches in the Pearl Delta.

**Effects of the Financial Crisis**

The church in the Pearl Delta is comprised mainly of Protestants from other parts of the country, many of whom have become unemployed in the financial crisis. Those who have kept their jobs may need to return to their hometowns earlier than expected and may not be able to return to their current factories in the New Year. This will undoubtedly have an impact on churches in the area.

The Matthew Effect (i.e., the rich become richer and the poor poorer; see Matthew 25:29) and the Butterfly Effect have already emerged in the Pearl Delta churches during the financial crisis. In Guangzhou for example, some churches’ rates of growth in 2008 surpassed those of the previous year. This momentum towards growth may continue in churches that are well-tended by pastoral staff. If there is another wave of young and middle-aged believers, financial contributions to the church will increase accordingly, and a Matthew Effect will emerge. Churches that are complacent and conservative will experience a reduction in growth and income, creating a butterfly effect whereby the economic crisis impacts church growth.
The Church’s Role

Some of the Protestant proprietors of small enterprises with whom I have had contact have halted production and are close to bankruptcy, particularly in the case of small and middle-sized processing and sub-manufacturing enterprises. Accordingly, there has been a sharp increase in requests for prayer about financial problems and enquiries about lawyers. I recently visited one factory owned by a Protestant which sub-manufactures shoes and employs over 200 workers, and another which processes clothing for export. They halted production six months ago, and are waiting for things to pick up. Some Protestants who have invested in real estate have gone bankrupt, and Protestants in the advertising industry and foreign trade have reported to me that business was dismal in the second half of 2008. Although church contacts provided them with resources for consultation and social support and their faith gave them comfort and at times even inspired their business, many small and middle-sized Protestant enterprises do feel under pressure due to the grim state of business.

Our churches have always been reliant on believers’ contributions. As their members face the financial crisis, churches should call on their strengths and pool their resources in order to provide additional religious and ethical guidance and business resources. They could provide practical and relevant business fellowship and offer lectures, restoring confidence and providing a platform for Protestants to interact.

More Protestants to face problems at work and at home

In caring for my church, I have become accustomed to summing up believers’ enquiries and identifying their common threads. Around the turn of the millennium when I was in cities in the north, believers were mainly seeking help with job-hunting and financial issues. A large number of believers were pouring into the cities at the time, and finding work had become a major problem. Prior to 2007, domestic issues were more common. Traditional morals and ethics were under assault as issues such as living apart gave rise to a large number of marital problems. I estimate that between 2004 and 2006 over 80% of Protestants’ enquiries were related to domestic and marital issues.

In 2007 inflation worsened, and there were already hints of the financial crisis to come. There was a dramatic increase in the number of enquiries concerning financial issues, such that there were as many enquiries about financial issues as about domestic issues. Now, there are more enquiries about financial issues than about marital issues.

Sometimes bankruptcy is followed by domestic crises. Not long ago a believer from northern China came up to me after a church service. He and his wife had made several million yuan from real estate investments, and had borrowed money to purchase multiple commercial housing apartments before the end of 2007. They had already lost everything in the financial crisis. After a prolonged period of disagreement, the couple had agreed to divorce but remained living together. Their child was very confused. Later the wife became a Christian and joined the church choir. The husband and wife were reconciled and began to rebuild their family amidst their hardship.

This anecdote is representative of the issues facing churches in the Pearl Delta. As preachers in these times we must care for believers in many different ways, perhaps even sounding an early warning. In 2007 we told Christians to be vigilant against greed and beware the risk of speculating in real estate and stocks. At the present time we must help them to build up their faith. Churches that are able could host talks on economics that are based on Christian ethics.

What can the churches do?: Suggestions

Pearl Delta churches have generally already established quite sound fellowships in order to meet the needs of churches under the special economic and cultural conditions they face. Of course, church leadership is greatly influenced by the vision, habits and personality of the local CC/TSPM. Individual cases differ, but on the whole, Pearl Delta churches still have much room for improvement. In order to lead churches in participating in the building of a harmonious society and adapting to socialist society, perhaps we can exert greater effort when responding to the financial crisis, for example:
a. Churches in urban areas can follow the lead of their CC/TSPM organizations and form Christian fellowships in business circles. They could harness the collective strength of Christians in business circles to face individual crises together, and seek to use Christian ethics to encourage an economic order that accords with the Bible and is conducive to the pooling of resources among Christian entrepreneurs. They should give full play to believers’ economic capabilities, and comfort and guide business professionals and employers in Christian ethics.

b. Churches could reduce unnecessary expenditure and set up funds dedicated for charity and emergency assistance. They could set up mechanisms for urban churches to aid rural churches and large churches to aid small. They could also engage in works of charity for the public good, and help those churches in need, preachers who are unable to support themselves, and members who have met with exceptional circumstances. The living expenses of some pastors in rural areas could be funded by the CCC/TSPM.

In conclusion, the Pearl River Delta churches have many strengths. The financial crisis has presented the church with an opportunity for reflection, and its positives will outweigh the negatives. At the same time, located as it is between tradition and modernity, sacred and profane, the mainland and abroad, the church in the Pearl Delta still has a long way to go. Therefore, we must adopt a far-reaching vision openly based on the Bible and reformed principles. We must engage in theological reflection with a view to adapting to national conditions, traditions and the demands of the times. From there, we can seek a way forward that is both distinctively Chinese and suited to the church’s development.

Translated from Tian Feng No. 350 February 2009 by Emily Clare Dunne

Fuyin Church, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu

Christianity came to Zhenjiang in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Marco Polo noted in his Travels that there were six churches in the city. Fuyin Church is 119 years old, founded by missionaries of the U.S. Methodist Episcopal Church in 1889. The church reopened in 1981, following the Cultural Revolution era, and now has a pastoral staff of five, 3000 members and three Sunday services. The church has outgrown its historic building and a new church will be built on an 18 mu site elsewhere in the city.
Mutual Aid among Churches

In the March 2009 issue of Tian Feng, two authors, Long Shangyong and Wang Lei, shared their views on what mutual aid among churches means and what effect it could have in alleviating the financial crisis many congregations face as well as helping to balance the development of churches in different parts of the country. The following article draws on both authors’ views.

Mutual Aid in the Church: Glorifying God to the Good of the People

Outside of the exceptional circumstances of churches in the disaster areas, the current state of the church in China is this: between the eastern and western parts of the country, between churches along the seacoast and those in the interior, between those in urban areas and those in the countryside, churches are developing at a disproportionate rate and experiencing an immense wealth gap. While the churches in the affluent east and coastlands grow grander and larger, the cracked earthen walls of many churches in the west crumble away. As an entrepreneurial Christian makes a donation of several hundreds of thousands of yuan, another brother or sister can only sell a single egg and offer up a small pittance. While an urban church can frequently receive donations of tens or even hundreds of thousands of yuan, the yearly income of a rural church is still insufficient to support a monthly salary of 300 yuan for its evangelist.

Due to the constraints and influence of geography, economic conditions, the human environment, and other factors, churches across our country have developed unevenly. Even for churches in the same district, city or county, the tendency, due to a variety of factors, is toward uneven development. For example, one church may have a number of talented people to draw on while another suffers a shortage of capable persons; in some churches the gospel flourishes, while in others faith is weak; one church may have a solid financial position, while another is in poor circumstances. How, then, do we overcome such a problem and realize the common growth and development of the church? Mutual aid and cooperation are important paths to solving the problems of development in the church. The church needs to develop a variety of mutual aid models, because it is through mutual aid that the churches will engage and complement one another, thereby achieving a common progress.

Long Shangyong continues with the biblical and historical background of churches coming to each other’s aid, and offers a story from his own experience.

Mutual aid among churches began with the very establishment of the Church. The meaning of the word “church” in Greek is “a group of people called out by God.” Being a group of people, they depended upon one another and helped one another, supporting each other spiritually; encouraging each other in spirit; assisting each other materially and caring for each other in daily life.

Mutual aid among churches is the lesson of the Scriptures. Jesus once said to the disciples shortly after they were called, “you must love one another; as I have loved you so you must love one another; for if you love one another then all men will know you are my disciples” (Jn. 13:34-35). Paul also told the church, “look not to your own interests, but to those of others also” (Phil. 2:4). Again he says, “you must bear one another’s burdens, and by doing so you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). John says, “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” (1 Jn. 3:17-18). After considering these classic teachings, our hearts certainly cannot be at peace if we fail to provide for the needs of others.

Mutual aid among churches is a tangible, concrete action. Jesus not only taught his disciples in words, but he also gave his life in love for them and for all humankind. In addition to his letters to the churches to care for one another and to help one another, Paul would never forget to collect an offering for the needy saints in Jerusalem while on his missionary journeys. In whatever time or place, mutual aid was always given, between churches or between believers.
within a church. We can even understand the church from the perspective of aiding one another, because as stated before, the very meaning of the word “church” is mutual aid. When a helpless person finds a church, they have found a the source and channel for help. In observing the life of a church, we can see that a flourishing church has a strong inner spirit of mutual service and that its appeal to those outside is also very strong.

Mutual aid within the church is a primary reason for the success of the Gospel. The 18th century historian Edward Gibbon greatly disdained Christianity, yet in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, when summarizing the five reasons why the early church flourished, one he particularly stressed was the spirit of service within the church. The book records that believers in the early church were not separated by social status, education, or material wealth, but treated each other honestly and equally. Whether near or far, whether in peace or strife, the early churches always looked after one another and were concerned for each other. Some brothers and sisters, after coming to the faith, sold what they had and gave to the poor, took care of those suffering disaster. At the same time there were some believers who though poor themselves, would actually fast and save the extra food for the very needy. This spirit of self-sacrifice moved Caesar Didius Julian, who believed that the secret to Christianity’s success was this self-sacrificial love and that the downfall of the pagans of Rome stemmed from their disregard for others. He called those who believed in Christ the impious and unrighteous people, saying: “Those impious and unrighteous Galileans not only support their own poor, they actually support ours as well; our own poor get no help from us.” In order to support paganism, Julian went to the lengths of using the national reserve, doling out 30,000 tons of grain to his faithful high priest Azariah for the purpose of helping the poor.

One of the primary reasons I am a believer in Christ is due to personal experience of believers helping one another. I remember that during the latter part of the Cultural Revolution, people’s hearts were cold and detached and everyone felt insecure. Struggles among people had torn apart the landscape, and it was hard for people to care for one another. However, one afternoon, villagers were startled by weeping in the house of a family of believers. Several children followed the crying to find a crowd weeping around another child that had just died of sickness. There were old and young, men and women, all crying. While some washed the child’s body, others dressed the child, and still others comforted the parents and family. On one hand I did not understand what I saw, for these people were the neighbors of the grieving family, not kin, yet they were grieving so very much. On the other hand, I was deeply moved by the type of friendship they expressed. I felt a sense of urgency— I wanted to become a member of this Christian group and grieve with them. When we become Christians, there are times we suffer together and brothers and sisters cry together. Each time we “mourn with those who mourn” we will feel the love of our fellowship grow deeper. Now consider that mourning together is actually helping one another. Helping one another is not necessarily some grand event, rather it need only be a small matter—it need only be a small outpouring of our affections.

Following the May 12th earthquake, the gospel flourished across the board in churches of the major disaster area in Sichuan, with some congregations growing ten-fold. I visited churches in the disaster area countless times asking believers for the cause of the surge, and all would answer in the exact same way: amidst the disaster, the church partnered with
all those affected, not only caring for the brothers and sisters who regularly attended church, but also pouring their hearts and souls into helping those around them who had yet to believe. On the one hand the church encouraged them to take a positive attitude in facing the great loss wrought by the catastrophe, and on the other, they shared the aid given to churches, not only with their own believers, but also with those of their neighbors who were not yet believers. Before aid had even arrived in the disaster area, some brothers and sisters in the church were willing to starve themselves in order to give their food to unbelieving neighbors, who were immensely moved by their actions. Many people received aid from the church during the disaster and experienced the love of Christ so much so that very shortly after they received Christ as their savior.

Mutual aid among churches encourages people. This devastating earthquake made the Sichuan church see a glorious God full of grace and truth. The aid the disaster area received from churches around the country reached 105 million yuan. The churches in the disaster area received the support of the nation’s and even the world’s churches in a way unprecedented in the past 50 years of the history of the Sichuan church. A leader of the State Administration of Religious Affairs in the affected area made a statement that greatly moved me, saying: “Through this disaster I have been able to see that Christians are not like the rest. Christians from all over the world came together offering compassion and facing the disaster together with the afflicted!”

Concrete Action toward Mutual Aid Among Churches

The second meeting of the Joint Standing Committee of the Eighth Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) and the Sixth China Christian Council convened on December 9th 2008 in Shanghai to plan the work for 2009. A key focus of the meeting was raising money for a mutual aid fund that would provide needed assistance to churches in impoverished areas. Such a fund would provide financial relief for evangelists in churches located in poor areas and allow the normal work of the church to develop there. That the CCC/TSPM has made addressing the needs of churches in poor areas its starting point, and moreover, has begun to do something about it, is truly inspiring.

Wang Lei proposes practical ways individual churches or churches throughout a city or region might begin to help one another.

1) The one-way method. Here Church A’s resources are relatively plentiful and Church B’s are lacking, so Church A simply helps Church B. Church B receives the aid from Church A, but with no means to compensate, they can only express gratitude and thanks. However in a strict sense a one-way model of mutual aid doesn’t exist, because even if Church B cannot help Church A in terms of people or materials, they can at least intercede through prayer for Church A.

2) The complementary method. Each church is strong in some areas and weak in others, so they can engage in a complementary exchange. For instance, Church A, whose staff resources are abundant, can help Church B by providing capable people. Likewise Church B, which has rich financial resources, can provide material help to Church A.

3) The cooperative method. When a church encounters extreme difficulty or crisis, surrounding churches come together to help the struggling church to face the crisis and weather its difficulties. Often one of these three methods may be used; at times, it is necessary to apply several at once.

Such activities can be initiated informally, when one church finds itself in a predicament and another church comes to its aid. Or two or more churches might come to a common understanding of what is necessary through a more formal type of consultation, identifying models or rules to be followed to carry out aid arrangements. Another method would be to create a mutual aid system under the local Christian Council and Three-Self organization, creating mutual aid standards for the orderly development of mutual aid activities.

Sharing of personnel and financial resources are areas that lend themselves to these forms of mutual aid. Beyond the pastoral staff of a church, there may be many other skilled persons in the congregation...
who would be willing to share their gifts with other congregations.

Finances are of course an area where great disparity may be present among churches in different areas. Wang Lei notes that:

Typically churches in the southern part of the country will do better than their counterparts in the north, the coastlands will have greater success (financially) more than the inland churches, and the urban churches will be stronger than the rural ones. Pushing the church to engage in mutual aid in regard to finances would enable the church to achieve relatively even development, and more importantly, reduce the obstacles the church faces in spreading the Gospel. Currently many churches in inland parts of the country are even unable to build church buildings and believers lack an appropriate place for worship. Although some churches struggle through and build a church, they are left without funds to pay a preacher or launch needed ministries. At the same time we have seen some churches whose financial situation is fantastic, their church buildings magnificent with splendid architecture and gorgeous interior design, in addition to having a plentiful supply of evangelists. We cannot turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to such inconsistencies within the church; rather we should improve and change this situation through mutual aid. John the Baptist taught the people, saying: “…he who has one tunic should share with he who has none, and he with food should do the same” (Luke 3:11). These words are precisely applicable to the church today.

The church is the temple of God, the body of Christ, and the family of all believers. If it is said that the body of Christ is the unified body of believers, then each church is a limb in the body of Christ. “God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.” (1 Cor. 12:24-5,) Every church has the duty to watch over the churches around it, just as each church has the right to receive the care and help of other churches. We are not permitted to sit and watch as fellow churches face difficulties, but we should strive with all that is within us to help. In the same way, when our churches face hard times we need not refuse neighboring churches that come to care for and help us, for “if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” (1 Cor. 12:26) When the church is willing to walk hand-in-hand in Christ, then we will be able to be stronger, more complete, and more able to comprehensively finish that commission which was entrusted us by Christ for our new generation.

Both articles translated from Tian Feng No. 351 March 2009 by Derrek Arce

Chongyi Church traces its history to the arrival in the area of the China Inland Mission in 1866, and retains the name of a large church built in Hangzhou over a hundred years ago. The present church is the largest church in China, able to accommodate over 5000 worshippers. Chongyi is a very active, urban church, with a youth fellowship of one thousand members. See ANS March 2009, p.15 for more on the youth fellowship.
Award to Suzhou Church Design at Recent Seventh Biennial International Interior Design Awards in Beijing

At the seventh Biennial International Interior Design Awards Exhibition in Beijing, the design for the interiors of Dushu Lake Christian Church, currently under construction in the Suzhou Higher Education District, won a gold award for interior design. The church complex will cover an area of about 5600 square meters located on the lake shore. The exterior will be of typical Gothic design in red-brick. Sunday School, meeting and reception rooms and offices, as well as two restaurants, one Chinese and one Western, will be located in an adjacent building.

In addition to the main narthex seating 1000, another chapel will accommodate 256 worshippers. There will also be three smaller chapels for international fellowships of foreign Christians living and working in the Suzhou-Shanghai area: the English-language Suzhou International Fellowship (SIF) of 600 members, a Korean fellowship and a Japanese Fellowship.

CCC/TSPM Holds Training Course for Secretaries General and General Secretaries in Provincial Level Christian Councils and Three-Self Organizations

From April 20-24, 2009, the national CCC/TSPM held a training course in Shanghai for all secretaries general and general secretaries at provincial-level* Christian Councils and Three-Self Organizations. Forty-two persons from 29 provinces, autonomous regions and special municipalities took part. Sessions were led by the Rev. Gao Feng, President of the China Christian Council, and four specially invited speakers.

Rev. Gao stressed that strengthening the CCC/TSPM organization meant raising the calibre of its clergy and pastoral co-workers. Everyone involved in the organizations must make their study a model for the two bodies; pastoral workers must develop in faith, politics and culture, as well as in words, actions and moral character;
and actual work and real service must be employed in strengthening the group cohesiveness and impact of Christian Councils and Three-Self Organizations across the country.

One of the specially invited instructors was a corporate trainer, a first for the CCC/TSPM. He spoke on “servant leadership,” noting that a good leader does not manage through power but rather through character; a good leader knows him or herself as well as his/her co-workers; a good leader is one who accepts him/herself while also respecting and accepting co-workers; and a good leader is one who can energize the whole team through the spirit of love.

Mr. Chen Zongrong, secretary of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) Bureau of Political Science and Law, Mr. Liu Jinguang, deputy secretary of SARA’s Bureau of Foreign Affairs, and Ms. Wang Xiuling, head of the Christianity Section were also invited to lead sessions. They offered a variety of perspectives that expanded participants’ horizons and strengthened their understanding of the rule of law.

Small group Bible studies preceded each day’s events, focusing the participants’ attention on God’s word as they began.

Participants felt that the sessions were timely and practical, offering up-to-date, targeted training as well as the opportunity for personal renewal.

* Provincial level includes Autonomous Regions and Special Municipalities

“Freedom of Religious Belief” Part of China’s Human Rights Action Plan

On April 13, 2009 the State Council Information Office announced the National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2009-2010), a 22,000 character document in six sections dealing with the protection of economic, cultural and social rights, civil and political rights, and the rights of ethnic minorities, women, children, the elderly and the disabled. China also pledged to “earnestly implement international obligations under human rights treaties, promote and actively participate in the field of international human rights exchanges and cooperation.”

Freedom of religious belief is included in Section II, “Guarantee of Civil and Political Rights”:

(4) Freedom of religious belief

China fully implements the policy of freedom of religious belief, and, in accordance with the law, manages religious affairs and protects citizens’ freedom of religious belief.

- The state, in accordance with the law, protects normal religious activities, as well as the lawful rights and interests of religious bodies, venues of religious activities and religious believers.

- The state implements the Regulations on Religious Affairs, improves relevant auxiliary regulations and enacts relevant local laws and regulations to guarantee freedom of religious belief of citizens.
- The state protects its citizens from being compelled to believe in or not believe in any religion, and from any discrimination on the grounds of religious belief, and guarantees the rights and interests of religious believers.

- The state respects ethnic minorities’ religious beliefs, and protects their religious cultural heritage. It continues to make necessary investments in the maintenance and reconstruction of temples, mosques and other religious facilities of important historical and cultural value in ethnic-minority areas.

- The state gives full play to the positive role of religious circles in the promotion of social harmony and socio-economic development. It also encourages and supports religious circles in launching social welfare programs, exploring methods and channels for religions to better serve society and promote the people’s well-being.

The action plan further states that “In 2009 and 2010, the state will take proactive and effective measures to offset the negative impacts of international financial crisis, and ensure the economic, social and cultural rights of all members of society. ... China is a developing country with a population of 1.3 billion, low per-capita share of resources, underdeveloped productivity and unbalanced economic and cultural development. Having just entered the stage of building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way and accelerating socialist modernization, China is faced with the arduous tasks of reform, development and stabilization. Due to the influences and limitations of nature, history, culture, economic and social development level, and other factors, China still confronts many challenges and has a long road ahead in its efforts to improve its human rights situation.”

Full English text of the Action Plan is available online:

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