September 2009, Volume 23, 7-9

In this issue:

Editorial 2
The Church and Old & New Media 2
Christians and the Internet 3
Pastoral Care in the Internet Age 6
Nurturing a Culture of Reading in the Church 9
Elderly Believers Learn to Read 11

Help for the Christian Life
Considering Divorce Already? 12
Unemployed at 50 13

30 Years of Reform and Opening
God Has Done Something Great 14

News
Churches Mark 60th Anniversary of PRC 18
CCC President Visits Churches in Guangxi 18
Progress on Social Security for Clergy 20

Website:
www.amitynewsservice.org

CCC President Rev. Gao Feng speaks to Guangxi CCC/TSPM staff.
Dear Reader,

We are living in the information age; the age of the Internet and the new media. While some Christians and churches in China view these virtual resources with skepticism, others embrace their possibilities.

A number of churches, especially in urban areas, have impressive websites (see, for example, those of Beijing Chaoyang Church (chaoyangtang.org) and the Kunshan (Jiangsu) Church (kunshanjidujiaotang.com), which also showcases its Canaan Painting and Calligraphy Institute. The national CCC/TSPM has its own website (ccctspm.org) where users can read the latest news, peruse church documents, search Bible verses, listen to sacred music, read sermons and improve their biblical knowledge. Introductions to Christian belief and to the work of the CCC/TSPM are available, as well as reference books, prayers and devotional readings. The site also has an online bookstore offering Bibles, commentaries, hymnals, and devotional books as well as a variety of other titles, DVDs, children’s books and DVDs, music CDs, etc. Windows users can download the Bible in several versions: the commonly used 1919 Mandarin version known as the Hehe ben, Today’s Chinese, and in English, the Good News Bible and the NRSV. A recent edition of the Chinese Bible includes a CD-ROM; a “talking” Bible is also available. In its print version, the church magazine Tian Feng, includes excerpts from believers’ blogs.

Many urban churches use large screens during worship to project hymn lyrics—a reflection of the globalization of an evangelical worship experience. In spite of the large numbers of worshippers present on Sunday mornings, often filling more than one floor, contact is made with newcomers and non-Christians. At the Temple Lane Church in Suzhou, small booklets introducing the Christian faith are handed out.

In this issue Zhang Yuanlai explores the relationship between the Internet and evangelization, urging churches to make more and better use of online resources. Wu Bing’s thoughtful reflection on pastoral care also extols the positive role these resources can have but calls the Internet a challenge as well as an opportunity: online and virtual communities cannot replace the real experience of God’s grace and Christian fellowship.

The current estimate of the number of Chinese Internet users is over 300 million; even so, many Chinese have no access to either computers or the Internet. For them, the “old” media is still of vital importance. “Elderly Believers Learn to Read” describes a church literacy class organized for illiterate Christians who have difficulty with Bible study. In another article, Bao Zhimin sees a need for more reading in the church and urges pastoral workers to foster the habit of reading good books among their congregations. Christians’ needs and problems are further addressed in a regular Tian Feng column, responding to difficult questions from a Chinese Christian perspective. Two responses, one on divorce and one on unemployment are included in this issue.

Finally, we have the story of how a meeting point grew and built its own church building, through a long process of moving from one location to another. The details of help and financial assistance rendered by both church and government structures are of particular interest.

As always, I am very grateful to our volunteer translators: Emily Dunne, Cinde Lee, Suzanne Rowe, Kurt Selles, and Robert Soong.

Readers’ comments are encouraged and welcomed. Thanks to Tian Feng and Beate Engelen for photos used in this issue.

Janice Wickeri
Christians and the Internet

The "e-age" or the "Internet era" has brought revolutionary changes to people’s lifestyles, study and work. How should Christians of this day and age deal with the ubiquitous Internet? Is it a friend or a foe? Is it a fad or a tool? A serene pasture or a noisy battlefield? How should the church change its way of thinking and adapt to the demands of the Internet era in an age of globalization, hastened by the advent of that same Internet? Here, Zhang Yuanlai attempts to demonstrate that the Internet and the spread of the gospel are interrelated.

The Internet: a tool for church workers
The Internet has already impacted every area of life in contemporary society. Closer inspection reveals three areas of strong influence: it has become the primary means of consultation and communication; it is considered necessary for people’s daily lives, and it has become a key component of social activities.

In his article, “Shifting on its Pivot,” Michael Elliott says that the basis of globalization is the increasing capacities of computers and the Internet; concepts of nationality have been undermined in ways which traditional theories of international relations cannot explain. Just a few years ago, print and television media were the primary channels of information dissemination, but now, in more and more areas, the Internet is replacing traditional media and has become the most important way of communicating news. Print and television media are slowly losing importance, including the Christian Science Monitor, which recently announced that, like many other publications, it was abandoning its print edition for an online presence. Amazon.com, the world’s biggest publisher, also concentrates its primary publishing efforts online. And, as many traditional Christian printing and publishing organizations note with alarm the shrinking of their industry, they too are shifting their focus to online publishing.

In recent years, we have seen virtual networks quickly become a tool for the life and management of society. Along with the spread of the Internet, new social structures and business models have quickly appeared and become a mainstream trend. Online sales, shopping and advertising comprise these new business models. Use of the Internet has reduced business costs, increased the speed of service, streamlined business operations, increased product choice and reduced the physical space required for shops. In addition, the Internet has become a symbol of the virtual world, as indispensable in today’s society as water or electricity. Cutting access to the Internet creates as much hardship for consumers as cutting off electricity.

As we face the rapid spread of the Internet, we can say that the world seems to have been “Internet-ized” overnight! The church should adapt appropriately to this e-age.

The Internet and the spread of the gospel
The relationship between the church and the gospel is like that of a seed to the soil; in good soil, a seed will grow, and because of its growth, the ground will be made beautiful. The DNA of a seed does not change, but the same plant can adapt very differently to various environmental conditions including weather and soil, due both to its innate ability and to natural laws established by God. As for the seed of the gospel, its DNA (the true meaning of faith) never changes, but the unchanging gospel can adapt according to the soil of different cultures. This is necessary for the existence and development of the church. Paul expressed something similar: “I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some!” The gospel Paul preached never changed, but the means he used to spread the gospel, including the language and techniques employed, were always adapted for different cultural environments.

In Jesus’ day, the spread of the gospel took place...
mostly by word of mouth and letters written on parchment scrolls. In the 15th century the Bible was the first book printed by Europeans. Thanks to the most modern printing technology, the spread of European Christianity was further advanced. The first words transmitted from one shore of the Pacific to the other when the telegraph was invented were a verse of Scripture. Later, when publishing flourished and movies and television started to become popular, the latest technology was always put to use in preaching the gospel. In short, during the era in which Christianity had a significant impact on society’s values, the best of society often originated in the church; each new media presented a new path for the gospel and elicited an enthusiastic response from the church. This is one reason why Christianity has quickly spread to every part of the world. The church not only has doctrines of truth founded on truth and a system of ethics, but has employed the most advanced tools for dissemination of its principles and ethics, and sharing, management and governance among its membership.

We call this present age the information age or the Internet age. This is an age in which we can exchange information at high speed, an age in which we are on the point of moving from traditional media into the Internet age. In this age, social interaction is also shifting from what was traditionally face-to-face or by letter interactions into a digital era lying between the real and the virtual. One of the hallmarks of the information age is the use of Internet, which is very fast and breaches every type of obstacle. It has reduced the distances of time and space, pulling people into a virtual world, where we can float between the real and the virtual. In the information age, the voice of authority lies with those who grasp the opportunities afforded by the Internet.

We in the church must also grasp the technological opportunities of this great information revolution, and bring evangelization from traditional means of media into this “Internet-ized” age. Using both “real-time” and virtual effects, we must preach the message of the gospel on the Internet, building a real-world fellowship community that is a hallmark of Christianity, or an online, virtual, church.

Furthermore using the characteristic convenience of the Internet, we can better build up a community of interconnected saints and pastoral care, and thereby, bring people the solid truths of faith and fellowship in the midst of our increasingly virtual post-modern social life.

The Internet – land waiting to be planted

The Internet is like land that is ready for planting by today’s church. The church’s attitude to the Internet will, to a large degree, determine the future development of the church. In terms of the application of Internet technology in the church, or we might call it the church’s adaptation to the Internet, there remains a great deal of fine-tuning and specific work to be done. First, however, in this author’s humble opinion, the church must begin the task of adapting to the Internet era in three areas:

Liberate our thinking and accept new things

The application of network technology in evangelization and pastoral care does not augur a trend toward secularization in the church nor that it is simply going with the trend. Rather it is the embodiment of using “every type of wisdom” to spread the gospel. In the future, more forms of advanced technology will continue to appear; the church should grasp the opportunities offered by science and technology, and accept the reality—that the church exists in an age of rapid scientific and technological development—with an open mind.
The use of technology is a positive way to attract all types of talented people to the church

Among believers in the church, there are often many who are specialists in information technology, and who should be actively encouraged to implement Internet technology in the church.

Better late than never: we should do all we can to catch up, reclaiming the opportunities that have slipped by us in the online world

Speaking objectively, the Internet standard used in many city churches is already far behind that in the rest of society; our voice is limited to the church pulpit while the mainstream church is almost silent in the online world. There are over ten million believers but seldom do we produce our own high quality software programs... our current problem is not whether or not to accept the popularity of the Internet, rather it is how we will adapt to this society in which the Internet plays such a primary role. Better late than never - we have been marginalized in the past but let us not marginalize ourselves today!

What sets the Internet or information transformations apart from many short-lived fads in history is that the domination of the Internet is not simply a trend, but is rather a firm direction of social development, the start of an era. Although the Internet world contains many things to which we have not been accustomed, the fact remains that the Internet represents a progressive culture of social development and the crystallization of science and technology. The Internet is becoming the most important means of communication transmission and a key component of life and work. It is neither warranted nor reasonable for us as Christians to attempt to use the gospel as an excuse to reject a cultural advance. Looking at the issue from this perspective, for the church to choose to make the Internet a tool for its work of evangelization is merely one of the most appropriate responses to the Great Commission.

Better late than never - we have been marginalized in the past but let us not marginalize ourselves today!

Yet there is no denying that up to now, in this day when the Internet is already commonplace, many churches, especially mainstream churches, have not reacted with enough alacrity, have not adequately recognized that the Internet has an irreplaceable position in the development of the church. In certain places the church even passively boycotts the Internet.

Whether you like the Internet or not, whether or not you are used to it, you must adapt to it, for the Internet is the language of our time. The use of such language is the challenge that we must meet in order to spread the gospel and to build the church.

Translated from Tian Feng No. 356 August, 2009 by Suzanne Rowe

Bibles awaiting distribution in Lanzhou (Gansu). “Old” media is still sought after.
Pastoral Care in the Internet Age

By Wu Bing

Without a doubt, human life in the 21st century has been marked by its entry into the Internet age. In such an age in which one “net” can catch everything under the sun, the distance between people has shrunk. The Internet has facilitated more effective sharing of information and resources and has given the church additional space for sharing the gospel and pastoral care. However, the Internet has also brought a series of unexpected problems—a flood of vulgar and sexual content and the irresponsible dissemination of false information have caused some people to become caught up in the virtual world and isolated in the real world.

The Internet is both an opportunity and a challenge for the church’s ministry of pastoral care. It is safe to say that no church that takes on pastoral care today can ignore the reality of the Internet’s existence. A church that does not understand how to use the Internet is stuck in the mud and behind the times. Having served in pastoral care for many years and witnessed the advent and development of the Internet, I have formed some of my own thoughts on the relationship between the Internet and the church’s ministry of pastoral care.

The Internet: friend or foe?

Is the Internet a friend or foe to the church’s mission of pastoral care? I have found that even today, some pastoral staff and fellow Christians turn pale at the mention of the Internet. Many people simply dismiss it as a great scourge. Some preachers even admonish young people against using the Internet – I wonder which planet they are on!

By the same token, some church workers and Protestants cannot extricate themselves from the Internet and take everything that appears on it at face value without discriminating whether it is good or bad, or correct or mistaken. They take great delight in discussing the hot topics raging on the Internet and are blown about by online opinion, having lost their capacity for independent judgment. There are also many who copy Internet sources without thinking, to the extent that some preachers have lifted entire Sunday sermons from other preachers’ blogs verbatim.

In truth, the Internet is neither friend nor foe. I think that one of the defining features of the Internet is its usefulness as a tool for gathering information and sharing resources. The Internet is neither good nor bad in and of itself; its benefit or disadvantage lies in the use people make of it. The fictitious nature of online identity frequently brings out people’s weaknesses and sinful nature. Online, someone who is normally courteous and upstanding may become a mere brute, and a person who is honest and sincere in real life a sweet-talking playboy. We must therefore keep our eyes wide open in the online world, and be “shrewd as snakes, innocent as doves.” We must not lose our spiritual wisdom or capacity for independent judgment, but wield this tool with caution and care. In particular, we must learn self-restraint, so that neither our mouse nor our eyes wander where they should not.

In addition to this, we must also remember that God created everything it his own time and it was good; therefore, we must not deny the positive effects of the Internet. In truth, it is very difficult for church workers in today’s society to be effective if they cannot use the Internet. Online fellowship, interaction and sharing can never replace evangelism, church services and fellowship in the real world.

The Internet cannot take the place of reality; online fellowship, interaction and sharing can never replace evangelism, church services and fellowship in the real world.
turn their backs on the Internet. On the net, we can find a large volume of pastoral and preaching materials, interact and share with other pastoral staff, and overcome restrictions in time and space to carry out our pastoral ministry. If we are proficient at using the Internet, it can be our best friend.

The Internet: battlefield or pastoral field?
The world of the Internet is a virtual one, but in this virtual world, there exist all the kinds of things that are in the real world. Different religions, philosophies, values and ideologies can be spread and find acceptance online. Nothing, since Christ ascended to heaven, has been able to transmit information to all corners of the world as quickly as the Internet. This has meant that some ideas, cultures and even religious heresies which have long been excluded and rejected by mainstream society now run wild on the Internet and seriously challenge mainstream thought. In the case of Protestantism, we see Witnesses, Mormonism and New Age philosophies as soon as we log on; heretical ideas and teachings are pervasive. I was shocked to discover that even Eastern Lightning has a website through which to promote its false teachings!

We face a spiritual battle whenever we open an Internet browser. Heresies and cults, lewd sexual content, slanderous attacks … when Protestants and pastoral staff take a cursory glance at the Internet today, they may well be faced with tests and assaults that are a dozen times fiercer than those which reality hurls at them. Therefore we must “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that [we] can stand against the devil’s schemes” (Eph. 6:10-11). We cannot surrender this ground, but should actively develop online ministries, claiming this space to proclaim orthodox and positive faith-related messages. It is not good enough to retreat from online spaces simply because of these negative phenomena. In this Internet age we must be valiant soldiers, not deserters.

The Internet is not only a battlefield, but also holds great potential as a pastoral field. The greatest advantage of the Internet is its ability to break temporal and spatial barriers and enable us to build closer connections with others. With BBS we can discuss our faith, with instant messaging we can hold “heart-to-hearts” with our brothers and sisters, with E-mail we can send religious and pastoral messages promptly to those who know how to use the Internet and with blogs we can share talks and training materials with more Christians. Social networking sites enable us to form online bible study groups; blogs enable us to better pray and care for one another; large Protestant websites enable us to share information more efficiently and even seek advice from other pastoral workers online. If we can learn how to use our rod and staff in dealing with the Internet and apply God’s word to lead our sheep to green pastures and beside still waters, we are sure to reap results that cannot be obtained within the confines of a church building. Young people in particular can sometimes express themselves more easily over the Internet than to a pastoral worker in real life. I myself have always paid equal attention to preaching in church and publishing blogs and supplementary talks online. This approach is tried and true, and has yielded good results.

The Internet: virtual or real?
Everyone knows that the world of the Internet is a virtual one. In some respects, this virtual world is even more ideal than the real world and better able to satisfy people’s needs, and so some people have become entranced by it. In dealing with the Internet today, pastoral workers must be clear: this “virtual” world is not in the least bit illusory, but rather reflects the real world in all its detail. It is therefore essential that we continue to bear witness to Christ’s gospel on the Internet and lead people back to the true God, making the most of the Internet to develop evangelistic and pastoral ministries. At the same time we must also be mindful that the Internet cannot take the place of reality; online fellowship, interaction and sharing can never replace evangelism, church services and fellowship in the real world. Even at its best, the Internet can only compensate for any shortcomings in pastoral care in the real world.

When the Lord Jesus came to earth he personally called the Disciples to follow him. He didn’t help humankind by setting up a network between heaven and earth and then tapping away at the keyboard, but became flesh and really entered into people’s lives, laughing, crying, and living with them.
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

Nor did he set up a “Holy Spirit website” for people to log onto when they needed to, but rather sent the Holy Spirit who gives us life and love directly into our lives to help us, guide us and provide for us in tangible ways. Therefore, with regard to the church’s mission, online coaching will never be able to replace face-to-face assistance; all the brilliance of online essays will never be able to replace feeling the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in church; online interaction, discussion and prayer will never be able to replicate the family feel one gets from living and praying with other Christians in real life; no matter how grand “online church services” are, they cannot give rise to the same emotion as when “two or three people gather of one accord” before the Lord in worship. It is worth mentioning that the Internet is only a tool, but Christ came to establish his body—the church. The different parts of the church body must be connected for it to function properly.

Just as the church in the Internet age is the bride whom the Lord Jesus himself has chosen and who bears good witness to him, so pastoral workers in the Internet age are shepherds whom the Lord Jesus himself has chosen to tend his flock. Whichever age we find ourselves in, we must “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under [our] care, serving as overseers—not because [we] must, but because [we] are willing, as God wants [us] to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to [us], but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2-3). We must make appropriate use of the gifts and tools that God has given us to look after his flock in accordance with these principles. Only in this way will we “receive the crown of glory that will never fade away when the chief shepherd appears” (1 Peter 5:4).

Translated from Tian Feng No. 356 August 2009 by Emily Dunne.
Nurturing a Culture of Reading in the Church

A discussion about the reading and selling of books

By Bao Zhimin

Though it is unclear where their view originated, there are some in the church who oppose reading books other than the Bible. But this was not the view of the Apostle Paul. We can see in his request that Timothy bring along certain “books” and “above all parchments” that Paul read outside the Bible (cf. 2 Tim. 4:13). His outside reading also suggests that for successful ministry, evangelists need to read a lot, and that for Christians to grow they should be reading good books as well.

There is a movement in society today promoting reading. Related to this movement, in a speech he recently gave, Wen Jiabao, the premier of the State Council, made a statement that left a deep impression: “A nation that does not read has no future.” Premier Wen himself is an avid reader, who, despite an extremely busy schedule, manages to find time each day to read, even reading some books several times.

As we all know, reading elevates peoples’ minds and enriches their lives. In addition to living in the physical world, we also live above in spiritual and intellectual worlds, and what we think about shapes how we live. Jesus himself said, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4). Of course this passage is referring to reading the Bible, but Jesus’ statement elevates the very act of reading to a high place by assuming that the spiritual is the highest level of our lives and needs to be nourished very day. When a housewife puts down her household responsibilities to sit and seriously study the Bible, she is doing something lofty. But the importance of reading the Bible is not the main point of my discussion in this article. Starting from reading the Bible, I want to stress that Christians should nurture the general habit of reading.

Some people say they have a hard time reading the entire Bible, so that they do not have time to read other books, which, in their view, are less important, anyway. But the important question is when you read the Bible can you understand the entire book well? In fact, very often because we cannot understand the Bible’s meaning very well, we then give up reading it. The Book of Acts tells the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, who, while riding in a horse-driven cart, was reading the prophet Isaiah (See Acts 8: 26-40). We can even imagine him nodding his head and feeling proud of himself about what he was reading. But when Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The eunuch answered honestly, “I do not understand!” So Philip climbed up on to the cart and helped him understand what he was reading.

Every book you read is like inviting a teacher, or a mentor, or a friend to your side so that you can have interaction and discussion about the book, and through the process of learning make content of the book your own possession. The author of the book may have spent several years, perhaps even a lifetime, putting his heart and mind into the book, but in just a matter of a couple of days you can learn his topic. Can you think of anything more worthwhile or convenient? I am personally determined not to pass up any good book. Pastors and evangelists of the church should be people who love to read. Many of the people that we hear about who have had an impact on the church loved to read good books. John Wesley, the traveling evangelist and revivalist, always carried books in his saddlebags and even read while riding on horseback. At night when he recorded the day’s events in his diary, he would

Reading a good book is like conversing with a wise and dignified person.
also write what he had learned from his reading that day. The late church leader Kou Shiyuan touched on the importance of reading when he quoted the well-known ancient saying, “After a couple of days without reading, one’s words have no flavor, and one’s face is hideous.”

Excluding a few exceptional people, most of us in the church become mature through learning from other Christians. We need to maintain an open heart and absorb new things that are beneficial, so that we can keep being enriched and continue to mature. Often God speaks to you through other people, through their testimonies, through their messages, and through their life experiences, among other things. The Apostle Paul exhorts us on the importance of this when he says, “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil. 4:8).

In communicating with other people there are limits of time and space, but there are no limitations in the contact with the author of a book. Of course you have to choose a book to read, but that is a different question.

That is what I wanted to say about the importance of reading, but I also want to discuss another practical question. In the ocean of different kinds of books available today, which books should we read? And where can we get books to read? I believe that many of those reading this article serve as leaders in the church or serve as lay workers. I want to suggest to you that the initiative for church members to read must first come from the introduction and supplying of good books. First there should be some screening of good books, and then they should be offered as suggestions to readers. Over a period of a number of years, church publishing organizations and public publishing societies have published a relatively large body of Christian literature, which includes a wide range of topics. We are able to sell some of these books at the wholesale cost in order to make them available to all Christians. In addition to printing Bibles and hymnals, the National TSPM/CCC organizations have already published a large number of books related to topics about faith and about everyday life. In order to make these books conveniently available for ordering, the CCC has listed them on its website which everyone is welcome to visit (www.ccctspm.org). But an urgent matter at the moment is getting churches to establish adequate “book rooms” (places to buy books, such as “book stalls,” “book stores,” etc.), in order to provide readers a bookshelf where they can find books that they might like to buy. Because selling books places books in the hands of church members to help them mature in their faith, selling books a spiritual ministry of the church.

It should also be noted that selling books is not a waste of money, because even when books are sold either at the wholesale cost or with a discount, an appropriate profit can be made to cover the cost of labor and distribution. Selling books also is a convenience and a help to readers who by purchasing books are at the same time supporting the work of the church.

All this requires a new departure in the thinking of those in charge of our churches. Obviously making money on the sale of books is not the final goal, rather, the value of this ministry is realized when we are able to get books into the hands of readers.

Christians are often at a loss about what books to read, consequently the guidance and recommendation of church leaders is extremely important. From my experience, when I am preaching and mention an idea or testimony from a certain book, often some among my hearers try to be the first to go out and buy that book. I believe that if your church has a group of readers, especially a group of young people who are readers, your church has vitality and certainly possesses great potential for developing. Good books nurture life, and they nurture ambition. But developing an atmosphere of reading in the church must come from the example of church leaders.

Reading a good book is like conversing with a wise and dignified person.

Translated from Tian Feng No. 356 August 2009 by Kirt D. Selles
Elderly Believers Learn to Read

By Zhang Bailing

Hongtuling Church is situated on a hill near Benxi Lake in Benxi Town, Liaoning province. Since the implementation of the Reform and Opening policy, the congregation of Hongtuling Church has been growing steadily. To serve the many elderly members who cannot read, making Bible study sessions very difficult, the church started a Bible study and literacy class.

The class uses the *Easy Reader for Christianity* as its basic text and is taught by literate elderly believers. There was special interest in the class among people in their fifties to eighties, mostly grandparents, people very keen to learn. One teacher had said, “They all came with their reading glasses, like very learned men and women.” Everyone laughed at this, but there were tears of thanksgiving, too.

The students shared the difficulties being illiterate had caused them, how they hated being “the sighted blind.” They were at the end of their wits, and if it had not been for the Lord who saved them, they could not even hope to live, let alone learn how to read and write. God who saved them from their sorry state, they have been showered with the grace of God and they were filled with thanksgiving.

Some of them had done menial labour for years, some had been sold to other families, or taken into wealthier households as child brides, and many were denied schooling because the old society thought females better left ignorant. One elderly sister said that she had begged her father on her knees to allow her to attend school, but he refused. Now God has given them abundant grace, and all love.

Some brothers and sisters said, “Before I could not even read my own name, but now that we have this free class and can study the Bible, we are eternally grateful! We “sighted blind” people have had our spiritual eyes opened, and we now know the true and living God, and enjoy his embrace everyday. Our parents had given us our bodily life, but God has given us all that we need, even eternal life.”

These students, their hearts filled with gratitude, progress very quickly. They ask questions during class, and are very serious about learning. In doing their homework, they form their characters conscientiously and very tidily. They are very diligent about their studies and make time for them.

If they encounter problems, they ask their children, grandchildren, even passers-by to teach them. With God’s guidance and their hard work, they learn Pinyin romanization and how to use the dictionary. They find the word of God by using the Bible and the joy they feel in the sweetness of God’s words is incomparable.

“Lots of people do not understand us,” they say, but it is enough that the Lord alone understands us. We rely on God to remove every obstacle and pressure, because the Lord is our help.”

The brothers and sisters in the literacy class are seeking for God, relying on God, and looking up to God. They have grasped the knowledge of truth and are maturing in their spiritual life. They rely on...
Considering Divorce Already?

Both Christians, we were introduced a year before our marriage, but soon after marrying, we began to quarrel everyday. I have suffered greatly over this. I was attracted by his appearance, while we were dating. Now I'm having regrets and considering divorce. But as I’m a Christian, I’m afraid this may be an offense to God. What should I do?

Dear Sister Ahmei, Thank you for your trust. When I learned that a rift has appeared in your relationship, I too felt anxious for both of you. May God quickly bring healing to your relationship.

As far as I know, quarreling early in a marriage is usually not over principles, but because the transition from one to two is a difficult one.

In fact, you did not rush into this, you knew each other for a year. Since you are both Christians, prayers would be a part of this experience. In fact, if complete understanding of a person were the prerequisite of marriage, nobody could go down the aisle at all. Marriage is the union two different persons, and it is normal that sometimes their differences are great, which means they must approach each other with open hearts and tolerance, and even come to appreciate each other’s differences.

Marriage is a lesson, as the Lord unites two persons together, asking them to learn from and support each other. Working through this period may be difficult, but the result is joy, because through this experience, God wants us to practice growth in our lives.

Sister, can you learn to lift up his imperfections and pray for him? Ask God to help you let go of your intolerance, learning to respect him as “head of the wife” (Eph. 5:23) as Christ is also the head of the church. If it is a question of sin or transgressions against Scripture, hold to your principles; otherwise do your utmost to live with the many things life brings. Meanwhile, bring your dismay or wronged feelings to God, and ask God to change him. Quarrels between husband and wife are hard to avoid, yet, the Bible recommends a time to cease and desist, “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Eph. 4:26). ... Let yourself have the first word only after thoughtful meditation, and allow your partner to have the last word of every argument.

There is no blessing in a marriage when divorce is seen by both as the solution to every move. Notice that when husband and wife experience difficulties and misfortunes, both should support and rely on each other. Having walked through this tough passage, husband-wife relations are strengthened, becoming even more intimate. ...

Dear sister, I suggest that you take every opportunity to embrace your husband, for men’s emotions tend to be fragile, and he needs the comfort of your warmth (Proverb 5:19). Find a time of peace and tranquility to sit down together, enjoy your wedding photos and replay the DVD of your ceremony, recalling your romance and moments of warmth. Then, together hold your hands in prayer, believing that this love will flow through both of you to melt away the harshness and separation.

Enough said. May God bless both of you, renewing your marriage in warmth and fondness.

Your brother in Christ: Pastor Liang

Translated from Tian Feng No. 356
August 2009 by Robert Soong
Unemployed at 50

Due to staff cuts necessary because of the recent financial crisis, my employer notified me that I was about to be terminated. At middle-age, I now have to leave a job which I had come to consider as my “second home.” Where else can I go? I have no capital to start a business, I would be a rookie in any other line of work, I no longer possess the strength of a young man, and I feel very frustrated. I even complained to God, asking him why I had such bad luck. Sometimes I feel that there is not much meaning in being alive. What can a 50-year-old man do?

Greetings, Brother Ren! I really sympathize with your unfortunate situation: for a diligent worker to receive a “very sorry” notice from the company boss is really wrenching.

Yet you should not feel too overwhelmed, for you should know that you are one of one billion unemployed in the world. Even in the city where you live, there are many who share your fate. You might as well face reality and look towards God to calm yourself and plan for the future. Aside from seeking reasonable unemployment compensation and other related formalities, it is important to adjust your attitude and re-establish your confidence to move forward.

Draw closer to God. If you were normally too busy to do so, this is an opportunity to renew communication with God. In order to find a suitable job, you must rely on God through fervent prayer. In fact no matter what phase of life you are in, the “invisible help” is something we cannot do without. Ask God for inner strength and wisdom, so that you can face the challenges of life during hard times, and pray for suitable work. Once you discover the delight of being with God, you will find that unemployment has also brought an experience of blessing.

Ask your relatives and friends. In Chinese, the word “human being” looks like two persons leaning on each other for support. When we are in difficulty, we should visit friends and family, or ask for help from church friends; you can even network with your schoolmates, colleagues, and neighbors to seek assistance.

Mind your finances. When a family member is unemployed, family finance will invariably be affected. It is necessary to budget for expenditures and spend only what you can afford. Do not buy anything you can make yourself, do not buy disposable products if you can reuse what you have. Try to live more simply.

Adjust your attitude. It is important not to vent your frustration on your family—they feel just as bad as you do. During a crisis, the family should draw together and pray, waiting for God to show the way out. Do not blame each other: “Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred” (Proverbs 15:17). In fact, work is not your whole life—did you neglect your family when you were busy working? Now is an excellent chance for you to make up for lost time with your wife and children.

You should not waste time worrying. There is a famous saying, “If you cry non-stop over having missed the sun, you might also miss the moon!”

The Prophet Elijah was once very disheartened by the many trials he had to face, but God said to him, “Arise.... The path ahead is a long way!” The God of Elijah is your God today, his love for you is unending and unbending, you can restore yourself totally and gaze upon the Lord and take on the journey awaiting you ahead!

Yuan Sheng

Translated from Tian Feng No. 353
May 2009 by Cinde Lee
God Has Done Something Great

By Xiao Wang

Protestant Churches in Shanghai have experienced steady growth during the 30 years of the Reform and Opening policy. The approximately 12,000 Christians in the Hongkou district are served by three churches: the Jijing Church, the Hongde Church, and the recently built Christ Church Jiangwan.

On December 18, 2008, Christ Church Jiangwan in Shanghai’s Hongkou District formally dedicated its new church building in a worship service of thanksgiving and a dedication ceremony. Close to 2,000 people were in attendance, including pastors, evangelists, church workers, and many others from the city. The event was a wonderful witness to success of the government’s policy of religious freedom during the 30 year period of Opening and Reform.

A Witness of Thanksgiving

The Reverend Yu Jiang, Chair of the Administrative Committee of the Hongkou District Christian Council, led the dedication service, and the Reverend Zeng Shengjie, Chair of the CCC/TSPM Advisory Committee, preached a sermon from Chronicles 28:9-10 and 29:10-19 with the title, “King David’s Commission and Prayer to Build the Temple.” In his message, the Reverend Zeng used King David’s plans and preparations for building a temple for God to encourage the members of the church to realize that even the ability to make an offering comes from God’s grace, and he exhorted the church members to offer prayers for the new church. As a response of thanksgiving praising God for the completion of the new church building, the Christ Church Jiangwan choir sang two hymns of praise, “Praise to Jehovah” and “God’s Grace is Never-Ending.”

Following the worship service, Elder Yang Ji’en, Chair of the Hongkou District TSPM Committee, led the ceremony of dedication. During the ceremony, Elder Lu Jianmin, honorary chair of the Hongkou District CCC/TSPM and a member of its Christ Church Jiangwan building committee, presented the “Report on the Work of the Christ Church Jiangwan Construction Project.” Hearing his heartfelt words of thanks, his listeners kept interrupting his words with applause. The audience’s applause expressed gratitude for the One who graciously gives peace, for the Creator God’s care and protection from start to finish in the project. The applause expressed gratitude for the sweat and toil of the construction workers; for the various groups outside the church who supported the building project; for the donors who financially supported the project; and for the Communist Party’s implementation of the policy of religious freedom. In fact, there were so many—to be thanked that the eyes of some of the church members glistened with tears of thanksgiving as they listened to Elder Lu’s report.

The Reverend Shen Xuebin, Vice-Chair of the national TPSM Committee and Chair of the Shanghai TSPM, also spoke at the dedication ceremony. During the past thirty years of Reform and Opening, Chinese society has undergone tremendous changes, Reverend Shen noted, and the development of the Chinese church cannot be separated from the magnificent achievement of the entire country. In dedicating the new building, Reverend Shen urged the clergy and coworkers of Christ Church Jiangwan to build up the quality of faith at the same time as they worked to construct the visible or physical church. He emphasized that the new church needs to be managed and used well, that those serving the church needed to do a good job of maintaining unity, of loving each other, of showing mutual respect, of serving the members and tending the flock, of being salt and light, and of glorifying God and benefitting the people.
Many Moves Along the Way

Today Christ Church Jiangwan is located at 1717 Shuidian Road, Hongkou District, northwest Shanghai. The earliest members of the Jiangwan meeting point, however, first began meeting at 1374 Xinshi North Road in 1984. Although the Jiangwan meeting point was originally located in the Baoshan District, when the city reformulated district boundaries, it became part of the Hongkou District. At this time, the meeting point also came under the supervision of the Hongkou CCC/TSPM.

In December of 1986, gathering moved to another meeting place on Changzhong Road. Because this location was too old, the meeting point members bought a former warehouse along the river on Guyuan Road in December 1989, but it was very close to the river and often flooded, causing a potentially dangerous situation by weakening the structure and causing cracks in the walls. So with the help of the Hongkou District government, the gathering moved to a new meeting place in a former kindergarten on Fengzhen Road in March 1999. But just two years later when its growing numbers also outgrew this facility, it was forced to move to another former warehouse on Huayan Road in August 2001.

With so many moves in such a short span of time, the demand on the part of both the brothers and sisters at the meeting point and the Hongkou CCC/TSPM that a permanent location for worship be found grew stronger. With the support and help of the Hongkou government, a fixed site, another former kindergarten, on Kuizhao Road was purchased in October 2003. Later, however, because of strong opposition from residents in the area, that repeated efforts by the local government could not resolve, the government, out of a desire to safeguard social stability, decided find a more suitable building site for a new church.

Despite looking at more than ten possible sites, none were found to be suitable for the construction of a church building. But God heard the prayers of the brothers and sisters, and finally, once again with the help of the Hongkou District government, an agreement was reached in September 2004 to trade properties with a retired cadre club of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in Jiangwan. The PLA exchanged its 1,952 square meter property at the intersection of Shuidian Road and Fengzhen Road for the Hongkou CCC/TSPM site at No. 405 Kuizhao Road. With the river to the east, a bridge to the south, a major road to the west (Shuidian Road), and a park on the north, God had prepared a perfect site for building Christ Church Jiangwan.

In Overcoming Difficulties, God’s Grace Overflows

After obtaining a land use permit, the Hongkou CCC/TSPM submitted its application for church construction to the Shanghai CCC/TSPM in October 2004. Just over three months later, in February 2005, permission for “off-site new construction of a Christian meeting point” was received from the Shanghai Committee for Religious Affairs. On March 25, 2005 the Shanghai TSPM Committee gave the meeting point the legal right to act on behalf of the Jiangwan church building project. With these formalities accomplished, the Hongkou District CCC/TSPM organized a building committee and the project was gradually undertaken according to plan. Finally, on June 30, 2005 at the Shanghai Construction Supervision Office, other formalities required for commencing a construction project were completed.

With a commitment to doing business in an open, fair and impartial manner, on August 18, 2006 bids for the project were solicited through the Hongkou District Bidding Office. Southwest Construction and Engineering Company’s bid of 3.9 million yuan was accepted and contracts signed with other companies for design, construction supervision, and interior decoration. Time was short, expectations high and difficulties many, but relying on God’s leading, the project went forward step by step.

On August 3, 2006 a ceremony to lay the cornerstone took place, with over twenty city leaders from the...
city government attending. Just under a year later, on the morning of July 10, 2007, a three-meter tall yellow cross was installed on top of the new church's fifty-meter tall bell tower. As the cross was being installed, a torrential outburst rained down on the brothers and sisters as they stood in the rain singing, “Give Glory to the Name of the Lord.” By the time the installation of the cross had been completed, however, the rain had stopped, the sun had come out, and the golden cross on the fifty-meter tower shone with the rays of the sun. Though their clothes were drenched, the hearts of the church members were filled with the joy of thanksgiving.

The difficulties of the building project were numerous, but God’s blessings were even greater. The original architectural drawings called for driving 114 foundation posts, but this provided a enormous challenge since the land was right on the bank of the river where thin gas lines passed through the planned building site. There was concern that if even one of the gas lines was punctured, service to the entire Liangcheng and Jiangwan areas would be interrupted, not to mention the possibility of a puncture sparking a dangerous explosion. How to proceed? By prayer! Ask God for peace and wisdom to handle the challenge. The construction company tackled the problem by driving the piles more slowly and with less force. After each pile driving, a careful inspection of the pile and the surrounding ground was performed, a process which in effect limited the number of piles that could be driven each day to five. Thankfully, through God’s care and grace, all 114 of the piles were driven in without any accident or damage to the municipal gas pipelines. Moreover, despite the high water content of the soil due to its close proximity to the river, the construction workers reported digging only in dry soil unaffected by the high water table. Some of the workers digging on the building project even exclaimed, “Your God is a mighty God; even the river obeys Him!”

Help from the Church and from outside
Many different people and organizations contributed to the success of the church building project. Some of the construction companies working on the project forfeited other projects in order to work on the church building, and they even sent their top construction teams to work on the project. Other companies provided building materials free of charge to the building project. The design company painstakingly designed the vaulted ceiling and the Roman pillars. Care was taken to use only quality materials that were not only economical but also environmentally friendly. Everyone who worked on the project strive to help complete everything on time, and the company that installed the doors and windows only charged the church for the cost of the materials and their labor. The company that manufactured and installed the modern system of bells in the bell tower, even though it was a difficult task, finally only took the basic cost for the materials and labor.

The Xiangshan Daqitou Church sent a construction team that helped build the outside walkways, the walls along the property boundary, the underground drainage system, and the steps, to name a few of the tasks they worked on outside the building. All of the supervisors and the technicians working on the project were generous in their service, not even requiring the church to provide meals while they worked. This kind of selfless giving—in the spirit of all one family in the Lord—to the church building project made a deep impression on the members of the Christ Church. Not including the cost of the land, the total cost of the church building, including the cost of decorating, came to around ten million yuan. The entire outlay for the project came from the Hongkou CCC/TSPM’s long-term accumulation of funds and from designated donations by church members. God provided for every need in completing the building project.

Giving Glory to God for this Beautiful Church
Only through God’s help was Christ Church Jiangwan completed. The tendering of contracts, the planning and designs, the construction, the decorating, the lighting, and the installation of the sound system, all testify to the work of God. Throughout the entire process of completing the church building project, the congregation felt the love, power, and presence of God.
The first floor of the church is a chapel specially designed for use by the elderly and those who have special access needs. The chapel has a projection system and can seat approximately 300 people. The church's main worship sanctuary is on the second floor, and has a uniquely designed pulpit platform that creates a dignified and solemn atmosphere for those coming to worship. The third floor is an open-plan space with a rock-wall design that serves as a visual setting for the sanctuary. Those sitting on the third floor can look down and see the entire main sanctuary. Altogether the second and third floor worship space can seat approximately 1,200 people. Today on Sundays the church holds two worship services with about 1,500 people attending the services.

In addition to the main worship areas, the basement of the church building has a parking garage. With a capacity of up to ten cars and more than a hundred bicycles, this garage provides a convenient space for worshipers to park. The church's bell tower is covered in tiles and the building as a whole is in the European Gothic style. The entire design has the effect of upward movement, which gives a sense of the eternal. All the stained glass in the doors and the windows was designed by specialists. Each window illustrates a story from the Bible, so that someone admiring the beauty of the window designs can also take in the spiritual teaching of the Bible stories.

In the words of Psalm 127:1, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.” Throughout the construction of Christ Church Jiangwan, from the driving of the first pile to the provision of all of the finances, no problems with the quality of the materials or work-related accidents occurred. The members of the Christ Church Jiangwan felt God’s presence at all times and in all situations. God’s faithfulness in the Jiangwan building projected demonstrated that His promises are not empty words and that everything He says can be trusted.

Today Christ Church Jiangwan has been completed and the building has been dedicated, but shouldering the ongoing work of the church is a great responsibility. A new church is simply the physical or visible result of a completed construction project. The building of the invisible church goes on and is much more. How to best use this wonderful Christ Church Jiangwan building is a very important question that every pastor, evangelist, elder, and lay-worker needs to ponder. When he was on the earth, Jesus founded the church and called on the church to bring ever more people to God, to become sons and daughters of God. He also called on the church to be salt and light, to glorify God, and benefit the people. The earnest hope is that the new Christ Church Jiangwan will become a holy place where God is praised, and a temple where people pray, and praise: that, maintaining the three-self principles, following a path of love for country and love for church, it will be a golden lamp stand, conformed to the will of God and pleasing to all the people!

Translated from Tian Feng No. 349 
January 2009 by Kurt D. Selles

For subscription fees or any voluntary donation to cover the production and postage expenses of the ANS, please mail a check with your name and address to the Amity Hong Kong Office. Please make your check payable to “The Amity Foundation, Hong Kong, Ltd”.

For other ways of donating, please visit the Amity website: www.amityfoundation.org/index.php

Thank You!
Churches Mark 60th Anniversary of the Founding of PRC

A variety of activities are being held in churches across China to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, which falls on October 1st. Among the many which have already taken place are:

- On September 19, the Xiamen (Fujian) CCC/TSPM and YMCA held a joint “Cultural Evening in Celebration of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the PRC, Sponsored by Religious Circles in Xiamen” in the Music Hall of the Senior Citizens’ Activity Center. Performers for the event numbered 230 out of the 1000 attendees. The theme of the evening was “Love County, Love Church and Together Build Harmony.”
- A concert was held on September 19, 2009 by the Kaifeng (Henan) CCC/TSPM at the Beimen Dajie Church. The curtain opened to the strains of the national anthem, followed by remarks by the Rev. Ms. Zheng Chunshi, director of the Kaifeng Christian Council.
- A speech contest held in Shan County, Shandong on September 22, 2009, on the theme, “Paean to the Nation on 60 Years of Glorious History.” Over 400 people came to watch the competition.
- Also on September 22, clergy from the Hanzhong City (Hantai District) CCC/TSPM, as well as over 200 believers gathered for a forum on the 60th anniversary of the nation and the 59th anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Local government officials were also present by invitation.

CCC President Visits Churches in Guangxi

Rev. Gao Feng, president of the China Christian Council, visited churches in Guangxi province from Sept. 15-18, where he familiarized himself with measures being taken to address problems and challenges in the work of local CCC/TSPMs, personnel training, and building up internal cohesion in these bodies and learned how preaching and pastoral care are being effectively advanced, developments in ethnic minority churches, and democratic management in the church.

Rev. Gao was invited to take part in the groundbreaking ceremony for the regional CCCTSPM office building. He also visited the Beique Road Church in Liuzhou City, the Weixin Lane Church, the Gospel Christian A celebratory concert.
Church in Yizhou City, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region CCC/TSPM, a lay training course in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the Zhongshan Road Church and Gonghe Road Church in Nanning City, the Nanning City CCC/TSPM, and met and talked with coworkers in all these places. Rev. Gao is very much concerned with the self-construction of the CCC/TSPM and the democratic management of the church. He urged coworkers at the grassroots to join together in building up the body of Christ in their own context.

At the Yizhou Gospel Christian Church, Rev. Gao listened to a report by Rev. Tan Zhiyang of the Maonan minority on local church development, who described how Christianity grew from a few dozen Christians to the several hundred today; from evening worship meetings by oil lamp to those of today by electric light, effectively demonstrating how local church growth has followed social developments. In Nanning City, following a report by the head of the Nanning CCC/TSPM, Rev. Zhao Hongmei, Rev. Gao met with the main responsible persons of the Nanning CCC/TSPM, urging them to take advantage of the outstanding potential they have being in the provincial capital to play a leading role in the development of the church.

Rev. Gao (second from right) helps break ground for the new CCC/TSPM offices.
Progress on Social Security for Clergy

On June 19, 2009, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Council (CPPCC) Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee held a consultation on the issue of social security for religious clergy. Responsible persons concerned from the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), Party Central United Front Department, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Human resources and social security departments and responsible persons from relevant departments and bureaus were invited to attend. Following its investigation of the issue, the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee for a consultation of policy recommendations.

In fact, at this years CPPCC meeting, members from religious circles submitted proposals calling on relevant government departments to clarify relevant policy as soon as possible and bring clergy into the social security system.

This issue has already been addressed and initial steps taken to resolve it by Party Committees and government in some areas. Currently, places where the work of having clergy included in social security has already begun include Shanghai, Tianjin, Guizhou, Guangxi, and Chongqing; altogether 13 provinces, autonomous regions and directly-administered municipalities. But overall, clergy participation in the social security system nationwide is quite low.

Elder Fu Xianwei, member of the national CPPCC and Chair of the TSPM, points to lack of funding guarantees for social security coverage among clergy in comparison to coverage in society as a whole and to a lack of unified regulations to be applied to clergy. Many religious bodies cannot bear the financial burdens caused by the situation, especially in ethnic minority areas.

He notes that clergy have a relatively high rate of mobility and thus whether they may be insured in the place where their religious work is located becomes an issue. Most clergy have not moved their residence to their place of assignment; for those who have, problems with management of residence permits remains an issue. At the same time, there tends to be a higher number of clergy who are elderly and not eligible under current government regulations with an upper limit of 60 years old for men and 55 for women. The cost of medical guarantees for clergy has become a huge burden for religious groups, especially for Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims, and most especially for those in ethnic minority areas.

There is a perception problem as well. The responsible persons for some religious groups, as well as clergy themselves, do not have an accurate grasp of the issue. For example, some clergy believe that traditionally it should be the church that supports them in their old age, making social security unnecessary. Some local Party and government departments suffer from a similar incorrect view.

Elder Fu feels that there are many channels to help with the expenses involved in solving this problem for clergy. For example, policy regulations could be laid out which would provide tax relief for self-supported projects, thus increasing self-support funding and easing the burden of clergy participation in insurance.