

Report on a visit to China

11-27 September 2019

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Aims

- To accompany the Lay Leader of the Irish Conference to China
- To represent the Methodist Church Britain in formal meetings with China Christian Council
- To meet new leaders of the China Christian Council/Three Self Patriotic Movement
- To visit the Amity Foundation



Background

The Methodist Church in Britain has two partners in China. The first is the Protestant Church, known

as the China Christian Council (CCC), one of the five recognised religions in China, which has around 37 million

members. The other is the Amity Foundation a philanthropic foundation with a Christian basis, initiated in 1985 as a way to enable international Christian agencies and churches to partner in the development of China and its churches.

The CCC has recently reformed its constitution and now describes itself as a 'Uniting Church'. The parallel organisation known as TSPM (the three 'selves' are self-governance, self-support, self-propagation) is based in the same office in Shanghai and increasingly at both national and regional level has common office holders and staff move from one to the other. CCC concerns itself primarily with church organisation and TSPM with relating to the government. MCB has a particular link to the Social Services Department of CCC and supports training for local churches engaged in elder care, family support, etc.

The Amity Foundation has become a large community development organisation, mostly funded by Chinese donors – notably through internet platforms. MCB is particularly involved with its youth exposure programmes.

Visit

Linda Neilands has just begun her second year as Lay Leader of the Irish Conference and particularly wanted to visit China. She and I were the Methodist part of a Churches Together in Britain and Ireland group formally invited by the CCC to visit Shanghai,

Nanjing, Xi'an and Beijing. Other representatives were Anglican, Salvation Army and Presbyterian from



England and Scotland. In each city we had meetings with the Provincial Christian Council and learned about their different situations, focussing on our main two visit priorities, environmental protection and enculturation (or 'sinification').

In Shanghai we had a warm reception from CCC, led by Revd Kan Baoping, Vice Chair of the National Committee of TSPM, who had such a good experience at the Methodist Conference in Birmingham earlier this year. Also present was Ms Cao Ya'nan, Secretary of the Social Services Department, it was good to meet her, having previously only exchanged emails about our partnership activities. In pursuit of our environmental concerns we visited one of the Shanghai power stations at Waigaoqiao, a coal-fired plant with impressive environmentally-friendly statistics. One of our group was Dr Ruth Livingstone of Eco-Congregations who pronounced herself convinced of its flagship status. The British government is working with the Chinese government on power generation and the Research Director is visiting the UK later in 2019 for a conference on the use biomass at the Drax power station in Yorkshire.

The high-speed train took us the 300km to Nanjing in an hour. Here we visited the CC/TSPM, the Jiangsu Provincial Seminary, the National Seminary (NJUTS) and the Amity Foundation. CCC also put into our programme a visit to the Memorial Museum of the Nanjing Massacre of 1937, which commemorates the killing by the invading Japanese army of at least 300,000 people. Our visit took place on 18th September the national day of remembrance.

A visit to the Amity Printing Press is always uplifting. It is the biggest Bible printing factory in the world and is close to producing its 200 millionth Bible.



We also visited the residential care home for older people, built by the Jiangsu provincial government and run by Amity.



The Amity Bakery now has five shops and was developed to provide vocational training for the residents of its 'Home of Blessings' a project for young people with learning difficulties. It is now a commercial success.

The Union Seminary in Nanjing is the only national level seminary and now offers both Masters and Doctoral degrees. Our discussion

on the variously interpreted topic of 'sinification' with staff and students was enlightening and informative.

We flew two hours to Xi'an in the Shaanxi Province, a less visited area as far as the Christian Church is concerned, but familiar for tourists who flock here to see the 'Terracotta Warriors'.



The highlight of our tour for many of us though was Sunday morning worship with the congregation of Nanxin Street Church, established by Hudson Taylor, a Baptist missionary, in 1914, when it occupied an area



five times bigger than it does now. The group was presented with a copy of the Nestorian Tablet, which details the arrival of Christianity in China in the seventh century. We later visited the original in the Xi'an museum.

Another most impressive piece of work was the HIV/AIDS project, Shaanxishang run by one of the congregations. It has 1,000 trained volunteers helping the vulnerable groups who are the most susceptible to the virus. Migrant workers constitute one very marginalised and poor group and there are estimated to be 138

million of them and maybe 8-16% live with HIV. Living far from home and unable to register in the city they are focussed on finding work and sending money home, if they are reduced to undignified ways of surviving they cut themselves off from their family to spare them disgrace. At such times they are very vulnerable.

Our final city was Beijing, where we encountered the preparations for the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic; security was tight. We again visited the Christian Council/TSPM, where staff told us about the 120,000 Christians in the city. There are 16 churches which can hold more than 3,000 worshippers, but many small 'gathering points' half of which are associated with CCC and half who are partly or fully independent of CCC for some reason. We also met with a local Christian congregation, Chongwenmen Church, which runs an impressive programme of services, Bible studies and community programmes.

Finally, we had a meeting at the British embassy to discuss freedom of religion and other matters.

Steve Pearce
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