

Presbyterian Heritage Discovery in China



Shanghai

October 17, 2012

Pictured above: (left) Nate and Chris share their experiences leading an international church; (center left) Peter Lim, Rev. Bao, Choon Lim, and Jeff Ritchie; (center right) Trinity Church, a movie theater during the cultural revolution; (right) Yaxing joyfully shares her experiences as a Christian in China.

Introduction to our conversations

Reflecting on Ephesians 3:10, Jeff Ritchie opened our day expressing one of his hopes is for the relationships we will establish on this mission. God has not planted His abundant wisdom in the hands of any one church. Rather, we come together in order to glean from God's manifold wisdom that God has given His body across the nations. What might we experience of God's wisdom from our dear sisters and brothers in China, which we might not otherwise have in looking only to our own resources? This, in part, defines our approach as we meet with the various leaders of Christian Councils and Seminaries over the next several days.

Shanghai (Day One)

Despite our lack of sleep the day was a fruitful one of building upon existing friendships among Christians in Shanghai. We met with Rev. Bao Jia Yuan, president of the China Christian Council in Shanghai. Rev. Bao and The Outreach Foundation are "old friends," with a relationship dating into the 1990s.

One of the projects, which TOF has supported generously is to provide rural lay church leaders with small yet meaningful resource libraries. Since the project's inception over 3,000 people have received these libraries, helping them to build upon their two years of training. It is Rev. Bao who was inspired to begin this project through his role as head of the Rural Ministry Department of the China Christian Council in the 1990s and early 2000s.

One theme we have consistently experienced is to hear not the suffering of Chinese Christians, but of God's miraculous work here. So it was that Rev. Bao focused our attention on the growth of the registered churches throughout China. Each province has its own Christian Council, which oversees registered churches and meeting halls. He celebrated that in China each year there are over 400,000 new Christians joining the church. There are 56,000

registered churches and meeting halls, but only 3,700 pastors. Thus, while there is phenomenal growth to celebrate, it falls upon an already thin leadership to shepherd these 23 million registered Christians!

Thus, the need for leadership training is immense and The Outreach Foundation seeks to come alongside Rev. Bao and other leaders to identify ways we might help them in their need. Trips such as the one we are on are crucial for fostering relationships of trust that will lead to conversations on how we might help the church in China in the ways that are best for them.

Our day concluded with a special reunion with Jeff Ritchie's seminary classmate and his wife, Nate and Chris. Originally here with World Vision in 2003, they have settled in China, and he now pastors an international church. He described positive changes such as increased openness to foreign pastors, less control (they no longer need to submit sermons to the Council), and greater trust as a Chinese pastor no longer needs to open the international services. This is not the story in each province, but certainly evidence of the Holy Spirit moving powerfully here.