

Presbyterian Heritage Discovery in China



Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province

October 18, 2012

Pictured above: (left) Chancel of Chong-Yi Church; (center left); Peter Lim translating for us words from Pastor Joseph Gu; (center right) prayer room directly beneath the pulpit at Chong-Yi church where people pray during worship; (right) we were greeted at the Zhejiang Theological Seminary by Rev Paul Pan, Chair of the Three Self Patriotic Movement Committee

Introduction to our conversations

On our three hour bus ride from Shanghai to Hangzhou, Susan Boone shared stories from her experiences as a full time missionary in China, particularly in Hangzhou. Reflecting on James 1:2, 5 she told us of her friendships in Hangzhou, "I taught them English, they taught me Jesus." Later in the day we would hear that one of the five requirements to be a pastor is a commitment to suffering. Susan shared with us the story of Reverends Sun and Wang, who lived through the cultural revolution, confined to a small cell often having only rice, if anything, to eat. She asked them how they could be so happy even though they had suffered so much. They replied, "It was through our sufferings that we became close to Jesus, and Jesus is the source of joy." Hearing this story and others have moved us deeply as a team. Our faith cannot help but to increase as we learn to develop friendships among these dear Christians.

Hangzhou (Day Two)

On our 3 hour bus ride from Hangzhou to Ningbo, team members reflected on the previous day, during which we heard stories and visited with movers and shakers in the national church. Humility, commitment, joy, and excitement, we agreed, consistently emerged as qualities they exhibit so well. We sense the Holy Spirit moving in ways we wish would infect our churches back home!

Our days are marked by early departures from the hotel then late arrivals, with little down time between. So it was we had barely arrived in our Hangzhou hotel when we headed out to visit Chong-Yi Church and be greeted by Senior Pastor Joseph Gu. Chong-Yi Church, built in 2005, is one of China's largest churches, with a seating capacity of 5,500. The women who designed it obviously "get it" with respect to their theology; the building is in all aspects a monument to Jesus, His redeeming presence in China, the importance of prayer, and our mission in the world.

As president of the Zhejiang Provincial Christian Council and Hangzhou City Christian Council, Pastor Gu spoke emotionally about the City Council's recent completion of China's first indigenous Sunday School curriculum. Until this publication churches in China have used translated Western curriculum. This is a major development for the Church as it further clarifies itself as a distinct voice in the kingdom of God on earth.

Pastor Gu told us that outreach occurs through caring for elderly in Christian nursing homes, the establishment of Agape Christian Rehabilitation Hospital, and challenging

and training believers to do personal evangelism. The Zhejiang Christian Council reaches out to all churches, registered and unregistered, as an expression of its commitment to the unity of the church in China.

Women play an integral role in leadership as pastors and lay leaders in churches and meeting houses. Province-wide there are 1.98 million registered believers and the church is growing daily so the 5,000 churches and meeting halls struggle to keep up with the growth. Chong-Yi church, for example, has grown from 2,000 to 8,000 in its seven year period. Obviously more leaders are needed, so training is especially important and highly valued.

We visited Zhejiang Seminary, which offers a four year theology program. There are also program for Sacred Music and Biblical Studies. One of the teachers, Pastor Wang, had been taught English by Susan and it was a splendid reunion! Teachers have such influence here. The faculty consists of 20 women and men trained in and outside of China, and they are happy to receive foreigners to teach intensive classes. This is an example of the type of partnership we may consider in the future.

