

Presbyterian Heritage Discovery in China



Ningbo: a Journey into History

October 19, 2012

(left) Senior Pastor Gao sitting with Elder Zheng on left and Peter Lim; (center left) the Chinese word for “Immanuel,” which we find in each church in China; (center right) interior of Centennial Church; (right) Pastor Chen, Peter Lim, and Pastor Gao sitting with us over lunch.

A brief historical note

Ningbo is an historically important city for Presbyterian mission in China. In 1844, Dr. Divie Bethune McCartee, a medical missionary, arrived there and established it as the “chief city” of Presbyterian mission in China. His mission activity in homes grew out of his medical care, as Brown’s history of mission in China records, “At each home he was expected to sit awhile, smoke a pipe, and drink a cup of tea...proclaiming from house to house the glad tidings that there is a ‘balm in Gilead,’ and a physician there who can heal the worst maladies and minister comfort and healing to the wounded spirit.” New missionaries arrived and in 1845 the first Presbyterian church was established. By 1846, missionaries had established a boys school (a girls school already existed), and work had begun on a revised Chinese translation of the Bible.

Ningbo (Day Three)

Ningbo provided us with a perspective of the church of China’s past and the emerging church. A small city of 2 million, Ningbo is located near the ocean approximately three hours from Hangzhou. As historic a city as it is, this is the first time [The Outreach Foundation](#) has come to Ningbo.

Our first stop was Centennial Church. Originally an Anglican Church the present building was built in 1962 to commemorate 100 years of Anglican mission work. Four years later the church was closed due to the Cultural Revolution. In the Spring of 1979 became the first church to be reopened in China after the Cultural Revolution. Today Centennial Church hosts 4,000 active worshippers. Reverend Gao, Senior Pastor of Centennial Church, greeted us in the reception hall.

It was exciting for us to meet Reverend Chen, the female associate pastor on staff, who spoke about women’s ministry. Since the church attracts more women than men female pastors are in high demand. The pastors explained to us how the church is growing rapidly among younger generations, which is creating challenges in worship, education, and pastoral care. Our lunch consisted of meaningful dialogue between ourselves and the Chinese pastors concerning ways to address challenges we have in common.

Our visit with teachers from the Ningbo Christian Training Center was inspiring. NCTC is a premier site for

lay theological education. With so few ordained pastors, lay leaders and preachers are the backbone of the church, and their education is of utmost importance. For each two year full time training class, twenty one students take a demanding curriculum, and graduation requires both field experience and a thesis. Students take ten classes



A typical student’s desk at the NCTC.

per semester in the areas of biblical studies, practical ministry, theology, church history, and technology. Those who have not completed high school must take additional courses in cultural studies, which complies with national standards for a bachelors degree. The four qualities the school expects of students are that they must study hard, pursue the truth, exhibit a life of sacrifice, and display love. Those who excel may then apply to seminary and become ordained pastors after another several years of education and practical experience.

When asked of their vision for the future, the teachers stated they would like to see an entering class each year so they will be able to train more leaders. This will enable 2 two-year programs to be able to operate simultaneously. It was our honor to pray with them for God to fulfill this dream.