



CHINESE CHURCH SUPPORT MINISTRIES CHINA PRAYER LETTER



SEPTEMBER 2018

The Beautiful Game in China

The Football World Cup in Russia finished recently with President Putin and his people basking in the afterglow of a highly successful event. Compliments have been flowing, both to the Russian leadership and especially to the people for making World Cup 2018 a well - run, safe and happy competition.

The “Beautiful Game” has always brought nations together. It is in many ways a universal language like no other sport.

But there were significant absentees from those who qualified to play World Cup 2018. They included the four most populous nations in the World – China, India, USA and Indonesia who collectively represent 44% of the total world population. All of these nations have aspirations and plans to be part of the next World Cup.

No nation is more determined than China, not just to



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Seeking to serve, strengthen and support the church and the people of China

get to the next World Cup but eventually, by 2050, to win it!!



They also have put up their hand to stage a future World Cup with Xi Jinping recently telling FIFA boss Gianni Infantino he wanted China to host in 2034.

Staging the World Cup aligns with the plans that Xi has for football in China. Whilst his ambitions are consistent with the current emphasis on national pride and China's place in the World, it is more personal than that.

Xi Jinping loves football!

Modern China is the story of staggering achievements other nations could only dream of.

Since 2008, for example, China has spent US\$360 billion on its high speed rail network – 22,000kms – more than all other nations combined.

The Chinese National Football Development Plan calls for 50,000 schools to have a strong emphasis on soccer by 2025, the number of soccer fields across the country will grow to over 70,000 by the end of 2020, from under 11,000.

By then, the plan says, 50 million Chinese, including 30 million students, will regularly play soccer.

So the plan to win the World Cup by 2050 may not be as far-fetched as it sounds. Nike seem to agree – they have just aired a new advertisement in China featuring a drone referee and England fans bursting into tears when their team is drawn to play against China!

For Christians, sport is often an opportunity for outreach. 600,000 Bibles were given away in Russia during the World Cup. There is high demand for professional soccer players and coaches in China. A quick online survey shows hundreds of positions available right now.

Xi Jinping himself, has recommended Chinese parents take their children on overseas trips which offer soccer coaching. Chinese travel agents are looking for foreign partners to take advantage of this programme with its endorsement from the very top!

The Apostle Paul would likely agree with football evangelism. He said:

"I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."

[1 Corinthians 9:22-23]

Food for thought!

Medical Teams – Family Affairs

Our CCSM Medical Teams, operated by a specialist partner organisation, are becoming family affairs!

The recently completed June team included a mother and daughter who have a special and inspirational story to tell. (We will bring you Kathy and Joy's story next month.) Also on this team was a Hong Kong mother, Linda, volunteering for the second time. She was following in the footsteps of her dentist son, John, who had provided his services in 2015 and 2016. Both plan to go back again, hoping next time to do it together.

For each of them their first CCSM Medical Team was inspirational. Whilst they had both already been to China and even taken part in a private medical team which they had organised themselves, they were travelling to the far North West for the first time. They had been well prepared by others in Hong Kong who had gone before them but the camaraderie amongst team members and the humble caring attitude made a great impact.

John recalled being assigned a helper from Taiwan who had come with his two sons. During the 6 long hard



International Short-Term Teams



- * Mercy
- * Medical
- * Intercession
- * Trekking
- * English Cultural Exchange

September 2018: Trekking & Intercession Teams
October 2018: Cycle Team & Mercy Team
December 2018: Cultural Exchange Team

days of clinics, this helper had worked faithfully and cheerfully, disinfecting the dental instruments. Not the most glamorous of jobs! John remembers him as a humble, ordinary man. Only later did he discover that he was the CEO and owner of a major company back home!

Linda was deeply impacted by the foreign workers who had immersed themselves in the local community. She was amazed that not only did they speak fluent Mandarin but often local dialects as well. Even while many team members shrank back from the often basic bathroom facilities, these dedicated workers seemed unfazed by the lack of privacy and the pervasive smells!

John asserted that he has no doubt about the effectiveness of these teams. Many of his patients had never seen a dentist before and had rotten, uncleaned teeth, often with gum disease. He knew he was able to make a difference, firstly through relieving pain by extracting the worst teeth but also through educating them about the how to clean their teeth and the effect of diet on dental health. (This is reinforced in follow up visits from the full time local workers after the team departs – a vital part of the programme which also provides opportunity to share their different values and worldviews.)

Linda does not have a medical background but helped, after some

training, in a number of different work stations. One of these was assisting with the ECG machine – an unexpected new skill! (All non-medical team members can try different work during the clinics.)

Linda experienced a highly emotional moment when she met a patient who has advanced and untreatable breast cancer. Linda saw that her tumour was the size of a grapefruit. Having herself just had successful breast cancer surgery she asked why the patient had not sought treatment at an earlier stage. Her shocking answer was simply that she couldn't afford it.

This and other events have seen Linda give the rest of her life to God's service. She wants to use her contacts and connections to make a difference.

Both believe that teams provoke much discussion amongst the patients and local villagers. "Why would foreigners come to this remote place to help?" It is a powerful if often unspoken testimony of the one who is the reason why.



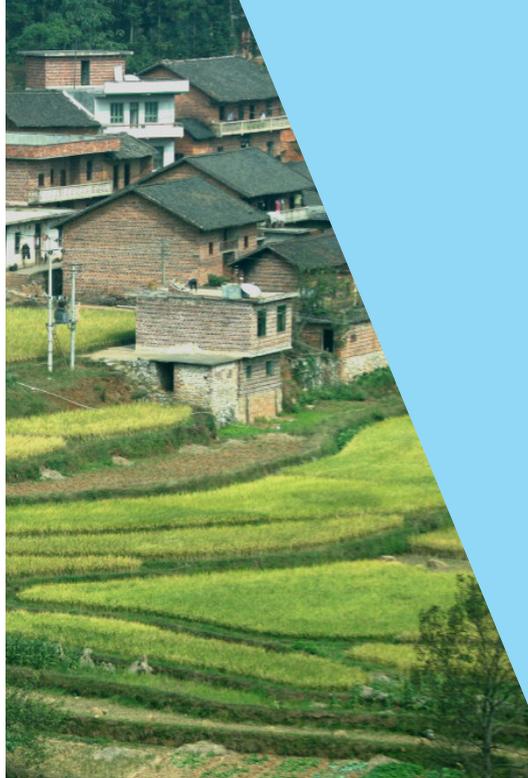
The Rural Challenges

It is not surprising that church leaders look to the large and thriving city churches as examples when formulating their models for how to grow a church. But an estimated 80% of Christians in China are outside the cities and their numbers are now declining.

The most obvious reason is the well documented urban migration which is drawing away young people from the villages for higher paid jobs and flashier big-city lifestyles. The menfolk frequently leave their wife and children behind during the week while they travel to work. If both parents work away the children may be left with their grandparents.

Rural churches despairing that they cannot hold onto their leadership and staff. Before long they lose them to the urban shift, and any remaining leadership, staff and co-workers are predominantly women or senior citizens.

There is little doubt that church leaders are doing what they can. They continue to hold services and Bible studies but other activities are limited by their diminishing congregations. China Source spoke with one rural church leader whose congregation was made up of many seniors and single families. He lamented, “We want to launch a ministry



for single families, but our church workers are not able to get it started”. In addition, it is now more difficult to preach the gospel in comparison with the relative freedom of the 1980s and 1990’s.

How then should the church adjust its patterns in the face of change? How can they rethink and redesign the way they reach out? The challenge ahead is how to serve and disciple the left behind single parents and children, how to care for the aging population and connect with the men who return only briefly before returning to their city jobs. And in reaching out to their communities in a restricted environment...how to keep the fire of the Great Commission burning without allowing the

gospel of faith and repentance to be exchanged for a counterfeit gospel of ‘salvation by good works’.

The 2016 NGO law may provide some favourable opportunities for NGOs to engage in community services. Already, Christian non-profits, although not allowed to preach the gospel, are taking advantage of this opportunity to engage with their communities.

As for the unregistered family churches, digital surveillance has now extended to the villages and they are systematically being shut down. Members can no

longer meet in groups. They will be challenged in every aspect of sharing the gospel and discipling new believers in this new environment.

Yet history shows that God can grow His church despite the obstacles! Look back to the 70’s and 80’s and recall the rapid growth of the church in the countryside. The rural church, in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, experienced exponential growth marked by signs and wonders. Despite significant persecution the Word was still able to spread, largely through family connections.

The Central Theme

Each year, since 1949, the Chinese government has released one particular document that has economists, politicians and traders watching intently. Its contents can cause ripples, even waves, in global markets. And its text can have a profound effect on the lives of businesses, families and individuals within China. The document has historically been a key indicator of the themes that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will focus on in the year ahead and is a roadmap of the policies that are to follow.

It is known as the “No. 1 Central Document” as it is the first document to be published each year by the Central Committee of the Communist Party

of China and the State Council.

This year it has set out a blueprint that will also impact on China’s Christian community.

The No. 1 Central Document for 2018 is titled “Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Implementing the Rural Revitalization Strategy” and as suggested by the title it is largely a document focused on agriculture, the rural countryside and rural people, who make up 43% of China’s total population and 56% of China’s total land area.

The focus on agriculture is not unique

PRAYER POINTERS

The Beautiful Game in China

Pray that we will look at every option to make Christ known in China including through sport.

Pray that football will provide opportunities for better understanding across the political and cultural divide.

Pray that our individual national offices can develop innovative programmes around the desire for children to have football coaching tours to our countries.

Medical Teams – Family Affairs

Thank God for the many people involved in putting together these teams. Pray that the right medical people will be drawn to join these teams next year.

Pray that He provides opportunity for team members and patients to connect and share their stories.

Pray that the doctors, dentists and other medical team members will return home refreshed, even when they have given up their holidays to offer their time.

Pray that God continues to provide favour towards the teams among local authorities and that they will be able to continue with the good work that they provide.

The Rural Challenges

Ask the Lord to help the Chinese rural believers to share the gospel despite the challenges they are facing.

Thank Him that He has made a way in the past to grow His church despite times of persecution.

Praise Him that He can “use the weak to confound the wise”. [1 Corinthians 1:27]. He can use even the little children to share His love and salvation message.

Pray that signs and wonders will follow as the rural believers share the gospel.

PRAYER POINTERS

The Central Theme

Praise God that China is being lifted out of poverty and are receiving higher education and healthcare.

Pray that rural Christians will not be reported by their fellow villagers and that the Lord will hide them from malicious individuals in the newly formed social control forces.

Pray that the Lord will use this period of persecution to challenge and strengthen the faith of believers in rural China.

Pray that the CCP will turn its focus off the unregistered churches.

Pray that atheism propaganda and education will raise questions about God in students' minds.

Systematic Church Suppression

Please pray that God will comfort and help Christian workers with foreign passports and missionaries who have been expelled or forced to leave China. Pray that they and their families are able to resettle, finding work and accommodation.

Pray for God's peace to be with believers in China that are arrested and questioned.

Pray that God will give our brothers and sisters words that will impact the agents and officers that they encounter.

News From CCSM UK

Pray for peace from God for every Chinese believer in all circumstances.

Pray for joy from God for Chinese believers, joy that would envelop them and comfort them and motivate them.

Pray for an overflowing love for Chinese believers, that would spill out to family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues and demonstrate the love of Christ.

Pray for a growing partnership between East and West that will extend the Kingdom of God.



to 2018. For the previous 15 years rural focus has been the theme. But this year the objectives have been clearly outlined: By 2020 poverty will be eliminated and agricultural supply will be increased.

By 2035 modernization of the agricultural and rural areas will be achieved and both urban and rural residents will have access to basic public services.

By 2050 farmers will be well off and rural areas will enjoy a strong agricultural sector.

The policy statement is extensive in its objectives, promising exciting changes in areas such as agricultural development, green policies, major social security advances, exploring investment and financing channels and improving the party's leadership in the rural sectors. Xi Jinping is clearly sending a message that he aims to decrease the gap between the urban and rural communities. This will be particularly welcomed in areas of education and healthcare.

However, amongst the promises of better income and a better lifestyle is a section that has rural Christians concerned. In Section 6, clause 5 it itemizes a CCP objective that will have a grave repercussion on the unregistered house churches and foreign missionaries. It states the CCP's intention to:

“promote social crime-prevention and control forces. We will carry out in-depth



efforts to eliminate evil, severely crack down on evil forces in rural areas, and in rural families, and crack down on illegal crimes such as gambling, drug trafficking and abduction. In accordance with the law, we will intensify efforts to crack down on illegal religious activities and foreign infiltration activities in rural areas, prevent religious intervention in rural public affairs, and continue to rectify rural construction of temples and abuse of religious statues.”

Since the publishing of the No.1 Central document we have seen this clause progressively put into action with the roll out of the “Sharp Eyes” project. Cameras are being installed in rural neighborhoods, including Skynet (satellite) cameras, allowing country folk to watch their fellow villagers’ activity in public areas via streaming boxes and apps. Not unlike watching a reality show on TV, they can simply press a button on their TV remote or mobile phone to alert police of any suspicious or

criminal activity.

The document also expresses CCP intentions to “improve the peasants’

spiritual outlook.... Strengthen atheism propaganda and education ...enrich the spiritual and cultural life of the peasants, and resist feudal superstition activities.”

Systematic Church Suppression

“We know we are being watched” has long been a comment bandied around amongst pastors and church leaders serving in China. However, over the last decade, they have enjoyed an interval where they have been largely left alone by local authorities with minimal interference.

Previously known as the underground church during the Cultural Revolution, unregistered churches came to be called family churches as they were able to operate more openly. Church numbers multiplied and the rapid growth has now alarmed the authorities who perceive organised religion not under State control as a threat to Communist Party rule.

This year, in response, China’s far flung state-of-the-art surveillance systems have been kicked into action. And the extent to which China has gone to trace networks of believers who have opted not to become members of the State’s official church is mind blowing. Surveillance teams have tracked believers through their private communications and contact lists, facial recognition technology

and public surveillance camera systems. Locations, travel and meetings have all been traced and recorded.

CCSM has been told of special agents being sent from Beijing to distant cities to arrest and question key leaders of the family church network. Their computers and devices are being taken and searched. Numerous reports are coming in from across China of unregistered churches being raided, congregation members being taken away for questioning, arrests and even beatings. Churches large and small are being shut down and church resources are being confiscated.

“I was given just 24 hours to leave the country” one church leader holding a foreign passport reported. He left all his belongings behind. Friends cleared out his flat.

On May 12, 2018 Police raided the Chengdu Qiuyu Shengyue Reformed Church (literal translation,

“Autumn Rain Covenant Reformed Church”) and suppressed a memorial service for the 10th year anniversary of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake in which 69,000 people lost their lives. Many in the congregation were taken away by police. According to sources hundreds of police officers, state secretaries and special agents went to the church and arrested the pastor, preachers and more than 100 believers. A number of

believers were beaten and books were removed. Pastor Wang Yi and evangelist Li Yingqiang were taken away but were later released.

Even registered churches are not completely immune from the crackdown. Reports of police harassment, agents sitting in on services and restrictions to church activities are also coming out of China.

News from CCSM UK

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

Ephesians 6:18 NIVUK

Do Christians in China need us? I've been asked that question this week. If there are so many Christians in China now, do they need us, do they need those who live outside of China?

It might depend on what is meant by “need”. In one way they have everything they need in Christ, he supplies their

every need. But in another way, the Bible shows us that God has designed his people to be in relationship with one another, to support one another, to together seek to bring God glory.

It seems that we have moved into a period where we should aim to partner with Chinese believers, looking to work in partnership with the Chinese church. We do have resources we can offer, we do have lessons we have learnt, we do have freedom to meet and worship. But we should be listening to our brothers and sisters in China to hear how God is leading them, to hear what their priorities are, in order to serve them best.

As the passage at the start of this





article highlights, prayer is vital, prayer is to be offered for all the Lord's people. Our brothers and sisters in China need our prayers, as indeed we need their prayer for us. Even Paul asked for prayer on a regular basis, he recognised his own weakness and limitations that could only be overcome through Jesus Christ, but eagerly wanted prayer for this to be released.

So I believe the question is not “does the church in China need us?” “but rather “how does the church in China need us?”

Continue to pray for God to be honoured in China, and pray for believers East and West to know how best to work together to bring in the Kingdom of God on earth. Pray especially as believers in China face fresh opposition and challenges, that they will experience “God with them” in all circumstances.

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