



# CHINESE CHURCH SUPPORT MINISTRIES

## CHINA PRAYER LETTER



NOVEMBER 2018

## Close To Home

A Chinese-born New Zealander was recently given 24 hours to leave China. Back in his adopted country he sat down with me to tell his story...

Jonathon was born in North East China. He first heard the name Jesus whilst a 7-year-old boy in his home town. There was a single radio in his residential complex and someone had tuned it to a Hong Kong Christian radio station. From that he learned a few lines of a hymn and heard them offering a free Bible to anyone who wrote in. He asked his father if he could do this, but he was told no. It would be many years later and thousands of kilometres away that he would hear the name of Jesus again.

Graduating with a PhD from a famous Beijing university, he was, for a while, a university lecturer in another major northern city. He vividly remembers accompanying his students to Beijing in June 1989 and was involved on the fringes of the Tiananmen Square protests. Shots flew close by, but none hit his group. At



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

the time he thought it was good luck. He and his students helped to carry those who were injured to hospital. These memories are indelibly lodged in his memory.

Jonathon left the academic world soon after and worked for some time in a southern city before deciding to migrate to New Zealand. He readily found well paid work and became a New Zealand citizen.

One day, out of curiosity, he walked into a Wellington church. He was warmly welcomed and soon after was given a Bible for the first time. He read it and the many questions turned to conviction. He was born again!

He knew that working and storing up wealth was not the plan for his life and he went looking for opportunities to serve God more fully. He shared his new faith with anyone who would listen. He believed that Christians had no option but to share the Good News.

In 2010, a friend invited him to a major southern China city where he was connected to a local unofficial church that had a strong church planting focus. For 4 years he trained part time at their Bible College (also unofficial) and was given increasing responsibility in his church.

During this time he stayed in  
China on a Visitor's  
Visa. At times  
he

needed a miracle to get this renewed and he has many stories of God's protection.

After graduating from Bible College, he was sent out as a church planter, ending up in a regional city in a West China province.

The church started with one older lady who he met at the hairdressers and had grown to about 20 by the beginning of this year.

Then the trouble began.

The large mother church was raided. All their resources and equipment were taken by the police. The pastor and congregation were warned that if they tried to meet again they would be heavily fined. Members had their work places visited by the police. They were told they would lose their jobs if they tried to meet again.

One by one, other churches that had been planted by the mother church were dealt to in the same way. The whole network of churches was systematically dismantled. Inevitably they arrived at Jonathon's church. Even though he used his old ID card, they knew he was from New Zealand. In fact, they knew all about him. He was given 24 hours to leave the country.

He left behind a house he had bought but was able to smuggle out his precious portable hard drive with all its sensitive information.

A small number of the believers in this group of churches have retreated to small

cells as part of a contingency plan. Many, however, were frightened by the threats of job losses and impossibly heavy fines. It is for this group of new Christians, not deeply rooted in the Scriptures, that Jonathon is most concerned.

Whilst he feels anger at times, he knows that the church in China will survive and ultimately grow stronger. But his thoughts are always for those who have been isolated from leadership and teaching. His tears are painful to watch.

## Two Churches, One Land

*Part 2 of an article by Robert Menzies, “The Future of the Church in China: Why China’s House Churches will Prevail”. This article was written in 2017, just prior to the persecution of the house churches in 2018.*

The contrast between typical worship experiences in Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) churches and their house church counterparts could not be more striking. Whether you attend a TSPM church in Kunming or Beijing, the experience will be remarkably similar to many Protestant worship services around the world. However, when you

attend a house church service, while you never know exactly what to expect (each house church has its own distinctive flavour), you can rest assured that your experience will be quite different from past experiences of worship in traditional mainline churches. In the midst of the diversity that characterizes the house church settings, one constant unifies: the

# International Short-Term Teams

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

December 2018: Cultural Exchange Team  
April 2019: Cultural Exchange; Cycle/Intercession; Mercy; Medical; Come, See & Do Youth Leaders Teams

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service will reflect the musical styles, the felt needs, and the familial relationships that characterize the Chinese context.

This is the real beauty, in my opinion, of the house church movement in China: it allows for the rich diversity that characterizes the body of Christ, and it does so in an authentically Chinese way. Worship in the house churches is more diverse in nature than in the TSPM churches, and it is also much more indigenous. A “one size fits all” approach to church life simply cannot contain the wonder and beauty of the body of Christ, globally or in China. This is true of worship styles, but it is also true of theology and church structure. It is especially true when the apparent uniformity is forced and contrived.

The artificial and contrived nature of the TSPM churches’ “post-denominational unity” was recently illustrated for me in vivid fashion by a friend, Pastor Huang, who pastors a local house church. Pastor Huang is associated with the China Gospel Fellowship (CGF), one of the larger house church networks in China. Pastor Huang told me that early in 2016 the leader of the CGF, Uncle Shen, met with the President of China, Xi Jinping. In

## Alopen

Christ sent his disciples to convey his redemption story to the people of the world. Yet for six centuries after the crucifixion we have no documented record of any Christian missionaries coming to bring this message to the Chinese. It is quite possible that the

this conversation, Xi Jinping purportedly asked Uncle Shen, with respect to the government’s policy toward Christianity, which of three paths he would prefer China to travel. The first path would eliminate the TSPM and only allow for house churches. The second path would allow for both the TSPM and the house churches, with each on equal footing. The third path would call for the house churches to become a part of the TSPM. Apparently, Uncle Shen answered, “Not path one, not path three, but path two is my preference.”

I must admit that I am sceptical of this story’s veracity. Certainly, recent events suggest that Xi Jinping and his government have no desire to allow the house church movement to compete on equal footing with the TSPM. If the new regulations governing religious activity may serve as our guide, it is apparent that China’s leaders are intent on restricting further the limited space that currently exists within China for house church groups to operate. Nevertheless, I find this story interesting because it raises an important question: What would happen if the TSPM and the house churches were actually allowed to exist on equal footing?

gospel did reach China in those early years, but the details have been lost to history.

It wasn’t till 1625, when a limestone tablet named the



Nestorian Stele, or the Xi'an Stele, was discovered, that the world first learned of a group of pioneering evangelists who courageously set out from Daging (the Roman Empire) arriving in China in 635AD, in the 9th year of the reign of Emperor Taizong (Tai Tsung).

The stele had been erected in 781 and describes 150 years of early church history in China. Near its top is the image of a small decorative cross standing on a lotus flower. The monument's inscriptions, etched predominantly in Chinese, mention a Nestorian Christian named Alopen who travelled with a group of Syriac (Persian) missionaries bringing sacred books and images. He reached the Tang capital of Chang'an (now Xi'an) and was welcomed by the Emperor.

Emperor Taizong, second emperor of the Tang dynasty, was renowned for his intelligence and success as a ruler. He surrounded himself with good advisors and would even concede to listen to their criticism, acting on it if he agreed with their opinion. He practiced a policy of religious tolerance. His reign is considered one of the most important in Chinese history and future leaders would study his life and attempt to emulate his rule.

The Emperor Taizong's birth name was Li Shimin. He was a learned man and thirsty for knowledge. His library is reported to have held 200,000 volumes, on par with the great library at Alexandria. He listened to Alopen preach and promptly organised for his books to be translated then set about scrutinizing them.

The very first book to be translated was named the "Sutra of Jesus the Messiah"—a collection of 206 verses that sought to explain Christian beliefs and show how they were compatible with traditional Chinese values. According to the stele, Li Shimin found Alopen's books most acceptable and included them in the Imperial library. He had them copied and distributed.

Three years later, in 638, the Emperor issued an official edict protecting the Nestorian church. Alopen was given permission to preach and spread the Christian faith. Emperor Taizong had China's first Christian church and monastery constructed in Xi'an and twenty-one monks (likely Persian), were installed to administer it.

During his rule China would have many years of peace and prosperity. His successor, Gao Zong (Kao-Tsung) (650-683) honoured Alopen with the title "Guardian of the Empire" and "Lord of the Great Law".

The stele accounts that "The religion spread throughout the ten provinces ... [and] monasteries abound in a hundred cities."

After 300 years this time of religious freedom sadly ground to a halt. In the mid-ninth century a period of great persecution of "foreign religions" began. Christianity all but disappeared from the Chinese heartland but was continued through that period in the outer regions among the Uyghur, Turkish, and Mongols.

# Project Dragonfly



Chinese internet users make up a megamarket that is an irresistible lure for technology companies such as the American giant Alphabet Inc, owner of Google LLC.

Many will remember that Google operated in China for four years prior to 2010, meeting compliance with China's censorship laws. At the time, a statement to BBC News Google explained that, "While removing search results is inconsistent with Google's mission, providing no information...is more inconsistent with our mission." Google did however provide users with a message alerting them when search results were omitted by the censorship process.

Then in 2010, a cyberattack from within the country hacked into email accounts, including Gmail addresses. Amongst those targeted were several prominent Chinese human-rights activists, some of whom were convicted and imprisoned based on their compromised correspondence.

Google's response was to make to an ethical stand. It redirected its Chinese traffic to the uncensored Hong Kong version of Google's search engine. Predictably, within months Google's services were inaccessible on the mainland.

The search engine has since been excluded from the Chinese market for eight

years. But recently news has emerged that Google never really left China.

In 2007 Google had quietly formed a joint venture company with Ganji.com. This company was named the Guxiang Information and Technology Co. and it operates a navigation website called 265.com under license as a Chinese company. 265.com uses Baidu to return its search results.

For 10 years, by harvesting its client's search data from 265.com, Google has gathered information to determine which websites are blocked by China's Great Firewall. And in August this year, a whistle-blower in Google's staff revealed that that Google has been using this data to develop a new search engine app specifically for China. The product's codename is Project Dragonfly. It is capable of returning searches that omit China's restricted sites and search terms, meeting the Chinese censorship requirements.

It is said the prototype has already

# PRAYER POINTERS

## Close to Home

Please pray that Jonathon will continue to be used by God wherever this might be.

Pray for those new in the faith who have been cut off from their church life and support. Pray that the Holy Spirit will be their teacher and they will soon have the opportunity again to gather and encourage one another.

Pray that the interpretation of the law that has led to these actions will be challenged and freedom to worship for all will be a new reality in China.

## Two Churches, One Land

Thank the Lord that he made China such a rich and diverse nation. Pray that every Chinese Church will finally be free to worship with their own unique and indigenous style.

Pray that Xi Jinping will experience the love, freedom and salvation of the living God.

## Alopen

Thank God for sending the Nestorians to bring his gospel message to China and for making a way for his message to be translated and shared.

Ask God that he will once again open the hearts and minds of the Chinese leaders to receive his message.

Pray that China will recognise the blessing that comes with Christianity.

Pray that they will recognise Jesus as their “Guardian of the Empire” and “Lord of the Great Law”.



# PRAYER POINTERS

## Project Dragonfly

Pray for the protection of those 1400 Google staff members that signed the letter protesting the transparency around Project Dragonfly. Their jobs could be compromised by taking a stand.

Thank God for people who find the courage to stand on their morals and speak out.

Pray that Google will chose not to create an app that would advance surveillance abuses.

Pray for those in power who decide what is to be censored.

## The Lost Kingdom

Ask God to make a way for the Ladakhi in Tibet to hear about Jesus in their own language.

Pray that God will allow Ladakhi in this sensitive region in Tibet greater freedom to discover the truth of the gospel. Ask God that each and every Ladakhi in Tibet will have an opportunity to hear about Christ.

Pray that God will find the right people willing to go to this inhospitable region. Pray that our Father will provide for the needs of those working in this region.

## News from CCSM UK

Pray for peace in China in society, in homes, in communities.

Pray for peace in the hearts and lives of Christians, despite pressures and challenges.

Pray that this peace in the lives of Christians will shine out to non-believers and draw them to God.



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and support the church and  
the people of China

been demonstrated to Chinese officials. Whether the service will be accepted and become publicly available remains to be seen.

What is obvious is that Google is now willing to again meet the Chinese governments censorship requirements that identify and block websites and search terms mentioning such things as peaceful protests, political dissent, democracy, certain academic studies, human rights, police brutality and religion.

The Chinese Communist Party's aim with censorship is no doubt to uphold its position of power, its ideologies and of course to maintain peace in the nation. To consider censorship as being entirely negative is foolhardy. There is no doubt that a level of censorship is beneficial, such as in cutting out sites that engage in criminal activity or pornography (something that both Google and Baidu could improve on). But in China, where freedom of speech and freedom of belief are concerned, the moral high ground is far more subjective.

Google's own staff have expressed concern about Dragonfly and the secrecy that has shrouded the project. 1400 staff

signed an internal letter pushing for more transparency from Google stating, "Google employees need to know what we're building." And "we do not have the information required to make ethically-informed decisions about our work, our projects, and our employment."

A small number of Google staff resigned over the issue amongst whom was senior research scientist Dr Jack Poulson. In a letter to the Senate committee he confirmed that Dragonfly could link Chinese users' search history with their phone numbers, potentially allowing China's government to easily track their activity.

These concerns have been further voiced in an open letter to Sundar Pichai, Google's CEO, signed by 14 human rights groups. This letter raises the concern that "Offering services through mobile phone apps, including Google's existing Chinese apps, raises additional concerns because apps enable access to extraordinarily sensitive data. Given the Cybersecurity Law's data localization and other requirements, it is likely that the company would be enlisted in surveillance abuses and their users' data would be much more vulnerable to government access."

## The Lost Kingdom

In India's north, beneath the southern slopes of the Himalayas there is a region that is vastly different from the lower foothills and lush green plains.

It is shrouded in snow through winter and becomes a desert in summer as the rains are held back by the high mountain ranges bordering its valleys. Winter

temperatures sit at minus 30 Celsius (-22°F). Farmers rely on melted snow for their crop's water supply.

The region was known, until recent times, as the Kingdom of Ladakh. It used to stretch from the Baltistan valleys (now mostly in Pakistan), the upper Indus Valley, Zaskar, Lahaul & Spiti district to the south, much of Ngari (also known as Ali in what is now Tibet, China) including the Rudok region and Guge in the east, Aksai Chin (now administered as part of Hotan County in Xinjiang, China) in the northeast (extending to the Kun Lun Mountains), and the Nubra Valley to the north over Khardong La in the Ladakh Range.

For a thousand years Ladakh was an independent kingdom with Leh (pronounced Lie) as its capital and its own language. It was once a major city along the Asian Silk Route. It endured periodic incursions from its Muslim neighbours in the west and war with Tibetans in the East, unstable rulers and even assassinations; yet it remained intact.

Its people, the Ladakhi, are a Tibetan group. Nowadays many Ladakhi are Shia Muslim but the majority share the beliefs of their Tibetan Buddhist neighbours mixed in with images of ferocious demons from the pre-Buddhist Bon religion. Traces of influence from the dark, distant past are found in the demonic masks and re-enactments of human sacrifices that make up their festivals. By tradition Ladakhi



families would give their youngest son or daughter to a monastery to become a monk.

Ironically, Ladakhi believe hell is a miserably cold place.

The Ladakhi Kingdom was finally defeated in 1834 by the Sikh Empire. But just over 10 years later, in 1848, the British pushed the invaders back and merged the mountain realm into the British Princely State, Kashmir and Jammu. Finally, this was acceded to India when it became a republic. Today a Ladakh royal family still exists in Leh, but their influence has been merely symbolic.

The Global Evangelization Movement lists a 1995 population of 2,445 Ladakhi in Tibet. Their inclusion in China was outside of their control. In 1949, after genial relations between the fledgling nations of India and China, the Chinese suddenly occupied the Aksai Chin region in northern Ladakh, constructing the 219 Highway (the Western Highway)

connecting Tibet and Xinjiang and building a military presence in the remote area. They annexed 38,000km<sup>2</sup> of the remote Aksai Chin region. The Aksai Chin area is so remote that the Indian government did not discover the Chinese had constructed a road there until 1951, two years after it was completed!

Full scale war broke out in 1962 and although India fought bravely they were overrun by the superior Chinese military and suffered a crushing defeat. Thereafter Indo-Sino relations have not been quite the same.

Presently the Joshua project gives a figure of only 600 Ladakhi remaining in the China controlled territory. Approximately 105,000 Ladakhi live on the Indian side of the border.

The first Christians to the Ladakhi were probably Nestorian traders in the eighth century. Georgian crosses have been found inscribed on boulders. In 1642 a Portuguese priest, Antonio de Andrade, established a base near present-day Zanda. The mission was torn down soon after by the king of Ladakh. The Moravians commenced work in Ladakh in 1856 and by 1922 numbered 158 converts. They reported, "There is no very active opposition to Christian work. ... The people are very willing to accept anything we can give them in the way of medicine, education, or even Scriptures and religious tracts." Although the Moravians are still working among the Ladakhi in India, there are no known Christians among the small number of Ladakhi in Tibet.

## News from CCSM UK



*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. [2 Thessalonians 3:16]*

These words of Paul to the members of the church in Thessalonica are a blessing, a prayer and an encouragement. We can use these words for our family and friends and fellow believers, we can also use these words as a basis for prayer for our brothers and sisters across China.

A blessing: “may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way”

The Lord of peace – that is who He is, He can give peace because He is the origin of peace, true peace is found in Him. A rich and all-encompassing peace – “peace at all times and in every way”

A prayer: Requesting that the Lord give you peace, and that this peace be present wherever you are and in all circumstances.

An encouragement: Our Lord God is the Lord of peace, He brings peace,



He provides peace, His peace overcomes. It is a peace that is not man-made, but God-made, it is able to be ours “at all times” and “in every way”. We are able to be included in His peace.

It can also be a testimony to God, when we have this peace and others see we have peace in trying circumstances, then we can testify that our peace is from God.

We thank Him that our peace really is beyond our own creation or means.

The final phrase “The Lord be with all of you” wraps this all together; if we have Him with us, then His peace will be with us, His presence changes everything. It is again a blessing to give to others, a prayer and an encouragement – “The Lord be with (all of) you”.

So let us take these words and use them to bless those in China now, use these words to pray from them, that they will experience peace and if you have chance to speak to Christians in China encourage them with these words “may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way”

Martyn Wells



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