



# CHINESE CHURCH SUPPORT MINISTRIES

## CHINA PRAYER LETTER



APRIL 2021

## Improper Punishments

Rules have been issued by China's Ministry of Education clarifying what punishments are considered improper approaches when punishing pupils. They will reinforce an existing 1986 law, which made corporal punishment in China's schools illegal.

Despite being made illegal in 1986 corporal punishment had by no means ceased in schools and remained widespread, possibly because many parents did not see it as a significant problem.

There was also some ambiguity around exactly what constitutes illegal corporal punishments with no law in China clearly defining it and there was a need to clarify how disciplinary measures should be supervised.



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Reports of harsh discipline, causing harm, trauma and even the death of students has been relatively commonplace in the media.

Last year a kindergarten teacher in eastern China was fired for forcing two children to go out into the burning sun as a punishment for playing during nap time.

In June 2020 a fifth-grader in eastern Jiangsu province took her own life after her teacher allegedly slapped her and humiliated her in front of the class. China Daily reported that the teacher had allegedly shamed her because her essay lacked “positive vibes”.

In September 2020, a 10-year-old girl in Sichuan was among nine students who were punished for getting their maths sums wrong. She was beaten with a ruler on her palms four times and made to kneel for five minutes. Later it was reported in the Oriental Times that her maths teacher had pulled her ears and beaten her head. Police said the student started to feel dizzy from a concussion and was later taken to hospital by her grandmother and her teacher, dying later that afternoon.

Educators now have it spelled out which methods are considered ‘improper discipline’. In addition to corporal punishments (those that cause physical pain), the Ministry of

Education has forbidden verbal abuse, collective punishment for individual violations and other methods that could harm students’ physical and mental health.

The rules elucidate the conditions under which educators can exercise disciplinary measures, as well as the scope of the punishments. Minor misconduct should only receive minor punishments. For example, forgetting to complete one’s homework could illicit a penalty such as writing self-criticism or apologies, or taking part in classroom chores. Perpetrators of more severe violations such as bullying may face suspension, be advised to take counselling, or be educated on school disciplinary policies. However, only senior primary school students and above can be punished with suspension.

The new rules took effect on the 1st of March 2021. It is yet to be made clear as to how teachers who disregard these measures will be punished.

Chinese children shall no longer be subjected to caning, be made to stand or kneel for hours, or be sent outside into the cold or heat.

Along similar lines, the new Family Education Law, currently awaiting approval, will prohibit any form of violence at home and will see China join around 60 other nations that forbid smacking in the home.

# Religious Clergy Cards

From now on, China's religious personnel must carry a 'clergy card' certifying that they are included in the national database of authorised clergy.

Under new regulations titled 'Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy' which will come into effect May 1st 2021, all those who 'engage in religious teaching activities' must be registered. By this definition, the law would include lay preachers and even those leading church cell groups, as well as ordained pastors.

To be eligible for a clergy card, a candidate must be nominated by a CCP-approved/registered religious group or organisation. Furthermore, standardised work titles, job descriptions and the conditions in which they can operate, are to be determined by the

national bodies overseeing each of the five official religions (Article 13). China's Protestant Church is overseen by the China Christian Council and the TSPM Three Self patriotic Movement, together known as the the Lianghui (两会) or Two Councils. They are not independent but operate under the control of the Religious Affairs Department, a division within the United Front Work Department (UFWD), a body directly subordinate to the CCP Central Committee, all members of which are required to be atheist.

The new regulation stipulates that registered clergy must operate under the 'supervision and management' of the CCP's Religious Affairs Department which will 'guide', monitor and 'file records' on all registered clergy (Articles 32-45).

## International Short-Term Teams

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Article 3 requires that candidates and cardholders demonstrate a willingness ‘to support the leadership of the Communist Party of China [and] the socialist system ...’ Furthermore, registered clergy and registered organisations are required to monitor and report on each other (Articles 44 and 45).

The law also orders that religious staff should focus on improving their own quality and their cultural and moral literacy. They are required to study the contents of doctrines that are conducive to social harmony, progress of the times and healthy civilization, and integrate them into sermons to promote the ‘sinicization’ of religion in China. (Article 7)

The card system assigns an ID number to clergy and integrates them into the ‘social credit’ system, a mechanism that uses both rewards and punishments to achieve adherence to the rules. Cards have an expiry date after which the candidate must reapply. Elizabeth Kendal, an International religious liberty analyst, predicted the clergy card will be “difficult to achieve and easy to lose.”

and church staff with more time-consuming red tape, compliance work and government training sessions. It will be increasingly difficult for them to maintain the fullness and integrity of the gospel while preaching at a pulpit shared with the Party. The cards will also strengthen the power of the police to identify and punish objectors who continue to lead independent fellowships and Bible studies, practicing their faith away from the state church.

It is possible that the real impact of these regulations will be on churches’ small groups. If there was to be a shortage of certified cardholders to contribute to small group teaching, the nurturing, growth and discipleship of believers will suffer.

Despite the expected increase in self-censoring by pastors, the law does not make it impossible for them to present the message of salvation in a Three Self Church. TSPM believers still have access to the full Bible in their own homes. The new law simply highlights the great need for believers to individually study the Word, led by the Holy Spirit, to enable them to discern what is of God and what is of another gospel.

# Death - A Subject To Avoid



Modern Chinese are educated to place their faith solely in science to explain every aspect of life....and death.

The CCP is so convinced that science is the answer to all life's questions that it has given away t-shirts and aprons embossed with the slogan "Adore Science, Anti-Evil-Cult" in marketplaces and restaurants as part of the leadup preparations for the FISU 2021 Summer World University Games pegged for the 18th-29th August, in Chengdu, Sichuan. ChinaAid reported the giveaway, which comes at a time when a wider anti-cult campaign is being conducted across China, sweeping along with it genuine Christian house church members, and people of many other faiths and beliefs. The giveaway items carry the FISU (International University Sports Federation) logo alongside the anti-cult slogan. Endorsing a propaganda slogan in relation to an

International event has drawn the ire of faith groups around the world.

But this effort to curtail beliefs and spiritual practices is by no means new to China. In AD 732, when wealthy citizens were reported to be holding too many extravagant and ostentatious ancestor worshipping ceremonies, Emperor Xuanzong decreed that such respects should be limited to one day a year, on Qingming.

Today, the Qingming festival, or Tomb-Sweeping Day remains a major festival observed in China as well as in many other Asian nations. It is calculated as the 15th day after the Spring Equinox which this year falls on April 4th.

Despite professing stalwart faith in 100% science many Chinese approach death with trepidation. Death is a topic cocooned in taboos and superstition.

Mere mention of mortality is believed to invoke misfortune. The number four sounds similar to the Mandarin word for death, causing travellers to refuse a hotel room ending in the number 4, or one on the fourth floor. Phone numbers excluding the digit 4 fetch a higher price. Parents avoid discussing issues around death with their children and people leave writing their wills until the last possible moment, lest the action courts an early death. In fact, the topic is so widely avoided, that when death actually draws near it can be very hard to handle for both the dying and their families.

Confucius himself remarked, “If you

don’t understand what life is, how will you understand death?” Yet even Confucius offered nothing but ambiguity in response to questions about the afterlife. In Liuxiang’s *Shuoyuan*, Zigong asked Confucius, “Do the dead have consciousness?” Confucius responded, “If I say the dead have consciousness, I’m afraid their worthy descendants will perform excessive burial rituals and hinder the lives of the living. If I say the dead have no consciousness, I’m afraid unworthy descendants will not bury their dead. So, should I tell people whether the dead have consciousness or not? I prefer to say that they will know after their death, and this is not too late.”

## One Certainty, One Hope



In 1987 the Song Tang Care Hospital, was opened in Beijing and it makes the proud claim of being China’s first palliative care facility. However, rather than being welcomed with community support, it was violently opposed by superstitious neighbours and forced to change location seven times.

Its claim to be the first such facility may be true for the current communist era, but it overlooks the many Christian mission organisations that built and

ran free hospitals and hospices in the early-to-mid 1900’s, after which time all foreigners had to leave.

Hospice care is still a relatively foreign concept for many Chinese. It is more usual that once hospital treatment options come to an end, patients are sent home to spend their last days in the care of their families. Palliative care, or hospice services, are scarce in China’s cities and almost non-existent in the rural areas. The tradition of “Raising children to care for you in old age,” is still a strong Chinese precept.

But although the notion remains strong,

# PRAYER POINTERS

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## Improper Punishments

Praise God who is a patient and kind teacher, who guides and disciplines those He loves. Praise God that He has plans to prosper us and not to harm us. Give thanks that China is seeking to protect its school children from harm and abuse.

Pray that teachers will be able to maintain respect in the classrooms and will be effective in guiding the behaviour of the children in their classes. Pray that the Lord will help and guide Christian teachers will be a good witness to their classes.

## Religious Clergy Cards

Pray for the clergy of the TSPM churches that they might be strengthened and not become discouraged in the increasingly challenging environment.

Pray that the Chinese TSPM congregations will grow in their hunger and love for the Word and that the Holy Spirit will lead them into all discernment and truth.

Pray that pastors will 'confidently make known the mystery of the gospel.' Ask the Father to help them 'speak boldly, as they ought to speak.' [Ephesians 6:19-20].

## Death – A Subject To Avoid

Praise God that he has instilled in us a hunger to search out the truths of both faith and science.

Pray that the nation of China will once again be able to freely seek out the mysteries of science without censorship of faith-based research and scientists

Ask the Father to help believers recognise those who are seeking

Pray that Chinese believers will have their feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, and will have courage to speak boldly about the hope they have in Christ.



# PRAYER POINTERS

## One Certainty, One Hope

Pray that TSPM projects among the elderly will have real outcomes.

Pray for opportunities for volunteers to have meaningful conversations with terminally ill patients.

Pray that these conversations will see lives ended with joy and confidence, and not fear of the unknown.

Praise God that all things happen in His timing.

## Joe's Story – an update.

Pray for Joe as he continues to study and be an ambassador for Christ in a foreign country.

Pray that God continues to speak clearly to him when he returns to China and that Joe will know the path forward with clarity.

Pray for more opportunities in the future for us outside of China to show our love to the Chinese people and see more and more young people like Joe come to know Jesus.

## Reimagining Human Rights

Praise God that he has instilled in all mankind a conscience.

Pray that China might be guided by the two greatest commandments in how it legislates for and governs human rights.

Pray that China's philosophy of "all-round development of the people" will not be used as a platform for increasingly godless governments to restrict freedom of belief.



**Chinese Church Support Ministries**

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

the cold reality is that for the numerous widowed and childless no family will be present when they pass away. Parents who have outlived their only child, or who could never have children, make up just some of the 118 million older people estimated to be living alone by 2020. Even though in 2013, Elderly Rights regulations criminalised filial neglect, many migrant workers still struggle to make it home when their parents sicken. Frequently next of kin have little choice but to continue working in order to pay for the hospital and medical bills. In these situations, the patient will face death alone without the emotional support of family.

Palliative care encompasses the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual. It goes far beyond simply managing pain. Spiritual care includes identifying meaning, fostering self-worth, and having a listening ear and allowing self-expression. It helps the dying to forgive and feel forgiven. Spiritual care is well known to decrease the severity of disease symptoms, reduce hopelessness, and facilitate emotional well-being and inner peace. Good spiritual care can extend life expectancy and quality well past predictions. For many nations, faith support is a valued component of spiritual care. In China, government policy does not permit faith support, they refuse to believe the spirit lives on.

Ironically, even Karl Marx seems to have pondered a final journey into the

afterlife.

Ten years before he wrote his Manifesto, Marx wrote a poem: “Thus Heaven I’ve forfeited, I know it full well. My soul, once true to God, is chosen for Hell.”

The government is rushing to prepare for the increasing numbers of elderly, a kickback of the one-child policy. When the latest Five-Year Plan for Elderly Care, was released in 2019, the document estimated the population over 60 years old would reach approximately 255 million by 2020. The government has offered private capital and NGOs more access to the elderly care market and is encouraging the construction of palliative care institutions. Palliative care is an area that constantly welcomes volunteers, and their visits can be as rewarding for patients as for volunteers.

Last month on March 11, Premier Li Keqiang made an announcement that China is poised to allow the reimbursement of medical bills for outpatients who receive treatment outside their home provinces. The changes will reduce inconveniences for out-of-town elderly people and make it easier for migrant families to be together.



# Joe's Story – An Update

*Whilst it has never been easy to be a Christian in China, young converts are often courageous and bold.*

Joe, from north eastern China, made some new foreign friends in 2012. At that time he was a student at a large university in North Western China and the foreigners had come to his classroom at the invitation of their young English teacher from the UK. Joe did not know but they were members of a CCSM Cultural Exchange Team. Like all of his classmates, he assumed that they were friends of his teacher. Joe told of his experiences with these puzzling visitors in his own quirky style in our July 2018 Prayer Letter. (<http://ccsm.amccsm.org/en/news/prayer/joes-story>)

A product of the China education system, Joe had “no religion” at that time but like many of his generation did have an enquiring mind. Seeds were sown and watered by on-going contact with some of that CCSM team. He became particularly attached to one lady, a mother with three similar aged boys who, Joe said “listened to my distress and pain of campus life, helped me with my assignments and speeches and always encouraged me.”

Later in 2013, he experienced a miraculous conversion. His limited knowledge of the Christian God had come through his foreign friends and the literature

they had left behind. A young man in the room next to his dormitory suddenly and frighteningly died of a heart attack after military training. Joe was brutally challenged by this seemingly pointless death. Then, in his own words: “A power I did not know but could not resist forced me to my knees and I asked God to accept me into His family.” I became a Christian!

Joe continues his story:

“During the journey of youth and academic years, I faced lots of challenges and difficulties. Some friends ridiculed my new faith and love of the Bible. But I feel blessed, as there was always a voice in my mind to tell me: “do not lose your faith no matter what happens to you.” I supported myself financially during my undergraduate years through to my current PhD program here in the UK. I had to teach for more than 10 hours a day during many summer and winter vacations. I went through many days when a bag of chips was all I had to eat! I prayed a lot and ask for Father's help. What I gained from those difficulties was far beyond my expectation.

Now my

life has become so much better than before because Father has made me a stronger person. Many say that it is hard to be a Christian in China, but I don't agree. I have never been courageous or diligent. But Father gives me the courage, strength and diligence to overcome all challenges. When I am in darkness, Father's words frequently appear in my mind: ..."suffering produces endurance, and

endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame..."(Romans, 5:3-5). For years now, I have read the Bible every day. I write diaries about my thoughts. Sometimes, when I check the old diaries, I cry inside because I am touched by God's great love. Those diaries record my journey and often my worries! But, more importantly, it documented how Father spoke to me and taught me day by day."

## Reimagining Human Rights



China's treatment of the Uyghur in Xinjiang has presented itself like a mirror to humanity.

As different people and nations gaze on the situation, what we see reflects our heart and our world view.

Our worldview is formed and moulded by many things – our culture, our station in life, our experiences, our beliefs. It both influences, and is influenced by, what is MOST important in our lives.

For many, human rights are viewed as a priceless treasure, and men and woman have fought and died for human rights over the centuries. But are our eyes all drawn to the same shining jewels in the Human Rights treasure chest? Is the Eastern perspective of human rights the same as the Western perspective? Are

human rights something that can evolve, be developed or reimagined?

On February 22nd, in a speech to the U.N. Human Rights Council, Wang Yi, China's foreign minister conveyed China's view on human rights. His speech clearly shifted human rights away from what many understand to be an individual's rights to be the collective rights of 'the people'. His speech clearly revealed that China's foremost priorities are economic development and security.

In his words, "Increasing people's sense of gains, happiness and security is the fundamental pursuit of human rights." He added that, "Human rights are an all-encompassing concept. They include civil political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Among them the right to subsistence and development are the basic human rights of paramount importance.... The scope of human

rights is constantly evolving. The right to health and the environmental right should also be given more prominence.” In what he called “The people-centred philosophy” he explained that “the wealth gap should be narrowed, and all-round development of the people should be promoted.”

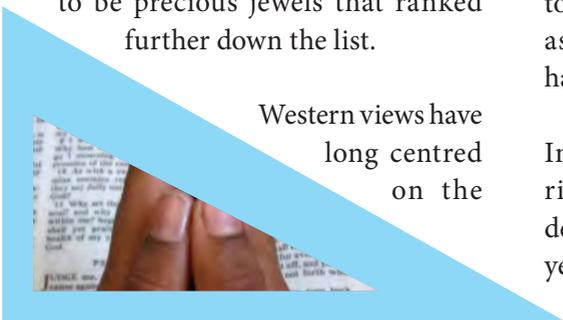
He did not deny the universality and particularity (the quality of being individual) of human rights, but said that peace, development, equality, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom are common values shared by all humanity and recognised by all countries. However, throughout the speech it was clear that the most treasured jewels in China’s human rights chest were wealth and security. Justice, democracy, and freedom seemed to be precious jewels that ranked further down the list.

Western views have long centred on the

individual. Having a ‘voice’ and being free to choose our own path in life, to think and speak our opinions freely are like priceless gold. So, it’s not surprising that democracy and freedom rank very high on the western list of treasures. I wonder, how the West would order the seven ‘rights’ listed above if asked to rank them? Would it be the same as 100 years past? Would war and poverty change our perspectives?

It has been said that in the Chinese worldview, “the ends justify the means” as long as they ultimately benefit the majority. But before climbing onto any moral high ground, one cannot deny that China has been repeatedly voted onto the UN Human Rights Council, and individuals everywhere pay little attention to the civil and political rights of others as long as they have a sense of ‘gains, happiness and security’ themselves.

In answer to the question, “Are human rights something that can evolve, be developed or reimagined?” It seems that yes, they can. At the very least, the order can be juggled.



**CCSM UK**

PO Box 5857  
Sheffield, S10 9GG  
T: 0114 229 5796

National Director: Martyn Wells  
[uk@amccsm.org](mailto:uk@amccsm.org)  
[www.amccsm.org](http://www.amccsm.org)

