

## **Partnering with Local Churches**

### **Mok Chan Wing Yan**

Present discussions in Hong Kong regarding partnerships in mission focus mostly on those who send and those who are sent, and there is very little consideration regarding where the local churches in the mission field stand on mission.



2010 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization was held in Cape Town,

South Africa. One of the most important topics discussed was on partnerships in mission. When congregants in the Western world were largely outnumbered by their counterparts in third world churches, it was time to rethink their future in a cross-cultural partnership context. Mission agencies and churches in mission fields should no longer maintain an instructional stance but foster a collaborative approach in establishing Kingdom allies.

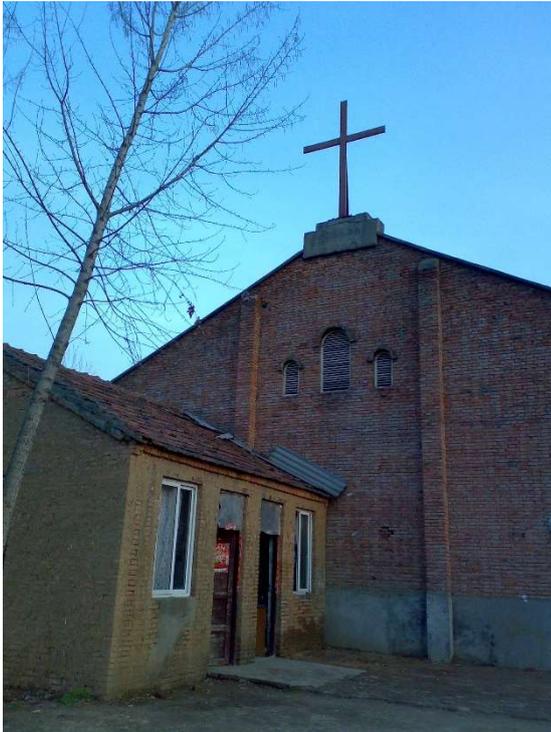
The traditional mentality for mission in Hong Kong sees missionaries as unilaterally bestowing the Gospel. Those local believers in the field of mission are there to hear the Gospel, and to receive help in the form of training and teaching. The local churches seldom have a say in the assessment of missionaries, strategizing for mission, or the administration in mission organizations.

### **Common Problems**

The problems commonly faced by ministries that do not partner with local believers are as follows:

Firstly, since the directing unit for mission workers is foreign, it is hard to indigenize the

Gospel. This will make the Gospel into imported goods which cannot grow in the traditional culture of the region.



Secondly, many missionaries see themselves as bestowers, and local believers as receivers. This encourages long-term dependency and delays the maturity and independence of local churches.

Thirdly, missionaries will not establish equal relationships with local believers, and thus will have difficulty learning from locals as they interpret the Truth. Multiculturalism is truly a treasure of Faith, and expands our understanding of God.

Fourthly, in the field of mission, the long-term leadership of foreign missionaries could easily attract negative criticism from society, seeing this as religious invasion. Over the long-term, this will become a burden for the local church.

In recent years, churches in the mainland have come to put increasing emphasis on the topic of “cross-cultural mission”. Churches both inside and outside the official system are starting to notice the needs of other regions. What is most commonly seen is that churches in coastal areas will send short-term mission teams inland to poorer regions. We can see the development of those churches. There are also missionaries sent to different regions inside and outside of China for long-term ministry. Most typical mission teams and workers could easily deploy methods used by missionaries from a hundred years ago, focusing mostly on their own efforts, and not knowing how to connect with other international teams already in the mission fields. Moreover, they would know even less about establishing partnerships with local workers.

Churches overseas have always provided support in theological education in the mainland, efforts were made especially in the fields of systematic theology and biblical knowledge. However, their vision for today ought to be cast more broadly into mission. Apart from providing knowledge, churches overseas can establish partnerships with mainland churches in sending out and supporting missionaries together. They can also invite mainland missionaries to join in overseas mission teams, putting missions on a better footing for churches in China.

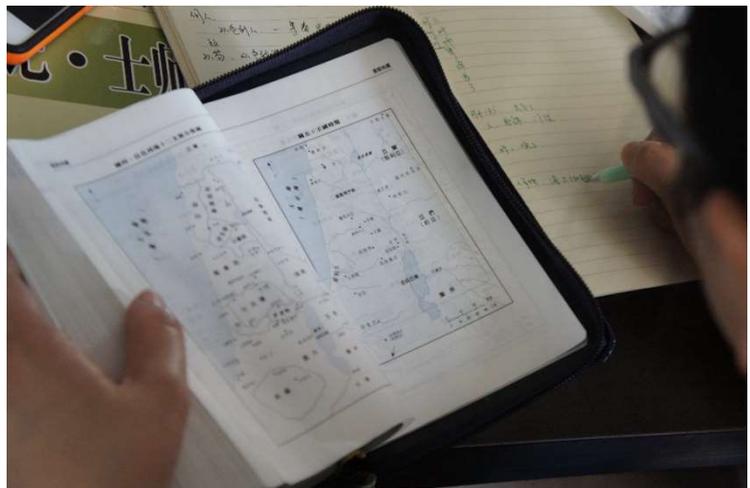
## Basic Beliefs

Behind partnerships is a set of basic beliefs: the belief that all nations and peoples are of equal status in the Kingdom—the mission organization, mother church, missionaries and local believers are all journeying together in the Kingdom of Heaven. The belief of the priesthood of all believers—those who are new believers and those who have been serving the Lord for many years enjoy equal rights and status in the Kingdom. The belief of the translatability of the Gospel—that the Gospel will be expressed in different ways in different cultures, and that different cultural expressions teach us more about the same Truth. The belief that those who are wealthy ought to learn from the poor, that those who are wise ought to learn to be child-like.

## The Role of CCL

**(Dr. Otto Lui's response to the above article)**

The long-term goal of mission is to train up local church leaders and hand them the baton of ministry in establishing indigenized churches. Throughout the years CCL has taken an attitude of being a companion and servant to mainland churches. The main bulk of the work occurs in our responses. For example, one year, we gave many cassette tapes of sermons to the pastors of mainland churches. A



partner suggested that we use CDs instead. After that, we changed to external hard discs and USB memory sticks and gave them more copies in larger volume and with greater content. This was not what we had initially thought of in the project, but it was as a result of responses.

Apart from praying for local churches, we listen to and observe their needs. If they can shoulder the ministry, then we will learn from them. If they are doing well, then we will encourage them. If some needs are expressed, we will exercise discernment and engage in discussions to find out how best to meet their needs through different content or methods. Finally, after many revisions, we will introduce all kinds of training programs, learning materials, etc. Some contents of the training are created as a result of mutual integration and collaboration.

Currently, we have not introduced the traditional elements of leadership, management and mission organization in our leadership and mission training models. Rather, we affirm our belief to begin everything from Biblical teachings, listing different experiences in discussing with mainland churches. It can be said to be a kind of coaching method, to guide them in establishing their own ministry models.

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## Equip Them to Serve!

### --- Nurturing Front Line Leaders of the “Living Word”

Compiled by Xihe

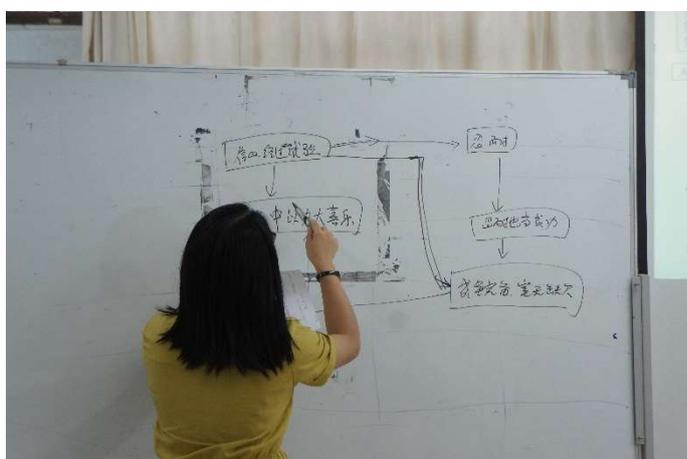


The “Living Word” can be likened to a “potato”, which can be made into different dishes, based on different recipes, and depending on your own circumstances. What is common among these dishes, though, is that “potato” remains the core ingredient.

The above remark was made by Pastor Chen during a “Living Word” Bible camp held in May. This was a vivid analogy she used to highlight the essence of the “Living Word” training, i.e. asking participants to adapt the principles of the “Living Word” teaching to cater to their own church’s needs.

## Interactive Training

Materials for this camp include *James, I & II Peter & Jude*. The author, Rev. Tang Tat-keung, first took participants through an outline of these several books. Then Rev. Tse discussed hermeneutics theory and applications. Practicum was also arranged whereby participants were divided into groups of two and took turns to lead Bible study. While some groups were adept at exegesis, others were good



at using activities to deliver their messages. After each practicum session, collective evaluation was made, where participants showed their appreciation towards each other’s

work and gave suggestions for improvement.

## Nurturing Believers through the Word



Mainland churches have a keen demand for Biblical teaching. Participant, Rev. Zhang shares, “Cult activities are rampant in the mainland, and correct Biblical teaching is hence extremely important. There was a couple in my church influenced by a cult. The brother later returned to the right track, but the sister remains active in the preaching of the cult, and even comes to our church to persuade believers to go her way.” From

this sharing, we realize how mainland churches are in strong demand for correct Biblical teaching. Through organizing the “Living Word” training, CCL supports the nurturing of Bible teachers in mainland churches. Rev. Zhang expressed her gratitude and appreciation to CCL for compiling *The Living Word Curriculum Series*, and wished that the materials could be used more extensively to benefit more believers.

Another participant, Rev. He, had this sharing, “Rev. Tse taught us how to apply *The Living Word Curriculum Series* through practical exegesis. I have learned how to properly interpret Biblical verses, which did not only help me lead ‘Living Word’ small groups, but also assisted me in delivering sermons. Using the techniques of mind-mapping and asking the three questions (what, why, how), I now better understand the meaning of Biblical verses. I hope to have a more accurate grasp of the teaching principles of the ‘Living Word’ and groom more core leaders in the long-term who can help share our ministry in the ‘Living Word!’”

### Aim: Equip to Teach

Participants of the camp came from three regions: South Central China, East China and Northeast China. All of them had been screened and were considered veteran frontline leaders of the “Living Word” in the mainland (group leaders and core members). They took part in advanced classes in the camp



and could hopefully become trainers to train up small group leaders of the “Living Word” in their respective churches. The camp was held in Hong Kong, which did not only make it easier for us to invite Hong Kong pastors as teachers, but also allowed participants to get away from their service temporarily and focus on their studies, broaden their horizons

through exchanges with different churches and church leaders, and engage in exchanges with Hong Kong churches.

## Please Support the “Living Word” Bible Camp

We plan to organize two to three “Living Word” Bible camps in 2016, and mainland pastors and leaders will be invited to Hong Kong to learn and have exchanges. A total expenditure of US\$70,000 is required. The first camp was held in May, and preparation is under way for another camp in the second half of the year to serve around 30 participants from Northeast China, East China and South Central China.

**Up to the end of July, US\$21,000 have been raised, and an amount of US\$49,000 is required.** If you are moved and would like to make an offering, please contact us for details, thank you.

## Prayers

### 1. Lack of Bible Teaching Materials

During a previous training, a mainland pastor reflected that her church had to re-use old Bible teaching materials due to a lack of new choices. May the Lord move more publishers to produce Bible teaching materials relevant to mainland churches to help believers ground their faith in the Bible.



### 2. Employment and Prospects of University Graduates



The *People's Daily* reports that there were 7.65 million graduates of mainland universities in 2016, an increase of 160,000 compared to last year. While anxiety about employment prospects remains, increasingly diverse options are now available and graduates are making more practical choices. May the Lord provide the graduates with spiritual mentors who can help them make career choices. May they learn to trust in God in their career planning.

### 3. Cold Winter of Christian Publishing Industry

With the recent official crackdown on the publishing industry in the mainland, it has become harder for Christian literature to be published (by obtaining ISBN). The Christian publishing sector entered a severe cold winter last year. Christian literature is also published through the China Christian Council/ Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China or regional seminaries (without ISBN) for internal circulation reaching more than 40,000 churches. May the Lord give literature missionaries (publishers, bookshop owners) wisdom, help them follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, adhere to their mission and learn to be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Dear Lord, may you shower your mercy on believers and satisfy their urgent needs on their road to growth.



### 4. Depth of Content of Online Platforms

The latest report of China Internet Network Information Center put the number of mainland netizens at 688 million by December 2015, alongside an excessive number of online media platforms. Many Christian organizations are sharing the Gospel online but it takes much to make the content appealing. May the Lord help Christian organizations make good use of online platforms by providing quality materials as tools for pastoral care.



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