

Becoming a Leader in the Face of Adversity

- 2019 Leadership Summit Learning Exchange Retreat (Pastor's Edition)

© Interview and compiled by: En Qing

In the everchanging atmosphere regarding religious affairs in the mainland, opportunities to train mainland church leaders have become increasingly difficult to obtain. Each training could be the last. In early March, the teaching team and ministry workers conducted the 2019 “Global Leadership Summit” learning exchange retreat for 38 pastors hailing from 8 provinces and 2 municipalities. It is because of this challenging time that the theme of this training retreat was “Leadership in Adversity”. We walked with the mainland leaders through leadership to train them to become leaders in adversity through watching training videos, seminars hosted by professional teachers, and exchanges in social visits and small group discussions.

Before the retreat began, many pastors had arrived early in Hong Kong. The first batch were 8 pastors chosen to be group leaders. We arranged a half-day group leader training session to prepare their minds, to study the content of small group discussion, and most importantly to pray for our Heavenly Father to watch over the coming few days of training. There was another group of early-comers who did not want to miss a single session of training -- we were grateful for their desire to be equipped! They sincerely shared, “In the present religious environment, it is a blessing to be able to come to Hong Kong for training. We don't just wish to increase in knowledge of leadership, we also want to exchange perspectives during the training so that, when the environment becomes even more challenging, we can be prepared to be a good leader and lead the Church forward!”

Embracing the Vision in Adversity - Pastor Couples

Pastor Zheng and his wife come from the east of China. This was their first time to attend this kind of learning exchange retreat. In this environment, the sharing on themed topics, the teaching and guidance of teachers, and the exchange and interaction between the students, all left an indelible impression.

Pastor Zheng stated, “In this time as the regulations on religious affairs is tightening, as a pastor of a church I feel that the pressure is becoming heavier and heavier. In facing these winds and rains, I often feel at loss, and I don’t know what the best thing to do is in this situation. This retreat has pointed me in one direction: facing adversity, the change begins with me. In an



unpredictably changing environment, leaders must come out from the noise and return to the vision that they had at the start. Only those who once again embrace their vision can seize opportunities -- it is better to seize opportunities rather than to try to create them. As pastors, we must often encourage ourselves with the words ‘soar on wings like eagles’. We need to insist that there is an answer, and in fact more than one answer. Leaders need to inspire themselves to grow, so that they can encourage others to break through difficulties and increase their leadership abilities. When our strength is not enough is when it is time to hand things to God.”

Pastor Zheng and his wife exchange looks as they continued to share about their experience, “We quieted ourselves and returned to the place when we were first called, and pondered over God’s calling for us. What God’s vision for us at the start was this: Sunday school ministry and Bible teaching. Though the environment in which we are serving may change a lot, we strive to live out our calling, and to perceive where God is leading in our ministry. As for concrete plans, we will share with other workers in the church and attempt to design studies to communicate important information about the influence of leadership. Our focus will be on church committee members first. Of course, the first step to change begins with ourselves; only then can we influence those around us.”

Teaching in Adversity - Living Word Teacher

Pastor Yau is a mainland Living Word teacher who is continuously mentored by the CCL senior teaching team in bible teaching. He uses his deep knowledge of students from the mainland to equip church and group leaders to teach from the Bible. He felt that the theme of “Leadership in Adversity” for the retreat was perfect in its timing for pastors in the mainland. “Two years ago when the demolishing of crosses in Zhejiang began to stop,

word came that the Christian faith was being suppressed in Shandong, Jiangxi, and Henan. Many were at a loss in the face of this sudden storm. In facing this persecution that came all of a sudden, learning about ‘Leadership in Adversity’ was like a long expected rain in the drought,” he said.

In each day’s training, the teachers started in “the Bible on leadership” session. Then, they played leadership videos, hosted workshops, visitations and small group discussions. Some topics especially caught pastor Yau’s attention, “The first topic was ‘It is not fearful to be alone’-- as a leader serving in ministry, you are often facing loneliness. But when you understand that God can use your loneliness, defeat and apparent setbacks to purify and forge leaders. Those who lead alone can go closer to God and walk closely with God. Secondly, when visiting a social service set up by a Christian organization, I could really experience the fact that love is all about giving, and never asking for anything in return. Spread your seeds day and night with passion, because there will always be a harvest sooner or later. If this is applied to the situation of the churches in China, whether in a good or bad environment, the Church should always strive to exemplify God’s love in the lives of the people, even as society changes. Finally, the ‘Shadow of the valley of death’ -- God is the God of life, why fear the shadow of death? Leaders must trust completely in His provision. Whether we are in adversity or not, we should follow God’s way. Leaders must see each day as the last day of their lives. Facing adversity and setbacks is just one step in the development of the future. What is there to be afraid of?”



Finally, pastor Yau insisted, “Even though the regulations on religious affairs in the mainland have been tightened significantly, it is nothing to be afraid of. God is sovereign over all things. I will continue the teachings of ‘Living Word’, and work with the teaching team to develop the work of the ‘Living Word’ ministry one step at a time, so that believers can return to the Bible and learn from it how we should walk today.

Innovating in Adversity - Young Leader

“Adversity? Who hasn’t faced adversity before?” Those words were spoken by

second-time student pastor Ye upon finishing the training. She is a young pastor, whose views represent the attitudes of a new generation of leaders. She believes that there will be no future, only treading on water, if there isn't innovation. In the past year, she found that maintaining the status quo made her feel bitter and weak. It was easy to give up without a vision to motivate her. In this age, there is no shortage of material or resources; just a shortage of people who use both effectively. For her, she constantly asked herself, "Am I learning about the needs of the times, and bravely moving against the prevailing winds?"

In summarizing what she learned in the retreat, Pastor Ye shared happily, "I believe that leaders must have foresight, the ability in execution, sensitivity, persistence and the ability to adapt. A true spiritual leader will not choose to fight alone. She must have a group of spiritual co-workers to partner with in spiritual ministry, especially in an environment of adversity. That is to say, they must be one body and one team. Moreover, leaders need to return to simplicity. Though it is stormy on the outside, they must maintain a beautiful relationship with God. That way they can lead the ministry team and the church towards God in unity, and serve those around them. In the future, I will also return to the truth, do the simplest things and create new miracles, conquer my fears and lead the team forward."



Afterword

Church leaders from the mainland, whether they are experienced leaders or young pastors, have not been frightened by the adversity and difficult religious environment they face. They stand firm on their calling in the face of adversity, pastor their flock with all their hearts, and lead the churches forward. Only our Heavenly Father knows how long this winter for religion will last. If the church is to stand firm in these stormy days, or even to step forward, it will need more prayer warriors, fellow travelers, and support. We humbly ask you who care for pastors in the mainland to pray constantly for them, so that they will not be alone in adversity, but experience the power of spiritual companions! We also ask you to continue to pray for the Lord's guidance for future opportunities so that these pastors may attend future trainings in Hong Kong.

Insisting on Training Pastors Despite the Difficult Circumstances!

© Interviewed and compiled by: Zhuo Yu

Introduction: Historically, a province in central and southern China has always been known as “a piece of hard ground for the gospel.” There, traditional folk beliefs wield great influence. Moreover, given the atheistic education system on the mainland, the younger generation now embraces the life philosophy of “not believing in anything”. Under this circumstance, spreading the gospel and pastoral care have become a spiritual warfare. At a leadership training camp, I came across Pastor Zhou, the vice-principal of the Bible school in this province, and seized the opportunity to understand the situation and the need for training church workers there.

The General Situation and Bible school

The province boasts a large number of sheep but few shepherds. There are a total of 1,500 churches and gathering points officially registered, served by 70 pastors and close to 200 teachers. The number of graduates from the seminary and Bible school in the province is lower than 500, and there is a shortage of formally trained ministers in rural churches.

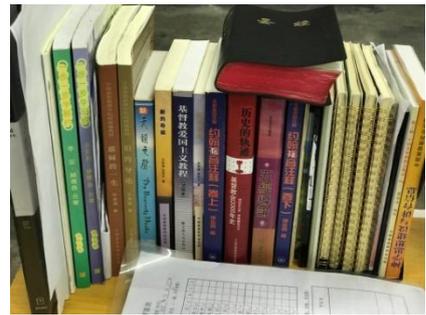
Each year, the 30 graduates from the Bible school inject new impetus into the rural churches. Pastor Zhou pointed out, “We are doing our very best to offer a three-year theological training programme and nurture students’ spiritual life. In addition, in light of rural volunteer workers’ training needs, we also provide them with a six-month full-time basic theological course.

At the school, we are also concerned about the high turnover of graduates. Therefore, in the past two years, we have organized advanced training courses and retreat camps for our alumni.”



“Sinicization” of Christianity and Theological Education

It is hard enough to train church workers and retain them. The Bible school had plunged into greater difficulties after the newly revised Regulations on Religious Affairs came into force. Pastor Zhou said worriedly, “Our neighbouring schools have received notices from local authorities, advising them to add in an element of ‘sinicization of Christianity’ in their curriculum and teaching materials. Students should also be taught the core values of socialism. Hence, upon receiving the government department’s advice, our school has been putting our heads together to see how, under such constraints, we can meet with the government’s demand and yet keep the integrity of our curriculum to ensure that students can still grasp the core in our beliefs.



We saw a book about Christian patriotism on a student’s desk. What impact will political subjects bring to theological education?

Furthermore, the school is in financial difficulty and teachers are paid only 60% of their wages. Over 30% of our students have to apply for financial aid. Today, it has become harder to communicate with external parties and receive outside visitors. Local authorities are also stringently monitoring students’ source of financial support. Reports on financial aid and the school’s financial situation have to be submitted to the local authorities. This directly affects our capacity to raise funds for students.”

Whatever he does, Pastor Zhou always puts students and the school first. Towards the end of the interview, he said earnestly, “May the Lord strengthen the confidence of myself and the teachers so that we can stay steadfast in our beliefs and devoted in our teaching in spite of the harsh religious environment.” May God listen to Pastor Zhou’s prayers, Amen!

Please support the Mentoring-based Leaders Training

(providing Living Word Bible Teaching, Business as Mission and Six Leadership Essentials)

Through training and exchanges in Hong Kong and the mainland, we will equip 115 team coaches, train 340 shepherd leaders and support 460 disciple makers. A fund of HK\$1.3 million is needed in 2019. Please respond immediately, support the “Leadership Development Ministry”. Thank you!

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# Prayers

## 1. Stand Firm in Faith

Since the newly revised Regulations on Religious Affairs came into effect in February 2018, primary officials have enjoyed more power in supervising and examining religious activities. Recently, the Guangzhou Administration for Ethnic and Religious Affairs announced cash rewards for reports made by the public on illegal religious activities in the city of Guangzhou.



May the Lord keep the public from making random complaints or reports for the sake of cash rewards, undermining even legal religious activities. May the Lord exercise justice, let officials exercise their powers fairly; may He also strengthen the faith of pastors and believers to keep them from being engulfed in fear.

## 2. Becoming a Training Platform

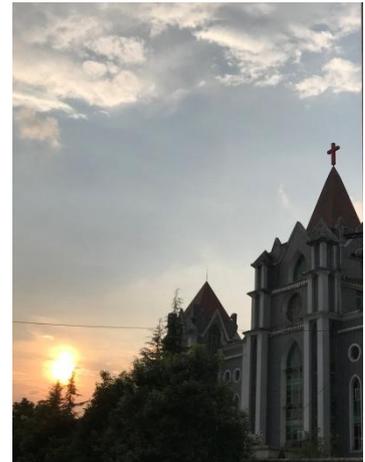


In the face of the changing religious environment in the mainland, church leaders cannot rely on their past experience alone. They can draw extra inspiration and support from training and exchanges with their counterparts, and consequently discover new ways to cope with the current harsh environment.

While overseas organizations cannot easily offer training in China, may the Lord maintain Hong Kong's unique position in providing a training platform for mainland church leaders, and walking alongside them.

### 3. The Challenges facing Urban Churches

In recent years, most urban churches have experienced growth and the ratio of intellectuals joining churches has also increased, leading to the growth of scholar fellowship and businessmen fellowship. Yet churches are not well-equipped for ministering to the young generation raised in a secular and Godless environment.



May the Lord give wisdom to church pastors to help them provide relevant teachings, nurture the spiritual life of intellectuals and train them up to be future leaders. May the Lord lead churches to enter the society, and understand the factors keeping the young generation from accepting Christ, so as to become more effective in winning souls.

### 4. Education as a Business of Love



Lately education officials in a province in eastern China pointed to the low pay and yet heavy workload of high school teachers. Many are under heavy pressure for having to take up family education besides teaching. Meanwhile, while education is seen as a business of love, some teachers lack passion and enthusiasm for their work.

May the Lord show mercy to the teachers, that the governmental bureau can review the current system, and look into enhancing the pay, benefits, as well as training support for teachers. May the Lord move churches to pray for teachers so they can be life mentors for students, besides imparting knowledge.

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