

Christian Education in the Home

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With the actual implementation of the newly revised Religious Affairs Regulations, recent months have seen frontline workers receive numerous reports from churches in the mainland about increased difficulties in organizing gatherings. Moreover, children's Sunday school in many regions could no longer be run. Based on the current trend, there is decreasing space for mainland churches to serve children. In the present situation, training a new generation in faith, love and reverence for the Lord will become a very difficult task.

Reconsidering the Transmission of Christian Education

When mainland churches can no longer be a platform for the teaching of Bible truths to children, pastors and believers will need to reflect on how to conduct Christian education. Will developments for the future become stagnant, or can another path be discovered? Have we considered that perhaps the responsibility of feeding children spiritually through Christian education has transferred from Sunday school in the church to the family at home? Or that the spiritual teacher for children has changed from the pastor or church worker to the parents?

Actually, “Christian education in the home” is nothing new. It has always been the tradition of the Jewish people to transmit their faith from generation to generation. Jewish children receive their first religious education from learning Hebrew history and religion from their fathers and mothers. Moreover, the Old Testament and the law of Moses and proverbs require that parents take up this responsibility-- “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” (Deut 6:6-7) Nonetheless, churches in the mainland are not familiar with “Christian education in the home”. How then do we bring this idea to pastors and believing parents in the mainland?

Inspiring different thinking

If the churches are to master “Christian education in the home”, firstly they must try to understand Christian education for children from different perspectives.

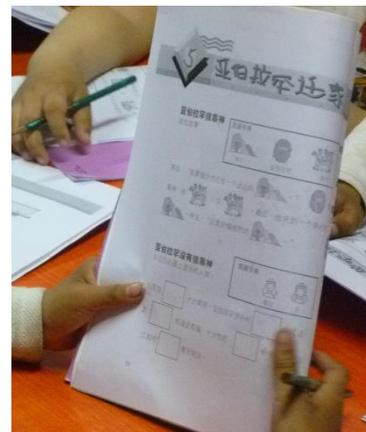
Transcending Designated Locations: In the past, children’s Sunday school leadership and content design had always been the responsibility of pastors and children’s workers in the church. Parents need only bring their children to church on time, and they would have fulfilled their responsibility, as the church was the designated learning place. As the new regulation has appeared, a feasible approach would be to transfer the platform of Sunday school from the church to the home. Of course, such a transfer would monumentally increase the responsibilities of believing parents, and many parents may not have confidence in becoming a spiritual teacher to children. Hence, children’s workers in the mainland will have to change their teaching charges from children to parents. In this way, though children’s work is stifled, family ministry can flourish as a new path.



Transcending Designated Times: Churches in the mainland generally run weekly children’s Sunday schools the same way Bible classes are run--singing praise, memorizing scripture, listening to Bible stories, etc. All of which is followed by classes ending. In contrast, Christian education in the home can be conducted every day, and the times that parents can teach

children is not limited to classroom hours. Real everyday life becomes the backdrop for learning Biblical truths daily. Children can see through their own eyes whether their parents are obeying the teachings of the Lord in their everyday speech and actions. This responsibility cannot be taken lightly at all. Like in the olden days when Jesus taught his disciples through daily obedience to train them to become spiritual leaders.

Transcending Designated Curriculum: in the past, most mainland churches only needed to prepare one set of course material to teach all the children in Sunday school. Though there might be differences based on age groups, each child in that age group would be taught the same lesson. Yet, when Christian education enters the home, each child will have unique needs, and will learn at their own different rate. The use of a single standard course will no longer be suitable, and parents should not teach in that manner. Teaching can instead be interactive; based on the real needs of the child.



These breakthroughs in thinking are very foreign to many pastors and believing parents in the mainland. They did not grow up in this way. They have only known that learning the Bible happens at church, and have never thought about cultivating their children's spiritual growth at home. Nevertheless, as policies have changed, we need to change our inherent ways of acting and find new paths. If we do not start this process now, we will lose the next generation of children. We must "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6)

Start from Equipping Pastors

If "Christian education in the home" is to be effectively implemented, naturally believing parents will need to be equipped. But it is of foremost importance to train pastors and church workers. Only through training these people can they lead parents into becoming spiritual teachers for their children. Mainland theological



education heavily emphasizes interpreting the Bible, and less on its actual application in given situations. Therefore, faced with real situations, professors and even pastors could feel panicked. Pastors will need to monitor the situation when children are no longer permitted to learn about the Bible at church, and tackle this with ministry to parents. They need to cultivate a cohort of spiritual leaders (parents) who are not restricted by buildings, so as to fulfil the mission of teaching a new generation of believers in the family home.

Pastors in the mainland being overly busy in their ministries has become a normal state of affairs. There are believers who judge the faithfulness of a pastor based on the number of ministries he/she is involved with. This often unconsciously propels ministers and pastors to put all their time into ministry and thereby neglect the care of their own families, to say nothing of raising and pastoring their own children. I came to know Pastor Chan, who is personally responsible for over 20 church locations. He needs to preach at each meeting, and he spends a miniscule amount of time at home with his wife and child. With situations like this, how are pastors in the mainland supposed to be an example in teaching parents to grow their children spiritually?

More worryingly, in the mainland society, cohabitation, premarital sex and even adultery is hardly rare even in churches. Mainland pastors are often ill-equipped on this front, exhausting themselves in counselling these believers. They are in desperate need of support. They need to be taught how to counsel parents to build strong marriages, and then to teach to their children the values on marriage and family as it pleases God.

It seems that, in order to implement “Christian education in the home”, church workers and pastors need to be equipped first. Training courses must cover marriage, family, communication and other elements, in addition to Bible teachings, so as to help train parents to become spiritual teachers to their children. In responding to this need, this year’s “Professional Diploma in Christian Education course”¹ will include modules on “Marriage and Family”, “Communication and Counseling” and other courses. With practical course content and professional teachers and professors, participating pastors will be guided in reflecting on their family situation, and taught to pastor to believing parents in preparation for “Christian education in the home”.

Conclusion

Recalling when children's Sunday school first appeared, it was in response to the deprivation of education that children faced because of working conditions. Through literacy classes, children and their parents were evangelized. Returning to the subject of teaching the Bible, the responsibility of the spiritual growth of children lie with parents. Yet at some point, which we are unsure of, this responsibility became that of the Sunday school teacher. As the new regulation tightens the space for religious freedom, perhaps it is time to consider again how to put the responsibility of spiritual cultivation of children back in the hands of parents.

¹ *Professional Diploma in Christian Education course is jointly organized by the Leadership Training Institute and CCL.*

Focus and Re-focus

© Otto Lui
Associate General Secretary (Training)



Since the implementation of the revised Regulation on Religious Affairs early this year and Measures on Integrated Management of Religious Work in late March (drawn up by the United Front Work Department), churches in various regions have expressed that restrictions have become more stringent. Compared to the past, there is

now less freedom to organize church activities. Those supporting such measures said that regulation is needed to ensure that legal religious activities can be carried out smoothly, while those in opposition opined that the measures are an infringement of religious freedom, undermining church activities.

Apart from discussing whether our freedom has been curtailed, have we missed out anything in our discussion? What should be the focus of church ministry? Can we introduce changes to ministries which are now banned so that they can still continue? Should we seek a new focus for our services?

We are grateful that in the past half year, many of our training programmes could continue, including training on the “Living Word” and leadership training in northern, eastern and central China. Besides, four training programmes in Hong Kong, including a leadership training camp and Christian education courses involving one hundred or so participants, were all carried out on schedule. Thanks to the Lord’s grace on us!

Re-thinking the focus of our ministry

However, teachers from outside are indeed finding it increasingly difficult to conduct training in certain regions. Major training camps have been cancelled. Some unofficial seminaries have even been forced to close down due to a lack of teaching venues. Given the changing environment, while insisting on our mission, we must also re-think the focus

and objectives of our ministry, and whether new teaching formats can be adopted. Here, once again we confirm that God has bestowed upon us the following focus and training mode in our ministry:

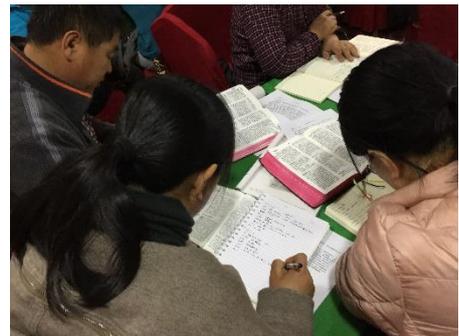
The long-term development of mainland churches relies on leaders among the churches themselves. Hence, our focus is to groom leaders. Mainland ministries should be led by mainland church workers. The needs of the church, the training curriculum and training venues should be decided on by mainland church workers, while workers from outside like ourselves will work to tie in with their efforts.

Church workers from outside can better grasp the bigger picture of church development and offer advice on the overall development direction. For instance, if children Sunday schools are not allowed, can we work instead on parent education? If there is not much room for evangelizing in the traditional way, can we evangelize through small groups and personal relationships? There is not much freedom for poverty alleviation now. Is there a pressing need then to train mainland church workers on offering social services and conducting business as mission?

Praying for their needs

In training mainland church leaders recently, our colleagues discovered that these leaders have not stopped their work in light of the changing environment. Instead, they have arranged for various training programmes in a more flexible manner and diversified their ministries. Here, we appeal to your prayer support for our ministries:

Pray that God will prepare more leaders suited for training so that they can one day become trainers themselves. Teachers from outside can then take on a different role: walking beside them as their coaches and supporting them in their frontline teaching work.



Pray that God will change the mindset of some churches/organizations from outside so that they will not be deterred to serve just because the doors that were open in the past have been closed. They should continue to seek God's will and adopt new thinking and focus.

Pray that God will protect church workers who insist on serving faithfully so that they will work on expanding God's kingdom peacefully and joyfully in spite of the treacherous environment. May God's name be exalted!

Going forward, we will go northwards to serve every month. May God protect and guide us, and provide for us. God will open a way for us because of your prayers and support!

Please support “Leadership Development Ministry”

The fundraising target for the China Church Ministry (training) in 2018 is US\$192,300 which will be used to support Living Word Training, Leadership Training, Professional Diploma in Christian Education course, etc. As in early July, US\$57,700 has been raised and we are running short of US\$134,600. We appeal to you to respond immediately, please support “Leadership Development Ministry”. Thank you!

Prayers

1. Break away from the existing mode

Mainland church workers have different views on the newly revised Religious Affairs Regulation and related policies. Some think that church activities can continue as long as they comply with the 'regulations' but others are worried about the increased restrictions.



May the Lord give mainland churches wisdom, help them find new ministry opportunities, try out new modes of service and identify God's will.

2. Book donation journey



Thanks to God! The 2018 Mainland Seminary Graduates Book Giving Plan completed its first and second stages in May and June. Each graduate received a set of 21 Christian literature, including Bible commentaries, apologetics, books on discipleship, marriage and family, theology etc. Despite mainland restrictions on publishing and difficulties in transportation, our team witnessed more than once the timely delivery of books to the seminaries. This is all owing to God's grace! Some graduates have given sharing of their eagerness and anxiety about beginning full-time ministry.

May the Lord give strength to the graduates, lead them and give them faith and hope in their pastoral ministry.

3. Concern for people trapped in lowest-paid jobs

The development of villages lags severely behind that of the cities. The dean of Remin University's National Academy of Development and Strategy Liu Yuan Chun said that the level of development in cities is three times that of villages. It is common for villagers to flock to cities for low-paid work with long working hours, such as construction workers, security guards, delivery men, cleaners etc.



May the Lord send churches to reach out to these lowest-paid workers, to share with them their care and concern. May He also bless the workers' offsprings, so they can receive education and improve the family's finances after completing their education.

4. Respect for students' choices



Five higher education institutions in Beijing have recently announced that they are prepared to respect students' choice of study paths. Some other institutions have already reformed their admission criteria, allowing students to do general courses first in foundation years, before majoring in an area of their choice later.

May the Lord lead more colleges to review their curriculum to help students choose and study for a subject that matches their interests and talents.

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