

## Ministry Editorial

### Seek and Ye Shall Find -- The Space for INGO Serving in China

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In the past, many organizations have provided poverty relief, education, disaster relief, and other related services in China. On the one hand, assistance could be given directly to the people in need, and on the other hand the gospel could be preached. Many INGO (International Non-Governmental Organization) have even established offices in the mainland to conduct official operations. With the implementation of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Administration of Activities of Overseas Non-Governmental Organizations within the Territory of China* on January 1st 2017, some of these services had to stop; others have changed to more limited operations. The objective of today's editorial is to explore whether such services are still needed today, and whether an organization can provide both direct services and gospel ministry.

We conducted an interview with an organization that had not retreated despite the tightening regulations on religious affairs in the mainland. We hope that with the sharing of Director Wang (an alias), who is in charge of this organization, we can understand how, with God's guidance, an organization can continue to provide professional help to those in need and also continue to create gospel opportunities for



the local church, all the while operating in a restrictive environment. This organization provides medical services to those in poverty, and has over 23 years of history in the mainland. During that time, it has served over 50,000 clients, and it reaches to many provincial capital cities in the Midwest. Moreover, it cooperates with over 100 local churches.

## Clarifying the “right” role

Director Wang emphasized repeatedly throughout our conversation, “Our ministry is not in service of the operations of the organization, but for the Kingdom of God.” The organization has loving God and loving people as its mandate. They are clear about their role as professional medical care providers. They express God’s love to people in a concrete way. Hence they operate ambulance services and establish clinics. They also help to mobilize medical teams formed from professionals in Hong Kong and mainland churches. In order to maintain constant service to the impoverished, they try their best to help local officials understand the nature of their services, and translate their ministry of love into a mode that local government departments can accept. For example, they would share with officials how the situation of ambulance services is so that they can quantify its effectiveness and results.



As for the gospel and training work, they empower local churches to take charge. They believe that the social service organization is a bridge between local churches and their beneficiaries. The organization does not spread the gospel on the frontline, and the fruits of evangelism are left for the local churches to harvest and nurture.

## Choosing the “right” service

Are the organization’s social services easily replaceable? How unique are they? How can the relevant government departments be made to see the contribution that these organizations make to society? Director Wang gave an example to answer the above questions. “It takes professionals to provide medical services. This is something that everyone knows. However, R&D is also very important. Every time we begin a new service, we conduct in-depth research and needs analysis of the potential beneficiaries. For example, with regards to high blood pressure, we shared with the relevant departments that the average citizen’s understanding of high blood pressure in China is 50% lower than the average overseas, while the acceptance of medical treatments was 20% lower. When officials heard this shocking statistic, they could instantly see that people need this medical



service, and also need to raise awareness of the availability and efficacy of treatment. Slowly this opened a door for local ministry. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that thinking of a ministry that satisfies people's 'needs' was not because of the wisdom or insight that I or the team had. Rather, we are thankful for the constant reminder from our heavenly Father, that we need to change and renew our hearts, and never stay at the level of past experiences. Though we have been serving in the mainland for over 20 years, we understand that the methods of the past are no longer suitable. We need to be sensitive to God's leading, and never stop conducting research and innovating."

### **Seeking the "right" people**

The "right" people include those served, and partners. The organization learned to take the example of Jesus Christ to enter into the midst of those in need and be a lamp to witness for the Lord. Director Wang understood that to live out this ideal, they couldn't just rely on INGOs. Seeking people to serve also meant looking at different regions to develop medical services in. Given the geographical size of China, it is not enough to just do a little everywhere. Only a service that can go deep and continue would be of any use for local church gospel ministries. There are impoverished people everywhere in the nation, so the organization sought in the Lord, and so decided to help the poor in the Midwest regions, especially among ethnic minorities. Director Wang said, "Having found people to serve, we not only had to draft up a plan and calculate the resources required, more importantly we had to find the 'right' people to go in. We can provide medical services for sure, but who among our team would be a good neighbor to those whom we will serve? Not an INGO, but a local church. Therefore the most important element is to find the 'right' church. This church could not passively receive our beneficiaries, but had to sustain them. As I mentioned previously, we empower local churches, so they are an integral member of our services. They are the ones who are familiar with local people, languages and culture. They are the ones who can become medical volunteers and lead home-visits, etc. Moreover, if one day we can no longer provide services to the locals, it is the church that has to continue the ministry on their own."

### **Collecting resources based on matching needs**

Resources are of vital importance to the operations of the organization, affecting the continuity of the service. How does an INGO that does not directly preach the gospel obtain sufficient resources to continue operating? Director Wang states adamantly, "In seeking resources, we remind ourselves to never ask for offering based on what the organization has already done. Rather we consider things from the perspective of the churches in Hong Kong and think about how to match the needs of those churches before asking for their

support. In this process we showed to the churches in Hong Kong that medical ministries can bring glory to God's name, that believers joining in mainland medical services is a concrete action of evangelism. Moreover, it allows believers with professional qualifications to respond to their calling to ministry in the workplace. When the churches and believers in Hong Kong have affirmed the value of medical ministry, and join in service while developing believer's spiritual growth, then we believe we shall have all the resources we need."

### Seeking space to serve

When the right role, unique service, manpower and resources are found, the chances of INGOs being able to provide services increases greatly. Director Wang gave this encouragement, "In an environment where the regulations on religious affairs are constantly changing, INGOs need to put aside previous modes of service, and do more R&D. They need to find innovative and unique ministries. Moreover, they need to pay more attention to national policies. It is only through knowledge that they can know how and what to serve the people. Only then can we flexibly connect with the needs of the people and provide professional services. As for the gospel work we all care deeply about, try to empower local churches to allow them to serve their own neighbors. Finally, pay close attention to the handover between different workers. Apart from inviting more mainland professionals to join ministry teams, it is imperative that the younger generation, starting as volunteers, can be prepared to receive the baton of future ministry."



**Epilogue:** A brief conversation with Director Wang allowed me to understand that, while the tightening regulations on religious affairs did have real impacts on ministry in the mainland, apart from temporary ending of ministries or withdrawals, there is room to consider different avenues as a door to ministry. In the end, Director Wang gave one last tip—to pay close attention to the development of the Greater Bay Area. It may turn out that this can be a springboard for social services to ride on the momentum of commercial development in the Greater Bay Area. It may be a road for business as mission to serve in the mainland.

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## Living Word

# Important Mission: Helping Believers Devote Themselves to Bible Study

© Pastor Zheng  
Church leader in eastern China

### Studying the Bible is never easy

In the past few years, our church<sup>1</sup> and many of our neighbouring churches have come to realize the importance for believers to study the Bible. So, much effort has been devoted to promoting Bible study among all believers, such as organizing Bible study groups through Wechat and encouraging believers to make records and notes after reading or meditating on the Bible on a daily basis. However, the results are not satisfactory. This is because believers often fail to grasp the meaning of the Bible passages and so lose interest in reading the Bible.



Meanwhile, given the popularity of the “small-group church” concept, many churches are eager to set up small groups to assist believers in studying the Bible. While they have visited different places to learn from others’ experience and invited various teams to train them on the subject, not many churches have actually implemented small-group pastoring. Some churches have encountered bottlenecks such as failing to obtain the right teaching materials or group leaders lacking the skills to lead. This highlights two problems: teaching materials often failing to meet local needs, and pastors lacking the manpower and time to train up leaders and groom their spiritual life. Consequently, many group leaders become frustrated and discouraged, and have even given up on leading Bible study groups.

### Finding a way out in the “Living Word”

At the time when our church was trying to find a way out, we came into contact with “The Living Word Curriculum Series”. After carefully reading through the materials, we

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<sup>1</sup> Note 1: This is a county church with over 500 believers, but only two full-time pastors (Pastor Zheng and his husband) working with a group of church leaders to shepherd the believers.

found them to be useful in supporting our group leaders as the materials discuss systematically the different books in the Bible and offer guidance on how to lead Bible study and turn Biblical teaching into actions. In the past few years, church believers have become more educated, and their daily and spiritual lives are very much in line with the teaching level of “Living Word” materials. The cultural gap in using the materials was not as big as what we imagined. More importantly, the Bible study approach and design of “Living Word” are readily accepted by believers. Even if a believer starts studying the Bible from scratch, as long as he is willing to follow the “Living Word” curriculum in his study, he will be able to understand the meaning of the Bible passages and experience the power of God’s words.

To better learn “Living Word”, we invited a teaching team from CCL to conduct a three-day training session for us last November. They taught our leaders how to best use “Living Word”. They did not only discuss the approach in Bible study and how to use the curriculum series, but also sought to bring brothers and sisters back to the Bible and instill in them a love for God’s words and desire to live in God’s words in their everyday life. Although “Living Word” may be more suitable to people who have reached a certain educational level, group leaders are allowed the flexibility to choose appropriate Bible passages to help believers of different ages and educational attainment to study the Bible. Perhaps some people may not be able to finish certain sections in the textbook, but they would nevertheless be able to grasp a way of studying the Bible. This will certainly help believers revive their spiritual life. After one to two years of studying, believers are bound to know how to analyze Bible passages. Praise the Lord for his abundant grace!



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Sometimes the reality may not be as desirable as we wish. But should we give up just because of that? Jesus never gives up on anyone, no matter how unimportant s/he seems. Jesus works on people bit by bit. We hope “Living Word” can help strengthen churches, train up church workers and guide believers back to the Bible!

We hope “Living Word” can revitalize churches!



# Prayers

## 1 Look for new opportunities

Since the implementation of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Administration of Activities of Overseas Non-Governmental Organizations within the Territory of China* on January 1st 2017, many overseas social service organizations have ceased their services on the mainland. Still quite a number have stayed behind, looking for new opportunities.



May the Lord guide overseas organizations, help them stay positive, understand China's national policies more, know more about the demand for services and be flexible in offering professional services to those in need. May they also create gospel opportunities for mainland churches.

## 2 Relevant training and materials



In recent years, quite a number of mainland churches have tried to increase believers' desire to study the Bible through small groups. It is no easy goal to achieve, however, while pastors search for suitable study materials, learn from other churches through visits or bring in training teams.

May the Lord use the 'localised' Living Word Curriculum Series to help brothers and sisters return to the Bible, study and live out God's Word. May the Lord bless church leaders and group leaders with relevant training, so they can lead Bible studies for believers of different educational levels, spiritual journey etc.

### 3 Adhering to Biblical Truths

According to sharings by mainland preachers, because of the change in the mainland religious environment, some churches have adjusted their messages in Sunday sermons, e.g. by adding socialist core values (prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, fairness, rule of law, patriotism, devotion to work, integrity, friendliness).



May the Lord bless church leaders with wisdom so they can teach Biblical truths to their congregations while reacting with flexibility to the demand for education on socialist core values.

### 4 Care for Cancer patients



At an executive meeting of the State Council, it was decided that tax concession would be provided for drugs for some rare diseases in line with the policy to offer early cure for cancer and protection for drug use. From March 1st, the first batch of 21 rare disease drugs and 4 active pharmaceutical ingredients were given a 3 percent reduction in value-added tax.

May God help the mainland medical system keep improving, especially in enhancing the treatment of cancer diseases so patients can get practical support and be spared exorbitant drug expenses. May the Lord guide mainland churches in working with medical service organisations to care for the spiritual needs of cancer patients and their families.

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