

All Prepared to Do New Things for God - Reflection on the National Security Law for Hong Kong and China Church Ministry

© Otto Lui
Associate General Secretary
(Training)



In the past year, Hong Kong has experienced three “big waves”, which hit the city directly and severely. As all three “big waves” are related to China, the question will be: is there still a role for the Hong Kong church to play in the China church ministry?

“Three Big Waves”

The first wave is the social turmoil arising from the amendment of the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance last year. The impact of the saga on the church is similar to that of the 2014 Occupy Central Movement but on a larger scale. Last year, we carried out a study on “Movement on the extradition bill and church ministries” which found that churches affected by the 2014 Occupy Central Movement could relatively handle the distress and tension stemming from people holding different political views better. The root of the problem identified is distrust in the Chinese government.

The second wave is the shutdown of the global community due to COVID-19. In the beginning, Hong Kong was lauded for its anti-pandemic efforts, since we have all learned a lesson from the battle against SARS and exercised good self-discipline in observing personal hygiene and practicing social distancing. While churches stopped physical gatherings; worship, teaching and communication have been shifted to online platforms.

Meanwhile, conflicts between the integration of China and Hong Kong were brought to the limelight again as China was deemed a source of the virus. Controversies related to whether to close the border resulted in healthcare workers staging a strike.

The third wave is the National Security Law for Hong Kong. The National Security Law enacted by the Chinese National People's Congress on July 1, 2020. A lot of Hong Kong people feared for the worst. It was hitting people much harder psychologically than the attempt to legislate on Article 23 of the Basic Law back in 2003, prompting many Hong Kong people to consider emigrating.

A Few Worries...

So how influential will the National Security Law be? We are yet to ascertain its impact, also, the National Security Law is supposed to deal with activities of "external forces" in Hong Kong, which may not be known to most Hong Kong people. As such, we can only discuss our concerns and how we should prepare ourselves based on limited information and past experience.

What will be the relationship between Hong Kong and overseas mission organizations?

A number of mission organizations have started studying whether their overseas connections will be affected by the National Security Law. In the past, the mainland government viewed overseas missionaries coming to China as a source of infiltration. In fact, many overseas mission organizations, churches and even individuals have resorted to different ways and means to come to and stay in China and spread the gospel, among whom many were from the United States. China and the United States are in a love-hate relationship, cooperating with and resisting each other at the same time. We can never be sure whether American people coming to China have in their mind the pure purpose of spreading the gospel. When the relationship between the two countries gets tense, these Americans will be asked to leave. The National Security Law for Hong Kong is enacted, will the same happen in Hong Kong?

Hong Kong is an international metropolis, and its overseas linkages function as an important bridge for China to connect with the international community. Times have changed now, and Hong Kong's role in this regard is diminishing, meaning that the central government will have less to worry about in enacting the National Security Law to safeguard national security. Indeed, many overseas mission organizations chose to set up their headquarters for Asia or the Asian Pacific region in Hong Kong where there is a robust legal system, free flow of information and a diversified culture, making it a desirable place for people of different cultures to work and live in, not to mention that the city is also a gateway for evangelizing to China. Will all these disappear?

Can the Hong Kong church still participate in ministries in China?

Apart from international mission organizations, Hong Kong churches and organizations which have up to now played a part in ministries in China are similarly puzzled about their future. In the past, no matter what difficulties one encountered in the mainland, one would feel safe upon returning to Hong Kong. However, according to the legislative arrangement under the National Security Law proposed by the National People's Congress, a mainland law enforcement body will be set up in Hong Kong. Will the sense of safety vanish?

We are not saying that participation in ministries in mainland churches is illegal. Any service aimed purely at spreading the gospel to Chinese people will not endanger the state but on the contrary bring God's blessings to the Chinese people. However, our past experience shows that colleagues taking part in mainland ministries may at times and in certain regions be treated in a hostile way. There have been occasions where colleagues were subject to administrative detention or had their home return permits confiscated. These colleagues' worries are understandable.

Will Hong Kong churches be subject to the same restrictions as mainland churches?

As "one country, one system" is getting closer and closer, will mainland's religious policies be implemented in Hong Kong after the National Security Law for Hong Kong takes effect? This is also the concern of some colleagues. Hong Kong has all along enjoyed freedom of religion and freedom of speech. People need not think too much about the political consequence when expressing their views. We can speak our minds freely when delivering sermons, writing articles in religious and non-religious publications or doing interviews with newspapers and on radio. Diverse political views are also allowed within the same denomination or the same church.



In recent years, some church colleagues have been standing at the forefront of political incidents, which have drawn criticisms from mainland authorities. The general feeling is that Hong Kong churches will have to toe the government's line on social issues and stay politically correct. Some colleagues are also beginning to worry about whether church activities will be restricted and subjects on justice can still be discussed. We do not have answers to these questions. All we can say is every scenario is possible and that for now every scenario is merely a possibility.

A Dark Cloud

Some think that the National Security Law can bring stability to the society while others opine that we are heading towards “one country, one system”. Some brand this time as a “second return”. “One country, one system” is like a dark impending cloud, and has never been so close in the 20-odd years after return. For now, we have no idea how to ward it off. Many of our current discussions on, say a possible tide of emigration and the church breaking up into smaller groups and gearing up to face persecution, resonate those we had in the 80s in the last century.

If this is a dark cloud, is it impossible for us to predict its impact? Of course not. If it is a dark cloud, heavy rain will be expected, yet there will be a time when the rain will stop. A dark cloud above our head will affect us emotionally, yet we can get prepared for the imminent downpour. Even if there is a dark cloud, one can never be sure that it will definitely rain! The Book of Ecclesiastes provides us with good insight on happenings in the world:

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

Getting Strength from the Bible

Therefore, the way to get prepared is to take on the right perspective, go back to God’s words and adjust our perspectives. Abraham heeded to God’s call to leave his comfort zone and live as a guest in the land of Canaan. He submitted to God’s will, but his journey was not smooth sailing. He had to fight in wars, experienced the calamity of a drought and even lied to people out of fear, yet he was called the father of faith. The early church began at a time of great oppression and disciples fled everywhere from Jerusalem when they were persecuted. Paul, the apostle, was persecuted by the Jews starting from Philippi and as result brought the gospel to southern Greece. Later, he was taken as a prisoner to Rome where he got the chance to shepherd the church. The gospel was spread to Europe as he fled from calamities.

In face of adversities and suffering, the church cannot claim immunity. How to face up to difficult realities is a challenge to be tackled. Abraham offering Issac and the early church accepting Saul as a member of the church despite being oppressed by him previously are good examples of how we should display our faith in God. When charting our way, we must bear in mind that God walks with us all the time. God may close one door, but He may open another, bigger one. Such experience will strengthen our belief that God’s words are powerful and He is faithful.

Reminders from the History of the Church

A closer look at history will tell us that “there is nothing new under the sun”. We cannot plan our future while disregarding what history has taught us. We believe that God prevails over history and what happened in the past can teach us valuable lessons. God’s justice can be manifested in unjust circumstances. We can also see how servants of God over the past generations overcame the odds and stayed faithful to their calling in times of adversities. Christianity often grew amidst hardships, and the early church expanded to the entire Roman Empire when there was great oppression. Similarly, the Chinese church grew rapidly in difficult times.

We must be prepared. This moment is the turning point in history, and God will do new things. Although we do not know what God will do, we can learn from the past that while short-term pain is inevitable, new things and developments will soon follow.

Learning from the Mainland Church

Apart from taking reference from history, we should also learn from the mainland church. The path that the mainland church has treaded provides a lot of good insights.

With economic scarcity and the lack of major evangelistic gatherings, the number of believers still rises year after year. On the contrary, as the economy boomed in recent years, the growth of the church has slowed down. While some churches’ online worship was banned in some regions, a large number of sermon recordings are circulated online in other regions, and online small group gatherings are held every day. Even online prayer meetings, Bible study sessions and evangelistic meetings organized with overseas believers are held. As long as one is willing to try, there is still ample room for one to connect with others. While some freedoms have been curbed, diverse church ministries like social services or business as mission are still being developed. Where there are believers, there can be opportunities and innovation.

A church in the eastern coastal region is a good example. Restrictions have been tightened in the past few years, and the authorities have been monitoring not only activities in the church but also in the community. The government encourages people to report illegal gatherings and also keeps a close eye on strangers joining church activities. In face of such restrictions, the church puts more stress on loving your neighbours and fostering a cordial relationship with neighbours. In the process, members of many families have also been converted. Given such restrictions, the church has been able to put into practice the



teaching of loving your neighbours. If you become friends with your neighbours, there will no longer be “illegal gatherings” or “strangers”. The church also stays alert to the issue of online surveillance. If the volume of online data rises suddenly in a region, that means many people are gathering, and the government will certainly pay attention to that. The church’s response strategy is to ask everyone to hand over their smart phones in gatherings to ensure that the data volume will not arouse any suspicion. As a result, everyone can also concentrate more on their worship and learning.

Importance of a Disciple’s Life

Next is preparing for believer’s mind and heart and equipping everyone to be a disciple. It is indisputable that there will be greater restrictions, but the church should be concerned more about internal issues rather than pressure from outside. External pressure can be handled by believers staying united, but internal problems are really the bigger threat. In recent years, some mainland churches—in particular those whose crosses have been demolished—can understand that what matters most is to groom quality disciples, an area much ignored in the past. The restrictions on churches in fact provide the best opportunity for disciples to grow in their spiritual life.

While the growth of number of believers has slowed down, church workers’ work has not stopped. The focus now is on ministries which are still feasible. Efforts are devoted to enhancing the spiritual life of believers where possible. Perhaps the restrictions are a tool used by God to help His people re-focus on the basics, stop the multitude of activities and go back to what matters in life. We all know that it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, and the lives of those who believe will be transformed. A person whose life has been transformed will put God first, and lead a life based on the ethics of God’s kingdom. Only a change in people’s hearts will bring about changes in the society in the long run.

Adjusting the Ministries

In face of the changing environment, church leaders have to make suitable adjustments. All along, the China church ministry is being adjusted every now and then based on the changing circumstances. During the 70s when China closed its doors, we learned about the needs of Chinese churches based on limited information. The only work that could be undertaken then was research and prayers, which incidentally prepared for our work later when China reopened its doors. At a time when we had no idea what to do and were



confused, continuing with our research and prayers were in fact active steps to take to prepare for what was to come in the future.

Mainland churches have developed from accepting donations from the outside to developing their own diverse ministries, which all took place when restrictions were rigorous. True faith is believing that God is in control even in rapidly changing circumstances. He can put in hurdles so as to steer us back to doing the right things, or to “compel” us to use our creativity which He has put in us so that we can carry out the great mission in innovative ways in new times. The environment can serve as a good teacher, since we believe that God is in full control, including the fast-changing environment which can teach us good lessons.

Conclusion

Hong Kong churches should seize hold of the opportunities now and learn from the experience of the Chinese church. They should adjust the strategies and directions of their ministries to get prepared for possible restrictions in the future. Apart from taking care of our own needs, we should listen carefully and respond to the calls from mainland churches for training up disciples with spiritual maturity and solid faith! Whatever will become of Hong Kong, there are still things that we can do. God has given us over 100 years of freedom, making us a unique group of people who can integrate experience from outside and the mainland situation to help mainland church leaders grow.

The sharing above is based on CCL’s ministry experience in the past half century. God uses different ways to allow CCL to develop continuously our China church ministry. For example, before the mainland halted the publication of Christian books, we started publishing e-books and launched publication programmes in seminaries. Meanwhile, we have also actively taken forward our mentor-mentee training model to further groom the spiritual life of mainland leaders. Even in times of the pandemic when we could not travel to the mainland, training for church leaders and small group leaders is still going on, based on the foundation of relationship built over many years.

This is the road that CCL has walked, and it is our sincere wish that more Hong Kong churches can walk hand in hand with us in the next mile of our journey.



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# Unswerving Determination to Serve Subdues Constraints

- © Pastor Feng  
A pastor of a rural church in the southern central region



Being compelled to stay home during the coronavirus pandemic brought a great deal of inconvenience. However, it gave me the opportunity to reflect upon my ministry in the past year. Despite the hardships, I was able to experience the Lord's grace in a much deeper way, I even found myself empowered to overcome various constraints!

## Constraints of Rurality Subdued, Believers Received Pastoral Care and Nurture

I regard the preaching ministry on the pulpit an important service component. This is because preaching plays a major role in building up the lives of believers. However, leaders who are well trained in preaching are scarce. I always wish to identify suitable believers and provide training to them. This can start with training them to become meeting chairpersons and subsequently enhance their proficiency in Biblical knowledge. In the setting of rural churches in villages, believers are generally older, less educated and with relatively weak Biblical literacy. They are often heavily occupied by farming and domestic work which render them less motivated to pursue spiritual growth or devote themselves to serving the Lord. As a pastor, I cannot help but ask myself, "Am I going to cross my arms and take the situation as it is?"

My answer is no. I decided to begin with nurturing members of selected small groups. There were five small groups in the church. I was leading four of them. Before I came to this church, believers did not have a habit of reading the bible. Although they were baptized, their lives were not renewed. They continued to play mahjong and gamble on horseracing. Praise to the Lord, with my persistent urge to them that they need to read the Bible as a habit and with my continual provision of Bible teaching, their lives began to show gradual changes. Some of those who spent a lot of time on mahjong in the past now gave up the habit and have become willing to serve. Whenever I come across individuals who are weak in faith, I spend time with them and listen to them. For those who are suffering from physical illnesses, I pray with them for healing. God is merciful. A sister who used to have anxiety



disorder was cured of it. At the end of last year, I visited the home of every member of the congregation, listened to every one of their needs and encouraged them to trust God despite the adversities they face.

## Constraints of the Pandemic Subdued, Ministry Resumed through Unconventional Means

It was initially planned that after the lunar new year, the entire congregation would visit other churches for experiential cross-training. The unanticipated coronavirus outbreak caused total isolation of individual villages. People also became hesitant to meet with one another. In the early stages of the pandemic, no one dared to leave their homes. I spent my days praying and reading the Bible. Besides praying for our country, the medical workers, and the patients, I also prayed for believers so that they might standfast if they ever feel battled in faith. I frequently pay attention to information disseminated on the internet. Some believers are unable to differentiate real from fake. They can easily be misled by heresy and false teachings. Whenever I notice inaccurate information, I proactively initiate discussion to clarify the issues. Whenever there are individual members who need to be comforted, I use WeChat to reach out to them and pray with them.

As we were unable to hold meetings at the church, I suggested to the deacons that we could try online services. They were initially opposed to the idea, but I insisted and continued to prepare my sermon every week. Three weeks went by; the deacons finally consented to starting online worships. There are many physical constraints in the rural area: mobile phones may not be functioning well; telecommunication network and signals are unsteady. We were unable to accommodate the entire community of believers to join the online service simultaneously. Yet we did not give up. We decided to divide members into groups. Each group utilized a phone or a computer device that was connected to join the worship. Individual members were rather anxious at the beginning, but after a while, they were able to adapt and participate attentively. During the pandemic, we even recruited new friends who show interest in learning more about our faith to join our meetings.



Members of a small group attending an online service with devotion

As the pandemic continued taking its toll relentlessly, we were prevented from attending physical church worship. Yet God prepared for us the online platform. Though our provision of pastoral care might be far from perfect, the love of Christ has bound us together. To be able to serve God is my joy and strength. Despite not receiving a single cent as wage during the pandemic, I thanked CCL for subsidizing me with a stipend to live through this harsh period. Please pray for me. May God give me wisdom and a discerning spirit, enable

me to understand His way, give me the courage to proclaim His words and live out the truth. May God enlighten me to perceive His will even more clearly!

**Please donate to support Mainland Pastors' Living Stipends**

Pastor Feng did not make concession and insisted on serving despite facing various constraints. We have been partnering with her since 2019 and providing a stipend to her. We are diligently raising funds with the sheer hope to continue supporting Pastor Feng as well as other pastors who are also experiencing financial difficulties. We hope they can focus fully on serving on the frontlines.

Please remember their needs in your prayers and show your support. In 2020, CCL is planning to support 28 pastors who come from the northwest, southwest, eastern coastal and southern central regions. CCL will support them according to their actual needs and the living standards of their respective areas. Our target is to raise USD109,000. Currently we have raised USD47,435, and are still short of USD61,565. We sincerely request that you respond promptly. Thank you!



# Prayers

## 1. All Prepared to Do New Things for God

The National Security Law enacted by the Chinese National People's Congress came into effect on July 1, 2020. The law might have long-term impacts on Hong Kong churches' involvement in the mainland ministry.



May the Lord strengthen the faith of Hong Kong churches, help them adjust their ministry strategies and directions at this critical moment, and make good use of their unique position to adapt the culture of Western Christian ministry to Chinese culture; may they also remain partners with mainland churches to support church leaders' efforts in enhancing disciples' spiritual quality.

## 2. Handling Internal Issues



In rural churches where congregations have limited education, internal management has become a source of trouble for pastors. A young pastor in the southern central region shares: "While deacons should meet up regularly to discuss church affairs and pray for God's guidance, the older lay leaders tend to try to solve problems through 'relations' and are unwilling to make changes. They are hesitant in making changes to cope with the pandemic."

May the Lord open the eyes and ears of elderly believers, help them be open to changes and work together with younger pastors to solve issues, and lead the churches' future development.

## 3. Restoring Couple Relationship

It is common for mainland couples to work in different regions and meet their spouses only during the Lunar New Year break. Under the pandemic, couples spend a long time together and yet have become aware of their spouse's inadequacies, and had rows over housework or their children's education. Christian couples are no exception.



May the Lord show mercy, let couples have frank communication and be willing to listen to each other's feelings and stress, as well as learn to put problems forward before God, to have love and patience for each other. May He give mainland pastors wisdom to provide counselling and teaching for conflicting couples, help them restore their damaged relationships.

#### 4. Stay Vigilant



The pandemic in the mainland is still repetitive in some regions, such as in Xinjiang and Beijing. Mainland schools have reminded students to remain vigilant. The summer holidays pose another challenge, e.g. large crowds gathering at tourist attractions, cross-province travels etc.

May the Lord help people remain vigilant against the pandemic and other infectious diseases in their daily lives and during travel; may He also protect students' and other people's health.

~ THE END ~

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#### Pray for China

Published since 1974

~ Pray for China publications can be served as a platform to express the latest situations and needs of churches and leaders in the mainland.

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*Editor-in- Chief*    Otto Lui

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*Editorial*            Jurita Lui  
                             Eddy Leung

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*Publisher*            Thomas Tang

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*Subscriptions*      pfc@ccl.org.hk

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