

What a Blessing to Walk Hand in Hand with Our Subsidized Pastors

© compiled by Yin Qing

Despite the volatile pandemic situation in China in the past year, pastors have stayed dedicated to their ministries, undeterred by the challenges in their everyday life and struggles in their faith. In serving the Lord, pastors should not just count on their own ability, but rather look up to God who would use His own ways and means to help them overcome the odds and continue nurturing believers' spiritual growth. With God's grace, CCL has been seeking offerings to support pastors' daily living expenses and ministry expenditure so that they can focus on front-line shepherding.

These pastors' ministry experience in 2021 gives us a glimpse of God's abundant provision and how fully committed they are in their service. Hopefully, through the sharing of the few pastors below, we can gain a better insight into their service and keep supporting them in our prayers and offerings.



“The Three Keys” to Pastoring: Small Groups, Visits, Biblical Teaching

Although there were waves of Covid-19 outbreaks last year, we could testify to God's bountiful grace! In response to the pandemic, our congregation was broken down into small groups. When the pandemic was very severe, even small groups' face-to-face gatherings were suspended. Yet, we shared our praises for the Lord and God's words via WeChat. Paying home visits was another important shepherding strategy. Two of our pastors visited the homes of a number of believers while sharing words of encouragement via WeChat and telephone calls as well. During the visits, we learned that believers had taken a liking to

small group gatherings. They said that as small groups were smaller in size, sharing and exchanges were made easier, enabling them to better understand the Word and grow in their faith. We thank the Lord!

Regarding Biblical teaching, since believers lived in different villages, we organized Bible classes in small groups for three days, with each group comprising no more than 20 people. Last year, I taught classes in many villages, mainly on the Gospel of Matthew and Overview of the Old Testament. Thank the Lord that the learning outcome was most positive. The class participants were very focused in their learning and had plenty of interactions and sharing. A participant said: *“I didn’t like reading the Old Testament in the past and neither did I understand the content. Yet, I have come to love the Old Testament after the class.”* Another participant said enthusiastically: *“After studying the Gospel of Matthew, I discovered a lot of significant links between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and the Old Testament is closely connected with Jesus Christ.”* I myself also gained a lot through the teaching, growing spiritually together with the class participants. The experience also inspired me to study into more books in the Bible for sharing with them. I saw how participants got excited upon understanding the truth and how I wish I had captured the contented smiles on their faces in a photo.



Pastor Qin taught the Bible in the various villages where the believers lived.

Pastor Qin from the Southwestern region

Believers Need To be Both Cared for and Disciplined

Our church was in a small township and constantly subject to the threat of the cults. Therefore, we attached great importance to caring for believers and connecting with them closely. Last year, on top of the two “big visits” every year, we also paid a number of “little visits”. Besides, to help brothers and sisters serve better and build the body of Christ based on their individual gifts, we divided the WeChat groups into the sharing group, choir practice group and Bible study group to care for and equip believers in a targeted way.



Pastor Zhou went to the villages to visit believers and liaised with them closely.

Under the pandemic, we still maintained close ties with believers, witnessing both their growth and their failure. As pastors, we should discipline in love those brothers and sisters

who had done wrong. We should not turn a blind eye to misdeeds for fear of jeopardizing our relationship. In disciplining believers, we adopted a three-step approach: first, we would talk to the wrongdoer individually, aiming to identify and rectify the problem as much as possible. In case the wrongdoer failed to correct the mistake, we would ask several members of the church to talk to him or her who hopefully would face up to the problem and make remedy. If the wrongdoer refused to listen, the third step was to wait for the right time in the Lord to exhort him or her again and in the meantime pray for God's direct discipline on him or her.

In whatever challenges we face, we always pray for God's protection of the church - its ministries, its fellowships and its development. May the Lord strengthen and protect us!

Pastor Lin and Pastor Zhou from the central Southern region

God's Leadership and Guidance

When one serves the Lord, one does not work alone; God also plays a part. During the pandemic, we were worried about losing believers as we could not take care of all of them. However, God Himself strengthened His children and even blessed us with more believers. In August, a couple of new converts asked to be baptized, and an arrangement was made for them to be baptized in a river in early September. We shared this piece of news with other believers on our WeChat group, and immediately received requests from 14 other brothers and sisters to be baptized. I recall that on the baptism day, 17 believers were baptized after I delivered a sermon. I was overjoyed and singing praises to the Lord!



Pastor Chen was full of thanks for baptizing the new converts in a river!

To broaden one's horizon, one must get outside of one's hometown. I had all along stayed in the church upon graduating from the seminary and scarcely went to other places to further study and equip myself. Last year, I was blessed with the chance to undertake a short-term course outside. On the way, I also paid a visit to my classmate who was then conducting some training for believers. She invited me to share some words of encouragement with the participants. I was inspired by God to speak about the transfiguration of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew 17:1-8. I encouraged them by saying that: *"the holy mountain is good, but you can see only Jesus there. The holy mountain is good, but remember to go downhill."* This is also a reminder to myself.

The Lord knows exactly what we lack. Because of the pandemic, we, not very well-provided for in the past, faced increasing hardship. The Lord helped us tide over the difficulties

through His beloved children who had donated daily necessities (like rice, edible oil and blankets) to the needy brothers and sisters. I clearly recall how we had visited 180 families in special difficulties to offer these gifts of love. We thank the Lord for His provisions!

Pastor Chen from the Southwestern region

Serving Joyfully with the Lord by Our Side

God loves our township in the hilly area and provides us with a group of church co-workers. We worked with one heart and mind to spread the gospel, going everywhere from the mountains to the plains and from the cities to the villages. Our footprints have been all over the region. Sometimes we were rejected and misunderstood, but there were always people willing to accept the gospel. Whenever we heard people turning to God and accepting Christ as their personal savior, we were simply thrilled!

I was extremely busy last year. I delivered four sermons every month, and took turns to visit and serve gathering points every Monday, went out to evangelize every Tuesday, served the small groups every Wednesday, served in the choir every Friday and joined training of the wind band every Saturday. On top of these various services, I had to take up various household chores as well. I felt physically exhausted sometimes, but with the Lord walking beside me, my life was very fulfilling and I was always filled with joy.



Although Pastor Ma was busy every day, she was most willing to take out time to visit believers and baptize elderly believers.

In the new year, I hope to do even better, plan to set up another gathering point and train up two to three co-workers. I also wish to recommend one or two young and middle-aged believers to study in a seminary so that they can become our successors. Going forward, there is so much to do, but I firmly believe that God's grace will always be much more than our work!

Pastor Ma from the central Southern region

We thank the Lord for the dedicated service of the several pastors above. In the past year, they had experienced the Father's direct guidance and company. Their lives and the lives of the believers were blessed, and the Father empowers those workers who follow Him. We hope that their sharing can also bless us and spur us on. No matter how hard the

circumstances may be or how scarce the resources are, under the Lord's guidance and protection, we can always nurture our believers, bless our society and help expand God's Kingdom!

*"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."
(Romans 8:37, NIV)*



Peers keeping pace —

The footsteps of four young comrades arm in arm

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Associate General Secretary (Publishing) / Publisher (CCL Publishing House)

Being a seminary situated in a moderate city, its dynamic is not as vigorous as the major cities along the coast, yet its resources are also not as scarce as that in the inland areas. Four students from ordinary churches studied together for four years at this seminary. After completing theological education, they, like several thousand other graduates in various provincial cities, commence church ministry in different cities and towns.



Upon graduation, the evangelists move on to churches in different cities and towns. They have on hand materials on discipleship and shepherding. It is hoped that the materials can assist them to serve and build up believers of their respective congregations.

Ordinary enrollment for extraordinary learning

Although very busy adapting to shepherding their respective churches, the four graduates keep in touch with their seminary teachers since the teacher-student relationship has been intimate in the past and the fresh graduates are keen to share the experiences and challenges that they encounter after devoting themselves to full-time ministry. A few months later, their teachers apprehended that though the graduates serve at different places and their churches are of different scales, they seem to be facing similar challenges, and they can actually become spiritual companions to help each other press forward together.

Meanwhile, they made the decision to study an item in the book gifting pastoral package together, namely, “Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ”. They adopted the small group learning mode and devoted 1.5 to 2 hours to each session. The four fresh evangelists faced a lot of struggles initially, including how to prioritize their daily tasks to squeeze in a timeslot for a small group meeting. Another dilemma was that in order to maximize learning and sharing, they needed to figure out the appropriate learning methodology to effectively assimilate the four main components of the book: “Core message analysis”, “Key verses recital”, “Inductive Bible study” and “Supplemental reading”. Why were the four peer evangelists so perplexed? This is because they are very used to the one-

way, didactic preaching mode when it comes to biblical teaching. Their shepherding experience has been centering around giving sermons or speeches. They have yet to learn how to utilize small groups and fellowships to cultivate a motivational and caring atmosphere.

A common call to open up the hidden window

The gracious provision of our Heavenly Father is always sufficient. Their persistence in keeping the small group meetings going eventually yielded favourable results. During one session, when they were nearing the end, one of the group members shared the challenges he faced in ministry. He candidly revealed his inner feelings and thoughts. All other members made efforts to give feedbacks, encouragement and support. They strived hard to live out what they learned from the book, which is to encourage and support each other with sincerity and the truth. The building up of trust and intimacy among group members can rarely be achieved instantly. It is much harder and takes longer for ministers in China than for spiritual communities in other parts of the world. But when such breakthrough does happen, the end result is not intellectual advancement; rather, it makes them cherish the sharing and become mutually caring for one another's spiritual wellbeing. Then they can better adapt to and overcome the challenges in their respective shepherding circumstances. If they can truly experience the sweetness of what it is like to have spiritual partners



who care for and support each other, such experience will prove to be invigorating and should help them shepherd and build up the lives of their flocks in the frontline.

It is our wish that every recipient of “Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ” could share the experience of the four graduates mentioned in this essay. They have made their common experience uncommon by learning together as a group and supporting each other with sincerity and the truth which is the key message of the book.

Shepherding is not simply the conveyance of knowledge. Listening with one's heart and communicating truthfully is much more important. Upon graduation from a conventional seminary program and having received the book gifting materials on discipleship and other topics, we wish this year's graduates can supersede the basics. They can also further their study by small group learning. When their lives continually experience transcending renewal from within, they would in turn nurture and build up the lives of believers in their respective congregations.

**Please support
the 2022 “China Seminary Graduates Book Gifting Project”**

Fund needed: USD 307,692

Project details: More than 70,000 copies of publications will be distributed to 50 seminaries, Bible schools and training centres in China with a total of 4,000 graduates. Video clips highlighting the key contents of three selected books will be produced. The overall objective is to help recipients provide pastoral care and nurture to individual believers as well as build up the spiritual well-being of the entire church congregation.

Please pray for the Book Gifting ministry and support us, thank you!



Prayers

1. Quietly serving for Christ

Serving quietly, preachers experience indescribable joy seeing people accept Christ. A preacher shared his gratitude after Christmas: *“For more than a decade I had seen people who only came to church for fun during Christmas, but after so many years many have developed a positive understanding of church. Our ministry has borne some fruits also. For example, our choir leader accepted the Lord during Christmas.”*



May preachers’ ministries be pleasing to the Lord, and bring non-believers to know the Lord of life; may He strengthen the hearts of pastors and believers, so they do not become frustrated even if their ministry has yet to bear fruit.

2. Waiting patiently



Units involved in the publication and printing of religious texts in China shared that ‘waiting patiently’ is an important lesson for them. Since the implementation of the newly revised Regulations on Religious Affairs, various layers of approval are required for the publication of religious books. The whole process takes at least several months. Approval does not come easily, and even if it is granted, another hurdle is the vetting and application for printing the texts. All people can do is to pray humbly and trust in Him.

May the Lord give wisdom to publishers and printing companies to meet the official requirements; may God give them faith, help them trust that God will fulfil His purpose according to His time.

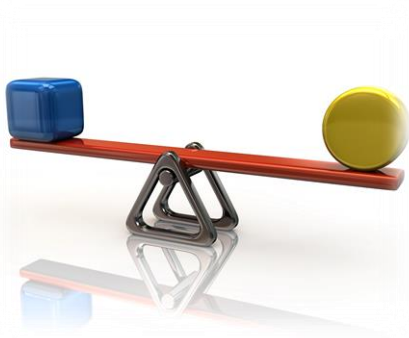
3. Wisdom to cope with new policy

The more challenges out there, the more wisdom is needed. “The Measures on the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services” announced in late December last year bans preaching, posting religious content, organizing religious activities online etc. The new measures were implemented in March.



May the Lord guide China churches forced to suspend physical gatherings under the pandemic and which have ministered online, give their pastors wisdom to cope with the latest policy and make necessary adjustments.

4. Learning and Life Balance



Ministry of Education announced last year that new arrangement about after school learning had successfully reduced students' burden incurred from both workbook exercises and after school learning. The measure resulted in an 80% reduction in the size of tutoring and training organisations offering lessons online and offline. Advertisings for such lessons are almost all gone.

May the Lord help students keep learning and life balance, and parents to prepare healthy extra-curricular activities that can help ease their children's academic pressure.

~ THE END ~

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 China.

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