

**Holding Fast onto Family Ministry
-----Caring for young mainland families**

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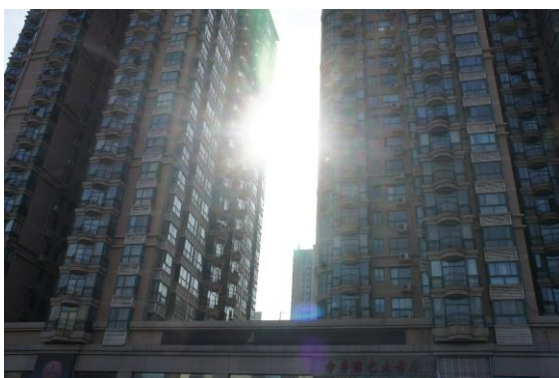
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Families in the mainland are linked in countless ways with the economic development of society. During the early years of the economic boom, many people from rural areas left their villages and flocked to the cities to work. They left behind an increasing number of children in their villages. These children, who lacked parental love and discipline, face many challenges growing up. Many studies and reports have shown this, and their results will not be discussed here. As for the younger generation who grew up in the cities -- especially those with higher education -- they generally hope to go to first or second-tier cities to develop their career and form families. Nonetheless, they find themselves facing two extremely difficult issues: housing and childcare needs.



Housing



Hong Kong residents are all too familiar with the woes of the ever-rising housing prices. Not only is it very difficult for the average citizen to afford a home, but it also increases the prices of rent, which then becomes a heavy burden on household expenditure and even the expenses of small enterprises. The end result is that costs are always increasing. The situation is not much better in the mainland. For example, in a better area in Beijing, housing prices could easily exceed \$10,000 per square feet. This is well

above what the average person can afford. In order to suppress housing prices, the government has greatly increased the duties and fees involved in paying for a second apartment. Nevertheless, for this reason, some people get “sham divorces” and then re-register their marriage certificate once the house is bought[1]. Many young people have worn themselves out for the sake of their careers. Those who choose to marry will have to trouble themselves with the expenses of buying a home and planning a wedding, which is absolutely exhausting. Under these conditions, how can their faith help them cope with the pressure?

From “One-Child Policy” to the “Age of Two Children”

To control population increase, the mainland has instituted a “One-Child Policy” since the 1980s. China has one of the lowest birthrates in the world.

Birth Control: Those who violate the One-child policy by having more children are subject to a string of setbacks. These could include monetary fines, non-registration with the state (which will affect the child’s social welfare, living conditions, schooling, work and marriage). It is also possible that the mother could be forced to have an abortion, or forcibly sterilized. [2] No matter in villages or cities, this policy has created deep cultural contradictions for women: how would the family name be carried on if the firstborn is not a boy? How should a girl be treated? How could the consequences of having more than one child be borne? Should we emigrate to another region or country to have the child there? Given how precious that one child is, what sort of upbringing should s/he have?



Skewed Male-Female Ratio: Many years after the implementation of the One-child policy, not only has it brought a heavy impact on the family, it has also affected the basic structure of society. One of the impacts is the skewed ratio between the male and female genders. According to statistics compiled in 2014, among those born in between 1980 and 1989, the unmarried men to women ratio stood at 136:100. The ratio of 1970-1979 stood at 206:100. It is estimated that in within 5 years (2019), the “Bachelor Crisis” will break out fully, making it even more difficult for men to find partners for marriage![3]

Population Aging: Statistics compiled from 2011 to 2016 indicate that the working population has continued to decrease in the last 6 years from 925 million to 907 million (65.6% of the population). The aged population increased from 185 million to 231 million (16.7% of the population), an increase of 45.87 million since 2011. [4]

Entering the age of “Two-Children”: The consequences of the One-child policy have slowly started to appear. In 2014, the government proposed a “Selective Two-Child Policy”, which meant that couples who were both only-children could have two children. In 2016, the government proposed a “Universal Two-Child Policy”, which brings us into the age of “two-children”. Yet, according to statistics in 2016, only 18 million babies were born! These numbers are far below government estimates, and this is due to a few factors. [5]

- These days, modern young couples no longer wish for many children. Rather, they want a lifestyle of freedom and do not want to bear “child-rearing debts”, or be fettered by their children for many years of their lives. Thus, they would rather just have one child, or none at all. Some couples even joke around saying that one child is equivalent to establishing a bank, two is the people’s bank, and three is madness (a pun on the Chinese translation of HSBC).
- Both partners of married couples nowadays must work in order to pay for the mortgage and high living expenses. Having a single child is already a huge expense, and if neither parent is able to raise the child, then money has to be spent on a baby-sitter to care for the child. Moreover, if there were two children in the household, the situation would be extremely difficult to manage, and this makes many couples pause.
- Social welfare support is inadequate. Many communities lack public child-care organizations (for the care of children between birth-age and kindergarten) so it is difficult to find someone to adequately care for young children. Moreover, community hygiene centre (caring for children aged 0-14) pediatricians and assistants number only 12,000, yet there are over 230 million children. That means that there are only 0.53 pediatrics affiliated healthcare professionals for every 1,000 children. You can imagine the issues that arise for carers every time a child falls ill or requires vaccination.

The Pastoring and Support of Churches

(Editor’s Note: According to the “2015 Social Services Development Statistics Report” by the Civil Affairs Department in the mainland, there were 3.841 million divorces in 2015, an increase of 5.6% over 2014. Many Christian families and even pastors have had their marriages run aground. For young couples to secure their marriage, they must withstand the impact of the secular world.

Those youths who grew up under the One-child policy have been seen by their parents as “little emperors”. Many parents did not teach their children traditional Chinese family values and morality; for example, respect for seniority and fraternal respect. Conversely, parents act in accordance to the whims of their children. Only children

become overprotected, with a weak sense of responsibility and ability to persevere. Those post-90s on the workplace are infamous for “flash quitting”. Many young people in the cities may stay at a company for only 3 to 6 months, with some of them quitting for as little as an increase of \$100 in wages.)

Faced with these social trends, it is clear that teaching and pastoring on family values by the church is extremely valuable. Not only is this for supporting young believers within the church, it can also help many live out marriages and build families in the society that are pleasing to God, and in accordance to Christian values. How can churches care for and pastor young families? Here are some points worth considering:



1. From the pastoral perspective, believers today crave for the learning of truth that does not stop in the head, but rather truth that speaks to the world they face. The meaning of the mainland expression “grounded qi” is similar to the phrase “down to earth”. Believers today are not satisfied with vague, abstract and “spiritual” vocabulary. Rather, they want truth that resonates with their lives, which gives them the wisdom and ability to face challenges in the real world.
2. Believers who are the only child in their household may require more care in terms of their personal growth and character-building. They need to be taught how to love God and love others. They will require someone to journey with them and guide them to make God-honouring decisions in their social life, their romantic life and even in choosing a mate and marriage.
3. For believers who are preparing to become parents, they need help in careful planning. Their understanding of what it means to be parents, and preparation for the role must be assessed.
4. Special care needs to be given to aged believers, and they may also need help in the caring and raising of their grandchildren. They are more knowledgeable regarding raising children, and can be of great help to young parents in the matter.

5. Some families may require urgent help in raising young children. If those within the same community can organize emergency relief groups, they can help with any sudden situation and alleviate emergencies.

Take Action, Keep Praying.

1. Pray for pastors in the church, that they may understand the needs of young believers, and provide them with Biblical teaching that resonates with their practical needs.
2. Pray for the work of restructuring church education: from infants to the elderly, church teaching must be based on the specific needs of different age groups. Moreover, each part of the body must learn to care for each other, and establish close and personable relationships to form a mutual support network.
3. Pray especially for young believers who face the impact of the secular society on their finances, marriage, family and spiritual life. Pray that God will help them root themselves in the words of the Bible and to face all sorts of challenges with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Footnotes:

1 “Beipiao 2017” *Current Affairs* RTHK Television Production, broadcast April 2017

2 “The Age of Two Children” *Current Affairs* RTHK Television Production, broadcast April 2017

3 “Mainland Males Outnumber Females by 33 Million”, source: chinahket.com. Accessed 4th May, 2017.

4 “The Age of Two Children” *Current Affairs* RTHK Television Production, broadcast April 2017

5 As above.

Mainland Seminary Graduates Book-giving Plan: New Pastors Shouldering a Heavy Responsibility

Compiled by: Yin Qing

Through our “Mainland Seminary Graduates Book-giving Plan”, we have made acquaintance with a group of seminary graduates. The graduates have joined churches as new pastors over the years in managing the church and shepherding believers. Without teachers helping them and a team to support their ministries now, what challenges and difficulties do these new pastors face?



Pastor Li graduated from a Bible school some three years ago and went to serve in a church in Guizhou in south western China. He was invited to share with us his experience and needs.

Honourable pastors at CCL:

Hello, and may the peace of the Lord be with you!

Shortly after receiving the books you donated, I set off to serve in a church in Guizhou. Time flies, and I lead an extremely busy life every day. Believers in my church vary greatly in age and educational background, and it has been difficult for me to prepare a sermon suitable for all. Many followers are also affected by religious messages circulated via wechat and QQ, which are often not healthy or in line with the Bible. While some believers may have converted to Jesus, they cannot get out of the influence of traditional beliefs, and practice their Christian faith with an element of such traditional beliefs. In a way, my church is just like a new-born church despite the fact that it is already 100 years old. As the number of believers grows, the church's ministries are also expanding, calling for a lot more church workers. However, funds to support them are inadequate, and this remains a great problem.

Confronted by such difficulties and challenges, I hope to better equip myself and nurture more leaders. I aspire for more advanced Biblical learning, but cannot spare the time in face of the onerous church workload, inadequacy in manpower as well as the need to take care of my family. Therefore, I hope to get some assistance from Christian literature. The

mainland is particularly lacking in books on hermeneutics and pastoring At this moment, I look forward to the publication of more Christian literature on sermon delivery, hermeneutics, disciple training, care for the pastors and Christian marriage counselling.

Please pray for me! I hope that those who have graduated recently and are inexperienced like myself can be provided with more Christian literature in support of their pastoring ministry in the church. Thank you very much! Emmanuel !

Li, a Guizhou church

“Support one pastor, and shepherd an entire group of believers!”

- Please support the 2017 “Mainland Seminary Graduates Book-giving Plan”

Please help us continue with our efforts in the past five years in which 200,000 volumes were donated to over 10,000 graduates. In May this year, the donation team completed the first stage of the book-giving journey to 14 cities covering a distance of 17,000 km. The Christian literature mainly supports pastoring at the frontline, including Biblical tools and books on hermeneutics, Bible studies, disciple training, apologetical theology, parent-child relationship, marriage and family, etc.



“Support one pastor, and shepherd an entire group of believers!”

You can also help support this group of new pastors!

The first stage of the “Mainland Seminary Graduates Book-giving Plan” has been completed. Your support is needed urgently for us to launch the next phase of the Book-giving. You are cordially invited to make an offering to support the donation of one set of shepherding materials for the 4,500 graduates this year. With each set costing HK\$450, a total amount of HK\$2 million is needed. We are grateful that close to 40% of the funds have been raised, and an amount of HK\$1.2 million is still needed.

For details of the Book-giving programme, please visit <http://www.ccl.org.hk/bookgifting>

Prayers

1. Addressing diverse needs

From the baby stage to old age, believers have different needs at different stages of their lives, yet Sunday sermons and large Sunday school classes can hardly cater to the diverse needs of congregations.

May the Lord broaden the mindset of church workers, help them develop holistic Christian education concepts, and help believers of different age, character and background be rooted in Biblical truths, enabling them to respond to life challenges with Christian values.



2. Supporting would-be preachers



The tightening of restrictions on Christian books since 2014 has limited the supply and range of Christian publications, around 1,500 types of Christian literature in mainland. It is hard for theological seminaries to find suitable Christian literature such as those on scriptural interpretation,

discipleship, Bible study, leadership etc. The seminaries are in grave need of spiritual literature.

May the Lord guide CCL's Mainland Seminary Graduates Book-giving Plan with the target of sending 100,000 books to 45 seminaries, in support of would-be preachers involved in group ministry.

May the Lord bless the seminary graduates, equip them with insights from Christian literature to nurture believers in the future.

3. Caring for autistic adults

Statistics show that China has more than 8 million autistic individuals. While there are rehabilitation and educational services for autistic children, little social support is available for those aged 15 or above, who have to rely on their families for care and support. Yet they are faced with issues such as daily care, employment, medical needs, aging etc.



May the Lord move churches to open their door to the vulnerable group lacking basic security, to help them experience God's love and integrate into society.

May the Lord move organizations to set up more rehabilitation and service units for older autistic people.

4. Tackling domestic violence



Despite the implementation of the national anti-domestic violence legislation on March 1, 2016, many Chinese people still suffer domestic violence without letting other people know, due to traditional beliefs. Domestic violence also happen to church members' families, eg. Christian wife being beaten up by her non-believer husband, or Christian husband with

suppressed emotions physically abusing his wife.

May the Lord comfort abuse victims, help them find shelter in a church when needed. May the Lord equip mainland pastors with training and marriage counselling materials so they can care for and minister to the victims.

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