

Leadership Development undeterred by the Pandemic -- Leadership e-Forum

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Training Opportunities under the Pandemic

Due to COVID-19, mainland churches have stopped in-house gatherings, but the opportunities of ministry and learning have not been lost. Whether there can be such opportunities all depends on the will and determination of the church servants. While the 2020 Leadership Summit at Hong Kong originally planned in early-March could not be held, the instructor team did not want mainland pastors to miss a chance to study and decided to resort to online platforms. Hence, the Leadership e-Forum was organized. At the end of February, a three-day trial lecture was first conducted with 12 group leaders, followed by a week of enrolment on the internet. Nearly 80 pastors from five main regions: eastern, south central, southwest, northwest and northeast responded and joined the Forum in mid-March. During the six-day forum, the instructor team lectured on a series of topics, covering teamwork of leaders, crisis management, young leaders' development, integration of social services and Gospel ministry, personal growth of leaders, etc.

Change of Learning and Communication Mode

To interact via the Leadership e-Forum, both instructors and students needed to adapt. Our colleagues have paid efforts to coordinate the video lectures and helped instructors

familiarize with the tele-conference application and equipment. Certain mainland students also had to adjust their personal habits and mindset in face of the significant change of the learning and communication mode.

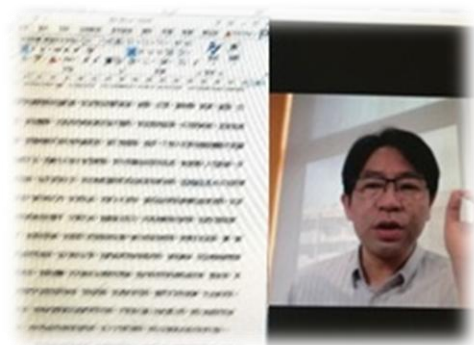
Co-worker Wang has experienced the advantages of online learning. She described it as follows, “The general impression is that online lectures are subject to many limitations in comparison with normal classroom lectures, but this time I have the feeling that the online classes are nothing inferior. Study activities were completed every day. For example, interactions of the instructor and students, small group discussions, and review after group discussions were all implemented without anything missing. Most impressive is that upon finishing each session, students were required to complete a course evaluation form. Though the questionnaire was concise, it made me reorganize in one go the whole day’s study in my mind. Through responding to questions asked, I associate the studied content with my own situations. This way, I summarized what I have learned, apart from just giving feedback to my teachers.”

Co-worker Xiao enjoyed the interactions with group members online: “This is the first time I joined. Despite certain differences in the atmosphere between the online study and inside a classroom, our post-lecture discussion within the small group was very enthusiastic. Basically, we studied in the morning and had deliberations in the afternoon, which was led very well by the group leader in accordance with the instructor’s guidelines. In my group there were co-workers from the same ministry I was serving, and the group experience would help us in the future to put into practice what we have learned.”

We also have heard some sharing from students serving in remote locations, who said that the online teaching method actually made their participation possible. As the pandemic had stopped people traveling, their normally busy schedules were halted and they had the chance to sit undisturbed in front of the computer to study. Previously there was a problem with financing in enrolling in such classes in that their low incomes (one or two thousand RMB monthly, max. three) and expensive expenses for traveling to Hong Kong to study have deterred them from coming. Their churches usually either lack resources to support them or do not recognize the need to fund pastors’ learning away from home. But now during the pandemic, CCL and the network have provided to them learning opportunities with minimal costs and flexible timing!

Influences on the Life of Leaders

Diverting to another teaching approach, the Leadership e-Forum has moved the leaders towards “Transcendent Leadership”. The forum covered subjects discussing dissimilarities cross-culture and cross-generation, and between the new and old, elderly and young, urban and rural, local and



Instructor Dr. Otto Lui talking about the need of personal growth of leaders in the Leadership e-Forum

international rules. The content brought forth different levels of insights and impacts on these leaders of different personalities, eliciting both rational reflection as well as emotional responses.

Co-worker Wang, who has a sentimental character, described the six-day course as a “from near to far and back to near” process: starting from reflection of the “self”, to the environment in which one was situated, and back to how one views oneself as a leader with various attributes. She was a new participant, and in the beginning did not have much feeling about the course. But as time passed, she delved into the course, and told herself: “Arise, there is a long way to go!” It is believed that the experiences of the course will resonate in her heart, accompanying her in the long journey of leadership!

The dialogue with Yang, a pragmatic co-worker, he gave one the feeling that he was a person of discipline and adherence. When he mentioned the lesson on managing contingencies and adversities, he spoke with a serious tone: “The instructor’s teaching forced me to think about how to live through perilous circumstances, considering that only in adversity could one show his/her resolute character. Being a leader, there might be more failures than successes, or one might only lead a mundane life, but at least one should give one’s best. The fear to act is the biggest enemy in times of emergency or adversity.” He was excited in talking about different generations, which was a topic of his interest. The instructor pointed out that different generations assume a particular way of life, thinking and acting according to their generational context. Various approaches should be appropriately taken to manage persons of different generations. In this respect, the leaders need to identify the uniqueness of different persons, and give them proper encouragement and aid, so that they can embrace better values and their potentials in a team are fostered.

Xiao is an amiable and witty leader. She described herself: “As a post-80s, I am not young now. We post-80s are a bit self-assertive and do not care about others’ judgement, and often we stay detached from what’s happening around us.” She said that her concepts received a whack from the course this time, and she ruminated on the instructor’s queries: How do leaders in adversity reverse the unfavorable situation? How are transcendent leaders shaped? How does a leader drive his/her own emotion beneficially to accomplish transmission of a vision? She expressed that in the church, a lot of time was spent in discussing work plans, with rarely any such queries being raised, not to mention asking workers to engage in any serious reflection. Besides, the after-class discussions also awakened her to the fact that we often inadvertently forgot the characteristics given to us by the Lord and gradually failed to employ them. We should rediscover these characteristics and secure them for use in serving the Lord. We hope Xiao, who views herself as not young now, will fully utilize what the Lord has given her and serve Him as an approved worker!

Online Learning Perspective

After the end of the Leadership e-Forum, many students enquired about the possibility of an extension of the study. In view of strong demand from mainland co-workers on leadership training, we responded without delay. Taking into account the experiences of online operations in this period, the instructor team and colleagues have decided to provide online courses on a long term basis.

In April, ZD Learning Community was formally established, which invited mainland co-workers interested in continued learning to be members. The instructor team dispatches weekly online learning episodes, which enable members to study individually or in small groups in a continual manner. Planned content include leadership, family, vocation, spirituality, etc. This season is on the Leadership Summit Series, to be followed by courses about the marketplace, Christian education, wealth and commercial education, etc. In just a month or so, nearly 300 members have enrolled.(Up to end of June, 900 members have enrolled.) Since they come from multiple locations, the instructor team is now busy recruiting group leaders / regional representatives, in order to support the members in their learning.



Instructor Dr. Boaz Yeung talking about “Breaking Through Bottlenecks” in the ZD Learning Community

Opportunities arise in difficult times. The pandemic created the Leadership e-Forum, and then has brought about the birth of ZD Learning Community. Although ZD has just started and is perhaps going to encounter many difficulties, it is a door that our Father opened for us. We pray that the Lord will use this network platform to connect us with mainland co-workers who never enjoyed any leadership training in the past because of problems in accessibility and finances!

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Theology Books invigorated a Teacher's Pulse

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Can “Theology” be frightening to a bible school teacher? Certainly! Despite having accumulated years of experience teaching at bible school as well as preaching regularly on the church podium, Teacher Li of the southwest region still continued to find theology a subject too difficult to grasp. Due to lack of confidence, he seldom applied concepts in theology in his preaching and teaching ministry. While constantly bearing a heavy workload and facing the challenge of scarcity in resources, although he has been teaching for nine years, Li never had another chance for his own further study. When the coronavirus pandemic erupted and the world suddenly seemed to have come to a standstill, Li had an unexpectedly amazing experience. This is brought about by one of books he received in the book gifting package---“*Listening: The Beginning of Theology*” by Pastor Carver Yu. The content of the book deeply struck him.

Preaching on Theology can be down to Earth

Li shared candidly, “While I was studying in the seminary, I did not like theology. I considered it too abstract and too difficult to comprehend. Reading assignments on theology were intimidating to me. I never thought I would read the book *Listening: The Beginning of Theology*¹ twice!” Li pointed out that he and many other believers often share similar misconception of regarding theology too distant from daily Christian living. But as Pastor Yu suggested theology is not only closely related to our religious life, what the pastors and ministers preach also intimately connects with theology. “One needs to use theology to critique what is being preached at church to see if it is faithful to and compatible with the incarnation dimension as well as God’s overall revelation.”² Such a statement prompted Li to once again reflect upon the essence of theology.

Li described the experience more vividly, “The book has triggered my deep reflection. Being a minister, I constantly need to proclaim the words of God, yet I have always had doubts. Did my own language and intellectual inadequacy limit the interpretation thereby resulting in the original intent of God’s revelation being twisted? How could I construct my sermons upon the framework of theology? I am aware that what I preach should be faithful to the incarnation theology, and it also should address the bewilderment, prejudice and addiction of mankind. In addition, it should respect culture and challenge societal corruptness and conflicts. May God enlighten me on the importance of preaching and teaching, help me use the preaching and teaching opportunities to nurture students appropriately.”

Rediscovering the Joy of Reading

Li understands the importance of reading, when he teaches hermeneutics in school, he keeps reminding students that there is no better way to interpret the bible than careful reading of the bible. He notices that no matter how well the students understand the history, cultural background, context and structure, hermeneutics principles, etc., if students do not pay attention to problems associated with their individual reading methods and habits, such will become obstacles to effective comprehension.

Li continued, “Pastor Yu reminded me that if one loses out in reading, he/she will also lose out in hermeneutics. The majority of my students has only completed junior high school. They lack adequate training on reading comprehension. What makes the situation worse is the fact that many of them are influenced by the internet culture. They are used to the piecemeal and casual browsing mode while surfing the net. Quoting from what Pastor Yu said, ‘This is “impulsive reading for instant gratification”³ and “subjective, self-centred reading driven by sensation or entertainment seeking”⁴.’ If the students subconsciously apply this mentality in their reading of the bible, they easily become muted to life changing power of the bible. If a person does not approach the bible with a pious and courteous attitude, it is difficult for him/her to deduce its core essence.”

Upon finishing this book, Li lay out his goals for the future. First, Li wants to correct both his students’ and his own knowledge and attitude towards theology, they should not consider theology a remote entity. Theology is an essential element to guide Christian living as well as preaching and teaching. Next, Li plans to reevaluate the mentality and methodology he and his students apply towards bible reading. Whenever approaching a text, they strive for attaining accurate exegesis of the inherent truth, knowledge, values, etc. May the Lord help Li effectively apply what he learned from Pastor Yu’s book to his preaching and teaching ministry!

¹ Pastor Carver Yu, “Listening: The Beginning of Theology”(Simplified Chinese), Nanjing Union Theological Seminary · 2015 ◦

² Refer to “Listening: The Beginning of Theology”, Page 11

³ Refer to “Listening: The Beginning of Theology”, Page 193

⁴ Refer to “Listening: The Beginning of Theology”, Page 195

Book Gifting fulfills the Needs of Seminary Teachers!

Aside from gifting books to current year graduates of mainland seminaries, the book gifting team also notices the needs among seminary teachers. Sourcing of pertinent education materials has never been an easy task in the mainland. There is very limited supply and variety of books; readily applicable teaching materials are even more scarce. Thanks to the Lord, through the support of donors, from 2012 onwards, CCL has been able to identify relevant books to supply to more than 1,700 seminary teachers in the mainland.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, seminaries have temporarily closed for classes. Besides conducting classes online, teachers get a hold of this opportunity to further their own education. Items of the book gifting package are serving this purpose remarkably well and they are invigorating a strong pulse on preaching and teaching among the recipient teachers.

The ministry of mainland theological education needs your support! While continuing the graduate book gifting project, we also specifically choose quality reference books from among the new publications in the mainland for seminary teachers so that these can be used as their teaching resources. Please send in your donation if you are motivated by our heavenly Father to partner with the mainland seminary teachers on their respective service paths. Thank you!



Members of the book gifting team give books on theology and pastoral care to the principal (middle) and teachers of the bible school in northern region.



Teachers in the southwest region enthusiastically introduce their reference book resources on pastoral care to theology students.

Prayers

1. Ministering after the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic in the mainland has eased, but the aftereffects have emerged. Brothers and sisters have shared their weakness with pastors: “I am weak, feeling powerless about the potential difficulty at work and life in general after the pandemic.” To offer help, some pastors have begun online prayers and Bible studies, trying to strengthen their faith. They study scriptures like the Book of Jeremiah to help believers follow and trust in God during adversity.



May the lord strengthen the pastors’ ministry to help increase believers’ faith; may the Lord prepare more practical teaching materials for the frontline ministry.

2. A Heart for Neighbours



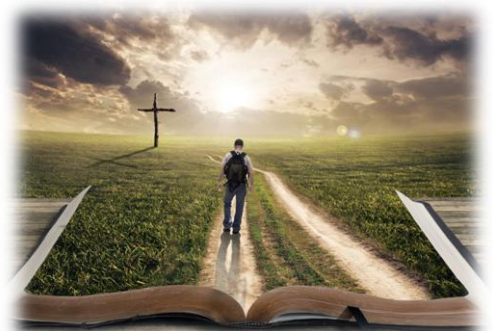
At the height of the pandemic, many believers actively donated anti-pandemic supplies and food to their peers and neighbours, showing care for others. Now that the pandemic has eased, pastors are reminding believers not to cool down their passion. Even when life is gradually returning to normal, mainland Christians are reminded to care for their neighbours even when they are busy with their own personal and family matters. This is a time when neighbours need

listeners, people who can listen to their grief of losing loved ones, the difficulty at work and in finances following the pandemic.

May the Lord send believers to be princes of peace bringing comfort to those in grief and hope to where there are worries.

3. Upholding the Truth

During the pandemic, lots of sermons infused with lies from heresy infiltrated the Internet. Believers in some remote regions with little education were lured, believing that the lies could bring them peace. They



consequently left their churches. Pastors tried to explain to them the Biblical teachings but some remain drawn to the lies spread by heresy. Some pastors were saddened by this.

May the Lord protect believers from being lured by lies and losing their faith. May the Lord comfort the pastors, give them wisdom in teaching believers how to differentiate between false teachings and the truth.

4. Mental Health of College Entrance Examination Candidates



“Gaokao”, the national college entrance examination held from July 7 to 8. Results of the high-stake exam directly affect numerous school graduates’ pathways for further study and career. Some candidates experienced sleeping problems, loss of appetite and even anxiety due to the pressure and excessive expectations from their parents.

May the Lord keep the mental health of this year’s 10.71 million candidates, such that they can face examination results properly, and help them experience appropriate care and company from their parents.

~ 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 the mainland.

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