

Book Gifting 2020 — Healthy Adaption of the Church

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The pandemic has taken away lives, slowed down economic and social activities and almost brought the world to a halt. The journey in the past year had been an arduous one. Under social distancing restrictions, the shepherding of believers and church gatherings had inevitably been affected and adjustments had to be made. For our ministries in China, apart from discussing whether the room for church ministries in recent years had been curtailed, the fact remained that personal visits had been impossible during the pandemic. On top of some church ministries using online means to liaise and care for believers, how is the mainland church faring generally? What adjustments have been made by the mainland church in various aspects? As we cannot visit frontline workers, how can publication resources play a greater role during this period?

How Seminary Teachers Adapted: Breakthroughs in Learning and Teaching

Learning during the Lockdown

Teachers in seminaries were often invited to pastor and teach in churches, apart from taking up teaching duties in seminary classes. We can imagine the heavy workload of teachers in normal times and how their schedule was fully packed even during public holidays and special festivals. Their lack of rest time was unhealthy both for themselves

and the people they served. The pandemic started early this year, and some seminary teachers could not return to their homeland. Even if they left early and returned to their hometown, they stayed home the whole time as all worship sessions and gospel gatherings scheduled during the Spring Festival were cancelled. Indeed, these teachers had all along lived under the various pressures of a packed schedule, not to mention the burden brought about by the pandemic. During this period, however, they could spend more time with their family and take a good rest. Many teachers, while maintaining contacts with their students and brothers and sisters in the church through online means, could also take the opportunity to read, adjust their teaching content and digest more complicated Biblical materials. Overall, they had the chance to better equip themselves for their future ministries.

Transforming the Teaching Model

In light of the vast size of China, it was already common among many mainland believers to connect with each other through the internet, with people of all ages having mastered the relevant technology. However, theology education and leadership training in the church were still dominated by face-to-face teaching. In recent years, some sizeable seminaries have started using computers and projection systems, yet some are still teaching by the traditional way of writing notes on the blackboard. One can imagine how difficult it is for seminaries to move their teaching online in line with the general trends to shift our work and conducting our everyday life online. A teacher from the Northwestern region described that he was totally caught off guard by such a shift. He said that his entire teaching team had to upgrade their computer skills, recompile their teaching materials and change their teaching method. It took them one whole week to complete the testing of everything, and it was a major breakthrough for them! The teacher found that during the initial period of online teaching, individual students' attendance was rather unstable and some learned slowly. As extra support was rendered to these students, they ultimately adjusted to the new teaching mode. After 70 days of online teaching, they gained good experience and even considered extending their online teaching to a wider scope of people. This might be an even bigger breakthrough!

How Church Pastors Adapted: Using Resources Efficiently and Re-building Relationships

Effective Use of Resources to Cement Ties

We conducted a survey among mainland pastors and believer leaders in August last year¹, and found that while pastors emphasized the teaching of the truth and development of ministries, believer leaders focused more on the spiritual life of brothers and sisters as well as relationships among pastors and believers. In the past half year, churches which were ministry- or activity-led have seen individual pastors getting more distant from believers following the suspension of physical gatherings. Some even failed to follow up on believers

affected by cults online. On the other hand, churches which placed importance on relationships and living out the Word readily turned their gatherings online and their ties were further cemented.

Given the overall environment in recent years, major gatherings have already decreased in number. The pandemic further highlighted the importance of the relationship between shepherds and their flocks, and such relationship could be built through small group gatherings, sharing or even one-to-one mentorship programs. During the early stage of the pandemic, some pastors made use of the book “Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ”² in online small group studies among young people to help them tide over the difficulties they faced such as losing their jobs and living under a lockdown. They were encouraged to focus on and follow the Lord, and this helped foster trust and mutual help within the group. Among couples and family members, conflicts as a result of differences in lifestyles also arose as they now stayed together at home for a long period, in comparison to before the lockdown when each member led their own busy life. There was even a spate of divorces in some regions. The problem was particularly acute among families of pastors, since pastors normally led a busy ministry life without much rest time. In light of this, we added the book “Love as We First Met”³ (a course on the growth of marital relationships) published last year in the mainland to the book gifting pack for seminary graduates in 2020 so as to build the new generation of pastors and support them in their pastoral service.



Graduates holding “Witness Essentials” which can help graduates teach believers on the frontline how to bear witness to the Word.

How Book Gifting Adapted: Walking Alongside Pastors and Responding to Their Needs

From how seminary teachers furthered their studies and adjusted their teaching model, to frontline pastors using discipleship and family-building materials to rebuild their relationship with God and man, we witnessed once again that these servants of God had not stayed idle amidst all the hardship. Instead, they cherished their resources and adjusted their heart and mind in relaunching their service in God. As the pandemic eased, various seminaries stopped their online courses and restarted their face-to-face classes. Students’ graduation was also postponed from spring to summer. We thus immediately re-activated our book gifting program to respond to needs all over the country.

This is the ninth year of our book gifting program. By now, we have established good understanding with seminaries, publishing houses and logistics centres. Yet, in face of the fluctuations of the pandemic, challenges remain grave. One can imagine that after several

months of suspension of operation, publishing houses had a backlog of tasks to clear. Extra time was needed to reprint the books and handle the warehousing and logistics operations. A greater challenge was the fact that a number of factors influenced when graduates would return to the seminaries. We hence needed to deliver the books in several days and on time to faraway provinces and cities. If we failed to do so, students who had already left the schools to return to their distant homeland would not be able to get them. Meanwhile, infection control measures in some cities also affected the transportation of goods, further aggravating the difficulties in book delivery.

Good Partners Testifying to God's Grace

The purpose of book gifting is to provide pastoral resources for graduates, and the activity was arranged in the past eight years to tie in with the graduation date of seminaries. However, under the pandemic, there were a lot of uncertainties on when online courses would be held, classes would resume and supplementary classes would be taught, which meant that the graduation period this year would stretch over a period of half a year (from July to the end of the year or even early next year). Despite this, we insist on arranging book gifting based on the number of graduates as well as graduation dates to ensure that the book packs are delivered to each student and wastage can be avoided. Therefore, the relevant arrangements for book gifting lasts unprecedentedly one year from early this year to the end of the year. The pressure is tremendous, but God's grace is sufficient. We have seen enthusiastic responses from different provinces and cities, and it is all God's work! For instance, a bible school in the eastern region said that they "not only received the books, but also your abundant love. May God bless the offerings of brothers and sisters. These books are most useful to graduates for their future ministries...." Another seminary replied: "Your books are the only ones that we have received for our graduates this year, and we have not received donation of other resources under the pandemic". A graduate in the Southwestern region said: "My three-year training is just a beginning. Although I have learned only a little, I have to go out and serve in view of the great needs of the field and the local church. We can only learn as we go along in our ministry. Thank you for your pastoral resources. With such assistance, we are more empowered as we serve the Lord!" Thank the Lord for His supplies to meet the needs of frontline workers.

We understand that we cannot visit seminaries personally and introduce to them the e-books this year because of the constraints under the pandemic. Yet, our staff have liaised closely with graduates of different seminaries and assisted them in installing e-books, especially e-Bible tools, on their phones. Whenever we see photos of successful installation of e-books, we thank the Lord and are touched by how graduates of different ages, for the sake of better serving the Lord, are willing to make breakthroughs and adjust to a new way of learning.



Graduates of a seminary in the central southern region enthusiastically displaying the e-books they have installed!

Offering Resources to Help Build a Healthy Church



At the time of this article being written, we have donated books to 30 seminaries, which is half the target number this year, and we give thanks to the Lord! Among the remaining seminaries, some have yet to catch up with their teaching, while others are still juggling with the teaching for the new school term and graduate classes. Their graduation date has not been fixed. Please pray for the efforts of the teachers and students, as well as our application for re-printing of some books and timely delivery of the books to the students.

In the past half year, pastors, believer leaders and seminary teachers and students have made adjustments to their service as well as teaching and learning and come to depend more on God. Whether it is adjusting to the new pastoring and teaching model or making better use of publication resources to shepherd or teach, these are definitely a step forward to building a healthy church. We sincerely invite you to walk alongside the mainland church, and witness together with us God’s wonderful work among His followers!

¹See “Pray for China” Issue no.318

²The simplified Chinese version of “Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ”. Author: Greg Ogden, 270 pages. Mainland publisher: Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, 2017.

³The simplified Chinese version of “Love as We first Met”. Authors: Benjamin W.H. Wat, Rachel Wat Lai Y.K., 216 pages. Mainland publisher: CCC/TSPM, 2019.

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# Intimate Pastoral Care amid the Pandemic changes Lives

© Xiao Dong  
China Church Ministry Frontline Worker



In the first half of 2020, church leaders in the mainland made strategic adaptations by administering as much pastoral care as possible through virtual media. The cyber world, however, was not without its limitation. Many rural ministers continued to explore every possible opportunity to provide training to believers with great potential to be developed into future leaders. They also administered pastoral nurture and care to those believers who were in need of individualized support. Minister Zhou from the rural church in the central southern region shared two testimonies of hers below.

## Strengthening the Faith of an Emerging yet Timid Leader

Before the pandemic, minister Zhou was almost always running here and there. She seldom stayed in one place for long to conduct leadership training. Amid the pandemic, the new norm stipulated her to lead a more regular lifestyle. It became possible for her to schedule leadership training for gifted believers. Minister Zhou joyfully shared, ‘Sister Xiang is gifted in singing. All these years, I have been encouraging her to use her gift in ministry. I encouraged her to lead chanting in church, but she almost invariably declined by saying, “No, I can’t do it. I only have primary school training.” In the past few months, I shared with her the life of the apostle Peter. Peter was only a fisherman, he was never scholarly trained, but he became an important apostle used by God. Though we consider ourselves inadequate in many ways, we can seek God’s help. When we add in our own dedication and effort, we will definitely grow. I invited Xiang to come to my home regularly. We sang hymns together while I played the piano. We practiced every song repeatedly. The cumulative effect of regular practice potentiated Xiang’s vocal gift, her singing skills developed rapidly. From hardly knowing a single musical note to now capable of singing by sight reading, from knowing little about beats to now capable of identifying variations in rhythms, from timid and withdrawn to now courageous and willing to lead chanting and conduct choirs, now Xiang no longer says, “No, I can’t do it.” She actively engages in ministry, her spiritual life dances like a butterfly that’s just emerged from its cocoon.’

## Soothing the Emotion of an Agitated Family Member

The internet is not an appropriate platform to connect with believers who were experiencing emotional instability. Minister Zhou was thankful that she still found the opportunity to make person-to-person contact. She said, 'There was a sister in my church whose husband recently lost control of his sanity. He kept beating and yelling at his family members. Our sister was frightened. She was waiting expectantly for me to visit her home. However, this was not a simple matter amid the pandemic. I prayed to our Heavenly Father, "God, I miss them very much, please clear up the obstacles so that I can go out to visit them. Amen!" In the following morning, I put on a mask and set off. When I was nearing the entrance of the village, the guard asked me where I was going. I frankly told him my intent to visit someone who fell sick. To my surprise, the guard granted me clearance. I thanked the Lord for opening up the path. As soon as I entered the home of the sister, I could hear the noise made by her agitated husband. I immediately invited our sister to pray with me together. After praying earnestly three times, her husband eventually calmed down. We thanked the Lord for listening to our prayers. When I was about to leave, her husband even urged me to stay for dinner. As final remarks, I instructed our sister how to pray for her husband perpetually.'

We thank our Heavenly Father that minister Zhou was participating in His work. Despite the constraints of the pandemic, she attempted various means to be physically present with believers and channeled God's blessings to them. Minister Zhou also shared with us the needs within her own family. The family was supported by her church salary which is a little over RMB1000, the income from a small business run by her husband as well as a subsidy<sup>1</sup> for ministers from CCL. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, her husband had been unable to generate income in the past six months. Please remember their financial needs in your prayers.



Minister Zhou (in dark outfit) was sharing with bible school teachers the difficulties and gracious guidance she had experienced in her ministry.

<sup>1</sup> Minister Zhou has been receiving a CCL living subsidy for ministers since September 2017.

**Please Support the Living Subsidy for Mainland Evangelists**

The pandemic is never an obstacle to Minister Zhou. Her dedication to nurture her congregation cannot be stopped. God is inviting you to walk with, pray for and support ministers like minister Zhou. Are you heeding His call? Please remember and support the ministry. For 2020, CCL has planned to provide support to 28 ministers who come from Northwestern, Southwestern, Eastern and central southern regions. CCL will allot subsidies to these ministers based on their actual needs and the living standard in their respective region. The budget is USD109,000. As of the end of November, USD82,050 has been received and USD26,950 is still outstanding. We sincerely invite you to respond. Thank you!



# Prayers

## 1. Crave for Team Work

Due to the months of pandemic and floods, preachers in remote regions are feeling lonely and overburdened: “Quite many believers had traumatic experiences due to the pandemic and floods, and we have tried hard to show concern for them. But often each preacher has to minister to congregations in various gathering points, and there is a limit to what we can do. We do hope to have the support of a team.”



May the Lord bless preachers in remote areas, strengthen their faith amidst manpower and resource constraints. May the Lord send more workers with theological training to serve in remote areas!

## 2. Long-missed Face to Face Lessons



As the pandemic has eased and the threat of floods gone, seminaries in the mainland have since mid-September to October officially resumed lessons, and some seminaries are catching up with unfinished courses left from the previous year. Teachers and students are grateful for the opportunity to resume lessons, and treasure the long-missed face-to-face lessons.

May the Lord guide both teachers and students, that students can have deep learning, and teachers can help foster students' spiritual growth in person.

## 3. The Difficult Path of Reconstruction

After months of relentless rain, provinces along the Yangtse and Huai rivers are damaged by floods, affecting more than 40 million people. Now that the risk of flooding is gone, grave challenges remain. Displaced residents have returned to their homelands and found their houses destroyed, crops



and cattle swamped; some churches lack resources to do repair or reconstruction work.

The road to reconstruction is tough. May the Lord have mercy on the flood victims, help them get timely assistance from government departments, and may He move well-resourced church members to support the needs of churches in remote regions!

#### 4. Promote the Internal Circulation of the Economy



While the mainland’s imports/exports, retail and logistics industries have yet fully recovered, ‘internal circulation’ has become a buzzword within China. It is nonetheless a lengthy process involving production, distribution, circulation and consumption. Hi-tech and e-commerce platforms will be the first industries to benefit from it. Domestic sales and supply of production materials will affect the speed of economic recovery.

May the Lord give wisdom to relevant government departments and industrial/commercial enterprises, help them cope with the challenges flexibly so more jobs can be created.

~ 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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