

## **Looking Forward to the New Year with Hope and Gratitude**

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General Secretary



Someone has said that the Chinese are an optimistic people. At the end of a year and beginning of a new year, we let go of whatever difficulties confronting us, and spend time with family to look back at the past year with a grateful heart and embrace the new year with renewed hope. A small poem about a farmer's family aptly captures this thankful sentiment: "When the field work for the year is over, we joyfully bathe in the sun in front of our house. We chat cheerfully about our good yield, and what better time to enjoy ourselves after a year of hard labor!"

The year 2020 is most challenging for countries around the world. In Hong Kong, the pandemic has claimed the lives of over 100 people and more than 10,000 have been infected. The society has come to a standstill. The economy has plunged, hitting hard different sectors and pushing up the unemployment rate. This, coupled with the radical changes in our political landscape, has struck fear into Hong Kong people. With these challenges, Hong Kong, "the Pearl of the Orient" and a much-favored international metropolis, is living through unprecedented shock!

Likewise, the mainland has faced grave challenges in 2020. After the first breakout of Covid-19 in Wuhan in early 2020, the pandemic quickly ripped through the world, and all fingers were then pointing at China. The Chinese government strongly resented the virus being termed "Wuhan virus" as it smacked of hostility and political undertone.

Understandably, only when vaccines are in abundant supply later this year will the pandemic be fully contained. Meanwhile, extensive flooding in the middle of last year was also a rarity in the mainland, bringing devastating consequences to the livelihood of people in the affected areas.

The year 2020 also brought insurmountable difficulties to the mainland church. In the wake of the pandemic, classes in seminaries were suspended, face-to-face teaching came to a halt and church gatherings stopped. Such activities only resumed progressively in the latter half of the year. Students attended makeup classes and took makeup exams, while graduation ceremonies were cancelled or postponed. In the meantime, while the serious flooding affected rural churches adversely, the tightened religious policies meant that churches of different backgrounds continued to be suppressed. Stricter restrictions were imposed on religious publications, prolonging the time needed for publication approval with fewer publications approved.

## God's Grace Tides Us Over All Difficulties

There is a saying about the Chinese people's ability to "weather the storms year after year", highlighting the persevering character of the Chinese. Believers are even more so as we have in the past overcome many challenges in our journey to follow the Lord and gained good experience and wisdom. Amidst attacks from all sides, we have learned to hold confidence in our Heavenly Father and look upon Him for His guidance. God did a lot of amazing things in the past year, providing much room for us to continue with our work.

*"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)*

At the beginning of the new year, let us recount God's grace and blessings in 2020:

1. [Leveraging on technology to continue with gatherings and classes](#) --- While face-to-face gatherings, classes and training were brought to a halt by the pandemic and the severe flooding, yet we are grateful to be able to offer online courses and serve mainland believers, teachers and parents relentlessly. Despite the online restrictions, many regions in the mainland could carry on their gatherings, learning and exchanges.
2. [Overcoming barriers to deliver our books](#) --- We are thankful that CCL's Book Gifting Project for mainland seminary graduates continued amidst the pandemic and serious flooding. As of 2020, we have gifted 2,483 packs of devotional resources to graduates of 39 seminaries. These resources, or "the personal library" to some, would be of great help to the graduates in their shepherding, evangelizing, sermon-delivery, personal growth, family counselling and other ministries as they start their lifelong service in their hometown church or a new setting.

3. [Passing on the torch of publication to mainland peers](#) --- The simplified Chinese version of “Love as We first Met” (authors: Benjamin W.H. Wat, President of Bethel Bible Seminary, and Rachel Wat Lai Y.K.) was published by the CCC/TSPM. On 11 January 2020, we hosted a thanksgiving gathering to celebrate the publication of two million volumes of devotional literature in the mainland. Since we published in 1995 the first book “The Bible-CGST Study Edition” (compiled by the China Graduate School of Theology), a total of 87 books have been officially published in the mainland in the past 25 years.
4. [Continuing with publishing the “Living Word”](#) --- In the fourth quarter of 2020, we published the teacher’s and student’s versions of the “Living Word”-- ”Book of the 12 Prophets (Part I)”. The “Living Word Curriculum Series” was the first set of Biblical teaching materials written by Chinese pastors/scholars for mainland believers. The Series comprises a total of 28 volumes (each including both the teacher’s and student’s versions), covering all the 66 Books in the Bible. The Book of the 12 Prophets (Part I), the 21<sup>st</sup> volume, was published after a lengthy fundraising exercise.

## Striving Ahead in 2021 under God’s Leadership

1. [“Mainland Seminary Graduates Book Gifting Project”](#) --- If God is willing, we plan to gift 100,000 Biblical literature to 4,000 graduates from 50 seminaries, Bible schools and training centers. This year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Book Gifting Project. We are grateful for having served over 26,000 graduates in the past nine years, giving away some 600,000 Biblical literature to accompany these graduates as they embarked on their ministry.
2. [Publication in the mainland](#) --- We pray that God’s grace will allow us to publish three more devotional books in the mainland this year, bringing the total number to 90. We count on God’s blessings to enable us to achieve the target of publishing 100 books and continue serving mainland believers through the literature ministry.
3. [The Living Word Curriculum Series](#) --- We pray that three new sets of Biblical teaching materials can be published this year, with each including both the teacher’s and student’s versions. The total number will be brought to 24, covering 62 books in the Old and New Testaments. Pray that the Lord will use these materials to help the church during the pandemic, and may God empower the writers of these materials. Hopefully, the teaching materials related to all the books in the New Testament can be published next year.
4. [Support for evangelists](#) --- Plans are afoot to support 30 full-time evangelists this year. Financial support will be offered to low-paid evangelists in the remote and economically-deprived regions so that they can focus on their shepherding.

5. **Rebuilding relationships and values in the family and marriage** --- To offer online courses to pastors and parents. Pray for God's guidance that families of the believers will be transformed into a place for nurturing believers' spiritual life and enabling them to take up the responsibility of educating the next generation:

Not only will the church bear the responsibility of teaching children about our beliefs, but parents should also take up the duty;

Not only will the school educate children, but parents should also be responsible for teaching and nurturing the moral character of children.

*"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6)*

## **Heading Towards the Sixth "10-Year" with a Focus on "Going Deeper"**

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CCL, and we are thankful to the Lord for establishing CCL in 1971. It inherited the mission of the China Inland Mission (CIM) and China Sunday Schools Association (CSSA) when the two organizations merged, i.e. to use literature ministry and training ministry as channels to assist churches and believers to build a healthy and robust spiritual life by way of teaching and following the Bible.

As we step into the sixth decade of CCL's ministry, I ponder over the need for us go and get "deeper" in our spiritual life and beliefs!

The world is changing and so is China. The changes are so rapid and drastic that those who are caught by them must pay great efforts to adapt. It is not easy for believers to stay steadfast to our faith in this chaotic and unruly world. Believers need spiritual wisdom and values to make good judgement in a society which is filled with specious and distorted ideas and theories. As the saying goes, "only the sturdy grass can withstand strong winds". When the environment is in a turmoil, those whose spiritual life is not well-grounded in the Lord will be exposed. After the pandemic is over, the church needs to rebuild the life of believers. A good foundation for believers' faith must be laid through learning and living out the Bible persistently. Believers should be made aware of their calling from God and encouraged to commit themselves to their mission.

In serving the mainland church and believers, a strategy as embodied in the vertical and horizontal axis of the cross can be adopted:

1. **The horizontal axis is a "strategy on quantity"**: many ministries should be offered quickly to cover a wide spectrum. The depth is not the focus here, it can follow later. The aim is to respond to the needs of the new converts swiftly and help them establish a solid foundation in their faith in a systematic way.

2. **The vertical axis is a “strategy on quality”**: ministries should be specialized and in-depth. The church should groom leaders who are committed and become life mentors using their life to influence others.

“It is better to be light up ourselves than cursing the darkness!” Before Jesus Christ comes again, the world will only get increasingly dark, evil and complex. The unprecedented pandemic worldwide in 2020 is a warning for us to work harder for the Lord and light up ourselves in darkness to make the Chinese church a blessing to the society and the nation. It is our strongest wish that the church will become a witness to the heavenly kingdom, and to faithfully groom healthy and strong believers who remain joyful in the toughest of times. These believers should insist on leading a Christ-centered life and respond to the calling from God. They will only do things upon the Father’s commands, things which can change lives, things pleasing to God and things which can glorify God!

Lastly, I invite you to use a different mindset to view our turbulent times: the focus is not on how such volatilities bring about changes, but rather we are asked to change through experiencing such volatilities.



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## Teaming up with ethnic minority Christian comrades

© Pastor Qin

Teacher of the Southwest region Christian Training Centre and pastor of Li Su Tribe church

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the gospel was spread into the Yunnan province where minority groups resided, resulting in many tribes accepting Christ. Churches were established in villages of various minority tribes. To date, among certain minority groups, as many as 65% or more of them are Christians. Besides attending and being nurtured in the church, ethnic minority believers can also receive short-term theology education in regional training centres to become Christian workers. Then they can undertake the great commission to share the gospel with fellow kinsmen as well as to evangelize other ethnic communities.



### Advancing the frontier of cross-ethnic evangelism

More than a decade ago, believers of the Li Su Tribe experienced the conviction to reach out to members of the neighbouring Tai Tribe. It is always easier to share the gospel with people within your own clan; cross-ethnic evangelism presents much greater challenges. Tai people worship the Buddha. If ever a Tai villager is converted to believing in Jesus, he/she will face rejection by the entire village. If anything happens to this believer's family, whether it be marriage or burial affairs, other villagers will refuse to help, not to say they will offer assistance when the farming workload becomes demanding. Under such circumstances, whenever a Tai believer's family encounters troubles, Christians from nearby villages will go to his/her home to offer help. Whenever there are Tai people who express interest in knowing more about the Christian faith, Li Su believers will bring them to church and share the gospel with them. Baptism is carried out in the river within the vicinity.

Besides lecturing to minority tribe students at the Christian training centre, I also shepherd believers of Li Su church. In recent years, some believers and I have been guided by our Heavenly Father to begin cross-nationality evangelism. We share the gospel with Burmese workers in the southwest region of China. We have even established Burmese speaking churches in the municipality where they reside. The gospel message is shared through

organizing evangelistic meetings, meal gatherings and visitations of the sick. Baptism is conferred to those whose Christian faith is confirmed.

## Dedication and determination conquer difficulties

Ethnic minority churches, nevertheless, still face a lot of problems. Minority group believers lack understanding of their responsibility to support their ministers. The coronavirus pandemic coupled with the torrential flood have made life exceptionally tough. Donations become scarce. Younger generation believers dare not devote themselves to become full-time ministers despite their possession of generally higher education background. A great many theological students have also been forced to look for other jobs to sustain their living. Those graduates who continue with their ministry need to turn themselves into tentmakers, working and serving at the same time. Moreover, although there is the freedom of religious belief, there is no freedom of organizing religious activities. Reporting and obtaining approval is mandatory. Sharing of the gospel and evangelism can only be conducted within premises with permission for religious activities.

There are, however, always more solutions than there are problems. Coworkers and ethnic minority believers continue to have a strong faith and work relentlessly to spread the good news. We reach out to different villages, pray for the sick, offer help to families hit hard by disasters and comfort them by sharing God's words with them. There is one family that we have been visiting quite frequently. The father of this family became seriously ill. We prayed for him and shared the gospel with him. This brought great comfort to the entire family. His daughter also needed support as she received dissatisfactory results from the college entrance examination. Christian brothers and sisters comforted her with love and the words of God. She was deeply touched and started to read the bible on her own. Later on, her father was taken away to be with the Lord; the daughter was greatly struck by grief. During her father's funeral service, I deliberately chose Revelation 14:13 as basis of my sermon. It turned out that she was deeply touched by the phrase "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord". God's words continued to change her. She decided to enroll in the 3-month bible course at our training centre. Despite her father's death rendering the family financially insecure, the entire family is loving the Lord all the more.



The girl whose life is changed by God's words is willing to complete a short-term bible course at the training centre.

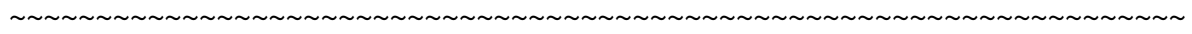
The ministry among ethnic minorities still faces many obstacles, yet the Lord's grace is ever more abundant. Please pray for the minority group churches and the training centre. May the Lord use us to build up more and more ethnic minority Christian workers!

Note: Pastor Qin has been receiving the Living Subsidy for Mainland Evangelists from CCL since December 2018.

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

Obstacles cannot stop us from building up minority group Christian comrades! Are you willing to walk with these evangelists, pray for them and support their daily living so that they may devote their full attention to serving on the frontline?

As of 2021, the Living Subsidy for Mainland Evangelists' fund needed is USD115,385. Please remember and take action to support them. We sincerely invite you to donate now. Thank you!





# Prayers

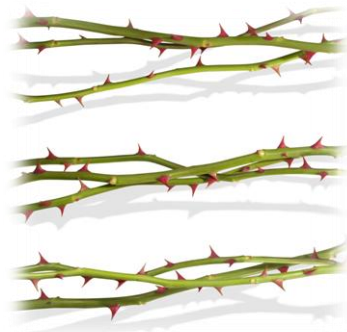
## 1. Ministering to new converts

Mainland churches are ministering to new believers who were converted during the pandemic, e.g., through discipleship training, courses for new believers etc. A church pastor shared: “The new believers mainly learned of the gospel through online service or small group Bible study, and now is the time to provide them with holistic training to help them integrate Biblical teachings into their lives and establish Christian values.”



May the Lord give wisdom to preachers, help them make good use of materials in nurturing the new believers’ spiritual growth. May the Lord bless the new converts with a heart to learn about Him, and to strive to know about the truth.

## 2. The troubled Christian publishing



Under an increasingly tight religious policy, the supply of Christian literature has declined due to stringent and time-consuming vetting procedures in the mainland. The sale of Christian books has been further tightened, with some churches being forbidden from selling them.

May the Lord lead and give wisdom to mainland Christian publishing units, so they can continue to publish and make available Christian books that foster spiritual growth despite the various restrictions.

## 3. Teaching for young ethnic minority believers

The secularization of churches has impacted ethnic minority churches. A preacher at a church in the southwest shared: “In the past, ethnic minority believers led simple lives, but some youngsters who had gone to work in affluent cities became dissatisfied with their own churches’ simple structure. They want to build bigger churches to show their respect for God. We feel the need to teach them



proper monetary values, in hopes that they can understand that our relation with God is far more important than the exterior of a building.”

May the Lord give wisdom to pastors, and keep the young from being deceived by secular values.

#### 4. Keeping “returned kids” company



“Returned kids” are defined as those who had followed their parents to live or study in big cities but due to new population or education policies have now returned to their hometowns.

According to Beijing University’s Institute of Education Economics, after returning home, those kids are strangers in their new school environment and easily bullied by fellow schoolmates, or they can easily become bullies. They are like “left behind children” without their

parents around.

Please pray for God’s mercy for them, may their parents visit them more often, and pray that God will send believer families in rural churches to send their own children to accompany the ‘returned kids’.

~ 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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