

Collaborating Different Biblical Learning Platforms to Respond to Ever-Changing Circumstances

© Matthew Fung, Associate General Secretary (Publishing) / Publisher (CCL Publishing House) and
Guan Bao, Marketplace Teaching Instructor



Since the Regulations on Religious Affairs were amended in 2018 and tightening of policies on religious publications in 2019, pastors and church leaders in the mainland have faced severe challenges in shepherding and fostering believers' spiritual growth. On top of this, the pandemic last year has led to the suspension of physical gatherings and a slump in the economy, causing various problems among believers in terms of their workplace, family and interpersonal relationships. In the past, despite the economic difficulties, exchanges between Hong Kong and the mainland were still possible whereby churches in the two places could mutually help each other. However, as face-to-face teaching is hampered by restrictions in religious rules as well as the travel ban, online ministries have assumed an increasingly significant role.

Continuously Adjusting – the Birth of “ZD Learning Community”

Mainland pastors and church leaders have been longing to enhance their spiritual leadership. When provinces and cities were still under lockdown in March last year, we hosted two online leadership forums for some 100 participants from five major regions. Participants had responded most enthusiastically, asking for extended learning. Subsequently, arrangements were made to organize a network with the name “ZD Learning Community”, comprising leaders keen to further their studies. They include pastors,

believer leaders in the marketplace, business owners, chief executive officers, financial controllers and bankers, etc. They began learning about leadership in April. Amidst the economic hardship and uncertainties, we provide materials for free, hoping to tide over the difficult times together with network members. The number of members has grown to 300 in just one month and soared to over 900 by June. More instructors have also come on board the network gradually, strengthening our teaching on family education, financial education, marketplace ethics and couple relationship, addressing the needs of participants.

“ZD Learning Community” initially chose to operate on an open online platform so that participants could learn and had exchanges on functions familiar to them. However, as the number of active users rose sharply, the relevant authorities were alerted. Because of this, the platform suddenly announced at the end of June that its service would cease! “ZD Learning Community” hence switched to using social network groups to release its educational videos on a temporary basis. Another assessment was made in September, and it was decided that the network would shift to a safer, more sustainable and cost-effective platform by the end of the year.

Collaboration of Two Platforms – “eReading” and “ZD Learning Community” to Better Serve Pastors

“ZD Learning Community” has linked up a group of believer leaders who are committed to living out the Word in the church, marketplace and their daily lives. Meanwhile, in the past few years, the “eReading” ebook platform has also pooled several thousand mainland pastors who have delivered sermons and conducted training on leadership and discipleship in different churches. Both groups need a large amount of quality devotional literature to help them shepherd on the front line. They believe that the electronic resources on the two platforms can fill the missing gaps in terms of materials at the church and seminaries, for example, materials on family counselling, disciple-making, church management and fostering a spiritual life. These materials can assist them in establishing a closer relationship with the Lord, family members, church co-workers, small group members and marketplace colleagues and partners, as well as practising their faith in real life and bearing witness to the Lord.



“eReading” and “ZD Learning Community” join hands to serve pastoral leaders.

After several months of assessment and technical trials, the two platforms joined hands in December last year and have since served close to 10,000 pastors and church leaders in different regions. Members of “eReading” can watch free videos of “ZD Learning Community”, learning therefore not only from books but also media. Likewise, members of “ZD Learning Community” can also download books of various subjects for trial reading and

learn in a more diversified way. From an operational perspective, a membership system based on the downloading of apps (on a mobile phone or tablet computer) can minimize the risk of the content being deleted as well as safeguard the safety of members' data.

Catching Up with the Times - Optimizing Content and Functions to Equip Leaders

After the two platforms were collaborated, members of the “ZD Learning Community” need only download the eReading app on their smartphones or tablet computers to view the different educational videos. They can also buy or try reading the e-books on the bookshelf. We thank the Lord that a member of the “ZD Learning Community” in a city somehow learned that the book “The Daniel Plan” is on the “eReading” bookshelf, which can readily address the needs of believers in rebuilding their faith, fitness and friendships under the pandemic. This member immediately used such e-materials in small group pastoring. Another seminary student from the northeastern region learned about the “ZD Learning Community” on the “eReading” app and further inquired about it. When he knew that he could pick his own time and place in learning without acquiring additional software and tools, he joined the network instantly! In addition, other “eReading” members also began purchasing various materials from the “ZD Learning Community” platform, covering topics such as how to lead an effective life, searching for one’s mission in life, the core needs among a couple and the six core values in managing one’s finances. They now learn not only from reading materials but also through watching videos. It is evident that in just one month (before this article was written in mid-January) after the collaboration of the two platforms, tremendous help has been rendered to members of the two platforms.



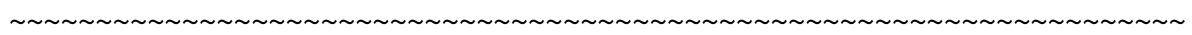
Materials from the book “The Daniel Plan” on the “eReading” bookshelf in support of small group pastoring of “ZD Learning Community” member.

If effective support is to be provided to leaders in coping with the ever-changing environment, the functions and content of the platforms must be enhanced continuously. In 2021, the team will strive to improve the layout design of the app to facilitate members in browsing and searching for topics of interest to them. Secondly, the technologies and systems must be upgraded to strengthen exchanges and interactions, create a good learning ambience and build a safe environment for members to connect with the teachers and resources on the platform. Apart from upgrading the functions, the content and e-materials must also be improved. Co-workers and teachers on the platform are now mostly volunteers. Although readers have to buy the books and members have to pay an annual fee, a number of members are in economic hardship, paying only a nominal fee or even using the service for free. To serve close to 10,000 members, we have to be sound financially to be able to take care of the basic needs of teachers and co-workers.

Thanks to the Lord's grace, despite our constrained means, new arrangements are being put in place on the two platforms to bring new resources and new perspectives to members. Apart from upgrading the layout design of the app and the interaction and learning functions mentioned above, an annual leadership summit will be organized for members of the "ZD Learning Community" in the next half year. Meanwhile, the four main teachers on the platforms will take turns every week to compile materials for students on subjects including leadership as well as marketplace ethics, financial management and family education with a Biblical perspective. Close to 30 teaching packages will be made available. Regarding e-books, over 10 topics covering marketplace ministry, tips on serving in the Spirit, Bible study and meditation, sermon delivery and emotional well-being will be prepared. For all these initiatives, an expenditure of USD64,103 is required in enhancing the functions and security of the two platforms and bring in the manpower required (i.e. spending an average USD6.5 to support each member).

We invite you to support and remember us in your prayers:

Please take action immediately, and donate to support "Leadership Development Ministry" (remark as "eReading Learning Community"). Thank you!



Understanding the Self and Others – Key to parents for nurturing healthy growth of children

© Teacher Zhao
Online “Parent Education” instructor



Amidst the pandemic, we have been unable to conduct in-person lessons, yet we continue to care about parents in the mainland, especially those issues and needs related to the education of their children. Online learning has therefore been initiated to extend our support to them. The “Capacity Building 360 – Parent Education Program” represents a major step in this endeavour. It has been our strong belief that in order to be a competent parent, one must possess

adequate self-awareness and understanding. Therefore, “Understanding the Self and Others”¹ has been selected as the theme in phase one of the program. This is to help participants understand how one’s family of origin shapes the formation of the present day “me”. Then the program moves on to help one examine his or her character and inner psychological elements. At the same time, the program hopes to reveal to participants how significant historical and social events as well as life stages impact an individual on the personal and family level.

Turning knowledge into practice

Online learning is an experiment for us. The advantage is that parents may participate regardless of location as long as they have internet access. Parents can study at home and at the same time look after their own children. The first phase of the program was conducted from early November to mid-December last year. Forty-five students from different provinces participated in this weekly online course. Students reported tremendous gain from the course materials and expressed eagerness to put what they learned into practice.

Sister He said, “This course has not only helped me understand myself better but also nurture empathy towards others. I can now comprehend the hidden scars behind certain behaviour, the mental scars left on a person after having lived through traumatic historical and cultural events! I have devised on an action plan to bring what I learned back to the

parents' group in my own church. It involves teaching believers how to deal with parenting issues. They should try to nurture their children according to each child's unique characteristics. I will also encourage parents to strengthen their marital relationship. Since a person and his or her partner grew up in different cultural backgrounds, empathy is very important if the couple wants to gain a deeper understanding of each other. They should also try to deal with conflicts constructively."



Sister Yan said, "After completing the first lesson ("Values in family"), I realized that I need to establish mutually accepted principles and values within my family. I also need to cultivate a loving and forbearing atmosphere at home. I, therefore, took action immediately and had discussions with my husband. We delineated a statement on our family values. We are now diligently striving to achieve our objectives in marital and parent-child relationships."

Sister He is attentively participating in the online lesson "My family moulds me" at home

Relentless determination is required to subdue difficulties

When conducting online sessions, we are frequently interrupted by technical and connection problems. Interaction between instructors and students is often hindered. Online learning usually results in one-way didactic teaching. Students who receive didactic instruction often feel bored and tired sooner. This in turn increases the teachers' pressure in preparing the lecture materials. Often times, in the middle of a session, some students have to attend to the needs of their children. This also makes the students unable to fully focus on the lesson. As a matter of fact, students are facing many practical family problems in daily life, yet the virtual platform is not conducive for them to share their individual needs and difficulties. Although we encourage students to send emails to us to discuss their personal issues, there is definitely constraints and difficulties to communicate in written words. We are trying hard to resolve or minimize the shortcomings.

In the future, the pandemic will continue to limit us in many ways. Yet the virtual platform remains an effective means to perpetuate teaching and studying. We hope to utilize a variety of media and enhancement tools to make our teaching livelier and to make the learning experience more interesting to students. We also hope to establish better channels of communication with our students. By knowing them better, we can select topics and design contents tailored to their needs. By helping them advance in knowledge and wisdom, we look forward to the building-up of Christ-centered and harmonious families among them.

¹ "Understanding the Self and Others": This is the theme title of phase 1 of the "Capacity Building 360 – Parent Education Program". Three sub-titles are included in this phase---"My family moulds me", "I need a mirror", "No man is an island".

Please support the “Leadership Development Ministry”

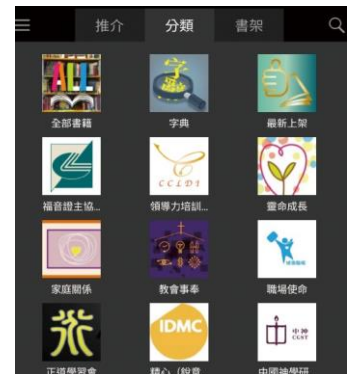
The demand for parent education is immense among mainland churches. The instructors are utilizing virtual platforms to conduct the teaching and maintain contact with the parents. To meet the various needs of mainland churches, our team of instructors plan to administer 104 sessions of online and offline tutorials to 730 mainland church leaders in 2021. We sincerely invite your prayer support for the smooth implementation of the program. Please also remember our ministry fund needs of USD115,385. We are grateful for your prompt response to donate. Thank you!



Prayers

1. Equipping leaders with e-books and online ministry

Online ministry plays an important role now under tightened restrictions for physical religious gatherings in the mainland, especially in building up pastoral workers and Christian leaders. There are now mature online platforms with materials that can nurture Christian leaders.



May the Lord use the platforms to equip leaders or nurture small groups. May He bless leaders to read up and use the video materials to enhance their spiritual leadership. May He also bless leaders, give them time to read and learn online continuously to enhance their spiritual leadership and horizon.

2. Nurturing parents to nurture their kids



Marital relationships, parent-child communication and education are longstanding problems. Some family relations improved under the half year of pandemic last year while others deteriorated. For churches in the mainland, there is a strong demand for parental education, and yet mainland pastors lack experience in family ministry. They do not have relevant materials either. Thank the Lord, through the Internet, instructors of

parental education in Hong Kong have helped mainland parents maintain good relationships with their kids.

May the Lord give strength to the instructors, help them nurture parents who can then nurture their children. May He also give parents the passion to learn and to serve their children.

3. Spiritual nurturing of believers in remote regions

Storms in the middle of last year led to landslides that buried highways. By the beginning of this year, some roads in rural towns have not yet re-opened. Believers in remote regions have consequently lacked access to ministering and teaching. Through Weibo, a preacher in south central China have read the scripture, prayed and sung hymns with believers, or contacted elderly Christians



without Weibo by phone. In the southwest, preachers reached gathering points after trekking dangerous hillside paths and wooden bridges in a journey lasting 3 hours. They encouraged believers to trust in the Lord amid difficulties, with God's Word.

May the Lord find favor with the dedications of preachers in different regions, may He strengthen the faith of believers in remote gathering points, help them continue to read His Word and pray amid limited pastoral care.

4. Biennial Reunion



By Chinese New Year every year, people working in urban areas will return to their rural hometowns for family reunion. During the last Spring Festival, due to the pandemic, some workers were forced to either remain in their hometown or not to return to their hometown to avoid travelling. Some have not seen their parents or children for almost two years.

Before mass vaccination happens, may the Lord keep everyone safe, whether they are in the cities, rural towns, or travelling. May he also give separated family members warm sharing and give believers who have returned to their hometown pastoral care and teachings.

~ 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.

Editor-in-Chief Otto Lui

Editorial Jurita Lui
Eddy Leung

Publisher Thomas Tang

Subscriptions pfc@ccl.org.hk

All rights reserved. Neither this publication nor any part of it may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of Christian Communications Limited. Publication is published every month by Christian Communications Limited.