

The quiet and restricted Great Northwest

◎ Sheung En
Member of Book Gifting Team

The author contacted seminary graduates in different parts of China. Individuals in the northwestern region are among the quietest. Their responses are brief and often comprise of one or two sentences only. This region is also known as the "Great Northwest" which includes five provinces: Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang. The geographical area is vast, accounting for one-third of the country's territory. Its climate is arid, rainfall is scarce, and resources are not as abundant as it is in the coastal regions. This area is remote, and it is difficult for travelers to reach. Despite the unpleasant geographical characteristics, this region is in a strategic location. It lies on the major route leading to Central Asia, West Asia and Europe. It was the starting point of the Silk Road in ancient China and is now an indispensable constituent of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative. From the political perspective, this is a sensitive area. National laws and regulations are strictly imposed, which probably explains the relatively conservative and cautious replies of the Northwest graduates when they correspond with outsiders.

Evangelists in the Northwest face two challenges today:

1. In-person meetings are restricted

The Northwest region strictly observes the national infection control measures, and churches have to stop physical gatherings whenever local cases are detected. An evangelist who is a Bible school graduate of the class of 2019 said reluctantly, "*We were unable to have Sunday Service here for six months, then we resumed services for a month, and now we have to stop again because the pandemic is worsening.*" With the church building being sealed off, the graduate evangelist made use of every possible alternative means to teach the Bible, such as home gatherings. Another graduate shared that he has been in ministry for four years and serves an area with a population of 400,000, but there are less than 2,000 believers. Now that even personal visits are banned, shepherding is limited, and he becomes much less busy than before, he feels sad for sitting around and being unproductive. The author encouraged him, saying that the place where he lives has an enormous need for

the gospel. His ministry is not confined to pastoring believers in a conventional setting. Try to seize this special opportunity to sow as many gospel seeds as possible.

2. Virtual meetings are restricted

Starting from March 1 this year, a new policy has been implemented regarding the use of Internet in China. Organizers need to obtain the "Internet Religious Information Services Permit" before they can disseminate religion-related information and initiate religious activities on virtual platforms. The author asked how the online meetings were conducted, a 20-year-old evangelist who graduated during the pandemic last year shared that people could pray, sing, and read scriptures in WeChat groups, but they could not preach or teach the Bible. Yet the church to which they belonged had no intention of applying to the State Administration for Religious Affairs for the permit. Reading between the lines, I got the impression that this rule is being strictly enforced in the Northwest, but the local evangelists do not have a plan to deal with it yet.

Bombarded by the lack of bible teaching and pastoring resources as well as by the restrictions imposed upon in-person and virtual gatherings, the author enquired what prayer needs the graduates might have. They made the following simple response, "*Pray for the safety of the church! Pray for the pandemic!*" The feeling of being weighed down and the pensive loneliness conveyed by this short remark is incredibly strong! The current circumstance is truly difficult, yet it will never stand in the way of God's grace. Looking back at the "China Seminary Graduates Book Gifting Project", since 2012, by God's grace, the book gifting team has been providing literature resources to a provincial Bible school in Northwest China. During these 11 years, around 120 graduates received support on pastoral care and biblical teaching each year. Since 2016, the number of sites in the Northwest that receive Book Gifting has been increasing each year, from one Bible school in 2012 to 10 training centres to date. Over the past ten years, nearly 2,300 Book Gifting packages have been distributed to the Northwest region. These resource packages are a sign that earnest believers from a far distant care very much about pastors in the Northwest and desire to be their companions. God's eyes have never left our fellow comrades in the Northwest, and His grace will seep through all layers of hard rock to nourish their soil unceasingly.



It is a true blessing of God that, despite the constraints and challenges, the Book Gifting packages can still reach the hands of the Northwest graduates each year.

Graduates serving in the Northwest encounter many challenges, so as graduates from other regions, they all have different hardships and are in great need of our continued support!

For this year's Book Gifting Project, the Book Gifting Team plans to distribute over 70,000 copies of pastoral resources to 4,000 graduates and produce three book presentation videos. In the first stage, the pastoral packages have been delivered to nearly 1,900 graduates.

We need your prayers and support for the book gifting in the next stage. Please remember that we still owe USD 192,308 in funding. Thank you!

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~The above is part of the content of PFC issue354, if you would like to read the full newsletter, please contact us at [pfc@ccl.org.hk](mailto:pfc@ccl.org.hk), thank you!~

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