



Prayer Letter

May 2019



The Chinese Church's Resilience Under Stress

I attended a prayer meeting for China recently. Many attendees at this meeting had travelled to China, but not many had lived there. Some had never been to China. They attended the prayer meeting because they love China and its church. One of the biggest prayer requests was for the church to persevere in the current political climate.

Historically, the church in China has withstood many times of bitter political climate. This is

proven by the rapid growth in unregistered churches after the Cultural Revolution. However, will the current church (with its many new believers) withstand the stress of the current climate? Answers to this question can be found by looking at a recent study about Christianity in China.

The average age of Christians in China is around 50 years old. They came to faith at various points during the past twenty years and have some common characteristics.

For example, they were educated during the 1970s, and experienced the Cultural Revolution. They have also experienced rapid economic growth in China since then. They have their own personal perspectives on what society needs. They provide a firm foundation for the church, with their rich experience and solid faith that cannot be easily shaken.

Chinese Christians born between the 1950s and 1980s have been deeply engaged with their own communities and social needs. But now, although some churches have been forced to break into small groups and become much less visible, they still impact society by sharing the gospel in a low profile way.

The most common reason non-Christian Chinese come to church is their desire to know ‘the truth’. It is not the assumed reason of ‘being healed of illnesses’. Other common reasons are a search for ‘assurance of eternal life’, ‘forgiveness of sins’ or ‘experiencing God in daily life’. These motivate Chinese to explore the Christian faith, and Christian communities can focus on the need for thoughtful, personal faith rather than the perceived ‘benefits’ of

belief - unlike the current pursuit of material benefits in society generally.

The top three reasons that people become Christians are:

1. The pursuit of truth.
2. Attraction to loving Christian fellowship.
3. Support of a caring Christian community.

This means that, as long as the church is helping people to find what they are really searching for in life, it will continue to gain popularity, even when it is operating “underground” with immense pressure on it.

The church’s recent growth cannot be accounted for only by the faith being passed down through the generations. Growth during the last few decades is also the fruit of Christians and pastoral staff working hard to reach out. People are becoming Christians through friends as well as family members. The church is growing because Christians are obeying the Great Commission. And the fragmentation of the church (due to dispersal into small groups) is a catalyst for growth.

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Reading is still the most common medium through which Chinese come to faith. The tradition of reading the Bible and other Christian materials (such as devotionals) remains fundamental. Daily devotionals and the belief that ‘truth is carried by words’ continue to transform Christians. As a result, Christianity will continue to stand firm in spite of current social trends such as secularization.

Most Christians want to be baptized as an affirmation of their faith. It is an important act of witness in a socialist society. They yearn to be assured of eternal life, and wish to deepen their understanding of the faith. Some hope for physical healing through baptism, or for growth in self-confidence – but of course this does not necessarily happen.

A study on religion in China found that over 80% of the population yearns for some kind of religious belief. For most people, religion is not about rituals or dreams, but a deep need to be loved and cared for. We can ascribe the rise in popularity of Christianity to its emphasis on the good news of

being loved and cared for by God.

The Christian community in China is 72% female, and the overall education level is rising. 31% of believers are illiterate or have only been to primary school; 22% are college graduates. This shows that most believers can read the Bible for themselves, and the number of believers able to reflect and ask questions about the Bible and theology is rising. New challenges are facing the church, but there are also many new opportunities, such as cross-cultural mission and local outreach. Before 1949, the church in China needed to rely more on Western help, but now the Chinese church has matured and moved into a new era of effective indigenous ministries.

China is in the midst of turmoil and great changes, but we thank the Lord that His love, faithfulness and purposes never change. Through the storm, Chinese Christians have become more firmly rooted in God’s grace. Secularization and materialism may impact the growth of Christianity, but Christians will continue to witness through their lives, and to tell others the gospel of Christ. May the Lord’s light continue to shine in China!

materials are harder to access. Pray that the Lord will raise up more Chinese Christian writers who can write good quality literature.

25 Church publications are now prohibited, as are Sunday school lessons. May the Lord help brothers and sisters find creative ways to continue their fellowship, promote growth and provide support for each other.

26 Pray for the family members of victims of the recent Jiangsu chemical plant explosion. May the Lord send His angels to help those in need.

27 Pray for the family members of firemen killed in the Sichuan forest fire. May the Lord's love touch their hearts as they grieve.

28 Pray for stability in the lives of young Christians who are affected by adverse economic changes in big cities; many are looking for employment or business opportunities.

29 Pray that God will continue to guide in the management of Christian-run elderly homes. Due to changes in their financial situation, some homes are unable to employ sufficient staff to take care of the residents.

30 Most parents of primary and kindergarten students were born in the 1980s or 1990s. They are "only children" and have not experienced life with siblings. This affects their relationship with their spouse and how they make decisions concerning their children's education. May God raise up counsellors to help these families.

31 June 1st is International Children's Day. Pray that Christian families will be thankful and have joyful celebrations.



PRAYER POINTS

May 2019

1 May 1st (Labor Day) is an important holiday in China. Pray for all workers, including those who are unable to attend regular church meetings, that they will continue to grow spiritually.

2 Many families choose to go abroad for vacation during the May 1st holiday week. Pray that they will have an opportunity to hear the gospel during their time abroad.

3 The week beginning May 1st has always been a popular week for church workers' retreats. Pray that workers will use this time to draw near to God.

4 Pray for the physical and spiritual health of all pastoral staff; many have served for over twenty years. May God grant them wisdom as they continue to lead their churches.

5 During the next two months, students are making final preparations to take their college entrance exams - parents' anxiety often rises at this time. May the Lord grant Christian students peaceful hearts as they take their exams and think about their future.

6 May the Lord bless and provide for the needs of a certain urban church. The brothers and sisters in this church provide accommodation and other material needs for poor children (from mountainous areas nearby) who are being schooled in the city.

7 Pray for a drug rehabilitation center where drug addicts are helped to detox. Gospel sharing and counselling has aroused both amazement and suspicion. May the Lord give wisdom to the staff as they continue their good work.

8 Please remember a farmer and his family who have welcomed around ten homeless children into their home, despite financial pressure and other difficulties. Pray that more Christians would be

willing to look after these kinds of needy children.

9 Pray for a brother who helps with farm work in villages where elderly parents have been left after their children have gone to work in cities. This brother is struggling to cope with the heavy workload. May the Lord raise up more Christians who are willing to help.

10 Since the “one child policy” was replaced by a “two child” one, pressure for abortion has eased in many families. However, the abortion rate has not decreased due to the perceived high cost of raising children. Pray that Christian families will recognize that children are gifts from God, and respect His sovereignty over life.

11 Over twenty years have passed since the adoption policy for foreigners started, and some of these adopted children have returned to China in search of their biological parents. The requirements for adoption have now been

changed. May the Lord watch over this ministry so that children can continue to be placed in loving homes.

12 Pray for those pastoring migrant workers. Migrant workers often change churches due to work; may the Lord help these pastors deal with frequent change.

13 For various reasons, many schools for migrant workers' children have had to close. Pray for the Lord's provision and guidance for the children who are impacted by this - their parents cannot afford to send them to public schools.

14 Pray for Christian campus workers. It is hard for them to make contact with students on campus, and is also difficult for students to attend off-campus Bible study groups.

15 Today is the UN's International Family Day. Pray for families in China, especially Christian families - that God will be glorified in all things.

16 Please pray for Christian NGOs to persevere in spite of changes in circumstances.

17 Pray for wisdom for those in Christian literature ministry; they are looking for new ways to develop the online literature resources.

18 Praise the Lord that although the church is in a fragmented state at present, congregations remain stable in terms of total numbers. Pray that the Lord will grant pastoral staff wisdom to shepherd their churches in the current circumstances.

19 This year is the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Union Version of the Bible. There will be celebrations, including thanksgiving services and Bible-reading events. May Christians deeply experience God's love as they read and listen to His Word.

20 Praise the Lord that most Chinese missionaries serving outside China have now

returned home safely. May the Lord help them settle in to life back home and grant them good health.

21 Please pray for young Christians who may be studying or working in various industries. May God guard their hearts, and use them as salt and light to impact society.

22 Local authorities in some areas offer financial rewards to those who report on religious activities. Pray that God will watch over church leaders during these challenging times.

23 There have been numerous occurrences of ‘convictions from speech’ in various universities. Pray that Christian teachers will experience His presence as they live and work in this stressful environment.

24 Traditionally, Chinese people like to read. Of course Christians especially like to read spiritual books. However, recent changes mean that good