

Catholics and Protestants in China busily prepared to welcome the world, as their country played host to the 29th Summer Olympic Games and Paralympics in August and September, 2008.

A WELCOME TO THE WORLD

Protestants beefed up simultaneous interpretation facilities in churches while lay volunteers in 20 Catholic churches throughout Beijing engaged in the diocesan's six-month English courses so they could greet and have simple conversations with visitors, as well as introduce their parishes. Hundreds of thousands of Olympic edition bibles were published and distributed free of charge in churches, cathedrals and within the Olympic Village.

China has the largest number of Internet users in the world and the Protestant China Christian Council (CCC) tapped into this resource and established a special Olympic Prayer Chain page on its official website. Prayers for a successful, peaceful and Spirit-filled Olympics were posted by Christians from all over China.

OLYMPIC-EDITION BIBLES

Protestant leaders thought that 50,000 copies of a special edition 'Olympic' Chinese-English edition of the four Gospels would be enough for the Olympic Village and Beijing churches. Bibles were in such demand – perhaps aided by their status as a collector's item! – that it wasn't long before the CCC placed an additional order of 50,000 with the Amity Printing Company, Nanjing, to fill an emerging gap. The Beijing Organising Committee especially allowed the China Christian Council to use the official Beijing Olympic logo free of charge for the edition's cover. In addition, the Beijing Christian Council commissioned 30,000 bilingual editions of the New Testament, and 10,000 copies of the entire Bible for free distribution.

Each contained on the inside a list of Protestant churches in Beijing and times of worship services.

Meanwhile UCAN reported that the Bishop's Conference of the Catholic Church in China published 30,000 copies of a Chinese-English New Testament with assistance from the United Bibles Societies who supplied the special edition's bleed-proof paper. In a bit of healthy competition, the Shanghai dioceses also produced 20,000 copies of its own Olympic edition for free distribution. The Beijing edition uses



The special Olympic edition of the Gospels.

a Chinese translation from Studium Biblicum Franciscanum and the New Revised Standard Version. The Shanghai edition used the New Jerusalem translation and a Chinese-language translation from Sheshan Seminary, Shanghai, said UCAN.

OLYMPIC CHAPEL VOLUNTEERS

There are no rough estimates yet of just how many of the hundreds of thousands of Olympic volunteers were Christian. For sure, there was a select team of 17 Catholic volunteers, priests, Catholic sisters, and seminarians from

the Beijing diocese, all of whom spoke at least one foreign language, who served in the Olympic Village Catholic chapel. The Protestant chapel also was in the care of 16 Protestant volunteers, mainly teachers and students from Yanjing Theological Seminary. Yanjing Seminary is so geographically close to the Olympic Village that students and their friends watched the opening ceremony firework display from the top of the seminary's buildings. All chapel volunteers led or assisted in worship and mass, were available for prayer, and were on a 24 hour a day, on-call rota to assist with general need.

OFFICIAL TORCH BEARERS

Several Protestant pastors and a Catholic priest and bishop took to the streets carrying the official Olympic torch as it passed through their hometowns. Father Paul Meng Ningyou, 45, of the Taiyuan diocese who carried the torch on live coverage television, said in a UCAN interview that in 'this special way the Catholic Church shows the public it is no longer a marginalised group, but plays a more active role in society.' Bishop Peter Fang Jianping of Tangshan felt he was chosen because of the government's acknowledgement that religious believers can play a role in China's development. Taiyuan diocese donated 150,000 *yuan* (£11,000) to earthquake stricken Sichuan.

Some of those representing Protestant churches in the Torch run were Revd Jin Yunpeng, chair of the Hebei Three-self Patriotic Committee where the Tangshan church has set up a training centre, church newspaper, and an orphanage and charity clinic. The Revd Lin Delai, 37, of the Flower Lane church in Fuzhou, Revd Ding Jianhua, a fourth generation Christian from Wuhan, and the Revd Xue Lianxi, 45, a Nanjing Theological Seminary graduate serving Hefei churches, represented China's Protestants.

This article was compiled from several sources including the Union of Catholic Asian News, <http://www.ucannews.org>.



AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

The severe earthquake of 12 May, which caused such devastation in Sichuan province and beyond, killed nearly 70,000 people, injured more than 374,000 and left more than five million people homeless. Over 18,000 are still listed as missing. The scale of the disaster is hard to imagine, but the response from the Chinese government and from many organisations and individuals in China and elsewhere, was speedy and compassionate.

FCC's partner organisations within China have been much involved, both in the immediate relief work providing food and shelter, and now in longer-term rehabilitation and reconstruction, both practical and emotional; reports have kept us updated. Your generous response to our earthquake appeal raised a total of £7,042, which enabled us to send donations to the Amity Foundation, the Jinde (Catholic) Charities and the China Christian Council's Social Service Department: heartfelt thanks to all who contributed!

Amity staff were amongst the first to arrive in Chengdu immediately after the quake and quickly dispatched teams to distribute necessities, including water, noodles, baby needs, quilts and tarpaulins for shelter. That assistance helped over 120,000 people in the six worst-hit counties, making sure that the elderly and disabled in particular were not overlooked. Amity followed this with a team of social work professors and psychologists, to provide counselling and assess the psychological needs of quake victims, traumatised by their

losses and especially by the loss of (often only) children.

The regular reports we received demonstrated impressively how Amity assessed and refined its targets and since July Amity has helped with the equipping of six schools in Mianzhu county, operating in temporary buildings. Amity will also help construct a temporary building for the Mianzhu Protestant church, where the original congregation of 500 has now doubled; a social service centre will be part of this plan. Woyun village, twenty minutes from Guanji city, will be the focus



Steel 'granaries' delivered by Amity.

of Amity's integrated rehabilitation efforts. More than 90 percent of homes in Woyun collapsed and Amity plans to help rebuild houses for the village's 2,500 inhabitants. Recently, steel container 'granaries', each able to hold 1,500 kilos of grain, were delivered to every household so that families can start to rebuild their grain supplies.

Jinde Charities also quickly set up a base in Chengdu and volunteer teams delivered tents and temporary shelters to some 52,000 victims, plus one month's supply of rice and cooking oil to more than 43,000 people. Much effort was directed by a team of 47 volunteers, including many Catholic sisters, to caring for the wounded and sick, particularly the elderly and children. Many clergy and laypeople who were participating in Jinde's relief efforts were themselves homeless and their churches had been destroyed, so in three parishes Jinde helped to set up temporary buildings, to provide local centres with housing, office and meeting space.

In July, Jinde conducted a one-week training course for some 50 volunteers to prepare them for offering long-term psycho-social services in the disaster areas. Immediately after the course, a team of ten – three priests, six sisters and one layperson – went to Sichuan. Longer-term plans include provision of quilts and winter clothing and two homes for the elderly.

Many churches in Sichuan, both Protestant and Catholic, were damaged in the earthquake and of course many church members were amongst those directly affected. Sichuan Christian Council and the Catholic Chengdu Diocese have been working hard to respond to local calls for help and churches all over China have donated generously to appeals. Immediate relief efforts have now translated into longer term projects, but, as a recent Amity report stated, 'For quake survivors, it is only the beginning of a painfully long journey of healing and recovery, for which they will need our continuing empathy and support.'