

Friends of the Church in China – Annual Report 2018

Friends of the Church in China:

FCC is a UK charity and membership organisation (UK Registered Charity No 1004221; 190 members currently). It has, for nearly 35 years, developed friendship links between the ecumenical network of churches in the British Isles and the post-denominational and catholic churches in the People's Republic of China. Over the years, it has done this partly by contributing to charitable projects established by our partner organisations (including the Amity Foundation and the China Christian Council (CCC)), most recently orphan support, provision of educational furniture for rural schools, and HIV/AIDS testing and training in Xi'an, Shaanxi. However FCC is recognised and respected by the CCC and Amity Foundation for sponsoring study visits to China by British people, helping improve educational opportunities in less developed areas through supporting English language teaching, and making arrangements to bring key Chinese personnel to the UK - including theological students and workers from the voluntary or charity sector. With other partners, and co-operating within the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) China Forum, FCC aims to present a realistic and hopeful view of the Christian church in China to members of the churches in the British Isles.

Constitutional priorities:

At the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in November 2017, members were reminded of three key constitutional priorities (see *The FCC Constitution* 2.c.iv and v) as foundational for FCC activities:

1. An active participation in mutual visits between Britain and China;
2. An intentional commitment to a 'fellowship of prayer';
3. A role in making the situation within the Chinese church widely known among churches of all denominations.

Contemporary FCC Priorities:

At the AGM in November 2018, priorities for FCC from the past year (and forward 'towards 2020') were illustrated in 12 images. It was reported that members and friends of FCC were:

- participating in projects in China, through CCC, Amity Foundation and in other ways;
- helping with the helping improve educational opportunities in less developed areas through supporting English language teaching;
- undertaking programmes to support those involved in Theological Education;
- seeking background so as to understand current changes in China.

Overall FCC check-list 'Towards 2020':

This *Annual Report 2018*, arising from the AGM of November 2018, aims both to summarise the current position of FCC, and offer pointers for the next 18 months. 'Friendship' (and Christian partnership) as expressed in FCC includes these three strands: Projects, English Language issues and Theological Education. What follows is a more detailed analysis of these priorities. Members forward these and other aims through prayer, by engaging in visits to China and by arranging visits (and offering hospitality) to the UK by key personnel. Publicity to FCC members takes place regularly through the *FCC Update*, and to the wider church through an updated website. See below for more detail.

The FCC Committee:

The Committee acts on behalf of the members, and met three times during 2018. Meetings have been well attended, and are always full of activity. The agenda deal with the thematic as well as with matters of detail. Discussion and decision take place in the context of prayer and reflection. Key concerns have been our own programmes, and the creating or renewing of connections with Chinese partners.

List of Trustees (elected members of the Committee as at November 2018):

Antony Rose; Bill Birmingham; Lawrence Braschi; Rosie Carter; Rachel Hextall; Jim Gibson (Honorary Treasurer); Ian Blaney (General Secretary); Godfrey Stone (Chair) (stonegodfrey03@gmail.com).

Co-opted members for 2019: Diane Allen, Secretary for the *FCC Update*; Dot Stone, Membership Secretary; Angela Evans, co-ordinator for the *Summer English Programme* (SEP).

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1a) Projects

A long-term project supporting orphan children is coming to an end within the next two years. Gifts from members (restricted income) have

This is an Amity photo - caring for orphans and 'left-behind' children



already been received, and these will cover FCC's remaining commitments through Amity. Another project (with CCC's social work department) concerns HIV/AIDS relief and treatment in X'ian, Shaanxi. With the assistance of the Barbour Trust, FCC contributed £6000. Student volunteers from universities in Xi'an undertook training and played a key role in the success of this work.

2000 (including migrant workers) have accepted preliminary HIV/AIDS screening ...



1b) South West (SW) China Connections

Giving greetings to Shimenkan



In 2017, the FCC committee initiated a reconnection with the SW of China. A visit was made to Shimenkan, Guizhou through the 2017 CTBI delegation. A visit was also arranged to Sichuan Theological Seminary in Chengdu, to meet its Executive Vice Principal 'Peter' Yuan Shiguo.



Students at Sichuan Seminary autumn 2017

One outcome of these visits has been the awakening of an interest from the churches in East Anglia in developing a relationship with SW China. This includes an interest in visiting China, and in participation in Amity programmes including the SEP. Another outcome was a decision by members to offer practical encouragement to this rural part of China. Therefore the chair will hope to visit again on behalf of FCC in 2019.

Christmas at Sichuan Seminary, Chengdu



2a) SEP & the Amity Foundation



A general hunger among children and students to master the English language is matched by the desire of local government in China to support the training of Chinese teachers of English. FCC Committee member Angela Evans led another team in China this year as part of the Amity SEP. The Committee remains happy to assist with members who would have been deterred from participating due to financial reasons. Although in recent years the number of volunteers has been declining, in 2019 we hope to send two teams. The SEP continues to be

an important programme, and one way that FCC generates new interest in China. Participants meet Amity colleagues in Nanjing before spending time working with Chinese teachers of English in less developed parts of China. Participants value the opportunity to visit Chinese churches and to meet Chinese Christians.

New Amity General Secretary
Ling Chunxiang



2b) The Amity Foundation, with its Christian ethos, has been an important partner for FCC for over 30 years. Once dependant on funding from international sources, Amity has increasingly developed funding streams from within China itself to support its national and international work (*) – and has opened offices in Geneva and Addis Ababa.

Amity in Ethiopia



Four FCC/Amity 'alumni': Li Ling; Zhou Liting; Ling Chunxiang and Tan Hua.



Ling Chunxiang, the General Secretary, with three other staff members look back with real appreciation to their time of language learning and 'capacity-building' through FCC in the UK. Amity is keen to send another young colleague in 2019 – and plans are in place to facilitate this visit.

(*) <https://www.amityfoundation.org/eng/facts-and-figures>

3a) Theological English



In recent years, several Chinese seminary teachers have come to the UK for informal visits. These have aimed at developing their confidence in oral and academic English. In each case these visits have been an important step as they undertake programmes of further study either in China or beyond. It has also been possible to offer short courses of oral English at one or two seminaries - often through inductive bible study. There remains scope for valuable work to be done (by this and other means, both in the UK and in China) to help key personnel to develop fluency in English.



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3b) Theological education

Thanks to FCC & four partners for investing in this project/visit!



The highlight of 2018 was a visit by the first two doctoral students from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Wang Jiawei and Luo Chengzan. They spent six weeks in the UK as part of their doctoral programme. Overlapping with this was a visit by 'Peter' Yuan Shiguo, the Executive Vice-Principal of Sichuan Theological Seminary, and a shorter visit by Ms Chen Qirui (Huadong Theological Seminary, Shanghai - currently studying for a doctorate at the University of Helsinki).

FCC shared this important summer with four financial providers, and we thank the Methodist Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Charitable Foundation, the Li Tim Oi Foundation and the Barbour Trust for their partnership. Our visitors attended an academic conference in Oxford, met various British scholars, and spent time in personal study as temporary readers in theological libraries. The visits culminated in two 'open' FCC meetings entitled *East meets West* in Oxford and at Lambeth Palace.



The church in China is committed to raising the quality of its ministerial formation. This entails furthering the academic qualifications of its teachers, developing a generation of Chinese theological scholars and thereby enriching the seminary curriculum to help nurture and guide pastors for this growing church, and so better to meet the needs of a nation with ever-rising educational levels.

4a) The Churches in China ... the buildings

This year we received news of new churches being built (for example a large International church in Ningbo, Zhejiang), and of new seminary chapels being prepared for use (the new chapel at Nanjing Union Theological seminary, and the Zhongnan Theological Seminary in Wuhan, Hubei). The restoration of Trinity cathedral in Shanghai has been completed, with beautiful stained glass, pews and organ. News of its future use is still awaited.



4b) Churches ... the leadership

Emphasis on lay training



Chinese leaders often explain the significant efforts being made by local Christian Councils to train lay leaders to complement the over-stretched resources of pastors.

At a national level, new leaders were elected recently for the China Christian Council (Pastor Wu Wei), and the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) (Xu, Xiaohong). We pray God gives them wisdom, as they undertake these new and demanding roles.

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4c) Churches: Unity in Diversity: One of the values of participating in the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) delegation to China in 2017 was the opportunity to discuss together work being undertaken both in China and within the British Isles, with those from other faith backgrounds. This theme was further reinforced by Luo Chengzan at the open meeting at Lambeth Palace in July 2018.



Another recurring issue for shared conversation between our churches is how (both in China and in the UK) the Gospel needs re-clothing in suitable forms if it is indeed to be 'good news' to the cultures and circumstances of each country. So, for example in Birmingham, our guests experienced a large Pentecostal church, reflecting the black British community in that city.

At the Lambeth Palace meeting, Chen Qirui used the work of Chinese artist He Qi to discuss the way she teaches the History of Christian Thought in relation to Chinese culture.



Dec 2018: China Christian Council



Pastor Wu, Wei from Beijing, elected to be Chairman of CCC.
Shan, Weixiang General Secretary;
Shen, Xuebin Supervising overseas relations

Dec 2018: Committee of the TSPM of the Protestant Church in China



Xu, Xiaohong elected to be Chairman



Gu, Mengfei General Secretary
Kan Baoping Residential Vice Chair

5a) Evaluation of 2018

We asked our four guests to evaluate their time in the UK, including the 'Totus Christus' conference in Oxford in July. This is some of what they said:



Yuan Shiguo

"The conference speakers helped me think through different ways of expressing the Christian faith.

It left me thinking more about how to express Christology in our Chinese context."

Following the visit, Luo Chengzan was asked to report back to the student body at NJUTS. The one comment passed on to us from both staff and students has been: 'The visit could have been longer!' The committee will review this dimension with Nanjing as planning begins for the future.



Wang Jiawei

"The biggest challenges for me are still the need of theological books about Christology ... and how to translate Kathryn Tanner's theological terms and concepts into Chinese and our social background."



Chen Qirui

"The most useful new idea is the interpretation of 'son of man' in the Gospel of John ... The diverse perspectives of the presentations renewed my view on Christology ... for example looking at the field of literature and poetry"



5b) Towards 2020

The 2018 Annual Meeting was given an outline of some of the visits and events proposed for the next 18 months or so. 2019 will be the 35th anniversary of FCC, coinciding as it does with the 70th anniversary of the founding of the 'New China'. Alongside this is the centenary of the Union version of the Chinese Bible. It is hoped all these themes can in some way be incorporated in the AGM for November 16th 2019. And we trust that visas will again be available to allow us to continue these valuable friendships face to face.

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What follows are some notes on three important policy areas, reporting what has been agreed by the FCC Committee, and outlining where further work is to be done:

A) FCC Communications Policy

Updates: In 2018, the *FCC Update* was sent out, under the authorship and editorship of Diane Allen with news on China and our work. These are designed to be easy on the eye, informative, newsworthy and relevant to the work and philosophy of FCC. Some members are not on email and still receive their Update by post but the majority receive it electronically.

Website: Work has been going on to modernise the website and make it an effective tool to recruit and inform new and younger members, enabling donations and subscriptions to be made online. The old website is still in place but we hope to publish the new one as soon as technical issues around online subscriptions have been resolved. There is now a facility for donations to be made online. This will allow members to contribute to the AGM, and to other events and projects, without the need for a cheque book.

Data Protection: The FCC Committee has been attentive in 2018 to the need for reviewing our data protection procedures and policies in a way that we consider proportionate and necessary.

B) FCC finances:

FCC accounts from the 2018 AGM accompany this report.

Finances have been stable with increases in the capital value of our investments. This balances the inflation costs, and compensates for the falling value of sterling against the Chinese currency. A key piece of work during the year was a paper by our treasurer which modelled FCC's finances to help the committee in its understanding of how much it could spend each year. FCC membership numbers determine in part our levels of activity and of finance. Much discussion was had about what would be a helpful level of spending each year to ensure that FCC does not sit on its capital but makes an effective contribution while retaining prudent reserves. Additionally, this summer's project once again helpfully illustrated the benefits of matched funding with other grant making organisations, allowing FCC to increase the value of its contribution through the gifts of other bodies. As a charity, FCC continues to benefit from Gift Aid - a net income of £1300 in 2018.

FCC Funding policy – a provisional statement

The annual FCC income (from membership subscriptions) covers the costs of running the charity, but little more. So to fulfil its strategic objectives, FCC depends on:

- *Individual gifts from members for specific projects.*
- *Income arising from one large legacy given a few years ago.* This helps us to 'match-fund' other projects.
- *FCC is currently planning a financial strategy which will be based on this pattern of 'match funding'. The intention is to use the legacy income wisely to forward the constitutional and contemporary priorities identified above, and in pursuit of the work illustrated throughout this report.*

C) Working alongside FCC Partners:

FCC is a small membership organisation, and is enriched by being able to work with others who share a common vision.

Scottish Churches China Group (SCCG) - Links have been kept up with our sister organisation in Scotland. We send each other news and greetings, and the Revd Patricia Johnston (SCCG Advisor) has attended one committee meeting this year. The FCC chair spoke at the SCCG AGM in March 2019. It is proposed that careful consideration be given to undertaking a shared project in the future.

Cultural Exchange with China (CEC) - The last AGM for CEC took place in February 2019. Maggi Whyte (a former Chair of FCC) attended on FCC's behalf, and has reported back about the future of Roman Catholic links to China through Fr Eamonn O'Brien (CEC Executive) - his retirement marks the end of CEC as a charity. FCC looks forward to maintaining links with Roman Catholic communities in China.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) China Forum – Angela Evans attended a meeting in November 2017. Unfortunately the 2018 meeting of the Forum was cancelled. The churches of the British Isles have been linked together in their relationship with China since the 1980s. A delegation from Shanghai Christian Council had attended. There was a presentation about recent developments in theological education by Richard Clutterbuck (Wesley House), with a more integrated approach involving reflective practice combining knowing and understanding, ministry skills and personal development, with more opportunities for non-residential training than in the past. Discussions apparently continue within CTBI as to where the China Forum fits within its overall priorities.

Other partners: FCC has links with several other individuals and bodies who share an interest in the church in China. Various British theological colleges and courses, and some universities, have academic staff who make and maintain their own links in China.

Personal and Corporate Membership of FCC is open to all who share FCC's values and objectives.

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