



Members of the Friends of the Church in China are Christians in Britain and Ireland who seek to promote contact, partnership and mutual understanding with Christians in China.

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Annual Report for 1st September 2018 to 31st August 2019

Registered as a charity in England and Wales
Charity number: 1004221

Registered charity address:
Flat 8 Elgar House
Boyton Close
London
N8 7BD

Email: FriendsChuChina@aol.com
Website: www.thefcc.org

Trustees

Diane Allen (until 16th November 2019)
Antony Rose
Rachel Hextall
The Revd Lawrence Braschi
Ian Blaney (General Secretary)
Angela Evans (Vice-Chair)
The Venerable Godfrey Stone (Chair)
Rosie Carter
William (Bill) Birmingham
Dot Stone (Membership Secretary)
James (Jim) Gibson (Treasurer)

Banking details:

Co-operative Bank, PO Box 250, Delf house, Skelmersdale, WN8 6WT
Sort code 08-92-99; Account no 65265110.

External Examiner: Margaret A Logan, 6 Shillingworth Place, Bridge of Weir, Renfrewshire, PA11 3DY.

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Annual Report 2019

The Annual Meeting took place at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies on November 16th 2019. Within the day's programme, the business of the AGM was transacted. The material in this report reflects what was presented on that day.

2019 – the anniversary year:

2019 has been the 35th anniversary of the founding of the Friends of the Church in China. In July, a special celebratory lunch was hosted by visiting friends from our long term partners in the Amity Foundation. Warm words of mutual appreciation were spoken, as we continue to find creative ways of continuing to work well together. The 35th Annual Meeting was held in Oxford in November, and a couple of celebration cakes accompanied the informal lunch. Two speakers were invited to mark two other anniversaries: Oldi Morava from the United Bible Societies spoke in celebration of the centenary of the Chinese Union Version of the Bible; and Professor Rana Mitter addressed the current direction of China in this 70th year of the People's Republic.

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1919 – 2019
Chinese
Union
Version of
the Bible
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FCC's origins:

FCC was founded 35 years ago, and this was at a time when China was reopening to the outside world. Set up as an ecumenical British charity, FCC was able to connect with the 'post-denominational' churches in China. Study visits took British people to China, and Conferences brought Chinese leaders to the UK. Strong mutual friendships have developed!



FCC 1984 – 2019
35 years old



The Church in China

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences publishes figures that clearly support the idea that (to quote one western writer) 'the growth of the Protestant church in China is one of the untold stories of the 20th century.' Estimates vary widely about the current number of Christians in China. But one sign that China is a major player in world Christianity is that on 15th November 2019, the factory in Nanjing recorded a total of 200 million Bibles printed (both for use within the Chinese church, and in other languages for churches worldwide).



In 2019, Pastor Wu Wei from Beijing became the newly-elected national Chairman of the China Christian Council.

FCC now:

Friendship is expressed through a fellowship of prayer, by encouraging visits both ways, and by making known what is happening in China to the British churches.

In recent years members and friends of FCC have focused on three themes:

- 1) Community Projects: For some years, FCC has supported orphans, children in schools, and rural churches among minority people groups. A recent urban project has been supporting work in Xi'an with HIV/AIDs – in this image, distributing packs of information to vulnerable groups of people.
- 2) English Language skills: Chinese visitors benefit from time in the UK developing their use of English, and each summer, volunteers have for many years served for a month in China on the Amity 'Summer English Programme'. (For full details of this programme, see below).
- 3) Support for those involved in Theological Education continues to be an important priority for the Chinese church. This aspect of FCC's work provides support for those training new pastors for growing churches, mainly through contributing towards the training, experience and further education of seminary teachers.



Chengzan and Jaiwei came to the UK in summer 2018. Building on their time in UK libraries, they are now writing their PhD theses.

Other important projects in 2019 included the following:

1) Amity visitor to the UK

In the early summer, FCC members and partners hosted a member of Amity staff, Ms Xie Jie. Her programme meant she visited many parts of the UK, including London, Stratford, Scotland, Oxford, East Anglia and West Wales. She was provided with a mix of language support, and visits to NGOs in her field of interest. She



Waste management



Community supported agriculture

learned about community supported agriculture; she visited projects run by A Rocha (an international network of environmental organisations with a Christian ethos) and learned about Eco-Church (churches that are environmentally friendly and promote the care of the environment); she explored a charity engaged in a combination of community care and tree planting; and visited state of the art facilities providing for waste management.

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A Rocha Garden, Southall.



The placement led to her improved confidence in oral English – this was borne out by her presentation at Methodist Church House in London at the end of her stay, and at a presentation to overseas visitors back at Amity HQ in Nanjing.

She also made good contacts while in the UK, including with Tearfund and Oxfam. The former is working in African countries, and it is Amity’s aim to follow in their steps.

This was reckoned by all sides to have been a good and helpful visit. From the Amity perspective, they will welcome future opportunities to send colleagues for similar staff development. For FCC, consideration will be given to supporting an Amity project in China involved in Waste Management – as a way to connect with an agenda that affects us all.

2) Theological Conference:

In partnership with the Li Tim Oi Foundation, FCC was able once again to support Ms Du Nana (now the Revd Du Nana, continuing her doctoral studies in the UK) to attend the Old Testament Studies conference in July. Her detailed report explained how the conference lectures were helpful for her studies and for her teaching. She also benefits by developing relationships with fellow scholars.



Du Nana (Christina) making a contribution at a theological conference July 2019

3) Planned spending of FCC reserves:

An important review of FCC finances was undertaken prior to 2018. The key decision was taken to discontinue the printed newsletter. This was successful in allowing the charity to live within its means (where membership fees cover administrative expenditure each financial year).

A couple of bequests were received during 2019, and (as trailed at the Annual General Meeting in 2018) it was stated that in 2020 the committee has scope for spending some of FCC’s reserves on worthwhile projects. The committee will develop an action plan to do this at its January meeting in 2020. This will be done where possible in partnership with others who share a common vision, thereby expanding the scope of what can be achieved by FCC as a small charity.

Summary: In 2019, FCC’s charitable projects demonstrated practical love for those facing poverty of various kinds, and our support for those teaching in seminaries helps overcome a poverty of pastoral leadership in the Chinese church.

An important year for the Amity Summer English Programme

In the summer of 2019, FCC fielded 5 members in two teams for the Summer English Programme. They went to Napo in Guanxi and to Dazhou in Sichuan. This was a larger team than in recent years, and thanks to generous funding from the Methodist Church (who granted five bursaries to Amity) FCC was able to offer an extended five-week programme, beginning a week before SEP with extra time in Nanjing observing Amity projects. Angela Evans continued to coordinate the SEP by providing support of many kinds, including two introductory meetings, facilitating all communications with Amity, and providing significant support in obtaining visas.





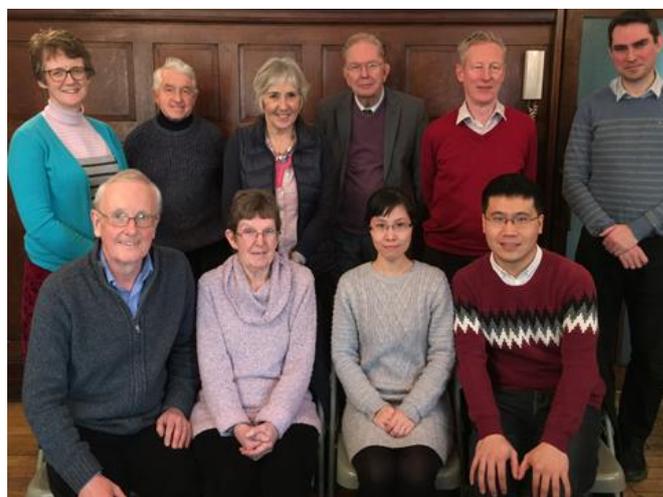
However through face to face meetings at Amity offices in Nanjing, and then through subsequent communication by email, it is becoming clear that (after many years) funding for this programme is probably coming to an end. Instead it is hoped in the future that there may be a shorter programme, possibly in Gansu Province, with greater emphasis on cross cultural learning.

The committee awaits further developments, but hopes that some form of annual visit can be sustained.

The work of the FCC Committee in 2019:

The Committee has met under the chairmanship of Godfrey Stone three times since the last AGM and a standing committee on a further occasion.

Committee agendas are always full, and the committee was joined by two new members after last year’s AGM, Jim Gibson (Treasurer) and Rachel Hextall. At one meeting, the committee welcomed two young seminary teachers from Shandong Province: Ms Du Nana and Mr Wang Wei. They are studying for further qualifications in the UK and in Beijing before returning to their calling to train new pastors for the growing church in their Province.



FCC is a small charity, and benefits from partnership working with others.

The Scottish Churches China Group was represented at one committee meeting by their Advisor, the Reverend Patricia Johnston, and she provides the committee with a written report of its busy schedule of work for each meeting. The Chair gave an update of FCC’s work at the SCCG Annual Meeting in Edinburgh in June.

FCC benefits from continued input from Fr Eamonn O’Brien. Since his retirement, his previous website has closed down. However his passion for China remains as strong as ever, and his new personal website is called ‘China Church Solidarity’. While some connections were made this year with Roman Catholic friends in Shanghai, on the whole FCC is less ‘connected’ than in some times in the past. However the committee watched the development on Catholic news in China this year, a year in which the historic Sino-Vatican provisional agreement was announced. Efforts have continued to normalize the situation of the Chinese Catholic Church and to respond to the Chinese government’s programme of Sinicization.



Meeting Father Joseph at Sheshan RC seminary. (Many years ago, Joseph remembers coming to the UK with SuDeci. Martin Conway was his FCC host)



Committee members have attempted to stay in touch with news and developments in China both through public and private sources, some of this news being sensitive and some disputable. When in China in October, the chair was warmly welcomed to the offices of the China Christian Council, where the three members present were made aware of the perspective of CCC on some contemporary issues. This encounter also helpfully prepared the way for subsequent visits in Beijing and Wuhan.



The committee is very aware that if FCC is to recruit new members and to promote the work of the charity beyond the existing cadre of members, it must have an effective presence online. The committee adopted an electronic communications strategy and policy, an internal document the purpose of which is to set out how FCC can be using electronic communications to further its purposes but also integrating some guidelines for the responsible use of communications. New email addresses for committee officers have just been created and will mean that officers will not in the future have to use their private email accounts for official correspondence.

On communications, Diane Allen produced several updates which were sent electronically to members. A new website was launched – www.thefcc.org. This is mobile friendly, and takes donations and new membership subscriptions. The navigation is more streamlined, and interfaces with Twitter. It is easier to update and keep up to date. For the first time bookings for the 2019 Annual Meeting could be made online and without cheques or cash.

Committee members represented FCC at a series of events including:

1. May/June 2019 - the Methodist World Mission Conference at Swanwick.
Here Dr Alex Chow from Edinburgh University is addressing the conference with the background posters 'God is Love'.
2. July 2019 - the European Network of Amity Partners (ENAP) in Denham, London
3. September 2019 - the World Mission Conference of the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. FCC continues to work with the Bishop Martin Seeley and members of the Diocese to generate interest in the church in China. Two members of the Diocese joined the Summer English Programme in 2019.



News of Members of FCC

At the beginning of the year 2019 the Chair and Secretary met with John Paton (former Secretary) and Geof Taylor (departing Treasurer) for a thank you lunch for Geof's service as Treasurer

In July the Reverend Franklin Lee, Chaplain of St John's Cathedral Hong Kong spoke to the committee about the ministry of the Anglican Church in Hong Kong, and the challenges of political protest. He updated FCC with a further report in November, requesting prayer in particular for children and young people (many of whom are caught up in the violence and street protests), and for the different denominational churches, many of whom are divided as to the best way to respond to the current violence. Here he is seen with the cathedral Dean, and the Reverend Will Newman (a former FCC treasurer).



The committee was sad to learn of the deaths of members Ruth Baker, Miss EM Rowe, Mrs E Barritt, Dr Frank Tovey and Dr Gary Tiedemann. We thank God for their lives, and the substantial contributions they made to the life and work of FCC. Meanwhile there has been a steady stream of new members over the year, and the membership total has increased slightly to a total of 197.

At the Annual Meeting, Diane Allen stood down as a committee member after a spell of service spanning 20 years. Diane has brought to the committee a great knowledge of China and Chinese friends. Her particular literary and editorial skills have provided sound guidance for the committee on many occasions.

It was reported from Oxford Diocese that Ruth and Martin (a former chair of FCC) Conway have been awarded the 'Order of St Frideswide', for lifetimes of service to the Christian faith.

The year ended with a visit to China by the Chair and Mrs Dot Stone between 7th October and 4th November 2019. Their five priority visits were to the China Christian Council in Shanghai, and to key leaders at the Union Theological Seminary and Amity HQ in Nanjing. This latter led to a cultural tour of the birthplace of Confucius in Qufu, and important conversations with the President of the Shandong Christian Council in Jinan.

In conversation with the Revd Gao Ming, President of Shandong CC



**Meeting the new team in Wuhan
Pastor Zhu Zhikou & Sarah Zhang Shuilian**



In Wuhan, they met the new leadership in the Hubei Christian Council on the newly-opened campus of the Zhongnan seminary in Wuhan.

They went on to meet the Vice Principal of the Sichuan Christian Council at the Regional Seminary in Chengdu.



Pastor Peter Yuan Shiguo,
Executive Vice Principal at Sichuan (SW) Regional seminary.
FCC Guest in summer 2018.

This visit was strategic, and allowed for a number of helpful meetings. The hosts were warm in their welcome and in their appreciation for FCC in its 35th anniversary year. Each meeting included good conversations which, in turn, were valuable in renewing and developing relationships which will guide the committee in its work in the years ahead.

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Looking ahead – planning for 2020?

Looking ahead to FCC’s future cooperation and collaboration with the Chinese church, a number of issues await fuller attention in 2020.

1. The committee mused on whether FCC might repeat something similar to the visit made by theological scholars in 2019. There would then be a combination of:
 - a) Scholarly interaction whereby Chinese scholars visit the UK to benefit from libraries and other resources;
 - b) Local meetings where FCC members and other friends people can learn about the church In China;
 - c) Participation by Chinese visitors in a three day Theological Conference in July called ‘Descent of the Dove’. www.puseyhouse.org.uk/conference-2020.html
2. Separately, the Lambeth Conference is 23rd July until 2nd August 2020. There is the possibility that some of the Chinese leadership may attend as observers, providing the opportunity for FCC with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland partners to share the offer of welcome to the British Isles.
3. The committee is actively exploring ways to assist Christian Councils who request the opportunity of sending colleagues for short-term visits to the UK for English language improvement, for deepening understanding of the church in the west etc.
4. Nanjing Union Theological Seminary continues to develop their PhD programme. One helpful enrichment for these scholars (who will themselves become seminary teachers) might be to arrange for them to reside at a UK theological college while undertaking library work in the UK. Further work will be done about this in 2020. Meeting younger people preparing for ministry in the British church might work towards connecting what FCC does with a younger age group in the UK.
5. Amity is eager to send appropriate staff members for professional development in the UK. This might build on Xie Jie’s visit in 2019 by connecting FCC with one of Amity’s environmental projects. In this way, FCC is engaging with something where the church in China and the UK can learn together (see Conclusion below).
6. During 2019, progress reports and updates were received from the CCC HIV/AIDs project in Xi’an. Through CCC, a personal link was made with the pastor of the church behind this social project. In 2020, attempts will be made to reconnect with this project, and also establish a link with the church. And FCC will continue the long-term support for rural communities in South West China.

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Conclusion:

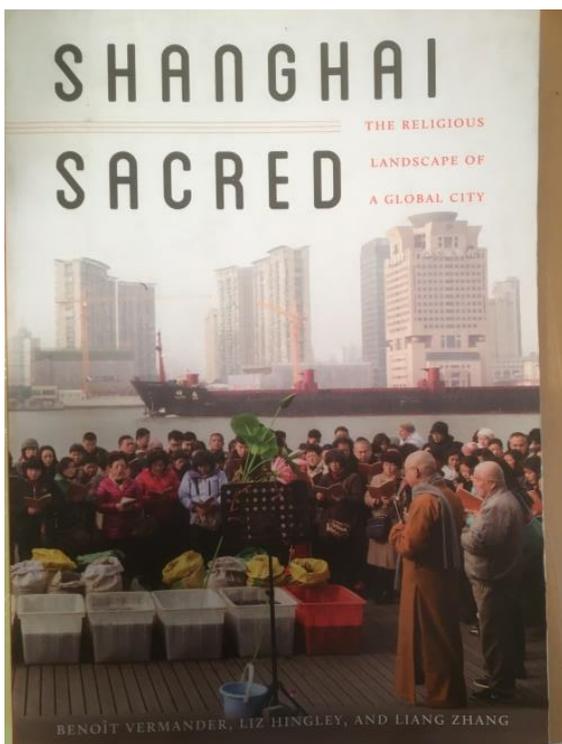
As we pray together, and develop friendship between the church in the British Isles and the church in China, common themes come into focus. As Christians, we both share a common faith in Christ and have several challenges in common despite some of the obvious differences between our two continents. Here is a first list of some such themes. What insight can FCC, with our British partners, bring to these?

- a) The population of both countries is growing more elderly, and the church has the opportunity both to demonstrate care for the elderly in society, and reflect on the meaning of life in older age;
- b) Such are the pressures of urban living that marriage and family life is under great pressure in both countries. What can we learn from each other? (It has been persuasively argued by Dr Alex Chow that the urban church replaces the support and stability that traditionally was provided by family).
- c) In both countries, neighbours belong to religions other than Christianity. Can FCC friendships lead to a sharing about how to relate well to members of Islam, Buddhism and (in the case of China) Daoism ... as well as to better understand the application today of the ideas of Confucius?
- d) In both countries there is a broadly secular culture, so perhaps our churches can share together lessons about apologetics and evangelism in such a context;
- e) And, as we described above, Christians and communities in both China and the UK are learning how to 'care for Creation' – and we all have a lot to learn here!

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FCC has received the following publications:

1: At the Annual Meeting in November, Sheila McClure was selling copies of her newly published book 'Letters from Chefoo' about her great-grandmother Constance (& Arthur) Douthwaite. It eloquently tells of the commitment of those first mission partners - a mixture of the heroic and the thoroughly ordinary aspects of pioneering caring Christian faith and action in a new location.

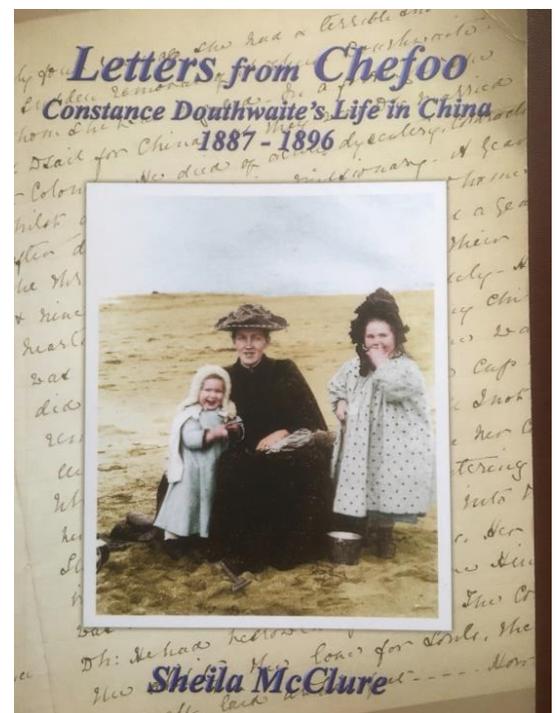
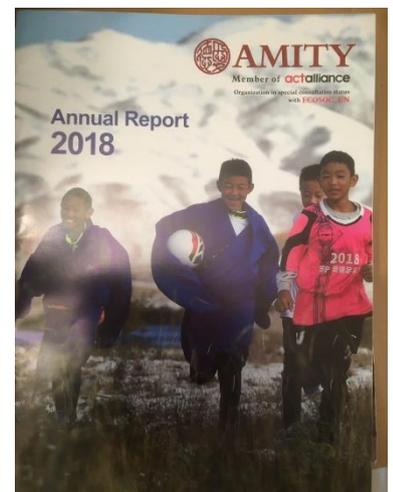
'Shanghai Sacred' is an anthropological study of the whole range of religious life in the mega-city of Shanghai. The cover picture shows the Buddhist festival releasing fish into the river (with a story of fishermen waiting downstream to catch the choicest specimens!).



There is a useful section about the Roman Catholic Sheshan pilgrimage centre and seminary,

which indirectly led three FCC members to make an unannounced visit where they were most warmly welcomed!

The 'Annual Report from the Amity Foundation' contains reports, news and stories. It keeps us up-to-date with how they are developing. The report is signed by FCC's long term friends Mr Qiu Zhonghui (chair of the Board) and Ms Ling Chunxiang (General Secretary).



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Sino Celtic Perspective

On the
'Cry of the Earth', 'Cry of the Poor'
Thinking beyond
Capitalist Globalization
'War on Terror and 'Terrorism'

'Sino-Celtic Perspective' is a report whose arrival was somewhat delayed. It refers back to a conference that took place at Trinity College Dublin in December 2016. Fr Eamonn O'Brien co-ordinated the conference, and speakers came from both Chinese and Irish / Celtic communities.

Finally, this special book celebrates the 70 years of the People's Republic of China, and comes from Shandong Province. While it is all written in Mandarin, most pages are very accessible because they are filled with beautiful examples of Chinese calligraphy, paper cuts and traditional painting.

