



## ***Friends of the Church in China (FCC)***

### ***Annual Report 2022***

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At the November 2022 Annual Meeting, FCC activity for the year was summarized in two phrases as follows:

*“This has been an untypical, but fruitful, 38<sup>th</sup> year”*

*“Through money, our practical love is following our prayers to places where we ourselves at present are not able to go.”*

Travel to China has again this year not been possible (the last FCC visit to China was in 2019), and (except for Chinese scholars studying in the UK) no guests came to the British Isles from China in 2022.

But £26,000 was sent to support a range of important social projects in the PRC as a way to focus FCC’s intentions in a practical way.

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This year’s annual report focuses on six themes:

- 1: Some news that FCC has received that anecdotally gives a picture of church life in China, particularly in the second half of 2022
- 2: More detail on the ways FCC supported projects in China to the tune of £26,000, complemented by an explicit rationale for this use of FCC funds
- 3: Ways in which FCC members benefitted this year from three keynote speakers - two who came from within the UK and spoke at an in-person meeting in September; and one who addressed the annual meeting in November by Zoom from China
- 4: Further reflections arising from FCC’s friendship with the church in China, with reference to resources that provide more detail on some of the issues
- 5: Looking ahead into 2023, when the fourfold cord of FCC’s aspirations will hopefully find greater expression in practice
- 6: A constitutional-practical word from the General Secretary about the need for new FCC office holders to be appointed at the 2023 Annual Meeting on November 25<sup>th</sup>.

## Part 1: Church life in China in the second half of 2022



National Covid policy meant that most churches in China were closed at Christmas 2021.

However, by June 2022, we were hearing reports of churches open again for worship like this one in Qingdao (above).

The pastoral team had also resumed their weekly groups catering for those enquiring about Christian discipleship (left).

Meanwhile, seminary life was returning to normal, and in July FCC received reports of graduation ceremonies – here are graduates from Zhongnan seminary in Wuhan.





2022 was an important year for two theological seminaries. In October, FCC sent congratulations to the Shandong seminary as they celebrated 35 years of service. And in November, FCC sent congratulations to the national 'Union' / 'Jinling' seminary in Nanjing. They were celebrating 70 years since the union that brought together 11 seminaries in East China. In both cases, regret was expressed from China that the customary invitation could not be extended to friends from overseas. The letter (from Revd Dr Gao Feng, President of NJUTS; and Revd Dr Chen Yilu, Executive Vice-President of NJUTS) concluded *"we will still be very delighted and grateful if you could share our joy and join us praising our Lord for his abundant grace!"*



Meanwhile, new pastors were being ordained – here in July in Jiangyou (Sichuan Province - the childhood hometown of Li Bai, the famous Tang Dynasty poet, 701-762 AD).



And in Yantai, at Shengli Church (Shandong Province) they were celebrating the church's centenary. The church building was built as an independent Chinese congregation in 1922.

Rev Dr Gao Ming, director of the Shandong CCC/TSPM, preached a sermon entitled 'Be Transformed by the Renewing of your Mind' from Romans 12.1-5.

Elsewhere, the reconstructed Yunlu Church in Jieyang City (Guangdong Province) opened its doors for the first time on 10 December. The original village church building had fallen into disrepair. With donations from church members and the Guangdong CC, the church has been rebuilt and now holds around 500 people.

And then just before Christmas, news arrived of the reopening of the former cathedral in central Shanghai. Situated next door to the national offices of the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), this building was, during the Mao era, used for a combination of cinema and warehouse. It remained in a poor condition into the new millennium.



But no expense has been spared in introducing new wooden pews, in restoring the stained glass (with a little panda included in the south transept), and in rebuilding a grand organ.

The sermon from the CCC chair was inspiring. Quoting from Ephesians 2: 19-22 and 4: 2-7 (Under the title "Building up the Body of Christ"), Pastor Wu Wei said: "By the grace of the Lord, Holy Trinity Church is reopened today. This is God's special grace to us. As a result of the continued implementation of our national policy of religious freedom, we are grateful to come to the Lord's Temple to worship and praise our God here as witnesses of this wonderful grace. May from now on the word of God be proclaimed in this church, and the sacraments of the church be administered here according to the command of Jesus Christ, and we, the sons and daughters of the Father, may worship God with one heart. There will also be many people here who will believe in Jesus Christ, and their lives will be changed. Here we are not only

asking God to bless us, but we are also asking God to bless the Holy Trinity Church, so that this church can be the outlet of God's grace and blessing, so that this church can be God's blessing to this city."

FCC members can only respond with a hearty 'Amen!'





## Part 2: FCC-supported projects in China in 2021-2022

At a time when Covid, drought, and earthquake have at different times challenged many across China, there have also been moving stories of local action by local people to support each other. Churches have been among these, offering emergency care for neighbours in practical ways.

However, through the China Christian Council (CCC), FCC has been introduced in recent years to the work of Pastor He Qicong in Xi'an. Despite the challenges of being closed because of Covid on seven separate occasions (for one week up to one month), the church in his part of Xi'an has continued their community-based work among those suffering from HIV/AIDs, started in 2006. In October 2021, Shaanxi Province reported 20,000 people living with HIV/AIDs. The age-span of those infected is large, with the proportion of young adults and people over 60 increasing. They describe their target group as "college students, sex workers, homosexual groups, migrant workers, and some widowed elderly." As a 'voluntary organisation', they win trust from potential beneficiaries, and they are in effect the third significant provider of care after local hospitals and the China centre for disease control (CDC). They aim to overcome public discrimination against people living with AIDs, and the lack of knowledge about AIDs prevention and transmission.

The Covid pandemic has coincided with the expansion of this work, to provide training for other churches wanting to undertake similar community-based projects. Interest was initially shown from 10 different provinces, and ten churches were selected. Four were within Xi'an, two in the Greater Xi'an region, and four in other Provinces (Henan, Zhejiang, Shanghai and Shanxi). Training has been provided both in-person and on-line. At the end of the training, two churches dropped out because they had inadequate office space, or an inadequate funding base (these are government requirements for the recognition of church-based projects).

### **Letter from CCC ('Sylvia' Cao Ya'nan)**

Dear Godfrey,

We are really very, very grateful to FCC and Barbour Trust for your enthusiastic support and generous help. Please convey our thanks to all the friends at FCC and Barbour Trust.

Thank you very much. Best regards, Sylvia

曹亚男 Cao Ya'nan (Sylvia)

中国基督教两会社会服务部

Social Service Department of CCC/TSPM

**NB: FCC's gift was 13% of the 'cascading project' budget.**

It is with great pleasure that FCC acknowledges the support of the Barbour Trustees in supporting the work in Xi'an. And in addition, FCC has spent money from reserves to support 13% of the total costs of the capacity-building work in other churches (see table below).

Another developing aspect of this ministry is the way Pastor He has been invited to lecture at the local Shaanxi Bible School about what the church has done over the past 16 years.

He tells students that his church was at one time called 'heresy church' by other churches because of how they undertook this work.



In his teaching Pastor He is clear that this ministry is an expression of 'the whole Gospel'. But it entails more than preaching – it includes an awareness of the society around us. Community work means learning many new skills in research, design and implementation of projects. It means grappling to understand the rules of government. It has meant becoming familiar with financial and taxation matters. It has meant finding ways of overcoming the reluctance of some church volunteers to engage and persevere. "What we learned is loving people with Christ's love. We learned to keep on serving; to keep on accompanying; to keep on praying. Overall, through this ministry, we passed on God's kindness and the gospel of God to the unbelievers."

He reports that a teaching session at the seminary lasted an hour and a half, and was "interrupted by more than ten applause! May God's name be honoured!"

The second area of particular focus for FCC in 2022 has been the Southwest of China. Having received legacies from the late Mary Ream and Alison Lewis (whose lives and work were very much focussed in SW China), the FCC committee decided to work with other partners and contribute materially to two projects. A new Amity project (see 'Sprouts of Earth' on the Amity website) is designed to serve mothers and babies in the first 1000 days of life. In this project FCC was the prime funder in its first phase of operation. We look forward to seeing how it develops.



FCC also joined a major Bible Society project that entails Bible translation, Bible distribution and the development of audio resources for Bible study. Much of the focus is on minority groups in SW China. FCC was a small partner in this much larger project, but it has been a helpful way to make more concrete FCC's partnership with the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS).

The table below summarises how FCC spent £26,000 in 2021-2022.

#### **FCC EXPENDITURE 2021-2022**

| <b>Amount spent</b> | <b>To whom directed</b>                                  | <b>Notes about sources of finance.</b>  |
|---------------------|--|---|
| <b>£7,800</b>       | <b>The 'British &amp; Foreign Bible Society' (BFBS)</b>  | <b>£4000 from Barbour Trust.<br/>£800 from Legacy income<br/>£3000 from FCC general Fund</b>  |
| <b>£14,000</b>      | <b>To Xi'an via CCC</b>                                  | <b>£4000 from Barbour Trust, plus<br/>£4000 from FCC general fund for Xi'an. Also £6000 from FCC general fund for training churches elsewhere in China.</b> |
| <b>£1,000</b>       | <b>Amity Foundation projects in South &amp; SW China</b> | <b>FCC general fund – waste management</b>  |
| <b>£2,700</b>       |  | <b>FCC legacy income in memory of members who worked in SW China for the 1000 days project</b>  |
| <b>£500</b>         | <b>Pastor Du Nana</b>                                    | <b>FCC general fund – a book grant</b>  |

#### *Reflection on the strategic priorities lying behind FCC's charitable giving in 2021-2022*

- 1: At several successive annual meetings, treasurers have indicated that FCC has reserves, and therefore the capacity to disburse funds to fulfil appropriate objects. The committee decided that 2021-2022 was the time to respond to this challenge.
- 2: The Eastern seaboard of China is prosperous, and at places even wealthy. But one focus for FCC has for many years been the poorest parts of this enormous country. A couple of current FCC projects therefore focus on SW China.
- 3: The Chinese church is developing its ministry of community and social care. But some projects are at present less popular with Chinese church congregations. So, FCC chose to give its support to one of these - HIV/AIDs work in Xi'an (Central China).
- 4: In working with the 'Registered churches' in China, FCC has in the last few years renewed a direct relationship with the 'China Christian Council' (CCC). CCC encouraged FCC to support the extension of Xi'an's expertise to other churches. CCC provides excellent twice-yearly reports on the way the money is being used. This all seems to FCC to be very strategic work. It also helpfully reflects a point of connection and

collaboration between church and state at a time when it would be easy to focus only on the points of conflict between the two.

5: FCC's commitment to SW China also reflects a commitment to the ongoing identity of minority ethnic groups within China. In the past, and still in the present, work is being done to translate the Bible and basic audio materials into languages where some speakers do not have the skill or ability of literacy. Likewise, the 1000 days project has potentially life-long effects on community health in this region.

6: FCC is a small charity, run over its 38-year history by a succession of committed volunteers. The membership fee comfortably covers the cost of running the charity. But for project work in China, to visit China, and to offer hospitality to Chinese guests, FCC depends on legacy income, on the kindness of other partners, and on funds specifically raised for those purposes. The Barbour Trust has been a generous partner in 2022 to assist in these significant gifts.

7: Involvement in charitable projects (in addition to making a small contribution to people in China) helps FCC develop relationships with Chinese friends and gives real insight into aspects of the life and work of the church in China that otherwise would not be available to us.

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### **Part 3: Three keynote speakers - two from within the UK, one (by Zoom) from China**

In response to membership requests, an in-person meeting was arranged in September in central London. In addition to the benefits of mutual exchange between members (some of whom had not been to an FCC meeting for a while), those present were able to hear two key addresses.



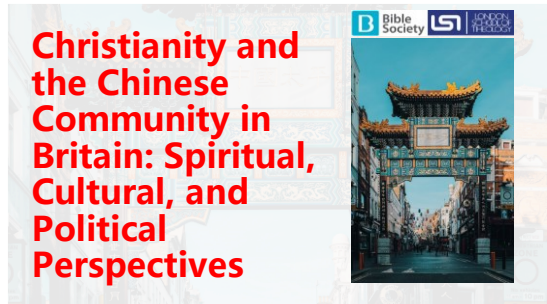
**H-J Colston-Inge** has been responsible for many years in running the 'Chopsticks Club' in China, and more recently has set up a network in the UK called 'Engage with China'. H-J spoke of her origins as a Chinese speaker, and her experience of China in the years when first access to China was possible. Members were particularly interested in her analysis of the lack of understanding of China among our British contemporaries. FCC shares with H-J in feeling this lack and wondering how it could best be met. She will attend a committee meeting in January to see if we can take this agenda further in any way.



**Dr Huang Yinxuan** is a native of Shanghai, and an academic sociologist who is now working for the London School of Theology and the Bible Society (BFBS) in the UK. The latter engaged him to share in doing some research into the Chinese Christian population in the British Isles.

The results of this research are now being published, and he gave FCC members a preview of some of the headlines. These included the rapidity with which Chinese Christians are currently becoming part of the Christian churches in the UK (as opposed to other ethnic groups). And the tensions that can result when Hong Kong Cantonese speakers join British Chinese churches where members' loyalties are more to the Mandarin language and to the political pattern centred in Beijing.

The keynote speaker at the online Annual Meeting was **Revd Dr Lin Manhong**. She gave us a detailed, wide-ranging and informative overview of the provision of seminary education for pastors in China. There are 3,284 current students in 22 institutions, taught by 400 faculty. 18 of the seminaries have moved onto a new campus (NB: The Sichuan seminary (below) has not yet been given a new campus).



Two institutions run a basic two-year programme, and seven offer a 3-year course. The majority (13) have a four-year schedule, serving students either from their province (7), or from a wider region in China (5), or, for the more able, serving the

nation as a whole (1). This last is the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. In their 70<sup>th</sup> year, they are celebrating the fact that they now have 20 doctoral students (2 in Christian ethics, who started in 2022; 3 in New Testament, 7 in Systematic theology, and 8 doing a 'Doctor of Ministry' programme).

Manhong is an Associate General Secretary of CCC, and Director of the department of Theological Education, so she was the ideal person to provide FCC with this kind of overview. She was earlier in 2022 involved in the 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Germany, where she was re-elected onto the 25-person WCC executive committee. When it again becomes possible for ThD students from Nanjing to travel outside their home country, it is through Manhong that FCC will decide how best we can assist some of these 20 doctoral students to the UK.

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#### Part 4: Notes and reflections arising from FCC's friendship with the church in China

##### 4.1: Sinicization

A lot is being said about the implementation of the Chinese government's policy for 'Sinicization'.

- A. At a simple level, and in a way sympathetic to one strand of the Chinese cultural tradition, Revd Dr Gao Ming is leading the Shandong CC to develop a Christian ministry based around the drinking of tea. In this way, he hopes to connect the Christian Good news with Chinese culture.



We have also in 2022 met this emphasis from the church in Fujian, in SE China.

- B. The Shandong CC ran a summer school for their 'staff' led by academic personnel in Beijing, on the theme "Sinicized interpretation of Christian classics". A similar day-long event took place more recently at Nanjing seminary under the heading (approximate translation) of "The Symposium on the Adherence to the Theological Education in the Direction of Sinicization."

In Shandong, the teaching was aimed at both seminary teachers and key church leaders. In Nanjing, the student body was the main point of focus. In both cases input was provided from within the university sector, from members of the 'party', with senior seminary staff making their own presentations.

- C. The most recent issue of the Chinese Theological Review 2021 helpfully handles this issue. It is available on the Amity website (see url below)

It includes several essays from senior CCC staff exploring what they understand this process to entail.



<https://amityfoundation.org/eng/index.php/portfolio/chinese-theological-review-no-312021/>

- D. Behind all these lies a central conference of the Chinese Communist Party's United Front Work Department (which has responsibility for religious affairs and regulations). It was addressed by President Xi Jinping in July. President Xi said the role of the UFWD was essential to safeguarding China's sovereignty, security and global interests, especially through establishing 'consensus' in orienting all social groups and religions 'towards Sinicization'.

#### 4.2: Roman Catholic news:

- A. It was (accurately) observed at the 2021 Annual Meeting that FCC had that year received no input from the Chinese Roman Catholic church.
- B. It was also the sad experience of the Churches Together delegation to China in 2018 that the organizer was unable to secure any visits to RC churches or seminaries despite the group travelling widely throughout the country.
- C. In attempting to address this issue, at the meeting in September, FCC members were introduced to Pat O'beirne. He is a Columban brother, and will where possible, act as successor to Fr Eamonn O'Brien who, for many years, has provided FCC with insight and encouraging accounts of God's dealings with the Chinese



Roman Catholic churches. Pat introduced himself and stayed for much of the meeting talking with those present.

D. We thank God for Eamonn. Later in the autumn he very kindly hosted lunch for the chair when he was on holiday and passing by Fr Eamonn's community base near Dublin.



Protestant / Roman Catholic ecumenism  
in practice in Shandong Province.



E. It was early in 2022 that we learned of local level fraternal relations between the Shandong CC and local Roman Catholic leaders.

F. About the RC church in China more generally, the following news item has been drawn to our attention (Asia News 24 November)

“Mgr Peng Weizhao was officially recognised as auxiliary bishop in Jiangxi Province in a service in Nanchang cathedral. First ordained as coadjutor bishop of Yujiang in 2014 by Pope Francis, Bishop Peng was held for six months by Chinese authorities, before being allowed to take up some duties. He will now serve with Mgr Li Sugang, bishop of Nanchang in a consolidated Jiangxi diocese. According to the official China Catholic website, Bishop Peng promised to “faithfully preach the gospel, lead the priests and Catholics of the Diocese of Jiangxi, abide by the national constitution, safeguard the unity of the motherland and social harmony, love the country and religion, adhere to the principle of independence and self-management of the Church, adhere to the direction of Sinicization of Catholicism in our country, actively guide Catholicism to adapt to socialist society, and contribute to the realisation of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” It is unclear whether the Vatican has had a part in the process of consolidating previously separate dioceses in Jiangxi.”

G. At the wider, more international level, things move slowly – but may still be moving .... as this next report indicates (Asia News 16 Sept; Vatican News 3 Sept; America Magazine 7 July):

“Pope Francis, responding to a journalist’s questions on a flight home from Kazakhstan in September said ‘[China] is a complex country ... it takes a century to understand China and we do not live for a century’. He went on, ‘I try to support the path of dialogue ... There is a bilateral Vatican-Chinese commission that is going well, slowly, because the Chinese pace is slow.’

It is reported that the Holy See asked for a meeting with China’s President Xi Jinping who was in Kazakhstan at the same time, but this was declined.

The Vatican and Beijing commission met for the first time since COVID to discuss renewing an agreement on the appointment of Catholic bishops in China. During the four years of the agreement so far, six bishops have been ordained and recognised by both sides. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State for the Holy See, has said that he expects the agreement will be renewed. On 24 October, China Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Wang Wenbin, confirmed the agreement had been renewed.”

#### 4.3: Hong Kong news item:

At the November Annual Meeting we welcomed the news that Revd Frankie Lee is now Dean of Holy Trinity cathedral in Kowloon – and has also recently got married(!)

Meanwhile FCC member Will Norman remains attached to St John’s Cathedral. Will spoke briefly at the Annual Meeting of some of the challenges facing the church at this time. He has also been able to refer a couple of Chinese friends to us when they came to the UK.

#### 4.4: Note on the population of China (Geographical Magazine Oct 2022)

China accounts for more than one sixth of the total global population, but the world’s biggest nation is already shrinking. In the late 1980s, China’s birth rate was 2.6. In 2021 it was 1.15 (Japan, with its rapidly ageing population is 1.3).

The one child policy, more women in higher education and a sex-selective abortion policy has resulted in a ratio of boys to girls of 120 to 100 (130 in some provinces).

The Chinese Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security predicts that China’s working-age population will decline by 23% by 2050. Meanwhile with a current population of 1.4 billion, India is set to overtake China in 2023.

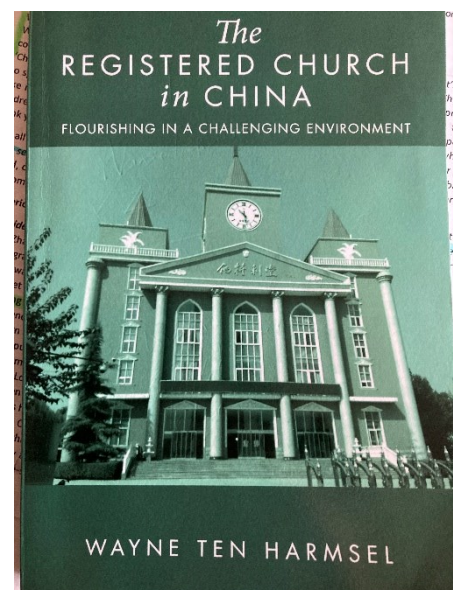
#### 4.5: Some books to note:

##### A. Chinese Study Bible (in Chinese):

In September 2022, an international version of the China Study Bible (published in 2018 for PRC) was published in the UK and globally. The original CSB, published by CCC/TSPM and the Bible Society, was distributed in China to pastors, seminary students and preachers. (See <https://www.ubscp.org/launch-chinese-studybible>). The Bible Society also produce a series of books (The Chinese Union Study Bible Series), written by Chinese scholars, further exploring the text of biblical books. These are still being written but will soon also be available to Chinese communities in the UK and other regions of the world.

##### B. 'The Registered Church in China' (sub-title 'flourishing in a challenging environment') by Wayne Ten Harmsel (Pickwick Publications / WIPF 2021).

This book reflects Harmsel's dozen or so years as a Christian working alongside several churches in China. This came to an end in 2017, so inevitably it already reflects events in a 'former' time before the 'fog of Covid' settled over things. However, this is notable as one of the few books written about the Registered churches. In many ways, what he writes about his perception of church life is very recognizable from my own much shorter visits during a similar period. His commendable aim is to balance negative assessments of the Chinese churches that can come from associating only with unregistered churches.



He regularly visited Beijing, Hunan, Shandong, Liaoning, and Fujian. He rejoices that Jesus Christ is Lord of his church (page 57), and that despite some strained relations between registered and unregistered communities, what matters (to quote one pastor ... echoing Phil 1 v17?) "... is preaching the Gospel, honouring and lifting high the name of Jesus Christ" (p77). Indeed, Harmsel comments warmly about the positive faith of many pastors, but notes that many pastors are poorly paid. He observes the moralistic tone of some preaching and suggests (where?) that the numbers attending seminaries has been decreasing. He does not hide his anxiety about he observed as the further 'regulation' of the church by national authority (Chapter 4). And he focuses also on the challenges of Sinicization (chapter 5).



Harmsel's conclusion balances strengths and weaknesses in a realistic way. But his attitude is what I appreciate, reflected in the final paragraph of his introduction, in which he writes: "We so easily cast stones from the safe distance of our western comfort, security and freedom. The Chinese church exists in a different but real world, where the Spirit of God is not about politics and where the Christian church is a gift and a blessing to all of China. How do we walk beside these brothers and sisters in Christ?"

D: Religion in China (sub-title: 'Ties that Bind') by Adam Yuet Chau (Cambridge: Polity Press 2019). (This book was reviewed by Mark McLeister from Edinburgh University at the Annual Meeting. Mark has supplied the following written review).

This very readable introduction to religion in contemporary China comprises eight chapters (Introduction, six main chapters, Conclusion), and is based primarily on Chau's own fieldwork. Chau takes a thematic approach, focusing on how people in Chinese societies make sense of the world through doing religion. Chau argues that "relationality" is at the centre of this. For example, relations between people and deities, between religious practitioners and specialists, between worshippers and the state. Across the chapters, Chau navigates different but inter-related lenses through which we can view how people in Chinese societies "do religion." He rightly does not focus on what people *believe* but how they *practise* their religion. This helps us better understand the motivations of individuals and communities to practise particular rituals or engage in particular festivals. Chau does not research Christianity in China, and this comes through to some extent in the book. Although he does comment on both Catholic and Protestant Christianities, this aspect of the book is not as informed or vivid as those covering religious practices associated with popular religion or Daoism, for example. This is a book which should appeal to readers who know little about religion in China and those with extensive knowledge and experience due to Chau's coherent but provocative framework of relationality.

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#### Part 5: How the FCC fourfold cord continues to look ahead hopefully into 2023

The budget for 2022-2023 allocates money for a wider range of activity than occurred in 2021-2022, including a reduced aspiration for supporting community charitable projects. But this reduction is not because we deem the ongoing project work less worthy but because we long to prioritise our resources to welcome guests from China and to visit China ourselves. For these opportunities, to take up invitations to visit China and to host guests in the UK, we wait patiently.



### **A fourfold cord?**

- 1: the **community projects** that FCC supports;
- 2: the priority of **theological education** for future leaders;
- 3: the welcome we offer for **Chinese visitors** (Amity; NJUTS; pastors; others)
- 4: we long to make **visits to China** – when visas become available again.

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Part 6: A constitutional-practical word from the General Secretary about the need for new FCC office holders to be appointed at the 2023 Annual Meeting on November 25<sup>th</sup>.

The Annual Meeting was asked to think and pray for suitable candidates to be nominated and elected to the key roles of Chair and General Secretary. The appointment is initially for 3 years, with the option of renewal for a further three. Further information is available from the current post holders:

[secretary@thefcc.org](mailto:secretary@thefcc.org) / [chair@thefcc.org](mailto:chair@thefcc.org)

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### **Conclusion:**

Winter storms and summer heat in the UK have had their parallels in 2022 with summer drought in China, and a damaging earthquake in Sichuan. Meanwhile geo-political storms continue, and inter-nation political and military earthquakes rumble on between east and west. In FCC's 38<sup>th</sup> year, the value of inter-nation friendship is never more necessary or important. FCC is a small charity ... but, not least in our prayers alongside our friends from whom we have been separated for three years or more, we ask for God's blessing. 'God be with us!'

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