

Annual Report 2024 for 'The Friends of the Church in China' (FCC)



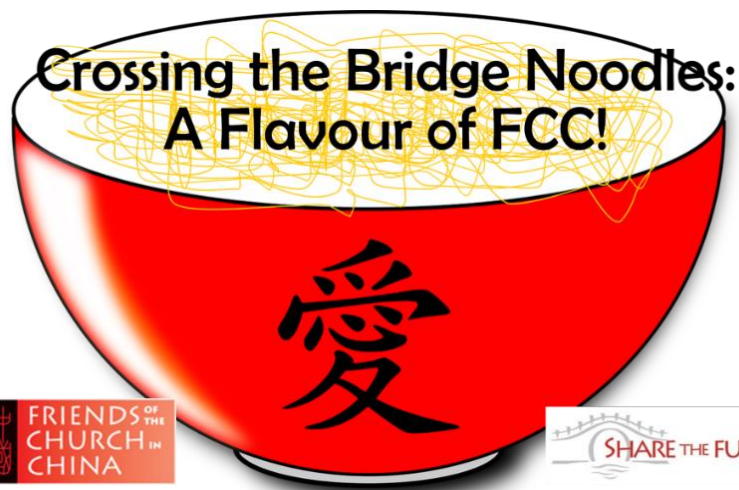
In 2024, FCC celebrated its 40th anniversary with a hybrid Annual Meeting in London on 5th October, attended by 23 people in person and 33 online. This enabled friends from China to contribute.

Long-standing FCC members produced a fascinating whistle stop tour of the work of FCC during the last 40 years, with the fun title *Crossing the Bridge Noodles: a Flavour*

of FCC. The famous noodle dish from the title comes from Yunnan and combines a whole host of different ingredients and flavours. The bridge is an image we use in FCC to symbolise our connections with our friends in China, giving a flavour of the many strands of FCC across 40 years!

The FCC was the brainchild of Canon David Paton, a former Church Missionary Society missionary in Fujian - his son John is seen (above)

cutting the celebratory cake. David had maintained a friendship with Bishop KH Ting across difficult years. An early statement said:



'The Friends whom we hope to encourage are those people in Britain who have a concern to understand what is happening in China and who want to maintain a praying fellowship with Chinese Christians and who believe that Chinese experience is important for the future of Christianity.'

The FCC played a pivotal role in building up friendships between churches in China and the British Isles in the years when China was opening up in the 1980s and beyond. And that is not just our own view! One of the many messages of congratulation for our anniversary came from Rev Dr Lin Manhong, the General Secretary of the China Christian Council, which oversees the work of the Protestant church in the whole of China:

National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic
Movement of the Protestant Churches in China

China Christian Council

September 25, 2024

Dear Friends in FCC,

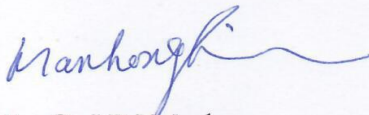
I am delighted to hear that the Friends of the Church in China (FCC) is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. On behalf of CCC&TSPM, I would like to extend our sincere congratulations.

It is truly with the grace of the Lord that FCC has developed for 40 years. Since the beginning, FCC has been acting as a bridge between the churches in China and in the UK, not only helping us build relationships, but also striving to tackle the issues of mutual concern through engagement in various programmes. We highly recognize and appreciate your partnership with the Church in China and pray that you will be given greater strength and wisdom.

And for decades, CCC&TSPM and FCC have enjoyed close friendship and fellowship with each other, which is the result of mutual respect and support. Over the years, we have exchanged visits of delegations and had cooperation in different areas of work. We are very thankful for the support that you have provided for us, and it is our hope that the bond and partnership between us will be continued and strengthened in the future.

Congratulations again on your 40th anniversary. May the Lord continue to guide and bless the Friends of the Church in China!

Sincerely yours,



Rev Dr LIN Manhong
Vice President & General Secretary
China Christian Council

Add: 219 Jiujiang Road, Shanghai, 200002 China Tel: 86-21-63210806; Fax: 86-21-63232605; Email: tspmccc@online.sh.cn

One of our members has now studied and codified the FCC archives at Birmingham University. His work will be the basis for a short history of FCC.

Monthly meetings

The FCC committee is aware that some of our most committed members cannot now travel to China but do want to be aware and involved in what is going on. With this in mind, we began a monthly Zoom meeting, inviting as speakers people who can share recent experiences of going to China, or particular areas of knowledge. These meetings have been successful, attracting between 20 and 30 members. Speakers included Dave Ho Young, who is part of the Tea House group (which supports and empowers clergy with Chinese-heritage in the Church of England).



Tricia Johnson from the Scottish Churches China Group spoke about a recent visit to a hospital in China where SCCG has long had links.

Mark McLeister told us about his latest visits to China, where he researches as an anthropologist, highlighting for example that where church attendances have fallen, post Covid, that can affect churches in various ways, including significant reduction in giving.

And Sheila McClure shared her book about her great-grandmother who was a missionary in Shandong province with the China Inland Mission. Many FCC members have family missionary connections that go back long before the establishment of the PRC, and Sheila's grandmother is a reminder to us of the extraordinary courage, commitment and faith of missionaries over a long period in China.

Visiting China

Travel to China is valuable, when possible, for maintaining links and building new ones. In 2024 the Chair visited Fujian, Shanghai and Nanjing, and the Secretary (Dot Stone, with Godfrey) visited Guilin and Fuzhou - including the new (10-year-old) seminary campus,



where the principal Dr Yue served tea in the traditional manner, and presented a record of the church in Fujian Province - which included references to earlier visits by FCC members to Fuzhou. Other local leaders helped celebrate the 'day of thanksgiving and prayer for the missionary work of the church' by

guiding the visitors to places where missionaries first reached Fuzhou in the 1840s (they remain grateful for that missionary era). At the weekend there was a visit to Tian Fu Tan (heavenly blessing church) and Christian New Year banners were given for our secretary's doorway!

Perhaps someone reading this would like to go to China but don't want to go on your own. There will be committee members going in 2025, and maybe one or two people would like to join them. Do get in touch with the Chair (chair@thefcc.org) or the Secretary (secretary@thefcc.org) if interested to find out more.

Partnership with other organisations in 2024

The Chair, John Austen, represented FCC at the 11th European Catholic China Colloquium in Germany. From early on, FCC has been ecumenical, and the Colloquium was an opportunity to re-establish links with Catholic organisations in mainland China, and Taiwan.

FCC Vice-Chair, Angela Evans, represented FCC at the *European Network of Amity Partners (ENAP)* meeting, and also at the 80th anniversary of the ordination of Florence Li Tim-Oi, the first woman priest in the Anglican Communion.

Funding of Projects and Visits

FCC has continued to work with our partners in China and here in the UK.

We were able to send £1000 to the Bible Society towards their Bible translation work in China (which includes the development of audio resources to help people hear and understand the scriptures). This was generously match funded by the Barbour Trust.

FCC has continued to support scholars from the Chinese seminaries as they study for doctorates, and we rejoiced that Pastor Du from Shandong completed her thesis and was awarded her degree this year. Pastor Chen spent time in the libraries in Cambridge working towards completion in 2025. The Chinese church needs well-trained scholars and teachers in the seminaries, and we were delighted that Barbour Trust contributed £1000 to help support this aspect of FCC's work.

For 2025, we are negotiating with two more scholars who have requested a visit to the British Isles. Their visits will include attendance at a theological conference in Oxford.

The China Christian Council social work department

FCC has for some years supported projects sponsored by the China Christian Council (CCC). We have just agreed to support two of their projects for 2025:

- **Social Service Capacity Building Training:**

Objective: To strengthen the social service consciousness of church members and elevate the professional capabilities of pastoral staff in social work. In 2025, training for church members will be provided in Guangxi Province

- **Family Relationship Counselling Capacity Training:**

Issue: With societal development, there is a rise in complex marital and family issues as well as mental health concerns. Pastoral staff, often trained in theology, may lack professional capabilities in specific social service areas such as marital and family counselling and psychological consultation. Training courses are provided for pastoral staff in family relationships.

Pastoral issues for church members become more complex in Chinese society (as in the UK), and we are pleased to contribute to projects which seek to address the need for pastors and church members to be trained in these areas.

The Amity Foundation

Based in Nanjing, Amity is a large and well-respected NGO, and a long-term partner of FCC. It was also founded 40 years ago, with input from the churches. Our links with them are close. This year, the project we have supported is 'Mini solar powered lighting for school children' living in Qinghai province. This helps them study in the evenings, when power supplies are poor or intermittent.

Several Amity staff have spent time in Britain for professional development. Some of their staff team (left) sent greetings for the FCC 40th!

In alternate years, FCC has invited Amity to send a staff member to the UK for professional development and help with their development in using the English language.

Plans are under way for another visit in 2025. The aim is that FCC funds a stay of about a month for their professional development.

As shown in the 2024 annual accounts, we are delighted that recent legacies to FCC have made it possible to help these projects with the Bible Society, the Amity Foundation, and the China Christian Council, and to support FCC's welcome to Chinese scholars, guests and visitors coming the British Isles. Most recently we have received generous bequests from



the estates of former FCC members Bessie Canning and Mary Low. We are very grateful that they chose to remember FCC in their wills., and thus to continue supporting our work.

If anyone reading this Annual Report would like to leave a legacy to help fund future work, please contact our treasurer on treasurer@thefcc.org.

FCC looks forward to continuing the work of friendship begun back in 1984.

Revd John Austen – Chair 'The Friends of the Church in China' (FCC).

Annual report for members 2024