



# Global Mission Network

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

In July 2006 a group of Chinese young people visited the United Kingdom and Ireland. The visit organized by the GMN China Desk Director, Caroline Fielder, was a significant experience for all involved. Caroline reports on it here.

## China Youth Visit



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As China becomes increasingly visible on the world stage, it is ever more apparent how little we actually know about her and her people. Experience shows that one of the most successful methods of increasing understanding is through people-to-people contact and partner exchanges. Today there are many opportunities for bringing young people into contact with one another, which, even a generation ago, were just in the realms of fantasy. Independent visitors from China to Europe and Europe to China are on the rise and there are more Chinese students in the UK than from any other country. In western Europe young people today have wider opportunities and choices available to them

than has ever previously been the case. In China the same is true.

For a number of years the China Forum has wanted to tap into these new possibilities. It has wanted to increase its youth

to receive religious education, but over the past few years youth and children's work has been on the increase. In some areas this work is flourishing, but resources, materials and training remain scarce.

### The focus of the visit was youth ministry

exchanges in order to promote better understanding and to increase links between our young people. Twice postponed, a long-awaited group of five young Chinese arrived in the UK earlier this summer.

The focus of the visit was youth ministry. In China this is a relatively new area of work. Religious regulations have previously stipulated that under-18s are not able

The group visiting the UK was made up of five young people aged from 22-34 years old. Each of them had been nominated by their home churches as key individuals involved in youth ministry, either on a voluntary or paid basis. They came from different provinces in China, from both the Catholic and Protestant churches, and met for the first time when they

and between Catholic and Protestant communities in China is not always good, the visit also offered an opportunity to learn more about each other and their respective home churches over the stay.

Each of the Chinese churches invited to take part in the visit were selected because they have a particular focus on youth ministry. The churches in Liaoning have been pioneering work with young people and HIV/AIDS awareness, especially in the area of peer education; in Fujian the city church work has a focus on migrant workers, while the rural ones look at children's ministry



### We visited a primary school, youth group, church and the Friends of the Church in China conference.

arrived in the UK. The visit aimed to encourage them all in their ministry by offering them a chance to share with churches and communities here, and to provide them with exposure to different strands of youth work here. As contact between provinces

and music; and in Anhui the focus was on work among university students and in offering lay training for those from the rural churches.

There were opportunities to share this work in a number of settings outside of the

churches we visited including a primary school, an inter-denominational youth group, and the GMN/FCC (Friends of Church in China) bi-annual conference on China. In addition to sharing what is happening in China, the visitors were exposed to a number of different church run projects, some of which were national initiatives, others small locally run projects. As it was the first time they came to Europe there was also the chance to do some sightseeing. Their two-week exposure visit

both the differences and similarities between our respective church communities. Friendships were formed which would last beyond the visit.

On a recent visit to China, Caroline Fielder, Director of the China Desk, who had led the visit to UK, was able to meet up with two of the participants and asked how they reflected on the visit now that they were back at home.

Song Ming said of the visit "God revealed His faithfulness to me and taught

**'the best part of the visit was a puppet workshop we attended with other young Christians. We Chinese love telling stories but have little resources to share the Bible with children'**

covered over 1500 miles taking in a variety of places in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England. The schedule was made up of numerous activities either aimed at or run by young people. They ranged from a puppet workshop, to decorating a council house as part of a community project, visiting church youth groups in rural and urban settings and meeting with conservationists who had reclaimed some waste land and turned it into a park for the local community. Being hosted by local Christians meant the visit was rooted in the local communities we visited and enabled the group to get a feel for life here, and a chance to engage on a more personal level with their hosts.

Certainly living in such close quarters for a fortnight provided ample opportunity to make friends, to share with one another what is happening in different parts of China and in UK, and to understand a bit more about

me the value of other cultures and what we can learn from them. For me the best part of the visit was a puppet workshop we attended with other young Christians. We Chinese love telling stories but have little resources to share the Bible with children. We have puppets in China but

**'God revealed His faithfulness and taught me the value of other cultures'**



I had never thought of using them in a church setting before. Since getting home I have given two workshops to others in our youth programme and we have started our own small group. Now some of us are writing short plays and songs to use with the children in church. We only have one puppet and so we have asked some of the older ladies in church if they can help us making some more. As a Catholic I had



never spent much time with Protestant brothers and sisters but the time in UK was a great time to share our faith and to encourage one another. Zhang Yu [one of the Protestants on the visit] and I share a great love for music. Although we live at different ends of China we have been in touch regularly sharing new songs with one another. We are both hoping to use some of the new songs we have taught one another in our Christmas services. Sharing in this way has been fun!"

Zhao Duo, also met with Caroline in his hometown of Shenyang, in the north-east of China. He had the following to say "More than anything

do some environmental projects in China, similar to those we saw in London. Shenyang is a very polluted city and I used to think that environmental issues were something the government was responsible for. In fact, environmental issues are an area that Christians in China are just becoming aware of. Before seeing the project I did not think that I could make a difference. Now I see that I can, and that if the young people from our church all start to do their bit then maybe others will follow."

The visit to UK was the first such visit for a number of years. In 2004 a youth visit went from UK to China and another one is planned for summer 2007. Interested parties should contact GMN for more details.

The visit of the Chinese young people was supported by the **Edinburgh Centenary Mission Fund**. This fund, administered by GMN, was set up to mark the centenary of the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference and is designed to support projects internationally, through recognized agencies, and in the Four Nations. The criteria for the fund are:

- Significant and creative work that furthers the cause of mission or education for mission
- The project or activity must involve ecumenical working
- Grants will be given for new or existing work that is being developed

Grants vary in size up to approximately £5000. Applications are invited and initial contact should be made to the GMN office. ●





Prof Piet Meiring

GMN members and supporters gathered in September to hear a lecture given by Prof Piet Meiring, Professor of Missiology at the University of Pretoria and a member of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) under the title ...

# 'Can swords really be hammered into ploughshares?'

## Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Here is a summary of his lecture

'Africa still is a dark continent, a continent struggling with seemingly insurmountable problems ... But light dances on the horizon.'

This was the central message Prof Meiring brought to the GMN gathering. A brilliant story teller, he told many moving stories of his experience of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and of the victims and perpetrators who came to it for justice or amnesty. He described a process where, 'tears flowed freely, but they were usually tears of healing.'

The TRC worked through three main committees – Human Rights Violations, Amnesty and Reparation and Rehabilitation. The Human Rights Violations Committee alone held 140 public hearings in all parts of South Africa and 27000 victims of gross human rights abuses were officially registered. The Amnesty Committee received applications from more than 7000 perpetrators from both sides of the struggle who needed amnesty. The TRC process was not universally accepted throughout South African society but for many it was a source of hope and healing.

Reflecting on what was learnt from the TRC process Prof Meiring came to five conclusions.

### Reconciliation needs a clear definition

It was important for the Commission to know what they were aiming for. There were disagreements about what reconciliation meant particularly among the lawyers and clergy.

### Reconciliation and truth go hand in hand

'Finding truth goes far beyond establishing historical and legal facts. It has to do with understanding, accepting accountability, justice, restoring and maintaining the fragile relationship between human beings' Prof Meiring reflected. It is not only about what happened but about the whole spectrum of human reactions and implications. He told of the ex-Minister of Police who, when he admitted responsibility for his role in the bombing of the headquarters of the South African Council of Churches said, 'When the final question was asked and when the legal team of the South African Council of Churches indicated its satisfaction ... my heart sang. I got a lump in my throat and I thanked God for his grace and mercy to me!'

Despite this process there are still many South Africans, both black and white, who suffer from the effects of the apartheid years.

### Reconciliation and justice are two sides of a coin

'Lasting reconciliation can only flourish in a society where justice is seen to be done.'

This is about immediate reparation but also about economic justice and equality in the new South Africa where opportunities are open to black as well as white. Reconciliation is a broad concept about the creation of a new society as much as it concerns individual acts.

### Reconciliation needs a confession as well as a willingness to forgive

Lasting reconciliation depends on the, 'capacity of perpetrators, individuals as well as perpetrator communities, to honestly, deeply, recognize and confess their guilt towards God and their fellow human beings, towards individual victims as well as victim communities – and to humbly ask for forgiveness. And it equally rests upon the magnanimity and grace of the victims to reach out to them, to extend forgiveness.'

### Reconciliation requires a firm commitment

Reconciliation is not for the faint-hearted whether victim, perpetrator or bridge-builder. The road to reconciliation is costly to all and where 'no

one can exist without partners.' Prof Meiring emphasised the African gift to all communities of the concept of *ubuntu* – 'a human being is a human being because of other human beings.'

Prof Meiring concluded that while the TRC had made great strides ahead in the reconciliation and healing process for South Africa there was still a long way to go. He said,

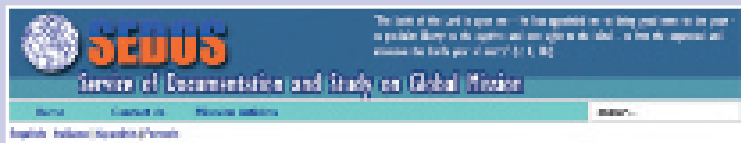
'I personally have come to the conclusion that we are, at best, only at the beginning of things. The journey has barely started. To publish a report is one thing, to break down centuries of misunderstanding and prejudice, quite another. Reconciliation can be attained ... but reconciliation can never be taken for granted. It can never be organised.'

A full text of Prof Meiring's lecture can be found on the CTBI web site [www.ctbi.org.uk](http://www.ctbi.org.uk)



1 Piet Meiring, *A Chronicle of the Truth Commission*, Vanderbijlpark Carpe Diem, 1999

# My Favourite Mission Web Site



[www.sedos.org](http://www.sedos.org)

Revd Philip Knights, a member of the GMN Co-ordinating Committee and formerly of the Catholic Agency for Evangelisation describes his favourite mission web site

This is not a bells and whistles cyber experience with high class graphics and dancing mouseover effects. Rather it is a quirky Aladdin's cave of articles and information in English,

Italian, French and Spanish on mission. Although based in Rome and intended to server Catholic Institutes of Consecrated Life active in mission, there is also some ecumenical input here.

However, its key value is input from all corners of the world with particularly fine contributions from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

SEDOS is an information service for missionary societies and congregations and for the study of mission. The web site makes available articles which have mostly appeared in its printed Bulletin or which have appeared in other mission journals.

What I really like is that it is a general forum for the world Church. This is not just UK Christians addressing the UK, nor Europeans addressing Europe, nor Africans addressing Africa. It is the world speaking to the world. It is a genuine crossroads of ideas in which the wide vision of the worldwide Church is articulated.



At a recent meeting the Middle East Forum heard Professor Norman Kember speak about his experiences in captivity in Iraq and his hopes for peace in the whole Middle East region. Here he talks to members of the Forum.

## Welcome to Flora Winfield

Among the first women ordained in the Church of England, the Revd Canon Flora Winfield has worked in parish ministry, university chaplaincy and teaching and as an Ecumenical Officer at County and National levels. She now serves as the Secretary for International Relations at CTBI and is also a Special Advisor to the

Secretary General of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and works with the St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. The author of a number of books and articles on reconciliation and dialogue, she is a Canon Emeritus of Winchester Cathedral.

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**www.rethinkingmission.org**

**www.rethinkingmission.org** is a web site also worth a good look. An e-journal mission resource it is the creation of USPG, the Methodist Church of Britain and the Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies (SOCMS). The Editor is Clare Amos who is Director of Theological Studies for the Anglican Communion and a theological consultant for USPG.