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As Christianity Grows Rapidly in China, IM Missionaries Emerson and Ivy Wu Prepare for a New Global Opportunity



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The church in China is growing dramatically. Six new churches are started each day. In recent years, 400,000 to 500,000 Christians have been baptized annually. According to a recent survey, more than 60,000 registered churches and 38 million baptized members are thriving in China today.

In this emerging Christian context, Emerson and Ivy Wu, International Ministries (IM) missionaries who hail from Columbus, Ohio, have been playing a significant role.

As the Rev. Dr. Benjamin Chan, IM area director for South and East Asia, explains, "There is a great need for all levels and types of training for Chinese Christians with the skills and energy the Wus are providing. With more than 200 years of global mission experience, IM and our global servants like the Wus are uniquely qualified to walk alongside Chinese Christians in this fast-expanding movement."

Ivy explains she has been given the gifts of evangelism and pastoral care and Emerson has skills in administration and management. "God has given us these complementary gifts so that we can work together as a team to help build the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10)," she says.

The Wus have served in Asia since 2013. Their first assignment was to the Macau Bible Institute, where Emerson Wu played a key administrative role in relocating the Institute to a new campus and where Ivy, an ordained American Baptist pastor, taught, preached and engaged in working with youth. The Wus, conversant in Chinese and having a passion for the Bible, began in January 2016 to serve alongside Chinese Christians in Mainland China and Hong Kong.

Now, building on their experiences in China and in their former church and campus ministries in Ohio, the Wus are preparing to embark on a new assignment as the directors of Global Chinese Mission for IM. This role will expand their service to Taiwan and Singapore, the Pacific Rim, Vancouver, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Toronto and New York. Their mission is to create a network platform to enhance strategic mission partnership.

"The Chinese churches in these places have expanded their ministries beyond their own borders to encompass a global vision for mission," says Chan. "They are already sending pastors and missionaries to the U.S. and many other countries."

"We are excited about the new work ahead and believe that by working together in this expanded way God will use us in a way that glorifies God's name," the Wus say.

The remarkable growth of the Christian church in China has come about since the Protestant church began to restore its activities there in 1976 after the 10-year Cultural Revolution, a devastating time when millions of people suffered from violent political persecution and all churches closed down.

The China Christian Council was established in 1980 to assist in the reopening of churches as tens of thousands of believers began flocking to worship services for the first time in a decade to listen to the Word of God and enjoy fellowship in Christ.

However, while a person can decide to become a church member one day and be sitting in the pews the next, it is not so simple to become a pastor. As a result, the growth of church membership has far outpaced the increase in church leadership. Despite the efforts to train pastors and Christian workers in China's 22 established seminaries and Bible schools, on average a pastor serves 700 members.

There is a particular need for leaders equipped to serve well-educated young adults. In a recent survey by the China Christian Council, church attendance by individuals in the 18-44 age bracket has increased from 20 percent of the worship population in 2008 to 50 percent today. Church members with a college education comprised 27 percent in 2008, compared to 42 percent today.

This changing demographic has brought with it “an important change of the church’s ministries,” Chan says. “In the past, churches focused on Sunday worship services, but they are now paying equal attention to weekday activities, especially Bible study and discipleship training. Churches have begun to start social ministries, bringing God’s love and blessings to their communities.”

Emerson and Ivy are optimistic about the future of the church in China. “Today, Chinese congregations and seminaries are blessed with great human and financial resources, and they have begun pooling these resources to serve around the world,” they say. “The vision is to double capacity for ministry at home in China and abroad. For us, the key is partnership.”

Emerson and Ivy glean much inspiration for their new challenge from Philippians 1:2-6, in which the Apostle Paul expresses his gratefulness for their “partnership in the gospel” and his confidence that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

IM has a close work relationship with the Amity Foundation in China. This organization was founded in 1985 to extend Christian love throughout Chinese society through disaster relief and social services. Today, the Amity Foundation has expanded its service to the entire country and set up offices in Ethiopia and Geneva.

An arm of the foundation, the Amity Printing Co., began providing affordable Bibles to believers under a global cooperative Christian effort. It has become the world’s largest Bible printing organization. Since 1986, Amity Printing Co. has produced 84 million Bibles for China and other countries and has provided four million Bibles annually to the church in China during recent years.

The Wus are members of Karl Road Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio. They have been married for 36 years and are grateful to have developed the kind of experience portfolio that enables them to embrace this new opportunity.

Currently on home assignment in the U.S. and are preparing for their new global networking role in the months ahead, the Wus are excited to speak about this new ministry in American Baptist churches around the U.S. and beyond.

“We ask that you pray for us and the people we meet and serve,” say Emerson and Ivy. “Prayer and support are so crucial for what we all are trying to accomplish together.”

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