PREACHING IN CHINA TO 4,000+ . . . AND TO JUST ONE

By Kathy Call

Hangzhou, China: The above photo of Chong-yi Church, conspicuously located near the new city center, captures just a wee bit of the sanctuary’s vastness and grandeur.

Built in 2005 in a rounded shape with a 110 degree view of worshipers from the pulpit, this sanctuary and its large balcony accommodate 5,000 people for one service. This is now China’s largest church building.

Flanking the pulpit hang two huge video monitors, allowing all to see the preacher up-close-and-personal. Television cameras record each service so that anyone can purchase a VCD of the sermon on the following Sunday.

Here, there is such a sense of awe! The lofty chancel rising above the blue-robed choir hides its lights in up-swept curved white metal, giving the effect of angel wings. Large platform lights cast the illusion of white doves ascending toward heaven. All together they create an unmistakable sense of “hush” at all times.

Pulpit prayers are fervent and exciting. No mere ritual, they reveal a deep conversation with their God who is very much “above,” but also very nearby each of them.

My sermon encourages “Deep Faith and Trust in Jesus,” the story of Jesus’ frightened disciples on the stormy Sea of Galilee -- a story revealing our own fears and lack of trust as modern disciples. Attention is rapt.

After the sermon, we sing “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms.” Its comforting words, “safe and secure from all alarms,” remind us that we, too, have little to fear when we know with certainty that God our Savior is “with us.”

This day, about 4,000 or a bit more are in attendance, making this church congregation roughly the same size as that in Huai’an. When the pastor asked first-timers to stand, I notice a couple dozen.

But, as I was soon to discover, the large numbers really don’t count. What counts is how God touches each heart, whether old-time Christian or new.

As the service ends in the glorious sanctuary, I decide to explore the church’s equally impressive four-story Sunday School/Administration building next door with its small Chapel (used this day for Baptism class.)

Sunday school is just concluding, with the din and bustle substantial. Little children burst forth from classrooms, smiling and laughing like happy kids anywhere. They excitedly show their morning’s handiwork to arriving parents. (China’s children always touch me with their joy and beauty!)

Now outside the pastor’s office, I smile at a man standing alone, waiting. As our eyes meet, he steps forward to meet me.

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“I have something to tell you,” he begins in English, piquing my curiosity. Soon his tale of faith comes tumbling out:

For 30 years I have thought about becoming a Christian. This morning I AM ONE!

He beams. And I grow, as Alice observes in Wonderland, “curiouser and curiouser.” He quickly recounts to me his excitingly fresh story:

I listened to your sermon, and then I heard the hymn we sang afterward, “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms.” Suddenly I felt something happening deep inside me. I knew that I had made my decision at last. Now I know that I, too, am a Christian. I can feel it! I can feel it! (He shakes his head in total amazement!)

“I can see your choice written on your beaming face,” I affirm him, sharing his abundant joy.

I suggest to him that he tell his story to Pastor Gu so that he can also rejoice with him and help further his newfound faith in Jesus Christ.

“That’s why I am waiting here!” he responds

What a lovely reminder that -- however the other dear “99 sheep” react on a Sunday morning -- the task of the pastor/preacher is always to call the one little lost lamb to back to the Shepherd’s fold . . . and to his “Everlasting Arms.”
Young Pastor Joseph Gu oozes with fervent faith, blessed with an ever-present twinkle in his eye and a far-sighted vision for his Bible-believing congregation.

Beside the two Sunday services, there is a special Tuesday Evening Young People’s Church service (ages 18-35 roughly.) While I was there, an energetic and articulate church Elder gave an enthusiastic challenge to the gathered 1,800-2,000 people on marriage.

Then there’s a youth fellowship, a prayer meeting, various Bible studies and many outreach activities. Several college students from here are now studying for fulltime ministry.

At the same time the Congregation was building their huge church and equally huge Christian Education Building, they still managed to construct a large Elder Hostel on the edge of town that is now overflowing with the elderly who have nowhere else to live as they age past 70.

I happen to glance in one room and notice a group of residents joined in prayer. The Church holds a worship service here each week and finds many ways to help meet their physical and spiritual needs.

Recently this Church has acquired a large plot of land facing the first Elder Hostel where they will construct another home for many other older people who are presently all alone and needing help.

We will be supporting this Hangzhou Christian Elder Hostel with any gifts to China Connection that you designate for this special, much-needed outreach.
LOVING THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM LEPROUS WOUNDS
The Latest News on Several Programs

Huaiyin Leprosy Village: Work progresses well on the projects we supported with our first $11,000. Complete are the new communal kitchen and brand new bathroom to replace the crumbling latrine down the path. Roofs on the patients’ buildings no longer leak. They are shoring up doors and windows to thwart unwelcome wind and rain.

Soon they will complete the painting and pour a concrete path from the buildings to the new kitchen and bath. We have asked the China Christian Council for several much-needed wheel chairs for those who can’t walk. And we have purchased for all 28 their first health care insurance.

April 2007 Doctor Training Course: Many of those who have had their leprosy cured still suffer from the terrible results. They continue to endure ulcers that do not heal, especially on their feet. Even with treatment, correcting these lingering problems is very difficult.

So we have worked with the Centers for Disease Control at the provincial, county and district levels to correct this.

In April, Dr. Zhang from Nanjing and Dr. Dou from Jiangyan taught a special course for 18 doctors in the Chouzhou and Huai’an area. The three-day sessions focus on teaching them to recognize, prevent, and treat leprous conditions. This theoretical teaching is then combined with on-site supervised surgeries on 11 people suffering from the legacy of leprosy in Chuzhou Leprosy Village.

Dr. Zhang admits that the trainees have to overcome the difficult sight of ulcerated wounds and to endure the stench as they clean and treat the leprous sites.

As a bonus, when the doctor trainees return to their villages, they find several active new cases of leprosy which they are now treating. Several brave farmers with ulcers on the bottom of their feet choose to endure their severe pain until after the planting season before their treatment.

Meanwhile back at the Chouzhou Hospital, doctors have set aside a cadre of doctors and nurses specifically for those who have problems from leprosy. As a result of this course, the doctors here have now treated 54 patients. They show me the meticulous notes made by the doctors, together with a progressive series of photographs -- before surgery and at two subsequent visits. When the year’s follow-up on these patients is complete, these 54 records will be submitted to Amity, our China-partner.

Can you image it? All of these wonderful results come from a grant of merely $4,000!

Visiting Chuzhou and Yangzhou Leprosy Villages: With CDC officials, my Amity colleagues and I press on to see the situation with the many leprosy victims living in these two other isolated villages.

What impresses me most is that I meet one man (photo: top of next page), now recovered from leprosy, who is well enough to care for others not so fortunate with their legacy of leprosy! This reminds me of the experience of US missionaries in Korea years ago who trained healed lepers to be “doctors” traveling from village to village to diagnose and treat other patients. Alas, most of China’s leprosy survivors lack the ability to walk or use their hands well enough to help in this same way.

Chuzhou Leprosy Village, although very poor, seems to be doing fairly well. Except! When rains or floods come, the road from this Leprosy Village to town becomes impassable for periods of time so that they can’t get needed food for the patients. Although building a small road is not usually a high priority for me, I can’t forget this very special need.

As you look at the helpless man (bottom, next page) without a nose . . . or hands . . . or lower legs, you can see why I am more sympathetic with this particular request.

We reach Yangzhou Leprosy Village by way of a barge across China’s Grand Canal. Once on the island, we walk nearly a mile to reach the large community.
Yangzhou’s old brick buildings need repair. But here there is a wonderful sense of joy where one might not expect any joy – as in Chuzhou. In fact, in all three Leprosy Villages, I can think of only two people who evidence despair. In Yangzhou, I meet one cheery man who has lived there for 41 years. He tells me, “They treat me very well. I have no complaints!”

What a joy it is to work with these dear people!

Our Fall’s Training Program on Leprosy: Thanks to a $20,000 grant from Presbyterian (PCUSA) Women’s “Thank Offering (including Health Ministries),” we are sponsoring another doctor’s training program in China’s interior Henan Province where Amity has worked for some time. This leprosy training will be extensive.

Doctors from two large counties where there is a substantial problem with leprosy will be trained to recognize and treat people suffering from the disease. Much like the program in northern Jiangsu, doctors will receive both theory and practice, with on-site supervised surgery on leprosy patients. More later about this program!

Training doctors will be combined with mass education via large posters in the two counties, teaching villagers to observe their own skin problems and take them to the local doctor for diagnosis and treatment. We believe that this two-pronged approach should prove very beneficial. We want to help stem the tide of new leprosy cases as well as continuing to treat the long-time effects in patients who have previously suffered from this disease.

We thank one and all who are helping with this large problem! You who have health problems of your own will understand just how difficult life with leprosy can be. We pray for your health, even as we seek to work with the needy in China!
Olympic 2008 News:

(1) “Is it Safe to Drink the Water at the 2008 Olympics?”
(May 10, 2007, China Daily). Athletes and visitors to the Beijing Olympics’ central area will be able to access safe drinking water straight from the tap, instead of having to rely on bottled supplies, promises Bi Xiaogang, vice-director of the Beijing Water Authority. “Facilities to provide safe drinking water within a 2.91-sq-km. area, encompassing the Bird’s Nest and the Olympic Green, will be completed in the first half of 2008,” Bi said. In addition, the department is working to upgrade its 2,000-plus water supply facilities across the city to provide safe tap water for all Beijing residents.”

(2) “Where’s All the Beijing Traffic?” Beijing will ban one million cars from streets for the duration of the Olympic Games, reducing by one third the normal heavy flow. During the games, free bus service will be available for athletes, spectators, game-volunteers and workers.

(3) “What’s This?” Well in advance of the Olympic Games, China offers Beijing restaurants 1,000 less “Chinglish” menu translations. Example: “Sliver Crap” now will be translated (more edibly and much more correctly), as “Silver Carp.”

(4) “How Do I Get There?” United Airlines begins a non-stop flight between Washington D.C. and Beijing. The new Boeing B-747-400 will bear the U. S. Olympic Committee logo honoring Boeing’s support of the U. S. Olympic Team.

(5) “How Much is This?” China is now establishing a credit card business with Bank of America, a joint venture. One assumes that this move will help China’s merchants with credit card charges by Americans at the 2008 Games.

China’s Hot Water “Turning Green:” [I’ve playfully led you a bit astray, but please continue!] According to the Los Angeles Times, a whopping 62 percent of China’s hot water is now generated by solar energy, compared with only two percent in the USA. [Let us “go and do likewise.”]

What Modern Chinese Students Value

In May, I received this letter from a dear friend, Liu Ruomin, teacher of New Testament at Nanjing Seminary.

“Dear Kathy,

Greetings from Nanjing! One thing I want to ask for is your prayer.

I am working as the advisor of 10 students of Nanjing Seminary who are student ministers here in Hexi Church in Nanjing. Hexi Church is a new church established last year. This beautiful church building has 800 seats. Since 10 students and I have been working here, we started three new programs in the church: a prayer meeting, pastoral counseling, and children’s Sunday school. We may soon start a youth fellowship for college-age young people.

We started with only eight children attending Sunday school, but now there are 40-50 each Sunday. They are from 5 to 14 years old.

It is so hot in Nanjing during the summer. It is not easy for adults to stay in small rooms for two hours without air-conditioning in the summer. So, it is more difficult for the kids to stay in a small room for about two hours for Sunday school. If somebody may offer 6,000 RMB ($750) to the church, the church may have two air-conditioner machines for the children’s Sunday school.

If I offer any burden to you, please forgive me in the name of our Lord, Jesus! In His love, Ruomin”

We immediately sent $750 for two built-in air conditioners for Hexi Church. And when I visited there in June, I found two other rooms so hot that I authorized $750 more to solve the problem. What a joy it is to help these children learn more about Christ ... and to encourage the pastor trainees from Nanjing Seminary at the same time!