

Underground Church Ministry

Keeping it secure

As we work in China, one of our main priorities is to keep the Chinese Christians safe from the authorities. Conducting training sessions with pastors, meeting with house churches and supplying religious materials is illegal and can endanger the believers. The Chinese government does not want any foreign influence, so it is our presence with the believers that bring them the greatest risk.

In 16 years of ministry, we have been fortunate and successful at keeping the work hidden and the churches safe. During that time, we have been followed, questioned and secretly photographed by police. We have been detained for hours at a time having all our materials confiscated. **At the Holy Spirit's prompting we have canceled meetings and made hasty departures from cities.** We limit our time in any given city to no more than four days. In some places we stay for only a few hours.



A secret meeting of the house church. Notice the door to the meeting room is soundproofed for security purposes.

One morning we were awakened by a dozen policemen and religious bureau officials who barged into our bedroom. As we were confronted, a local television crew was there to film the entire event. It was 2008 and security was tight leading up to the Olympic games. They arrived pretty "gung-ho" and prepared for resistance with a few of the policemen handling us a bit roughly.

Our evangelism materials were taken and they made an attempt to analyze the contents of my laptop. **We were detained and interrogated for 6 hours during which time we befriended the police sharing our testimony and the gospel with them.** In the end, when they realized we posed no threat, their demeanor changed. They emphasized that we were welcome to visit China anytime as they escorted from the area and put on the next train out of town. It was important for them to keep a good face on the government's handling of westerners, especially before the games.



In another encounter we were pulled out of bed three times in the middle of the night by the local police. We had shown the Jesus film to 200 people that evening on the main street and preached till late in the night and the authorities were figuring out what to do with us. The film and evangelism literature were confiscated; we were interrogated and made to sign certain papers admitting our crime. That night, we learned that one of our translators was using an illegal ID card and would be arrested if it was discovered. **While some of the team ran interference with the police in the hotel lobby we snuck the translator out of the building to flee down river. We made our get-away early the next morning before the police returned.**

But in recent days we see the attitude of the government changing. Authorities recognize the distinction between the cults and true Christianity and there is much more tolerance for the house church movement. A recent report delivered to the Chinese government by a secular social researcher was very positive regarding Christianity. It noted that while the government has persecuted Christians for many years, **Christianity has never posed a violent threat to society as other religions had.**




Although recent revolts in the Middle East nations have increased pressure on illegal gatherings, many church groups are experiencing a greater measure of freedom from persecution.



An Anxious Moment

On one occasion, we were meeting with 80 young church workers and evangelists in a large party room at a public tea house. The workers arrived early in the morning for all-day sessions. In the middle of the afternoon there was a firm knock on the door. The knock was suspicious because it came at an inappropriate time. **It instantly brought the meeting to a dead halt and filled the room with nervous tension.**

As one of the workers went to the door, the leader of the meeting jumped to his feet beside me and began leading the group in singing the alphabet song; “  A, B, C, D, E, F, G... ” **His idea was to give the appearance to possible policemen that the foreigners were just giving English lessons** (an acceptable purpose for a meeting with foreigners).

All of us anxiously eyed the door as it opened, only to reveal a familiar face. It was one of the young men who had to miss the morning sessions due to his work schedule! **As he entered the room everyone breathed a great sigh of relief and spontaneously broke into laughter over the clever singing cover up.** The young man did not understand why everyone was seemingly laughing at him. The puzzled look on his face added to the comedy and took the laughter to an uncontrollable level. It took us a while that afternoon to settle down our giggling and get back to the business at hand.

ITINERARY

August 14 Christian Covenant Church
Albany, Georgia

August 28 Resurrection Life Church
Ionia, Michigan

Dear friends,

*All joking aside, (see picture below) security is a serious issue for our ministry in China, but it is not the westerners that are in danger. **It is the Chinese believers that meet with us that put themselves at risk.** They can be fined or imprisoned depending on the seriousness of the offense. For their sake we are careful and many times more concerned with our activities than the Chinese believers.*

*It speaks volumes to us that the Chinese take such risks to be taught the Word of God. **Oh, that believers in the West had as much hunger for the Word as they do!***



*Our thanks go to those who pray for our ministry on a regular basis. **We count our success and security a result of your prayers.***

*Please take this newsletter as a reminder to keep praying for us and our co-workers in China. **May the Lord keep us hidden and keep the work fruitful.***

Keeping it safe!

Brother Bill