
Cross Cultural Discipling Mission

Benjamin & Karen Rees

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IF YOU RECEIVED THIS VIA E-MAIL: We value your prayers, but we also value your good will. If anyone who receives this would rather not receive it in future, please let us know and we will remove your address from our list.

IF YOU READ THIS ON THE INTERNET and would like to receive this letter regularly (roughly once a month), please send your request to <reesmission@gmail.com> and we will add you to the mailing list.

Began on 21 August 2008. Finished and began sending on 21 August.

Hot, hazy and overcast; typhoon approaching; heavy rain and strong winds predicted for the next two days. Temperature, 32°C (90°F). Relative humidity, 64%. Air pollution index, (general) 50-80, (roadside) 70-90.

SUGGESTED PRAYER POINTS FOR THE OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC GAMES

Last month a church in the U.S. wrote to ask us for suggestions of what to pray for in connection to the Beijing Olympics. Some of you may have similar questions. I had hoped to send the information before the Games began, but was prevented by several other deadlines that all came due this couple of weeks. Now the main games will be over in a couple of days – perhaps even before some of you read this. However, most of the same concerns hold true for the Paralympic Games, which will take place in September, and many will still remain long after both sets of games are over.

(By the way, although this year's Olympic and Paralympic games are officially the “Beijing” games, the sailing contests are being held in the coastal city of Qingdao, and all equestrian events are taking place in Hong Kong.)

Some background: Different Kinds of Churches in China

Churches in China can be divided into **four categories**. First, there is the distinction between **non-Catholic** and **Catholic**. Then each of these is divided between “**official**” and “**unofficial**” churches. The non-Catholic official churches are sometimes called “Three-Self” churches. Official churches are recognised and even subsidised by the Chinese government, but they also endure a certain degree of government control that varies with time and with the region. Those churches that will not accept government supervision, and those Catholic churches that still accept the Pope's authority, are known variously as house churches, unofficial churches, unregistered churches, underground churches, etc.

The official, government-recognised churches have actually benefitted from the Olympics. Chinese officials want the outside world to get a good impression of the country, and they know many who visit will be Christians, so they are giving money to the official churches for new buildings, renovation of existing ones, and other visible needs. U.S. President Bush visited one of these when he was in Beijing.

On the other hand, they also want everyone to think that China is peaceful, harmonious and united, so there has been a massive crackdown on dissidents of all kinds – and members of the unofficial churches are classified as dissidents by the government. Leaders of these churches have been expelled from Beijing and other areas foreigners are expected to visit, meeting places have been closed, and believers harassed in various ways.

* Pray for the leaders and members of these unofficial churches, that God will give them strength and courage in this time of trial.

* A specific house church you might pray for is one that some friends of ours have been helping, near the border with Hong Kong. Even well before the Olympics, they were ordered to close, but so far they have continued to meet. Pray for wisdom for the leaders, and that the congregation may somehow find a way to continue.

Some background: "Missionaries" in China

The e-mail we received asked specifically for information about "missionaries" in China that they could pray for. The only "missionaries", as such, that I know about in China are those in the "Special Administrative Regions" of Hong Kong and Macao. "Missionaries", as such, are not allowed in the Mainland. **Christian workers in China fall into a number of categories.**

Among the Chinese themselves, I think the **ministers of the official churches** are subsidised by the government. **Leaders of the underground churches** mostly work at other jobs and do church work in their spare time.

Foreigners who try to help with Christian work in China include the following:

The official, government-recognised churches do invite some "**foreign experts**" to do specific things, such as taking part in official functions, helping in Christian-related universities or hospitals, etc. Some feel this gives them a "foot in the door" and may open the way to broader opportunities in the future; others are skeptical that it does much real good.

Some western Christians serve as "**tent-makers.**" Many western Christians teach English in schools in the Mainland. There are also Christian business people involved with businesses in China. Many use this as an opportunity to witness for Christ, although how openly they can do this varies considerably from region to region, organisation to organisation, and individual to individual.

There are many **foreign Christians based in other territories** (a great many of them in Hong Kong) who go in and out of China, for all kinds of ostensible reasons (as tourists, business people, etc.) who help in all kinds of ways -- by taking Christian literature with them, by teaching in some of the house churches, and even, sometimes, by teaching unofficially in some of the "official" churches.

Finally, there are **casual visitors** – tourists, business people, athletes, musicians, etc. – who only visit briefly, but try to carry in literature or to witness to those with whom they come in contact.

One thing affecting most western visitors right now is that China has drastically reduced the number of visas being granted for visits to China, and has increased the fees greatly. I don't know if the English teachers have been affected, but I personally know both business people and church workers (in Hong Kong) who have had to drastically curtail the number of visits they make to the Mainland because of the curbs on visas.

* Pray for all the Olympic athletes from other countries who are Christians, that while they are in China they will have opportunities to share their faith and will use these opportunities.

* Pray for the visa situation to get back to normal quickly after the Olympics so that Christians on the outside who travel in and out of China to help the churches there can continue doing this as before.

Finally

* Pray that terrorism will not be a problem during the Olympics and Paralympics. Not only could many innocent people be hurt, but the Chinese officials could use terrorist incidents as an excuse for further crackdowns. Although Hong Kong is immune from most of the other problems I have mentioned, some fear there could be terrorist incidents here too.

THE END OF A LONG TRADITION?

I grew up reading Sunday School papers published by Standard Publishing and David C. Cook: *Junior Life*, *Straight*, *Sunday Pix*, *The Lookout*, and eventually the *Christian Standard*. Even though I mainly grew up in other countries (South Africa and then Hong Kong), and the cost of receiving the papers straight from the publishers would have been prohibitive, various churches collected their leftovers and periodically sent bundles to us at the cheap printed matter rates. My parents would then give them out in church a year after the cover date – both to give time for the papers to arrive and so that the seasonal articles would line up with the season.

Many other missionaries around the world who served in countries where English is spoken did similar things. I remember on one visit to the Philippines being shown a large room in Manila that served as a distribution point where papers sent there were sorted and then sent on to various churches. Many of our church members were already familiar with Standard publications before they came here.

We continued the tradition in our work here, especially the work with the Filipino congregation. Several of you who receive this letter have participated. Last year, however, the U.S. Postal Service drastically revised its rates – and has probably issued the death warrant for this tradition. Basically, all surface rates have been abolished. It would still be possible to send the papers by air, but the cost is so high I doubt if it is good stewardship to do so. We have tried to find some cheaper way for people to send the papers, but so far have not been successful.

If someone does know of a cheaper way to send the papers, we, our church, and probably many other missionaries around the world would appreciate knowing about it. If not, then when our present supply is exhausted (around the end of the year, thanks to a couple of our sources who sent one last batch after the rates went up), this may be the end of a tradition that blessed many while it lasted.

* Please pray that if there is some affordable way to get the papers over here, we will find out about it soon.

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