

China Asks Church for Help With Social Care

The Chinese government has welcomed the role of the church in providing social care in the country.

China's leaders have been holding a meeting this week in Beijing to discuss the economic and political agenda for the next decade, in which it seems the church will play a vital role.

"The government welcomes the support of the church," said government official Wang Xinhua at a recent Shanghai conference on the role of Christianity in China, sponsored by the Bible Society. "We lack the resources to meet all the needs that we face, so we need religious organizations in order to do so."

Wang said the "beliefs" and "love" of the church were an "advantage" to society.

He added that China's charitable sector was facing "a crisis of confidence" due to corruption scandals, saying the church was a less corrupt partner to the government.

Leading academic professor Choong Chee Pang told those at the conference, "Many social problems have their root causes in social injustice, the abuse of power, inequality, the widening gap between the rich and the poor due to mismanagement of the resources, corruption and bribery."

In an outspoken move, the professor said that as the church took up the challenge of providing social care across China, particularly among the elderly and poor, it must not lose its prophetic role.

"The church needs to be a prophet and a servant," he said.

“This is not a problem in a free or democratic society, but in other societies it can be a sensitive issue. It is hard for the Chinese church to play the role of a prophet especially with a critical voice.”

Though it is the world's second biggest economy, China is facing a social care crisis, particularly in caring for an increasingly elderly population.

According to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, by 2040 nearly 20 percent of China's rural population will be aged over 65.

At the conference, the government called on the church to provide care for the elderly, as well as offer drug prevention and rehabilitation and to work with those living with HIV.

Sixty-four-year-old Pu Ti Hua has already benefited from the social care provided by China's churches. During the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, she and her husband were made homeless. They joined around 200 people who sought sanctuary in the local church in the town of Yanting Yunxi.

“There's no Christianity or churches where we lived,” says Ti Hua. “But for the first time I felt the warmth of these people and their love. I had been totally shaken, but I found peace here. I lost everything: my home and all my belongings. It was very difficult. I felt terrible. I was emptied out. I had nothing. But the church helped me get over it.”

Today Ti Hua and her husband Song Cheng live in two rooms above the church. Here they return the kindness done to them by cooking food for church members three days a week.