
AN EIGHT-DAY PILGRIMAGE TO SHANDONG PROVINCE

The Revd Dr Philip Wickeri, The Revd Wu Wai Ho, Adam Mok and 17 other pilgrims visited Shandong Province from 10th to 18th May 2019. *In Touch* invited one of the pilgrims, Faye Yee, to share her reflections on the eight-day pilgrimage.

PHOTOS BY / FAYE YEE & S Y LI



Within the eight days visiting some of the churches under the Shandong Provincial Council, I was completely overwhelmed by the extreme diversity of our Chinese Christians in this province and how they expressed their faith. Much visionary foresight has been invested in the planning, with great expectations for future generations to be benefited, and continue the ministry of the Word.

Our meeting with the Shandong Provincial Council Executive Board, led by the Revd Gao Ming, provided us with a broad insight into the different organisations already in operation. There is an immediate need to build a new seminary to train more pastors to serve the 1.5 million Christians in the province.

We attended the Sunday service at **Shandong Theological Seminary Church**. It was a charismatic emotional service celebrating Mother's Day. The service began with a continuous buzzing noise as the whole congregation offered individual prayers in unison. The students led the hymn singing, to the accompaniment of organ, guitars and drum. The congregation, mostly of elderly people with a small proportion of younger people, enjoyed the music. A sermon and intercessory prayers were offered. Flowers were distributed to all mothers in the congregation.

Our visit to the rural district of **Ping Yan** gave us an interesting view of a very basic grassroots church in operation. It is in the process of waiting for the authorities' approval to build a new modern church to accommodate their thousand-plus worshippers. Their dedicated and passionate lady pastor gave us a comprehensive and tearful account of her struggles to acquire the surrounding land from various organisations. At present, separate congregations of 200 worshippers attend Sunday worship in a number of adobe huts scattered in the district, sitting on long hard benches strapped with padded cushions. Their pastor also holds services in her home on Sunday evenings. There is a heavy reliance on volunteers who are enthusiastic and willing to take the responsibility to prepare the venue for services.

At the **Tai An Youth Road Church**, we were greeted by the lady pastor, who outlined the organisation of the church. The interior design of the church was plain and simple. It was a basic arched structure, with the word 'Emmanuel' in Chinese script decorating the east wall. In the sanctuary was the lectern on the left with the altar table setting against wall. We visited Tai On City Christian Centre nearby, a residential seminary where a short-term intensive course was held for volunteers.

After getting qualifications, the volunteers would return to their respective villages to teach local Christians.

Qing Street Church is an ultra-modern contemporary church. On arrival, we were directed to a modern canteen and served a buffet lunch. The church has a dedicated team of volunteers who work full-time, from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, to keep the church open. There is a double chapel which opens into an enormously tall and wide interior. The east wall is decorated with a brown wooden cross and on either side are variegated lengths of silver pipes reaching to the horizontal bar of the cross.

An overhead spotlight illuminates this sanctuary area. The west opens out into an extended paved area, overlooking a beautiful country park, with patches of trees surrounding an oblong waterway, equalling the size of a swimming pool in length and width.

Our final visit was to a German-designed church left behind from the German occupation. We were greeted by the lady pastor of **Qingdao Christian Church in Jiangsu Road**. This German Lutheran church was completed in 1908 in western medieval style. Today, its original stained glass windows have been replaced with floral decorations.





The red ceramic tiled roof houses a bell tower with a large mounted on three sides. The church was formerly called the Gospel Church, and later renamed the International Church, with a capacity of 1,000 people. Religious services began again in November 1980. This whole church site is under the protection of the Shandong Government historic relic department.

We received an unexpected invitation to visit St Michael's Catholic Church, another German-designed church in Gothic and Roman style. It was built between 1932 and 1934 and left behind from the occupation. It is in superb Germanic architectural style, with opulent interior decorations culminating in a magnificent pipe organ, occupying the whole width of the west end of the building. Individual side altars and confession cubicles with stained windows of St Gabriel and St Michael decorate the walls. Situated at the entrance is an altar dedicated to St Thérèse of Lisieux, the French Catholic

Discalced Carmelite nun widely venerated today. She is also popularly known as 'The Little Flower of Jesus'.

In conclusion, this pilgrimage opened my eyes to the tolerance and the freedom the present Chinese government has toward Christians in China, enabling them to practice their faith within the prescribed regulations of the CCC movement. Although separate denominations is not encouraged, the broad separation of Roman Catholics and Protestants are acceptable. I was most impressed by the enthusiasm and energy that the leaders of these Christian churches devoted to their calling and vocation. The population of church attendance has radically changed over the past ten years. Over 75% are elderly women worshippers, plus more middle-age worshippers and an increasing number of young people. With the planning, vision and foresight of the Shandong Provincial Council Executive Board, the future looks bright for Chinese Christians in this province.