

## **Baptist World Alliance**

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## **BWA team visits China**

Washington, DC (BWA) --The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and the China Christian Council (CCC) have reaffirmed the relationship between both bodies that began in the early 1980s.

In January, a BWA team led by President David Coffey visited the cities of Beijing, Nanjing, Hangzhou, and Shanghai in China as guests of the CCC, an umbrella organization for all Protestant churches in China.

Gao Feng, CCC President, expressed "pleasure at the strong ties of friendship with the BWA and hoped these could be built on in the years ahead."

BWA leaders have been visiting China as guests of the CCC since the early 1980s. CCC leaders have been attending the Baptist World Congress beginning in the 1980s, and are expected to be present at the 20th congress in Hawaii from July 28 to August 1, 2010.

Conducted as a "listen and learn" tour, Coffey and the BWA delegation were impressed with the level of Christian witness in China, and were "able to visit churches and speak openly with church leaders."

The BWA team visited the Amity Printing Company, which celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2010 and is one of the largest publishers of the Christian Bible in the world. The printing press produces approximately 1.5 million Bibles each month, in addition to other Christian literature and educational books for children. Amity has exported more than 20 million Bibles to more than 70 countries in 75 different languages.

Meetings were also held with the Amity Foundation, founded in 1985, and which promotes education, social services, health and rural development. The foundation has established clinics, educational training programs, foster care projects, HIV/AIDS education programs and rehabilitation facilities, among other programs.

The BWA team was keen to determine the state and status of unregistered churches in China. The CCC reported a figure of 16 million Christians in registered churches, but the BWA delegation had reports that there were an estimated 80 million Christians in the most populous country in the world, "which would take account of the reportedly large numbers of believers in unregistered churches."

"We specifically asked our hosts if we could meet with unregistered church leaders in order to verify these news reports but we were asked not to do so, and since we were guests of the CCC, we honored that request," Coffey said.

"We must have patience for the church in China," Coffey stated. "It is going in the right direction." Even though "it became evident to us that there is not yet full liberty for the church, totally free of state control, there is sufficient freedom for a vibrant spirit-filled church life to exist under the existing religious law, which is evolving all the time."

In addition to the CCC, the Amity Printing Company and the Amity Foundation, the delegation also had meetings with the Three Self Patriotic Movement which, along with the CCC, form the only state-sanctioned or registered Protestant Church in Mainland China; leaders and students at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary; officials at China's Foreign Affairs Department; and with the director general of the State Administration for Religious Affairs.

Other members of the delegation included Wood Ping Chu of Hong Kong, a BWA vice president and president of the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation; Douglas Inglis of the Baptist Union of Scotland and the Scottish Baptist College; and Blake Killingsworth, assistant to the president at Dallas Baptist University in Texas in the United States and a member of the BWA Emerging Leaders Network.