

# CARING FOR CHINA

March 2007

## A Year in China

*It is great to welcome Andrew, Lucy and their family back to the UK after a year teaching English in China. We hope to hear more from them and their 3 children, Thomas (12), William (10), and Eleanor (9) at the Longcroft China Day in July. Here Andrew and Lucy share about their experiences.*

We were based in the capital city of the province. An ancient city with a population of 6.5 million, quite small for a Chinese city, but with a very high density of universities (around 20), and being relatively undeveloped. Many like-minded organisations are based here because of the number of teaching opportunities and as a center for Chinese language learning.

Although living in China is very different to the UK, we all enjoyed it immensely. We very quickly felt at home, as the team in China looked after us and introduced us to Chinese lifestyle through a wide ranging four week orientation course which included sessions on Chinese culture, Chinese history, and of course sampling Chinese food. Our children were also treated to days out sight seeing with some of the team's ex-pat workers from some of the child centers that the organisation runs. We were part of an intake of ten, and we all quickly made good friends with our co-workers and the rest of the team.

### Life in the City

We found the Chinese very friendly, and the children especially got a lot of attention. At times, we did feel a little like a family of pandas at the zoo. Chinese people are quite curious, and so to see a family of Westerners with three children (China still has a single child policy in force) was something to stop and stare at or photograph. It did feel a bit odd to bargain for fruit at the market with a crowd of on-lookers, but we soon got used to it. Our children went to an international school where there were 60 pupils in total. The average class size was six, with children coming mainly from America and Korea. The children enjoyed mixing with people from other cultures and backgrounds. As we

were living on a university campus, the kids had quite a lot of freedom, and they were able to run around on the sports field and kick a football.

We also enjoyed some fun time socialising with other people from the team and went for meals, mostly Chinese, but every now and then, when we needed to taste Western food, we



would go to a very good Pizza restaurant (run by Christians) that had a good range of ice cream desserts. There was also a large German supermarket near us that sold a range of Western foods. Thomas and William (and Andrew) also enjoyed the live coverage of all the English premiership football matches and England internationals. David Beckham is very popular in China, and his picture was on advertisements everywhere - so we didn't feel so cut off from home.

### Teaching English

We were employed as English teachers at one of the Universities and we had a number of opportunities to talk about our faith with our students. Chinese people are interested in finding out about our beliefs, and when they know you are a Christian, they are keen to ask

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questions – given the opportunity. It was surprising to find how little people knew. For example, a lot of students didn't realise that Christmas was to celebrate Jesus' birth, let alone that it took place 2000 years ago. In the classroom, we were able to teach lessons on Christmas and Easter. We also were able to put on a nativity play with the kids to around 400 students, which seemed to make an impression. We also had 'free talks' with students, where they could ask any questions, and had the chance to find about a bit more about our faith. Andrew was fortunate enough to have two Christians in one of his classes, who encouraged some of the other students to enquire about his faith. It was a real privilege to be able to share the Gospel, and see these students begin to understand what God and Jesus have done for us all.



China is an amazing, vast, ancient country that is going through an incredible period of change. While the communist party still has a strong influence on society, traditional communist values are being discarded in favour of free market economics. Family values and the lack of a welfare state mean that children are obliged to look after their parents (and grand parents), but the single child policy means that this responsibility is not shared amongst siblings. The importance of education in society in order

to get a good job means that there is an incredible pressure to



perform from a very young age. Schoolchildren and university students work like Trojans to ensure they get the required results. However, the size of the population and the increasing number of students attending university means there is a lot of competition for jobs. In fact, a number of graduates leave university only to return to work in the paddy fields on their parents farms if there is no paid work. In the midst of these pressures and the whirlwind of changes that are taking place in China, the Christian message, and truths of the bible can provide real comfort to people in China, which is why the church in China is growing so quickly. We heard numbers of 1000 people a day coming to faith – although it is hard to substantiate those figures. However, the rapid growth does bring issues, in that 'young' Christians often have to take on a role of leadership, with little experience or training.

## **Step out in Faith!**

Looking back on our year in China, it was a life changing experience for us all. We met many special people who we continue to stay in contact with, including students. Andrew is continuing to learning Mandarin, and we hope to return to China at some point in the future. We would definitely encourage anyone thinking and praying about doing something similar to step out in faith and test his or her call.