



American-Chinese Multi-Faith Religious Exchange

September 5-14
Final Report



The Multi-Faith Delegation poses for a picture with Dr. Jeffrey Bader (center) following a forum at the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C.

From September 5 through September 14, 2008, a delegation of twelve Chinese religious leaders and government officials visited Atlanta, Georgia, and Washington, D.C. to meet with U.S. religious leaders, as well as leaders from business, government, and academia. The delegation was comprised of China's five major religions, namely Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Taoism. The Chinese delegation was led by the President of the China Christian Council, Gao Feng, and advised by the Deputy for the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), Wang Zuoan. In addition, the delegation included:

- Kan Baoping – General Secretary, China Christian Council
- Ding Changyun – Deputy President, China Taoist Association
- Jing Yin – Member of the Standing Committee, Buddhist Association of China
- Chen Shujie – Vice Secretary General, China Catholic Patriotic Association
- A Di Li Jiang – Deputy President, China Islamic Association
- Lin Manhong (official translator) – Professor, Nanjing Jinling Seminary
- Guo Wei – Director, Foreign Affairs Department, SARA
- Pei Yong – Vice Director, Fourth Department, SARA
- Wang Xiuling – Section Chief, Second Department, SARA
- Ding Xiaoshu – Staffer, Foreign Affairs Department, SARA

Goals of the Exchange

To increase bi-lateral understanding regarding the role of religion in China and the U.S.

To explore, from a multi-faith perspective, the contributions organized religion offers, and the challenges of religious faith in modern society, both in China and the U.S.

To discover new directions and opportunities for progress in the dialogue between China and the U.S. on the subject of religion.

Project Background

In June 2007, His Excellency, Ambassador Zhou Wenzhong of the People's Republic of China, and Dee Froeber, Minister to Internationals, Forest Hills Baptist Church, Raleigh, NC, discussed the American public's perception regarding the role of religion in China. Ambassador Zhou suggested that a bi-lateral exchange of religious delegations would have a positive impact on the American public's understanding of religion in China.

Ambassador Zhou subsequently arranged a meeting for Mr. Froeber in Beijing with SARA Deputy Administrator, Wang Zouan. Deputy Administrator Wang responded positively to the proposal for an exchange of religious leaders. A similar discussion was also held with Rev. Dr. Cao Sheng-jie, former President of the China Christian Council. Rev. Dr. Cao expressed interest in a multi-faith exchange. In January 2008, a proposal drafted by Mr. Froeber to bring a multi-faith religious delegation from China to the U.S. was accepted by SARA.

From February 25 – March 3, 2008, an advance planning delegation from China's State Administration for Religious Affairs visited venue sites in both Atlanta and Washington, negotiating the format, timing, and details for proposed events with American sponsors: Forest Hills Baptist Church (Raleigh, NC), the Cooperative Baptist

Fellowship (Atlanta, GA), and the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (Washington, D.C.).

From April 25 – May 1, 2008, a delegation of American sponsors traveled to China to finalize project details. Dee Froeber, Sandra Haskins, Al Haskins, and Jeff Wood represented Forest Hills. Ms. Grace Freeman represented the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Meetings were held at SARA headquarters in Beijing with Minister Ye Xiaowen, Director of SARA, as well as other SARA and Three Self Patriotic Movement leaders. While in Beijing, the delegation met with Buddhist, Catholic, Islamic, and Taoist religious leaders. The delegation also traveled to Shanghai to meet with the leadership of the China Christian Council, the United Work Front, and local SARA officials.

During the course of the Exchange, steering team members made eight trips to Washington, D.C. and three trips to Atlanta. These trips were designed to link together the various organizations and individuals who would participate in the multi-faith dialogue. Regular meetings were also held with the diplomatic staff of the Chinese Embassy, including a meeting with Ambassador Zhou Wenzhong.

The Team

A team of Forest Hills' members and others was organized to manage the project.

FOREST HILLS BAPTIST CHURCH

Project Steering Team

Mr. Dee Froeber
Associate Pastor to Internationals

Ms. Sandra Haskins
Project Director

Mr. Jeff Wood
Project Coordinator

Mr. Al Haskins
Finance Director

Dr. Larry Harper
Senior Pastor - Forest Hills

Ms. Glenda Reece
Forest Hills Intl Ministry Chair

Finance Team Members

Mr. A.G. Bullard
Mr. Duff Freeman
Mr. Duane Long
Mr. Tim Swinson
Mr. Harold West

Prayer Team Leaders

Ms. Phyllis Waggoner
Ms. Sharyn West

COOPERATIVE BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP

Dr. Rob Nash
Dr. Harry Rowland
Ms. Anita Snell
Mr. Lance Wallace
Ms. Grace Freeman
Ms. Bekah Hart

BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Dr. Brent Walker
Mr. Jeff Huett
Mr. James Gibson
Ms. Kathleen Lansing

Mr. Jeff Wood was hired as Project Coordinator. Mr. Wood has lived and studied in China, is fluent in Chinese, and brought invaluable skills and expertise to the project.

Events and Topics

Forest Hills commissioned seven individuals to attend events in Atlanta and Washington, D.C., and travel with the Chinese Delegation: Larry and Angela Harper, Al and Sandra Haskins, Preston and Glenda Reece, and Dee Froeber.



Reverend Monsignor Henry Gracz (center) Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Atlanta, Georgia, led a tour of the church's meal services for the hungry, and performed Mass for the delegation.

The delegation attended Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, GA, and was hosted after the service by President Jimmy Carter. President Carter discussed his historical involvement with China as well as issues important to China's current religious landscape.

The delegation toured the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, visited two Baptist churches, a Catholic Church, and an Islamic Masjid. Dialogue on the topic of American and Chinese religious life was held at each of these venues.

The Chief Diversity Officer for Coca-Cola, Steve Bucherati, hosted a luncheon for the delegation at Coca-Cola's headquarters and addressed the roles religion and diversity play in the company's corporate culture. Finally, delegation members were hosted by T.W. Lord and Associates to a meal and an Atlanta Braves baseball game at Turner Field.

Time Lines...

New York City September 4

The Chinese Delegation arrived in New York on September 4, and was hosted by the Chinese Consulate. Rabbi Arthur Schneier, President of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, also met with the delegates for breakfast.

Atlanta, GA September 5-9

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship hosted the delegation in Atlanta. While there, the delegation had dialogue with business, government, religious, and civic leaders. For the Business and Civic Forum at Mercer University, Georgia state legislators, local business leaders, and the delegation addressed how religion can contribute to a more stable, ethical society. A Multi-Faith Forum with Atlanta's interfaith leaders was held at Mercer University. This was organized by World Pilgrims and the McAfee School of Theology. Each faith tradition spoke on how religion can strengthen family relationships and provide a sense of purpose, belonging, and identity.



Small group discussions at the Atlanta Multi-Faith Forum provided delegation members an opportunity to discuss the role religion plays in family relationships.

Events and Topics

Washington, D.C.
September 9-14

In Washington, D.C., the delegation took part in a forum co-sponsored by the Faith and Politics Institute and the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington. Attendees included religious leaders from numerous faith backgrounds as well as members of Congress. Speakers addressed the subject of religious freedom in a secular society and how belief systems impact majority-minority relationships. Participants divided into discussion groups centered on the topic of religious freedom in China and the United States.

In addition, a Senate hearing sponsored by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a House forum sponsored by the Congressional China Working Group were held on Capitol Hill, allowing members of Congress and staff to dialogue with Chinese government and religious leaders about religious policy in China.

Private meetings were also held at the U.S. State Department with Under Secretary of State Paula Dobriansky and with Ambassador John Hanford of the Office of International Religious Freedom. Both venues afforded these U.S. government officials the opportunity to hear directly from China's religious leaders in regard to religious faith and practice in China.

A public forum was held at the Brookings Institution. White papers were presented on



Delegation members take part in round table discussions with members of Congress and Washington D.C. religious leaders during the Forum sponsored by the Faith and Politics Institute.

religious policy and on the state of Christianity and Islam in China. A panel of China's religious leaders and SARA's Deputy Administrator Wang Zuon fielded questions from the audience on religious practice and policy in China.



A Congressional forum sponsored by the China Working Group (Representatives Kirk & Larsen) explored issues relating to religious liberty in China.

While in Washington, the delegation visited two leading religious sites, Washington's National Cathedral and the Avatamsaka Vihara Buddhist Temple. Dean Samuel Loyd described to the delegation the unique role that the Cathedral plays in American religious life. The visit to the Buddhist Temple gave participants an opportunity

to see how one expression of Buddhism has been integrated into the fabric of American society. Finally, the religious leaders spent an afternoon touring the campus of Georgetown University and having dialogue with faculty and staff of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs.

Outcomes of the Exchange

General Outcomes

After substantial dialogue, U.S. and Chinese participants came away with a more developed understanding of religious freedom, practice, and diversity in both countries.

Members of Congress, State Department officials, and others were provided with a first-person perspective from China's religious leaders on religious policies, practices, and freedoms in China. Stereotypes of religion in China were displaced with first-hand information.

Substantive exchanges took place in multiple forums focused on historically significant Sino-U.S. religious issues:

- Chinese and American definitions of religious extremism
- China's policy on registration of religious bodies
- U.S. policy on religious freedom and separation of church and state
- Distribution and sale of religious literature in China
- Discussion of human rights

A strong desire was expressed by both Chinese and American participants for continued interfaith dialogue.

Organizational Linkages

Forest Hills Baptist Church, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (co-sponsors for the event) as well as other hosts and participants developed



Moderator David Lampton and host Frank Jannuzi listen as the Chinese delegates respond to questions asked during a Senate forum hosted by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

new friendships and relationships which have the potential for future mutual cooperation and paths to new understandings with China's religious entities.

Spiritual and Social Outcomes

During the fifteen month course of this project, people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds have had the opportunity to work together in cooperation and to learn from each other.

- This diversity has included atheists, theists of multiple faiths, individuals from a broad socio-economic spectrum, and individuals/groups representing multiple political perspectives.
- Issues of faith, religion-in-society, and politics were shared in an interfaith setting leading to increased understanding among participants who hold very diverse views.

Potential Future Projects

A number of discussions regarding future projects as a result of this exchange are underway.

- American religious leaders' delegation to China in 2009
- Bi-lateral delegations focusing on specific areas of religious interest
- Mutual cooperation in theological training for Chinese pastors
- Congressional delegations to China for dialogue with religious leaders and government officials
- Bilateral faith-to-faith religious exchanges



Delegation participants join members from Second Ponce De Leon Baptist Church in prayer before eating.

Conclusion...Looking Forward

Forest Hills has a legacy of involvement with China going back for decades. The American Chinese Multi-Faith Religious Exchange was one more step in the fulfillment of this legacy. Since 1995, Forest Hills has hosted a Chinese language school for children at the language facility every Saturday. As a result, Forest Hills has had the honor of hosting numerous diplomats from the Chinese Embassy who frequently visit the school. This long-standing relationship led to the delegation becoming a reality. Relationships between U.S. and Chinese citizens will continue to be the key that will create mutual understanding. As organizers of this delegation who are Christians, we have sought to be Christ's ambassadors and represent His presence in the world.

This project began with a vision to increase mutual understanding and cooperation between religious and government leaders of the United States and China. The exchange offered many opportunities to fulfill this vision.

It has been an undertaking involving multiple facets of society on both the American and Chinese sides. The project successfully linked together hundreds of individuals and groups in China and the U.S.

In December of 2007, Chinese President Hu Jintao called on Chinese government leaders to pay more attention to the positive contribution of religion in China.



President Jimmy Carter (center) dialogued with delegation members about religion in China and the U.S.

The outcome of this forward-looking statement remains to be seen; however, the timing of the American-Chinese Multi-Faith Religious Exchange offered unprecedented opportunities for positive and informative dialogue, particularly so in light of President Hu's recent statement. American and Chinese participants came away with new insights and a better understanding of religious freedom, practice, and diversity in China and the United States.

We are at a cross-road today in China-U.S. relations, one which will have a significant impact upon both countries and the rest of the globe. Religion has, and will continue to have, a role in the dialogue between China and the U.S. Future exchanges, such as the American-Chinese Multi-Faith Religious Exchange, will play a vital role in leading to greater understanding and mutual cooperation between our two nations.



Principle Partners and Hosts

Forest Hills Baptist Church, Raleigh, NC
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Atlanta, GA
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, Washington, DC

Al-Farooq Masjid, Atlanta, GA
Angelia Rice – Atlanta Interfaith Broadcasting, Atlanta, GA
Anonymous Donors
Cathy Kimball - The China Star, Morrisville, NC
Clark Lobenstine – Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, Washington, DC
Clete Kylie – Faith and Politics Institute, Washington, DC
David Sapp – Second Ponce De Leon Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA
Duane Long – Longistics, Raleigh, NC
Elizabeth Brooks – Brookings Institution, Washington, DC
Frank Jannuzi – Senator Joe Biden’s Office, U.S. Senate
Gerald Durley - Providence Missionary Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA
Graham Walker – McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University, Atlanta, GA
Henry Gracz – Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Atlanta, GA
Jan Swanson – World Pilgrims Alliance, Atlanta, GA
Jeffery Summers – Maranatha Baptist Church, Plains, GA
Jeffrey Bader – Brookings Institution, Washington, DC
Jeffrey Haggray – DC Baptist Convention, Washington, DC
Jim Baucom – Columbia Baptist Church, Washington, DC
John Hanford – U.S. Department of State – Office of International Religious Freedom, Washington, DC
Joseph Grieboski – Institute on Religion and Public Policy, Washington, DC
Larry Hovis - Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina, Winston-Salem, NC
Mercer University, Atlanta, GA
Michael Dabbs – Representative Rick Larsen’s Office, U.S. Congress
Michael Tutterow – Wieuca Road Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA
Ming Liu - Avatamsaka Vihara Buddhist Temple, Bethesda, MD
Nelson Watkins – Faith and Politics Institute, Washington, DC
Paula Dobriansky - Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs, Washington, DC
President Jimmy Carter –Maranatha Baptist Church, Plains, GA
Representative David Price – U.S. Congress
Representative Mark Kirk – China Working Group, U.S. Congress
Representative Rick Larsen – China Working Group, U.S Congress
Richard Jeske – American Bible Society, New York, NY
Ruby Fulbright – Women’s Missionary Union of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC
Samuel Lloyd – National Cathedral, Washington, DC
Saudia Muwwakkil - Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, Atlanta, GA
Senator Roger Wicker – U.S. Senate
Smokerise Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA
Stan Holmes, Washington, DC
Steve Bucherati - The Coca Cola Company, Atlanta, GA
Susan Sweat – Senator Roger Wicker’s Office, U.S. Congress
The Chinese Embassy of the People’s Republic of China, Washington, DC
Tommy Lloyd – T.W. Lloyd & Associates, Atlanta, GA
Tommy Ross - Representative David Price’s Office, U.S. Congress

American-Chinese Multi-Faith Religious Exchange Delegation



The delegation takes a break from its busy schedule to take a picture with the Coca-Cola polar bear.



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