

Spring, 2011 Unity in Diversity Conference

Greetings. For those who may not know me, my name is Howard Chan. I am the Executive Director of PaLM. PaLM is a local parachurch organization that seeks to network, strengthen, and build up the work of the Asian-American church in NY/NJ.

Last Spring, Pastor Stanley presented a talk on the “State of the Chinese Church in Our Region.” In that report Pastor Stanley found that within New York/New Jersey were:

- A total of 124 Chinese churches
- Of these 124 Chinese churches, 102 are located in NYC, 22 in NJ
- Of these 124 churches, 73 had an English Service (including Joint & Bi-lingual)
- But, only 37 of the 73 had a separate English Congregation/Service
- Of these 37 English congregations, 28 are in located NYC, 9 in NJ
- Additionally, he found that 90% of our churches in NYC are not growing/declining
- And at least half of our churches in NYC are struggling financially

Needless to say, the findings of that report were discouraging. In light of the fact that the Chinese have been immigrating to these shores for more than 100 years...

- Why do we find ourselves in this situation?
- Why haven't our churches been more effective and productive?
- Why aren't our numbers growing? Why are so many of us struggling?

Before we look for some answers, let me share with you some statistics about the Chinese population that I found on The City of New York, Department of City Planning website site. Regrettably equivalent data is not available for NJ.

- The Department of City Planning of NYC reports that NYC has “the largest Chinese population of any city outside of Asia.”¹
- In 2009 the number of Chinese found be living in NYC was 471,355.²
- Of the 471,355 Chinese people living in NYC, the Department of City Planning tells us that 317,015 were born overseas.³
- Assuming that their findings are correct, that would mean that the remaining 154,340 Chinese are ABCs or American Born Chinese.

When we combine what Pastor Stanley found with what the NYC Department of Planning found, we find that....

- In NYC, there is one Chinese church for every 3,108 overseas born Chinese (317,015/102)
- In NYC, there is one English service for every 5,512 ABCs (154,340/28)

What these statistics tell us THEORETICALLY is that our churches should be overflowing and overcrowded. What these stats tell us FACTUALLY is that we don't have enough churches in place to effectively minister to the size of the Chinese population in NYC.

¹ New York City Department of City Planning, http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/pop_facts.shtml

² Ibid., http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/nyc_boros_09_asians.pdf

³ Ibid., http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/nyc_boros_09_place_of_birth.pdf

So, why don't we have more churches? Well, I suppose there are many reasons why we don't have more churches. But, those are yesterday's reasons. This morning, I would like to share with you four things that you and I do today to change this picture of the Chinese church for tomorrow.

1. One thing that you and I can do today is to look outside our church walls and observe the "big picture." God's kingdom consists of more than just our own church. Instead, God's kingdom's consists of every church within our NY/NJ region. We need to ALSO pay attention to, and plan for, God's work as a region. Up until now, most of us have only concerned ourselves with the needs and concerns of our own church and/or our own denomination. We need to look beyond our four walls...we need to see the "big picture."
2. A second thing that you and I can do today is to become a mentor. One reason we don't have more churches is because we don't have the workers to serve in them. And the reason we don't have the workers to serve in them is because too few of us are taking the time and making the effort to identify and mentor the next generation of workers from within our congregations. We can't expect people to "discover" opportunities to serve God on their own. We need to be heavily involved in the process by investing our time and energy in the next generation and helping to raise the next group of servants for God.
3. A third thing that you and I can do today is support the planting of ABC churches. Over the last 100 years, the Chinese church has lost 95% of its young people and she continues to lose that many young people today. If we are to stem the tide of defecting ABCs to other churches we need to plant ABC churches/ congregations. For until we do so, until we give our children a reason to stay within the Chinese church...they will continue to leave us. If we continue to force them to choose between staying at an immigrant church and going elsewhere, I guarantee you that the vast majority will continue to choose to go elsewhere.
4. A fourth thing that you and I can do today is begin to work together. Up until now, each of us has done our own thing, in our own way. And where has that gotten us? The statistics that I shared in beginning suggests that we are all on a sinking ship, in danger of going under. But that doesn't have to happen. The churches that we serve can remain afloat and one day thrive. But, it won't happen unless and until we begin working together. That is one of the purposes of this conference. It is to help both ABCs and OBCs to better understand and appreciate one another. And in understanding and appreciating one another, to work together for the sake of the kingdom.

The road before us is difficult. But, I am hopeful and optimistic that our future can be vastly different from our past if you and I would abide by Paul's exhortation to the Christians at Corinth.....

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. I Corinthians 1:10