



China News Summary

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Compiled by The United Methodist China Program
General Board of Global Ministries
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Earthquake devastates northeast Sichuan province. An earthquake registering 7.9 on the Richter scales struck northeast Sichuan province on May 12, 2008, killing more than 69,000, injuring over 370,000, and levelling entire villages, towns and regions. The earthquake was the worst to hit China since 1976, when over 220,000 died in a similarly devastating quake in Tangshan. Within hours of the earthquake, Premier Wen Jiabao, a geologist himself who trained at the Beijing Institute of Geology, flew to the affected area to oversee relief work for the first five days, and at one point was visibly moved to tears, reported the *Economist*.

President Hu Jintao pledged rapid response to the earthquake. Over a hundred thousand People's Liberation Army troops and disaster relief workers were called into the area and were met with devastation on a scale rarely seen anywhere in the world: thousands of schools had collapsed killing thousands of school children, hospitals were destroyed, and chemical plants collapsed leaking toxic substances into the ground and air, according to Chinese state media. Many rivers had become blocked by landslides creating quake lakes whose newly formed sides threatened to collapse with the weight of water pooling inside. According to China's State Seismological Bureau there have been thousands of aftershocks, 177 of them were major according to the United States Geological Survey. China's state run media reported that over 420,000 homes were destroyed in just two aftershocks that occurred approximately two weeks after the quake. China declared a 3-day state of national mourning in which the Olympic Torch run was suspended, the first time of public mourning since the death of Deng Xiaoping eleven years ago. It was the first time China has marked a time of national mourning for its people, said the BBC. China was quick to accept offers of help from other sources and within days teams from Taiwan, the United States, Japan, South Korea, Russia and Singapore joined the rescue effort. Over \$800 million in aid was pledged from overseas within the first week, reported the BBC. Within China the response to earthquake appeals were overwhelming and considered a watershed moment for civil society as it demonstrated both its capacity to join the government's relief efforts and the government's acceptance of these legitimate sources. Millions of ordinary citizens and hundreds of non-governmental organizations like the Amity Foundation, a main Chinese partner organization of the General Board of Global Ministries, mobilized resources and person-power to assist in delivering food, shelter, water, medical supplies, and general relief efforts. *(Sources were many for this compilation)*

The Amity Foundation responds to Sichuan earthquake. Within five hours after the quake, the Amity Foundation, one of GBGM's main partner organizations in the People's Republic of China, flew its staff to Sichuan to assess damage, liaise with local partners to begin in relief efforts. Amity released an immediate one million *yuan* (\$143,000) for relief work, and has made an Action by Churches Together (ACT) appeal for an additional \$4.3 million. Amity immediately set to work purchasing water, food, rice, tents and quilts. In addition it coordinated and dispatched teams of social workers and counsellors, professionals from Nanjing, to assist in trauma counselling. Victims have survived the quake but are surrounded by fear, grief and worry over additional safety as the area experienced thousands of aftershocks. Practising rigorous standards of accountability, Amity's mechanisms for having individuals sign when receiving relief supplies attracted attention and praise of other groups including the government, who encountered problems 'double-dipping' by people taking more than their allotted share of relief. In Shanghai, a number of non-governmental organizations (NGO) came together to create 'The Hump' campaign. These NGOs collected supplies from enterprises and individuals, and Amity was approached to help get these supplies to the affected areas. The supplies were plastic sheeting, tents, clothes, shoes, medicines, disinfectant, mosquito repellent, etc. According to ACT, within the next year a half Amity plans to assist 20,000 families through distribution of mostly non-food items, provision of psycho-social care, reconstruction of 500 houses, 2 primary schools and 5 village clinics, repair of 20 water systems, provision of emergency preparedness training and cash grants for the purchase of

agricultural tools. (*The Amity Foundation; United Methodist China Program; Friends of the Church in China; Action for Churches Together*)

General Board of Global Ministries responds to Sichuan earthquake appeal. The General Board of Global Ministries was quick to respond to the earthquake in Sichuan through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). Responding to Amity's ACT appeal for earthquake relief, GBGM sent \$50,000 to the Amity Foundation to assist with immediate on-the-ground operations. Contributions to the Sichuan earthquake can still be made through UMCOR's Advance Special #982450, International Disaster Response, China Earthquake, by visiting GBGM's website, www.gbqm-umc.org. Amity will also begin working with the orphans of the Sichuan earthquake and GBGM has contributed to this important initiative. Reports from the Sichuan Christian Council indicate that hundreds of churches in the area have been destroyed or damaged. The Sichuan Theological Seminary in Chengdu, 50 miles from the epicentre, developed a crack from the ground to the seventh floor. Immediately after the quake and afraid aftershocks would further damage the building, students and teachers spent several nights sleeping out doors until it was safe to return, said the Revd Yuan Shiguo, General Secretary of the Sichuan Christian Council. Assessments are still being made, but the damage to church buildings is widespread and GBGM has responded to an appeal to assist the Sichuan Christian Council in its relief and rebuilding efforts. An additional international appeal has been made by the China Christian Council. (*United Methodist China Program; www.gbqm-umc.org; China Christian Council; Sichuan Christian Council*)

Dharamsala calls for cessation of protests in respect for quake victims. The Dalai Lama and Tibetan political leaders in exile in Dharamsala, India, have called for a cessation of all protests in respect for the victims of the Sichuan earthquake which took the lives of more than 65,000 people when it hit May 12, 2008. Dharamsala asked that Tibetans all over the world interrupt their protests as a sign of respect for the victims, said Asia News. In a document published by Dharamsala, "everything possible must be done to bring aid: fundraising and volunteers groups, but also prayer vigils in memory of the victims," reported Asia News. The Dalai Lama himself had suspended criticism of the Chinese government and when visiting Britain in May told the BBC that he had seen, "greater openness on the part of the communist leaders with respect to the media and international aid, a good sign...." reported Asia News. (*"Dharamsala: stop anti-China protests, respect victims of Sichuan," May 22, 2008, Asia News*)

Olympic ticket scramble. The official booking site for the 2008 Olympic Games experienced 27 million hits in the first hour as the third batch of domestic tickets for the Olympic Games went on sale, reported Reuters. The official website for booking tickets struggled to keep up with demand, while people experience long queues at Bank of China official outlets. Over 1.27 million domestic tickets were sold in the third round for 16 sporting events, which included equestrian events in Hongkong. In total 7 million domestic tickets have been sold thus far. The third round of domestic ticket sales was hailed a success compared to the first round when demand crashed the computer program on the first day of Internet booking. The fourth and final round begins in July. According to the official Beijing Olympic website, "Any person who has established domicile in the territory of People's Republic of China (except Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Macao Special Administrative Region and Taiwan Province) and possesses a valid ID is eligible to order [domestic] Olympic tickets." Domestic tickets can be purchased for as little as 30 *yuan* (\$4.30), with the average ticket around 100-150 *yuan* (\$14.30-\$21.45), making the Beijing Olympics one of the most affordable for local residents. (www.tickets.beijing2008.cn; "Third batch of Olympic tickets sold out," Reuters, May 8, 2008; "China Olympic tickets old out," BBC News, May 7, 2008)

Taiwan's new President: high-level talks with Beijing should resume. Mr. Ma Ying-jeou, Taiwan's new president, took office in mid-May and immediately called for a resumption of high-level dialogue with Beijing, reported AFP. In his inaugural address, Mr. Ma said that both sides should, "reconcile and cease fire" and called on both sides to mend fragile relationships. Mr. Ma called on each to return to the 1992 guidelines for bilateral talks which he said stated that "each side can interpret the term 'one China' in its own way." Underlining Beijing-Taipei talks as his top priority for the next four years, Mr. Ma also has vowed not to enter into an arms race with Beijing in a desire to create regional stability, said the AFP. Taiwan's new president said the island will continue with arms procurement of defensive weapons but will not build or acquire nuclear weapons or weapons of mass destruction. "It is not in our best interests," said Mr. Ma. After the 1949 Civil War defeat of the Guomindang (Kuomintang) by the Chinese Communist Party's Red Army, the Guomindang's leader, Chiang Kai-shek, fled to the island of Taiwan. Taiwan and the mainland have been governed separately since, with Beijing claiming sovereignty over Taiwan.

Taiwan claims diplomatic relations with 23 countries worldwide, mostly economically poor African and Latin American countries which receive significant economic support from Taiwan. In January's national elections, the Guomindang swept to power in a landslide victory over the incumbent pro-independence Democratic People's Party. (*"Taiwan's new president vows no arms race with China," AFP, May 21, 2008; "Taiwan's new president calls for China talks," AFP, May 20, 2008*)

Russian president visits China first. Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, 42, met with Chinese President Hu Jintao, the first official visit of President Medvedev outside the commonwealth of independent states. Analysts say that Medvedev's visit east to China rather than west to established older powers, signals an end to 'cold war' rivalries and an intentional desire to build a new Sino-Russian strategic partnership, says the Associated Press. In recent years China and Russia held joint military manoeuvres, have taken a coordinated stance on opposition to Kosovo's independence and are taking a similar approach to the Iran nuclear issue. Russia and China also have condemned a US plan for a global missile defence system, saying it was a set back to international disarmament efforts, said the BBC. Both Presidents Hu and Medvedev signed a joint statement which the BBC says sends a clear signal to the Bush administration and its successor, that other nuclear powers have questions about the validity of a missile defence system. The joint agreement said the defence system would, "...harm international efforts to control arms and the non-proliferation process...." Also at the heart of Sino-Russian bilateral negotiations and talks were concerns about energy resources. China is desperate for Russian crude and natural gas and is urging Russia to build a pipeline to China from Siberia, say analysts. A separate pipeline that has been built to Russia's Pacific coast has forced China to compete with Japan for oil. But China has already broken Russia's monopoly on the transit of natural resources through central Asia by negotiating agreements with Turkmenistan for gas and Kazakhstan for a connecting pipeline. According to the BBC China is Russia's second largest trading partner next to the European Union, although trade with Russia accounts to only two percent of China's global trade, says the Associated Press. (*"Medvedev visits China on his first foreign trip as Russia's new president," Associated Press, May 21, 2008; "New Russian leader visits China," BBC News, May 23, 2008; "Presidents condemn US shield plan," BBC News, May 23, 2008*)

Sources and links

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***The United Methodist China Program** seeks to facilitate deeper understandings between China, the United States and other nations throughout God's world. It respects the autonomy of Protestant churches in China and recognizes that, with God's guidance, Christians in China are shaping a bold new witness. The United Methodist China Program relies on partner organizations like the China Christian Council to help it define new relationships within China's post-denominational context. China Program partners with the Amity Foundation, a Chinese social service organization initiated by Christians in China to make Christian participation in meeting the needs of society more widely known to the Chinese people. Through education, communication, and exchange, China Program is a sensitive lens through which we and people within China can see and understand each other more accurately. The China News Summary is prepared by Diane Allen, a GBGM missionary serving as China Program Associate.*