

May 14-15: Nanjing

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Written by: Sharon Watkins

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Nanjing is the motherlode for Disciples in China.

Heroism and history meet at the Nanjing Massacre Museum, and Disciples are part of it. Reminiscent of Yad Vashem - the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem - you enter the Nanjing Museum through a passageway that suggests the walls of Nanjing 1937. From there a story unfolds of the unspeakable cruelty and dehumanization of war - in this case the war between China and Japan that was part of the larger conflict eventually known as World War II - and more specifically the massacre of tens of thousands of Nanjing residents over the course of a few brutal weeks.

Photographs of bodies strewn on the streets, reproductions of newspaper reports from the day, diary entries, depictions of soldiers being taught the effective way to kill . . . and vignettes of heroic people - including a group of Disciples missionaries who stayed when they could have left and helped create a safety zone through which 200,000 Chinese people were saved from rape and slaughter.



Particularly striking is a statue of Minnie Vautrin then on faculty at Ginling College arms and skirt spread wide, chin and chest stretched forward, women and children crouching behind her as she refuses to let the soldiers through. Years before the phrase "critical presence" was coined by Global Ministries to describe how we decide where to be present overseas, Minnie and Searle Bates and others were demonstrating it dramatically in Nanjing. I've heard her variously described as the "goddess" or "angel" of Nanjing - or simply Buddha. All getting at the same point. Critical presence - in the name of Christ.