

## May 18 - Hard-working. Committed. Faithful.

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5/21/2013 10:59 AM 

Today back on a fast train through the Chinese countryside. "Hard-working" is a phrase that comes to mind looking at the neat, cultivated patches of earth for acre after acre.

We'll see "hard-working" lived to fullest in the next two days as we visit the various projects of the church in Zhenzhou and Zhoukou. Some of our most important Global Ministries work in China has been to improve the lives of an HIV/AIDS cluster that developed here when the people decided to sell blood as income, but the blood was collected with an infected needle. HIV/AIDS in China, as in so many places, has a stigma that isolates those living with the disease. Our participation has included giving them goats, thus providing nutrition through milk but also income as baby goats are sold. The church leaders saw how the process could be improved and asked in the next round that we provide the goats to the church - thus giving an income source that would help underwrite the cost of church ministries. They would then provide goat offspring to persons in need like the HIV/AIDS patients. Win/Win. We've also partnered with the local church in providing housing for people rendered homeless by their disease.

The church in Zhenzhou can make much of little. The church here is growing fast as in much of the rest of China. And trained leadership is in short supply. The Bible School in Zhenzhou trains hundreds of lay workers each year. The students come to the main church building for training - and were sleeping on the hard floor of the church even in the cold, cold winter. We offered to buy bunk beds for the students and sent the money. Instead of buying beds, however, they taught the students to make them, thus stretching the money farther, and teaching the students income-producing skills. A good sign that this community will make the most of whatever we can offer in the way of support.

The Bible School has turned 40 acres sold to them by the government at a good price into an advanced agriculture training ground. Their original idea had been to turn it into a park, charging admission and thus bringing in some income. However, on second thought in this poor community, the school and church officials decided to create a three level opportunity to train Bible School students in farming techniques that they can take home with them in addition to their theology and Bible. In this way they advance the lives of their parishioners and support the church economically.

So in these 40 acres a variety of trees are grown - some fast-growing for wood, some fruit trees, some decorative for the constantly expanding housing projects all over China. (In fact, in one instance, trees uprooted as an old housing section was being torn down were salvaged, replanted in the church's plot and then re-sold at a substantial profit to a developer needed new trees for his high rise.) In between the rows of trees, wheat and corn is grown, as well as seedling trees. Three layers. The students learn to cultivate, harvest and process the produce.

The project now goes way beyond the original 40 acres and has added many varieties of trees and produce. Students who have been through Bible training take these techniques to church centers all through out the western provinces, so that the Church is self supporting, church ministries can be supported financially and church members can better their physical lives as well as their spiritual well-being.

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