

May 16 - Shaanxi Bible School

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Today we visited Shaanxi Bible School - which we support with our DMF money - and I'm proud to say so. The principal there, Ms. Hong Wang, embodies the "three self" principles of the Chinese church: self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. In the US we might call her "entrepreneurial." Her school operates at the most basic of the three levels of Christian ministry training schools in China. But she aspires for more. (Ministerial training happens in the one national seminary in Nanjing which offers masters degrees, or at one of the regional seminaries which can offer baccalaureate degrees. In addition there are the provincial Bible Schools, like Shaanxi, which provide training for lay ministers and associate ministers.)

Shaanxi - though geographically still in the eastern half of China - is culturally in the West. The west is poorer than the east. Shaanxi is the only school for the western provinces. 70 students in the 4 year program and 51 students in the 1 year program live on campus in 6-student rooms. Their tuition is 1500 yuen per semester (about \$250). Their board is about \$165. But even that is steep for most of them. One third are completely supported by their church (where the student will serve as ordained elder or associate pastor upon completion of the respective program.) One third are self-supporting. One third split the cost with their church. We help provide scholarships for self-pay students.



In this poorer part of the country, faculty salaries are half or less that of their counterparts in the east. In order to help the situation, the principal had the inspiration to start a bookstore on campus. She orders books from Amity Press in Nanjing, sells enough at a profit to be able to provide free lunch to the faculty (a common practice for employers in China.) She now has a bookstore in two locations and is looking for new ways to help support the work of her school.

Never at a loss for ideas, she told us about the dilemma sometimes when students fall in love and get married while at the school. Now all of a sudden when they go home, one of their churches has two ministers instead of one to support - and may not be able to afford them. The school steps in. In one case the faculty found a location where there is no church and helped the couple move there and start a book store until they could raise enough money to actually begin a new church start. And with the tithe of the school's bookstore profits, the school pays the salary of their new church planters!



There are three things that have to happen for the Shaanxi Bible School to become a full regional seminary: Hire more teachers with master's degrees (most likely from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary), increase the size of their library by 10,000 volumes, and build the building they dream of. They have half the 2 million Chinese yuen they need for the building (\$1 equal about 6.1 yuen.) It's a tall order, but I think she'll do it. In the meantime we continue to partner gladly.