

NJPN Networking Day – Birmingham, Chinese Methodist Church  
Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2011

### **Eammon O'Brien CCS - Cultural Exchange with China**

The 2012 Conference is all about China so it was helpful to hear this talk ahead of that. I know very little about China apart from stereotypes and a bit of Chinese literature.

Eammon has worked in China for over 30 years. He gave us a number of examples of how China is portrayed negatively in the press. There is always an emphasis on human rights and the economic picture. Human rights exist in China but they are different from our concept of the rights of the individual. The emphasis is more on social human rights. The collective is more important than any individual.

It is a land of great contrasts. We saw pictures of cities that looked no different from our cities in Europe or US. Rural areas looked medieval. A coffee in the city could cost as much as a farmer's income for 2 weeks. East China is rich and West China is poor.

Religion has never disappeared from China although Mao did his best to abolish it.

There are two churches in China. The state approved one and the unregistered underground one. I didn't fully grasp the difference but there was no doubt that they needed to be free to be one.

Eammon had a few challenges for the Church in China.

- To use the openness in society to religion to create harmony.
- To reconcile the two parts of the Church.
- To reform the formation and training of priests.
- To challenge corruption.
- Challenge the materialistic lifestyle.
- Respond to migrant workers – these migrants come from other regions of China but have no rights to education or medical care outside their own region.
- Be part of the education around the environment.

Lunch was a good time to meet and talk with others and I got to speak to a mixture of people from parish enthusiasts to seasoned campaigners who are part of the history of Church Justice and Peace in this country.

The afternoon was taken up with campaigns and events upcoming. I'll be looking in to CAP's Close the Gap Campaign and Environmental audits in the Diocese/Solar panels on churches.

I would like to encourage people to attend the TUC March against the cuts on 26<sup>th</sup> March. I was interested to hear that the Conference on Food last year has encouraged the Hayes Conference Centre to look at its policy on food sourcing and the menu itself. Well done NJPN.

My journey back was a little fraught with lines closed and bus alternatives but it didn't mar an enjoyable day. I enjoyed the visit to the Chinese Methodist Church, the beautiful spring day, the bustle of Birmingham and I learnt something too.

Maria Pizzoni

Diocese of Wrexham