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3 December 2025

REV GARY BARCLAY, MINISTER, 586282

JOHN MARTIN, CLERK TO BOARD, 815817

JEAN HASTINGS, TREASURER, 811225

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THIS WEEK

Friday: Christmas Lunch at The Gallery Restaurant, Forth Valley College at 12.30pm.

Sunday: Communion Service, 10.30am, at which there will be a retiring offering for the work of Scripture Union.

CHRISTMAS POST

If you are in the habit of bringing Christmas cards to church to hand out to friends in our church fellowship, to save you wandering round everyone, there will be a post box in the Hub on Sunday 7th December and Sunday 14th December for you to leave your cards. The cards will then be delivered, free of charge, by the Murrayfield Posties. No need to add an address – just make sure the recipient's name is on the envelope.

STEDFAST

Stedfast is the United Free Church's 20-page full colour magazine with news and articles from churches throughout the country. It costs £12 for a year's supply (six editions) and Ann Lomax will soon be placing orders for 2026. If you've never subscribed before and would like to order it, Ann is the person to see.

TRICIA'S FURTHER ADVENTURES IN CHINA

Many of you will remember Rev Tricia Johnston asking us to pray for her trip to China. Well, she's home now, and this is her description of her second week.

2nd Update November 2025 Partner Visit

Monday morning involved a visit to a community centre that provides residential and day care services for the elderly. Some of the residents have dementia. There is a kitchen, on the ground floor, which prepares meals, not only for the residents, but also for the community. People can either pre-order lunch (via WeChat) and come and collect it or request it be delivered – both options are very inexpensive. We were offered a lunch tray (which is what residents and folks in the community receive) and it consisted of a good portion of rice, two individual portions of vegetables, a portion of meat/fish and a portion of dofu. I was introduced to one resident, a very active lady who was enjoying the 'sit down' exercise class. She said she would refer to me as her 'jie jie' (older sister) except she's 81 and I'm not – yet!! I was also introduced to a 90-year old gentleman who comes along every week day to do some studying/write poetry and then collects lunch for himself and his wife.

By the time we left the centre the smog had descended, over the city, and it was thick. The buildings all have indoor heating but coal is used for this so smog is common in the winter months.

The afternoon was spent with volunteers who, originally were trained to visit patients in the Palliative Care Ward, but, now that that has been amalgamated with a general ward, are visiting general and palliative patients. This is still a 'work in progress' as visits by volunteers is not a known option for the general patients.

By the time we left the restaurant, after dinner, the temperature had dropped considerably and there were a few snowflakes falling.

I was having problems with one of my adapters, so a Chinese colleague bought one online and arranged for it to be delivered to my hotel room. The colleague phoned me to say the adapter had been delivered to the hotel and 'Robert' would bring it up. This colleague has great English but one of us didn't get this right as I opened my door, not to Robert but to a robot!!!

I have known some of our friends/colleagues, in Shenyang, for 20 years and I have only ever heard them refer to 'my husband', 'my son', 'my daughter' etc never their first names. I asked about this and one reason given was knowing the relationship is more important than knowing the name!

Everything is done electronically here!! I just can't keep up with it. At dinner, a Chinese friend felt his cold was getting worse. A couple of doctors, at the table, suggested a particular tablet he should take. He used his phone to order it, online, and it was delivered to the restaurant within the hour!!

One thing I find very disconcerting re using my card and putting in my PIN No is that, on many terminals, the position of the numbers changes every time it is used! At home, I know exactly where the numbers are on the terminal pad so, here, I go to follow that 'pattern' but the numbers are in different places and as PIN numbers here are 6 digits, I sometimes have to type it in again – and the number positions have changed, yet again. Very disconcerting!

I've met a few folks, on this trip, who are really worried and anxious about the future. There are serious concerns over the falling population numbers and how services are going to be maintained with a much smaller workforce paying taxes to support them.

On my last day in Shenyang we visited a Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital. It has a hospice ward that combines traditional Chinese medicine and Western Medicine. I was asked if I would like to have some acupuncture to treat the osteoarthritis in my knees. I smiled politely, but not really committing to anything, and the next thing I knew the Hospital Director who is, apparently, very well known in Shenyang for his skilled use of acupuncture appeared at the door to give the treatment!! I think I now have the most photographed knees in Shenyang as the Director was followed by goodness only knows how many staff photographing his treatment of 'the foreign visitor'! Not sure how many needles were inserted but one description was that my knees resembled hedgehogs! The treatment itself, wasn't in any way painful but lying absolutely flat for 30 minutes, afterwards, was decidedly uncomfortable!

We moved from Shenyang to Beijing by bullet train. It took 2½ hours and was a very smooth journey. 2½ hours where, not that long ago, it was a 12-13 hour train journey, usually overnight! Once in Beijing we had to compete with very strong winds and very mild temperatures for late November!

As many of you will know, thanks to the generosity of Prof Max Watson (the Course author), the SCCG, has been able to work with the Princess Alice Hospice and our partners in Shenyang and Beijing to bring the European Certificate in Essential Palliative Care Skills to China. This is the first ever formal training in palliative care to run in China. On Thursday afternoon and evening (27th Nov) I was privileged to meet 14 of the 26 doctors and nurses who undertook the training. It was wonderful to hear this group of professionals' enthusiasm and commitment to improving the care given to the dying and their families. It was also encouraging to see the bond that has developed between them and the support they offer to one another because it will be needed going forward. They all know they face an uphill struggle in making palliative care a recognised and respected medical speciality. They also recognise the challenges ahead, in trying to improve the hospice services offered at the end of life – but they are so up for the challenge. They want to bring about positive change and will support and encourage one another as they work to do this. Please pray for them as they seek to change a culture, both societal and medical, that doesn't, currently, buy into the value of palliative and end of life care, because, this is a marathon, not a sprint!

Interestingly, as the group was introducing themselves to me, around the dinner table, one lady gave her name, her job title and where she worked and then added, 'and I'm a Christian' at which point, the lady sitting next to her said, 'so am I'! It was just lovely.

So ended my time on the Mainland, the official part of my 2025 Partner at an end. It has been an interesting visit with much to reflect upon and pray about in the coming weeks and months.

I landed at Hong Kong Airport at 11.30 on Friday 28th. The airport, like so many others, is extremely well laid out but, it's huge! So, by the time I got to Immigration I felt like I'd walked from Beijing (slight exaggeration!) and was, despairingly, eyeing up the long winding queues at the 'Visitors' desks when a staff member called me over and said, 'You can go through the Diplomatic Channel.' There was no one else in that channel so I was through in about two minutes – there are advantages to being a 'grey head'!

Blessings,

Tricia