

Chinese government awards Baptist missionary

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VALLEY FORGE, Pa. (ABP) - An American Baptist missionary was the only foreigner among more than 30 recipients of a prestigious charity award granted recently by the government of Jiangsu Province, China.

Chosen from nearly 1,000 nominees, recipients of the first-ever Jiangsu Charity Award presented Oct. 12 in the ancient capital city of Nanjing included Judy Sutterlin, an American Baptist International Ministries missionary in the People's Republic of China appointed in 1995.

Judy Sutterlin

The award, designed to recognize the role played by charity and philanthropy in improving people's lives and promoting social harmony, recognized Sutterlin as a "most caring and benevolent model" for service.

Sutterlin, who teaches at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, was nominated by the Amity Foundation, an International Ministries partner created at the initiative of Chinese Christians in 1985. The foundation's initiatives include education, social welfare, basic health and public hygiene, environmental protection, rural development, church-run social services and disaster relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation from China's coastal provinces in the east to the minority areas of the west.

Sutterlin teaches general, biblical and theological English at the seminary campus in the southern part of the Nanjing metropolitan area with 250 students. As faculty and students improve English skills, they gain access to additional Bible study resources, increase their ability to dialogue with Christians from around the world and acquire proficiency that can enable

them to lead English outreach ministries now existing in some city churches.

“Judy has been recognized as a caring and benevolent model, because her work demonstrates care for the whole person — intellectually, spiritually, relationally and physically,” observed Reid Trulson, executive director for American Baptist International Ministries.

On top of her theological and academic work at the seminary, Sutterlin helps with orientation and care for the Amity Foundation's English teachers and serves as a liaison to Amity projects supported by IM. Those include help for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, support for remote village clinic work, drug rehabilitation and economic development projects.

The Amity Foundation is overseen by the China Christian Council, an umbrella organization for China's Protestant churches and member of the World Council of Churches. Amity Printing Company, a joint venture between the Amity Foundation and United Bible Societies, has published more than 86 million Bibles since it was established in 1988.

According to the U.S. State Department, China's religious-affairs agency reports the official Protestant population as 16 million in more than 50,000 churches registered under the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, formed in 1950 on principles of self-governing, self-support and self-propagation.

The Pew Research Center estimated in 2007 that another 50 million to 70 million worship in unregistered religious gatherings, also known as “house churches.” Some unofficial estimates of the number of Chinese Christians are as high as 130 million,

-Bob Allen is managing editor of Associated Baptist Press.