

Letters from Overseas

Mary Fraser Writes from China

The Amity Foundation
Education Division
71 Hankou Road
Nanjing, Jiangsu 210008
CHINA

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Photo: Wolf Kutnahorsky

Waiting

As part of worship at a recent Gansu province Amity teachers' conference, I agreed to reflect on the Advent theme of waiting.

Waiting is a very significant part of the China experience: waiting for water to be delivered, maybe immediately, maybe in two hours, maybe tomorrow; waiting in bank lines where at any moment someone could edge you out; waiting to find out the dates of the end or beginning of term—someone must know; waiting to buy train tickets, only to have the window inexplicably close as you approach; waiting for a passport to be returned next week, the following week, and then a change in requirements.

These and other occasions of waiting could and sometimes do lead to feelings of frustration but you can't live in a constant state of frustration. You need to develop ways of coping. My favourite way is to use waiting times as prayer times! Not just prayer that the wait would end but usually prayers for others: individuals at home, those around me on the streets of China, and general world issues.

What have I learned from all the waiting? I have developed more patience, for sure! I know that the world does not revolve around my agenda and I have mostly stopped expecting it to. And I have learned to live with a certain healthy level of powerlessness.

I think about my experiences of waiting in times of change as I have waited to understand the next step in my life: waiting for children to grow out of teenage angst; waiting to establish a routine as a single parent; job decisions including coming to and working in China; and now the decision to leave China and wait to see what happens with the tumour in my eye.

I can say that those were times in my life when prayer was very important and waiting for understanding was very much like Advent as I waited for new insights to break into my life and steer me in one direction or another. As I have felt my prayers being answered, as I was becoming clearer about my direction, the waiting periods have been followed by feelings of anticipation, hope and peace for where I am on my life's journey.

Mary Fraser is a United Church of Canada global mission personnel serving with Amity in China. The work of this global partner and the work of overseas personnel is made possible through your gifts to the Mission and Service Fund of The United Church of Canada.

