

WorldServe Ministries and the Increasing Influence of China and Cuba: An Interview with President/CEO Ted Yamamori

By Laurie Fortunak

Author, scholar, and mission strategist Dr. Tetsunao (“Ted”) Yamamori began his new calling as president/CEO of a revitalized [WorldServe Ministries](#) 1 November 2008. For over four decades Yamamori has played an integral role in evangelism on a global scale. After teaching at the college and seminary level for eighteen years, Yamamori went on to work with [Food for the Hungry](#) (FHI), where he retired as president emeritus in 2001 after twenty years of service.

In 2004, he was asked to serve as international director for the [Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization](#), a position he held until recently. At the age of seventy, Yamamori felt led into his fourth ministry opportunity—to serve as president/CEO of WorldServe Ministries, which specializes in transformational development, focused on serving the most vulnerable and needy (both physically and spiritually), with emphasis on China and Cuba. It empowers indigenous churches to advance the gospel and impact nations. Yamamori is also a senior fellow at the Center for Religion and Civic Culture of the University of Southern California and adjunct professor of holistic mission at Asbury Theological Seminary.



"We are just beginning to dream at WorldServe," says Ted Yamamori.

He recently spoke with Lausanne World Pulse about his short retirement, the potential he sees in China and Cuba, and the future of WorldServe.

Q: You are seventy—an age when many people are either in retirement or contemplating it. Why did you decide to take on the challenge of leading WorldServe?

A: When I retired from FHI in 2001, I was ready to retire and enjoy a leisurely life with my family. Soon I was reminded of what I had already known: there is no retirement for a Great Commission Christian. The Lord has given us marching orders. Until he calls off that command, the order remains in effect. The truth of the matter is that when Jesus calls you into ministry, you must respond. I have reached seventy years of age, I am healthy, and my mind is still somewhat intact. I want to serve the Lord wherever I am needed for as long as the Lord provides me with good health. I suspect that until I draw my last breath, my conscious thought will be ministry, ministry, ministry.

Q: WorldServe is narrowing its focus on two countries—China and Cuba. Talk about these countries and the potential you see in them.

A: The Board of WorldServe recently decided to focus on China and Cuba, where the ministry is doing significant work. After Fidel Castro, there will be many changes in Cuba. I'm very anxious how the Church will respond in the next few years, and with WorldServe being well connected with churches in Cuba, I think there is great potential for evangelism and church planting.

When China opened its door to the world in 1979, I began visiting the country. Since that time, I have made dozens of trips to teach and do research there. I love China. China is a missiologist's laboratory. There is much to learn about China, and with its great population and economic power, China will continue to open up. The Beijing Olympics helped with that. The Chinese established their own pride in carrying out what they did. They were able to model what a nation can do and create pride in the people and in the potential of China. As a result, China might open up more and more.

I have been saying, "China by the Chinese and the world by the Chinese believers." It is partly a prayer, but it is a realistic prayer. Today's estimate of Christians in China is 130 to 170 million. The Church in China has grown because the Chinese believers nurtured the seeds of the gospel among them...without outside help. China has 516 people groups, and WorldServe has close working relationships with over a dozen house church movements whose constituency totals approximately sixty million believers. Many of these movements are already in contact with these people groups. The movement leaders are also sending their workers to the cities. China's urbanization process is progressing rapidly. Evangelists also wish to influence the business and intellectual communities in the cities. There is so much going on inside China right now—and such great potential for Christians there to influence each other and the world.

Forty thousand Mandarin Chinese are among Cuba's fourteen people groups. Is it not conceivable for WorldServe to help our Chinese indigenous partners to send out workers to Cuba? Our Chinese partners are reaching out to Muslims in Xinjiang province. Is it not conceivable for WorldServe to help our Chinese partners to send out workers to the neighboring Muslim countries along the Silk Road in the not-so-distant future?

Q: What are your goals for WorldServe for the next five to ten years?

A. The first thing is to regroup and refocus. WorldServe used to focus on persecuted Christians, and we have modified that. We want to be able to go a bit more public, and so we are focusing on the two countries—China and Cuba—as the board has decided. With a unified board, staff, and plan, we will be able to develop the way forward and the vision to reach the unreached people groups in both countries. Beyond that, our focus is 4-pronged: disaster relief, evangelism/church planting (hard-to-reach people groups and urban church planting), kingdom business (proclamation through business) and church renewal around the world. We are just beginning to dream at WorldServe.