

# *Visitors from Shanghai*



**by John Tong**

**translated by Francis Tse K. L.**

June and July proved to be busy and eventful months for us here at the Centre as we played host to a variety of very special visiting groups. First to arrive in June were friends from Singapore, members of the China Catholic Communication's Office there—an organization with which we have a lot in common and with whom we have a lot to share. Next came several bishops who were in town attending the Federation of Asian Bishops' meeting and for whom we organized a workshop on China at the request of their Office Human Development—a task we were most happy to perform. Early July saw the arrival of several priests from Taiwan, and the occasion for fruitful discussions on the current state of the Church in our relative areas. But of all the groups to come our way, the one attracting the widest attention was,

of course, the Shanghai Catholic Delegation, which arrived in mid-July for a nine day visit—the first away-from-home trip by a Chinese Catholic delegation since 1949.

The Centre began to get caught up in the excitement of the visit long before the visitors arrived. As hosts of the delegation, it was our responsibility to plan how best to spend the nine days so that the delegates would return home feeling their time had been well spent and that the major purposes of their trip had been achieved. From the beginning we worked very closely with Bishop John Wu planning each step. He, himself, was most anxious to return the courtesy that had been shown him by the Shanghai Catholics in his recent visit to China. The Bishop arranged, as the group's first function, a welcoming banquet in the Hong Kong Country Club, at which not only he but also his guests were visibly moved. Bishop A. R. da Costa was also anxious that the delegates receive a warm and cordial welcome on their one-day visit to Macau. Unfortunately, he would be away in Portugal at the time but he left all arrangements in the capable hands of his Vicar General, Fr. Domingos Lam. Both ordinaries set the tone for the entire visit by quoting from Psalm 133 in their initial words of welcome, a Psalm which sings of the joy of brothers and sisters gathered together in unity. The tone of the visit, then, was very much that of a warm reunion of family members separated for a long time.

The delegates had come to Hong Kong to see how the local church functions in society, how faith and spirituality can be translated into practical service to the community-at-large. For this reason, we arranged many visits with Christians involved in the diocese's two major commitments to social and education work here: Caritas and the schools. Caritas, whose multi-service network reaches over one million local residents in a wide variety of social services, greatly impressed the delegates not only by its size but also by the quality and dedication of its workers, as did the school system that now educates nearly 25% of the Hong Kong student population.

Perhaps the most moving scenes between the delegates and Hong Kong Christians took place in their visits to the



H.K. Catholic youth meet the delegates.

Central Council of the Catholic Laity arranged a full afternoon programme for them. Council chairpersons from all over Hong Kong were invited to meet and mix with the delegates, and the delegates were given a history of the rapidly developing role of lay people in the Church after Vatican II.

Along with meeting with the HKCC, we arranged meetings with the Catholic Youth of Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a young church, and its youth are very outgoing and articulate. The delegates had many opportunities to talk with young workers about their experiences and answer their questions about the lives of workers in China.

Visits to the seminary and convents were of particular interest to the delegation because such houses of formation have just begun to be reopened in China, and then, too,

local parishes. Some of the parishes were large, well established churches and others were small Christian Communities centered around borrowed auditoriums. But wherever they went, they felt the genuine affection and concern of parishoners. They remarked on the lively and more intimate atmosphere of the liturgy, and how comfortable they felt at the services. (We had forgotten that the liturgical reforms of Vatican II had not yet reached China, and for many of the delegates this was their first experience of the reformed vernacular liturgy.) And some were moved to tears by the warmth of their welcome.

To help the delegates get a feel for the ever widening role of lay people in the Church, the Hong Kong

Bishop Jin, who led the delegation, is the administrator of the newly opened seminary in Sheshan. It was an opportunity to speak of the changes that have taken place in formation programmes during the past 30 years.

While in Hong Kong, the delegation resided at the Bianchi Lodge, a Caritas training school for hotel management. Ideally located in the heart of the city, it was a convenient place for the delegates to meet relatives and friends and to entertain guests. It also allowed them a privacy that they would not have had in one of Hong Kong's hotels. Arrangements were made, with the consent of the delegates, for the switchboard to take all incoming messages in writing, and then the delegates themselves could chose those they wished to respond to. In this way they were spared the kinds of calls that can plague a group subjected to so much publicity and at the same time were free to contact anyone they personally wanted to see.

Members of our staff spent most of their time with the delegates throughout their entire visit, and it was good for both sides. Since those involved in the Centre are a mixture of local and foreign, Chinese and western priests and religious, it was an opportunity for the delegates to experience more the universality of the church and how different cultures can work harmoniously together as equal partners in the same Christian enterprise. On our part, the delegates impressed us by their sincere friendliness and simple expressions of genuine affection. We marvelled at their patience and perserverance. It was not an easy matter to go through the hours and hours of red tape and bureaucratic



Visit to a Caritas school

procedures that dogged every step of their journey. And yet we heard no criticism nor any complaint. We felt we could also learn a lot from their basic humility expressed in their willingness to learn, as well as their quickness to appreciate what they were experiencing and the insights and discernment they displayed when discussing the relative differences between our two worlds. We were made richer by their brief presence among us.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all those involved in making this trip possible and successful, including the government officials of China, Hong Kong and Macau, the New China News Agency, and the people of Hong Kong, especially the Catholic Christian communities of Hong Kong and Macau for their cooperation and immense support. My final impression is that a small but very important step has been made in the journey ahead that will bring all of us together again into a unified, loving community, which, as we know, is the prayer of Christ and the will of the Father.