

EDITORIAL

On October 1, 2005 the Holy Spirit Study Centre will be 25 years old. For one who has been here since the beginning, it hardly seems possible that 25 years have gone by already. It has been an interesting and multi-faceted experience.

The Centre's beginning coincided almost with China's opening up to the outside world. This took place at the famous Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of December 1978, when Deng Xiaoping announced that the modernization of China replaced "class struggle" as the Party line. As part of the opening up, a policy of "religious freedom" was inaugurated. That meant that churches, mosques, and temples began to reopen, and religious clergy, newly released from labor camp, began to take up their religious duties again. Many co-religionists from abroad, especially Christians, flocked to Hong Kong, or to other border venues, with the aim of seeking ways and means to help their fellow believers in China.

I was one of those new arrivals, having come down to Hong Kong from Taiwan (where I had studied Mandarin Chinese) on October 1, 1979. Another Maryknoll Father, Elmer Wurth, who had also studied Mandarin in Taiwan, came from the States to join me.

Founding members of HSSC (from left to right): Fr. Peter Barry, Fr. Elmer Wurth, Bishop John Tong, and Fr. Angelo Lazzarotto.



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It was a time of great hope and expectation. Our superiors had just given us the general assignment to get involved in outreach to the Catholic Church of China. At first we were not exactly sure how we would go about this. As we were pondering this question, Father John Tong of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, who had just been assigned by Bishop John Baptist Wu to do China outreach work, asked if we would like to join with him and Father Angelo Lazzarotto to begin a centre for research and liaison regarding China. We agreed, and after much preparation, the Centre was inaugurated on October 1, 1980.

The next thing to decide was what kind of work would we undertake. Since China was just opening up, there would be the need for disseminating information about a country whose doors had been closed for many years. Thus research, especially regarding China's religious policy, would be one of our works. Then we would need a journal to relay the results of our research to the outside world. So, *Tripod*, the first issue of which appeared in January 1981, was born.

Other areas of concern were the needs of the Church in China: church buildings; seminaries and convents would need to be renovated or rebuilt in order to reopen; formation of priests, Sisters, seminarians, and Catholics; donations might be needed to support the livelihood and medical care of elderly clergy and religious. Thus the Centre became involved in direct liaison with the Church in China that included some efforts at fund raising to support the various needs. Under the heading of liaison also came visits to the Church in China, either by staff members alone, or accompanying groups of Catholics, who wished to extend the hand of friendship to their brothers and sisters in the faith in China. Personal contact with the Catholics of China was greatly appreciated by them because it showed the Universal Church's concern for them.

China and the Church in China have changed a lot in these 25 years, and the Centre has witnessed all these changes. In this issue of *Tripod*, we have invited the founding members of the Holy Spirit Study Centre to review their observations over all these years, and two other veteran China observers/collaborators also share with our readers what they see and think of the developments of the Church in China. (PJB)