

Last year when Professor Zhu Zhonggong visited Canada, he brought back to us new concepts concerning the church's involvement in social services there. Indeed we know very little about church work outside China. Professor Zhu shared with us how he saw lay people working hand-in-hand with the clergy in support of the Church. It was a new idea with important significance for us, an improvement over our old approach, and so we began our present work.

Today our organization has some 350 members. More than one-third of them are from the field of medicine, with the rest chiefly from the engineering and education fields. At first we weren't very clear about how to proceed. All we had was the conviction that helping the church to serve society was something we as laymen had to do. Bishops Zhang and Jin encouraged our efforts, pointing out that the Catholics should not only be involved in religious activities but they should also express their common faith in service to society. Our prayer-life and our professional work-life should complement each other, that one without the other is not enough.

We're doctors, nurses and professionals in other fields. While we can't say Mass and perform other priestly functions, we can treat and heal the sick and offer medical assistance to priests, seminarians, lay catholics and non-catholics. We treat all members of our society as our brothers and sisters.

During the past eight months our medical teams have gone everywhere to help people. Since we still do not have our own vehicle, we use the Sheshan Seminary van. This makes it possible for us to send a team of about ten professionals to the different parish churches to give medical service to the people after Masses on Sundays. The people deeply appreciate our efforts. Most of our patients are catholics, but non-catholics also come to be treated by our teams. When we hear of aged people confined to their homes with paralysis, high blood pressure or other ailments which make it difficult for them to move about, our doctors make house calls to treat them. So far most of the work load has fallen on the shoulders of our retired doctors and nurses, who are still healthy and have the time to spare. The rest of us work on a volunteer basis contributing what we can in our spare time.

Tripod: What is the impression of the non-catholics regarding CIAS?

Chen: They appreciate us very much. However, due to our limited capabilities, we feel that we should concentrate our efforts on services to the elderly at this time. In Shanghai a high proportion of the

population is elderly and that percentage is increasing all the time. One of the reasons we have made this trip to Hong Kong is to visit Caritas in order to learn how to give better care to the elderly in our society. Our service to the elderly should not be limited to medical care alone. We also plan to respond to their other needs as well.

Tripod: Do you have a centre at the present time?

Hu: There is a great shortage of space in Shanghai. Fortunately, the new Sheshan Seminary has been completed, and the dormitory of the former seminary which has been vacated serves as our centre. It is quite spacious, though rather old. The diocese has suggested we turn it into a home for the aged. On our return we'll discuss what has to be done to get it into proper shape.

Tripod: Is having a church-run home for the aged a completely new idea in China? We know that in former times Chinese families took care of their own elderly members. Has this practice changed?

Hu: No, it is not a completely new idea. The church in Shanghai had managed such homes before, but these were closed down. There are homes



L-R: Damian Sun, Madeleine Wang, Peter Hu and Francis Chen

for the aged run by the government. And while these are well equipped and organized, their limited capacity falls short of meeting the present needs of society. Because of this, the government is encouraging us to manage our own homes for the aged, based on the principle of "love God and love the people". We are eager to take up this task.

Tripod: You just mentioned the principle "love God and love the people". Could you tell us something about the spiritual lives of your members? How do you get spiritual nourishment and strength for your work?

Hu: We have invited Bishop Jin to be our spiritual director. The diocese has just organized three spiritual retreats, one for the seminarians and the other two for us. Some of our members who are retired and have more time have signed up for these. The diocese is just beginning to organize such retreats after many years without them.

Tripod: Is there a relationship between the CPA and CIAS? If so, what are the differences between them?

Sun: Our work and goals are really very different. The CPA is a lay Catholic patriotic organization with its own historical and political background. Its main purpose is to act as a bridge between the government and the Church. CIAS, on the other hand, is a volunteer group of professionals whose main purpose is to use their professional expertise to serve society.

Tripod: There are many religious groups such as lay sodalities in the church. What would be the difference between such a religious sodality and CIAS?

Sun: We had many such sodalities in the past, but they were forced to disband during the Cultural Revolution, and up to now have yet to be reorganized. The objective of CIAS is really quite different from such sodalities. In addition to what we have already outlined, CIAS performs other tasks such as helping the children of families with their study problems. We also organized some tuition courses last year and supported the production of music tapes for use by church choirs.

Tripod: What is the incentive for joining CIAS?

Hu: We are strictly volunteers. We do not get involved for any financial benefit, but simply to contribute our efforts for the common good of society. Nearly all of our present members are graduates of Catholic institutions from the 1950's. We feel we are making progress,

and see the need to learn more about new developments in the church and society. We have seen so much since arriving in Hong Kong, and have discussed what we have seen here at great length among ourselves. Our discussions each night have lasted well beyond midnight.

We have also gained much from our other experiences here. This morning we attended the Mass at Wah Yan College chapel. We were deeply impressed by the liturgy in putonghua. We could understand every word. As you know, we still use the Latin language for the liturgy in China, but our Bishops Conference has set up a working committee to study the feasibility of liturgical renewal. So we are bringing back with us some material for them to study.

We feel that our most fruitful experience here has been the effect it has had on our own ideas. For example, we used to look upon care of the elderly as a charity, a gift we offer them. While in Hong Kong, we learned from Caritas and from the Little Sisters of the Poor that the elderly are indeed the masters of their home. Workers and staff are there only to serve them and assist them in any way they can to make their final years more comfortable. Many new concerns regarding the Church also emerged during our visit. Everything is changing. We have learned very much, and been exposed to many new ideas, which we feel will be most helpful to us in our work. Our visit to Hong Kong has been very fruitful indeed.

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