

A GLIMPSE OF DALIAN



Fathers Ding and Wurth flanked by two Dalian Catholics;
two novices in front

by Elmer Wurth

In May of this year when Father Dick Ouellette, a Maryknoll missionary from Brazil, was passing through Hong Kong, he asked me if I would like to accompany him on a trip to China. His only request, in addition to wanting to see some of China's historical sites, was to visit an area where Maryknoll missionaries had formerly worked. I immediately responded: "How about Dalian?" Although I had been to northeast China three years previously, visiting Shenyang and Fushun, I had never been to Dalian, a seaport city directly across the Yellow Sea from Pyongyang, North Korea, and where Maryknollers had lived and worked from the 1920's to the 1940's.

Maryknoll missionaries had first arrived in the Fushun mission, of which Dalian was a part, in February, 1927. At first part of the Paris Foreign Mission Society administrated vicariate of Mukden (present day Shenyang), Fushun was formally separated from Mukden in January 1932. When the Fushun prefecture, to use the mission terminology of those days, was itself raised to the status of a vicariate in February, 1940, Maryknoll Father Raymond Lane (林化東) was named the first bishop.

At the time of its establishment, the Fushun vicariate contained 10,332 Catholics, 2,805 catechumens, 30 Maryknoll priests, five Chinese priests, 33 Maryknoll Sisters and 50 Chinese Sisters. The Catholics

were served from twenty parishes, and the Catholic church administered a high school, an industrial school and nine elementary schools.

For most of their stay in northeast China the Maryknollers lived under the colonial rule of the Japanese, who had unlawfully occupied the northeast after the Mukden Incident of September 18, 1931. Being Americans, the Maryknollers were then expelled from the northeast after the December 8, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which led to a declaration of war with Japan by the United States. China had already been at war with Japan for over four years, after the later Japanese act of aggression at the Marco Polo Bridge on July 7, 1937, fifty years ago this past summer. The Maryknollers returned to northeast China after the Japanese war, but they left again a few years later at the time of Liberation.

Excitement gripped Father Ouellette and me as we looked forward to returning to an area where our missionary forebears had labored nearly 40 years previously. Setting out from Hong Kong, we flew first to Beijing where we spent a few days visiting such famous historical sites as the Great Wall, the Ming Tombs and the Forbidden City. Father Ouellette was amazed at the breadth and depth of the Chinese culture which these sites represent. We then flew to Shenyang, and made quick visits to the Catholic churches in both Shenyang and Fushun, where I had the opportunity to renew acquaintances with the clergy and Catholics I had met three years previously. We then took the eight hour train ride from Shenyang to Dalian, and upon arrival there were surprised to find quite a cosmopolitan city laid out before us. Dalian is in the midst of a building boom, with five or six large hotels and a convention centre under construction. The city has already hosted many seminars on international business and trade. On the streets one rubs shoulders with Russian seamen and with tourists and businessmen from France, Germany, Japan, Korea, the United States and the Philippines. Father Ouellette was happy to have the opportunity to speak Portuguese with a young Korean Catholic from Brazil, who had gone to Dalian to visit relatives. This really brought home to us the smallness of the world!

The people of Dalian are very friendly. The young people especially are eager to strike up an acquaintanceship with foreigners in order to practice their English. Two of the students from the local Foreign Languages Institute, which has ten foreign teachers, volunteered to show us around the city. We toured Dalian's parks and its famous Tiger Beach. Finally, we asked the students if they knew where the Catholic Church was. Luckily, they did know, as they had visited there once out of curiosity. We were led to Sacred Heart Church, located at 32, Xian Street, in the Xigang (West Harbor) district of the city.

We were warmly welcomed by Father He Yaohua, a man in his 60's who looks after the administrative duties of the church, and the 87 year old pastor, Father Ding Younan. The church building, though quite old-looking on the outside, has been beautifully renovated on the inside. The Fathers told us that the Catholics in the parish number about 300 at the present time. Other members of the parish staff are Sister Yuan and two novices in their 20's who have been studying about the religious life with Sister for some time. Fr. Ding is also in charge of the open church in the town of Zhuang He, about 80 miles northeast of Dalian.

When the Fathers understood that we were Maryknoll priests, Father He drew a book from out of his desk drawer which contained the names of all the Maryknoll priests and Sisters who had formerly worked in the Fushun diocese. We of course recognized many of the names. Father He told us that he had compiled the list as part of the preparation for writing a history of the Catholic Church in their area. Since we were the first Maryknollers to return to Dalian in 38 years and they had no word about Maryknoll in all that time, the Fathers were anxious to know about Maryknoll's present work. For instance, they wanted to know how many countries we worked in and how many Maryknoll ordinaries there are. To the latter question I replied that there were not many, as our policy is to turn the mission Churches over to local clergy as soon as possible. They also wanted to know how many seminarians there are in Maryknoll and in the Hong Kong diocese and about ecclesiastical developments in Hong Kong. To another question about relations with Protestants in Hong Kong, I replied, that there is a good ecumenical spirit there. I answered their questions as best I could, and I hope it was to their satisfaction. Fathers He and Ding, and a few other lay Catholics who joined us, seemed very interested in developments in the Catholic Church in foreign countries, especially in Hong Kong.

Since the next day was Sunday, we asked the Fathers the time of Mass, and were told that it was at 8:30 A.M. We returned the next day to find about one hundred Catholics in attendance at Mass. The Mass and Benediction afterwards were fervently celebrated by Father Ding, who because of his advanced age, had to be helped up and down the altar steps by the servers. Father He led the Catholics in the singing of hymns and the chanting of prayers, which were rendered in very good voice in both Latin and Chinese. Mass and hymn booklets printed in simplified characters were abundant.

After Mass, many of the Catholics waited to greet us outside the church. They were delighted when we asked them to have their picture taken with us. About 40 of the Catholics then gathered in the rectory to have a longer visit with us. They all asked about Maryknoll Fathers

and Sisters whom they had known. In most cases we had to reply that the missionary named had died. Amazingly one elderly lady could list all the Sisters and many of the priests by their American names. Most of the older Catholics of this parish had been baptized by Father Leo Hewitt. An 82 year-old blind lady was led to us, and as she grasped our hands, she said excitedly, "I was Father Hewitt's catechist." It was a truly moving experience as we chatted with the members of this local Chinese Catholic community about the missionaries they had known. What was impressive was that they had preserved their Catholic faith all those many years without the presence of missionaries.

Towards the end of our visit, I told the Catholics that I had brought some rosaries which had been donated by the Catholics of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Catholics wanted to present them as gifts to the Catholics of China, having the single request that the Chinese Catholics pray for them when they used the rosaries. Were we surprised when someone ran and fetched some rosaries made by Chinese Catholics, which they gave to us with the like request that we distribute them to Hong Kong Catholics and ask for their prayers! The Dalian Catholics expressed the great desire that they be united in prayer with Catholics abroad.

Since we had to catch a bus to the airport in the early afternoon, we made our reluctant goodbyes to the Catholics in order to return to our hotel and pack. Father He came to the station to see us off. Of course we did not expect to see the elderly Father Ding. But just before the bus was ready to leave for the airport, we heard a tap on the bus window, and looking out we were amazed to see Father Ding standing their supported on either side by the two novices. Through the open window Father Ding grasped our extended hands and said enthusiastic goodbyes until the bus left. We were overwhelmed by the thoughtfulness of this 87 year-old priest who had walked the five or six city blocks to the bus station to see us off. It was a fitting end to our pleasant three day visit to Dalian, and was symbolic of the fervent faith of the Catholics and of their fond memories of the missionaries.



Father Ding and Father Ouellette