

From the Editor

Many people today, burdened by feelings of emptiness and alienation, long for a sense of intimacy and connectedness. They feel lost, cast adrift in a sea of individualism, victims of events that seem to conspire to divide and isolate them further. Churches everywhere, conscious of their need to break down barriers that separate and heal the wounds of loneliness, seek ways to support that which can give meaning and purpose to people's lives. "Every day as long as 'today' lasts, keep encouraging one another..." (Heb. 3:13). The Church in its age old wisdom has discovered that sharing one's Christian faith with others can be a most powerful force for support and healing.

This issue of *Tripod* is dedicated to such communities of faith that bear strong witness to the kind of human and spiritual values that enable people to develop healthy relationships that benefit both themselves and society.

Father John Tong in *Society and the Catholic Church of Hong Kong* examines the problem of 1997, the political character of the Chinese people and the future of the Diocese of Hong Kong. Each day brings a fresh reminder of the imminent political change, not the least of which are the daily announcements of departures for other countries. There is much tension and uncertainty. But one thing is perfectly clear. The turnover will bring changes in the way the Church reacts to the need for mutual support and the kind of sharing that nurtures and strengthens faith. The awareness of the Holy Spirit, present among us and active in all the events of our lives, is a powerful instrument of sustenance and encouragement that communities of faith and hope can provide to "steady shaking knees".

Parish communities are often criticised for their self-absorption and failure to relate to larger issues outside themselves. Not necessarily so, says Fr. James Hurley, who in *Social Involvement: the Experiences of One Parish* invites us to experience first hand the development of a community of faith in which peace and justice issues play an important role. Parishes can go a long way in deepening the awareness of its members of their role as Christians in the larger society.

In *Parishes Tell Their Stories* Debbie Lo interviews Fr. John Kwan Kit-Tong, the young pastor of Hong Kong's St. Mary's parish. Addressing the issue of the post-1997 Church, Father Kwan sees faith sharing communities as the best means for assuring a "faith that is firm and deeply rooted enough to face life's increasing challenges." He also feels they will be grounds for training lay leaders to provide for priestless communities in the future.

We also bring you three brief sketches of faith communities in China: *Hecheng New Village* is a priestless Christian community that has through communal prayer and faith sharing found strength, fidelity and unity, as well as a renewed sense of communion with the Church at large; Shen Shiwei introduces *Our Parish Life* that we might learn from this community caught up in the vicissitudes of Church history in China through the ages; and, finally, *Sanban* which, thanks to the efforts of one man, has become a "Village of Vocations".

Our erstwhile China traveller Anthony Lam offers us a paradox to ponder in *The Spirit of Vatican II in the Church in China*. How is it that the Church in China, a non-participant in the Second Vatican Council, has managed to forge ahead of so many other local church communities in implementing the Council's fundamental mandates?

Our own Fr. Peter Barry rounds off this issue of *Tripod* with more in our book review series, featuring this month a dip into the history of the Columban Society in China: *The Laughter and the Weeping*.

And as an extra added attraction, we include a Pictorial Essay on the outstanding work of Catholic Relief Services/Macau for the elderly and handicapped.
