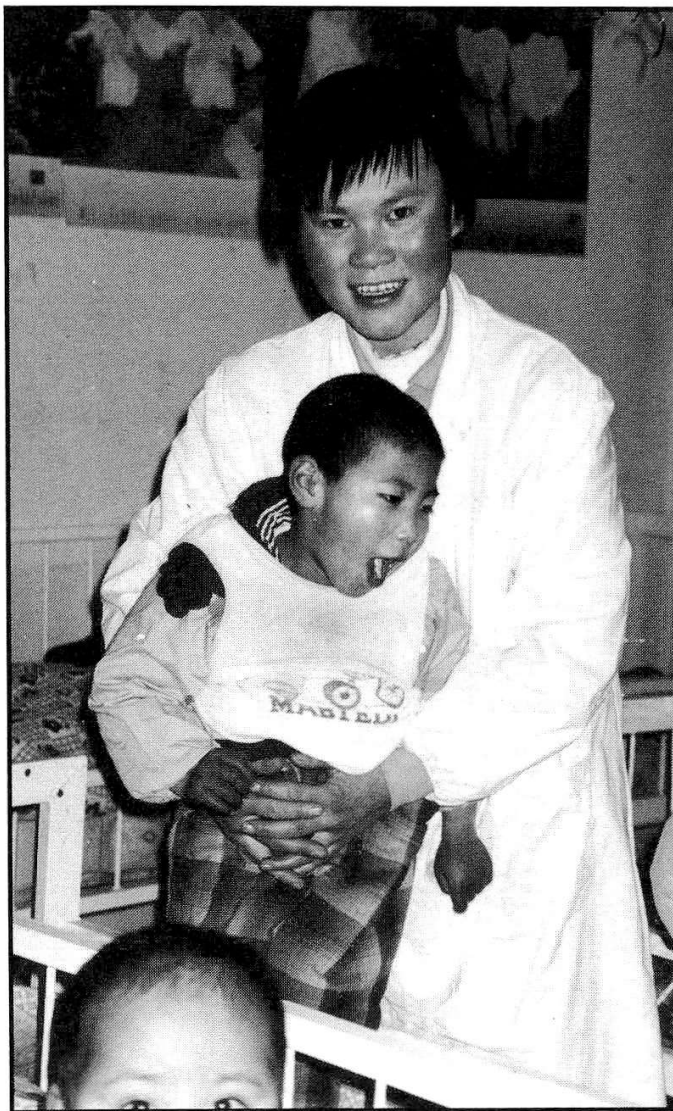


Models of Faith and Love

By Betty Ann Maheu, M.M.

“How much do they pay you for working here?” the woman government official asked the young novice. “Nothing,” the novice replied. “Then why do you work here?” the perplexed woman queried. With complete simplicity, the young aspirant said, “Because I love Jesus.”

This young novice is part of a group of young Sisters helping their dynamic and dedicated leaders Gok Sing Fa, at the Renqiu Home for Handicapped Children and Sister Clara Zhang, superior of the Biancun Children’s Clinic, to care for some 124



babies left at their or their A young Sister cares lovingly for this child bishop’s door in China’s Hebei Province.

“This money for the babies,” a friend said to me. For this reason, I had long wanted to visit these orphanages personally.

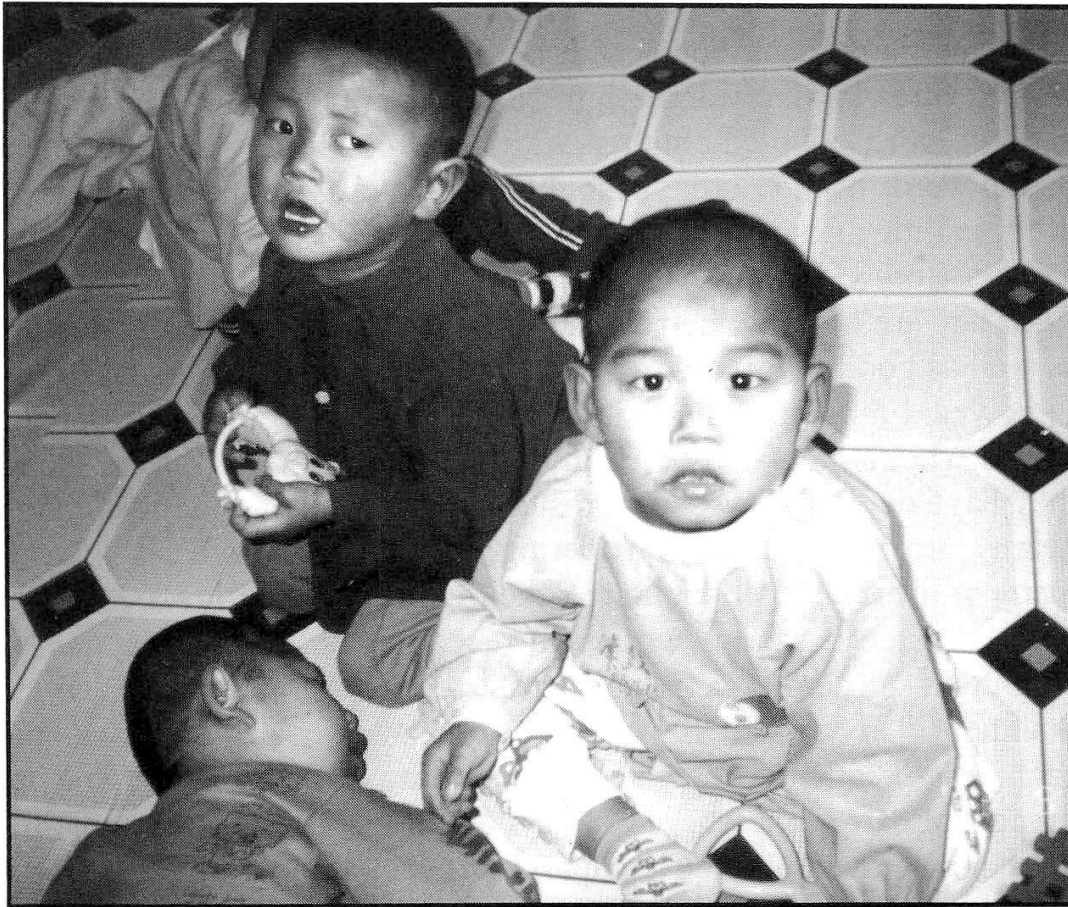
Although most people refer to these institutions as orphanages, they are not orphanages in the usual sense. All these babies have parents somewhere. These children have been abandoned by their parents. The children are either girls-- over 150,000 girls alone

are abandoned in China each year--or handicapped in some way. In these two institutions all the children, boys and girls are in some way disabled. Some are blind, others have harelips or cleft palates. Some have difficulty walking. Others have very serious birth defects like inoperable spinabifida.

Parents feel compelled by tradition or economics to abandon these children. They want to maintain the family line and be assured of support in their old age. A student at Beijing University, who wished not to be identified said, "Handicapped children are useless for either of these two purposes so they become a luxury. Few people can afford luxuries in China. Few Chinese women want to keep a retarded child,"



Sister Gok sing Fa with a ten-year old child.



Several children keeping warm together in their crib.

The physical condition of most of these children in these two homes militates against the possibility of adoption. Furthermore, most couples in China, where the One-Child Policy is still in force, can only adopt children under very restricted circumstances. The 1991 law stipulates that only childless adults who are over 35 can adopt children. Wang Deyi of the China Marriage and Family Association eager to validate the One Child policy and the adoption law says, "The low adoption rate among Mainland Chinese is due more to historic and cultural factors than to the One Child policy or the adoption law. (At the moment, there are plans to revise the adoption law, relaxing some restrictions on domestic adoptions

China's unwanted babies have become a new source of joy and hope for childless Western couples. Hundreds of couples eager to adopt a child gladly travel to China to benefit from the oversupply of baby girls. They willingly pay from US\$ 15,000 to 25,000 to adopt these abandoned and even handicapped children. In 1995 alone over 700 Chinese infants found loving homes in North America. In a hotel in Beijing at breakfast one morning, we met a woman from Canada

who was going back home with her new little daughter. The child was 4 years old, lively and bright. She had only one ear. The woman had two other adopted children with her. I could not help but reflect on the words of the Lord, "In so much as you have done it to the least of these little ones, you have done it to me (Mt. 25: 45).

Both Gok sing Fa and Sister Zhang are astute and resourceful. They are training their young followers to be nurses and doctors as well as good religious. Some courses to become doctors take only three years in China. In addition to get more help in caring for the babies who, almost daily are left at the bishop's or the Sisters' door, they have devised a system of foster parents. Catholic families living nearby are generously volunteering on a temporary basis to give many of these children their care, their home and their love.

Much has been written in recent years about the appalling conditions of some of China's orphanages where, some observers maintained from 60 to 90 percent of orphans in state institutions die each year. The homes operated by Gok Sing Fa and Sister Zhang are models of care, concern, cleanliness and love. These exceptional little ladies, moved by their compassionate heart and a love for God's little ones have become an inspiration to the many young women joining them in their work of mercy.

I could not help but think that perhaps things had not changed very much in China since the early 20th century. I decided to look at the statistics for the Catholic works of Mercy for 1935. I discovered that in that year the Catholic Church had 415 orphanages in China with a population of 3,087 boys and 24,781 girls. In addition the Sisters and Brothers cared for 73,217 more infants. 40, 625 of these had been brought to the Sisters and Brothers by parents who could not take care of them. The Sisters had also managed to find 21,101 wet nurses to feed the babies and had placed 11,491 more with different families. The young women giving their lives today to serve China's abandoned children are walking in the long tradition of mercy and love.

When I looked at this large group of infants, and realized that none of these would ever be able to take care of themselves or work enough to earn their living, I said to Gok Sing Fa. "Someday these little ones will grow up. What will you do then?" She looked up a smiled, "God will provide," she said, "God will provide." With such faith and love, God will surely provide.■