

The Catholic Church in Macau

A Picture Story

By Betty Ann Maheu, M.M.

The Catholic Church arrived in Macau in 1557 with the Portuguese. Today the Catholic Church is a tiny minority of fewer than 20,000 members out of a population of some 450,000 inhabitants. More than 95 percent of these are of Chinese origin with at least half of the population born in China. Forty percent were born in Macau while 10 percent are migrants from other places. The number of Catholics has remained rather constant with no significant increase or decrease in number since about 1990. The population of Macau, however, has increased steadily through waves of immigrants from the Mainland. These seem to convert to Christianity only rarely. There are in addition approximately one thousand Catholic Filipinos presently in the enclave.

Domingos Lam, First Chinese Bishop of Macau

When Domingos Lam succeeded Bishop Arquimínio da Costa as Bishop of Macau in February 1990, he was the first Chinese to be appointed by the Vatican to the highest post in the Church of Macau.

Bishop Lam was educated for the priesthood at St. Joseph's Seminary in Macau. He was ordained on December 27, 1953. He first served in the church in Macau and then at the Portuguese mission in Singapore.

When the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration was signed in 1987, the Holy See, after more than 400 years of appointing bishops from Portugal or its territories, decided to choose Domingos Lam for this post.



Churches of Macau

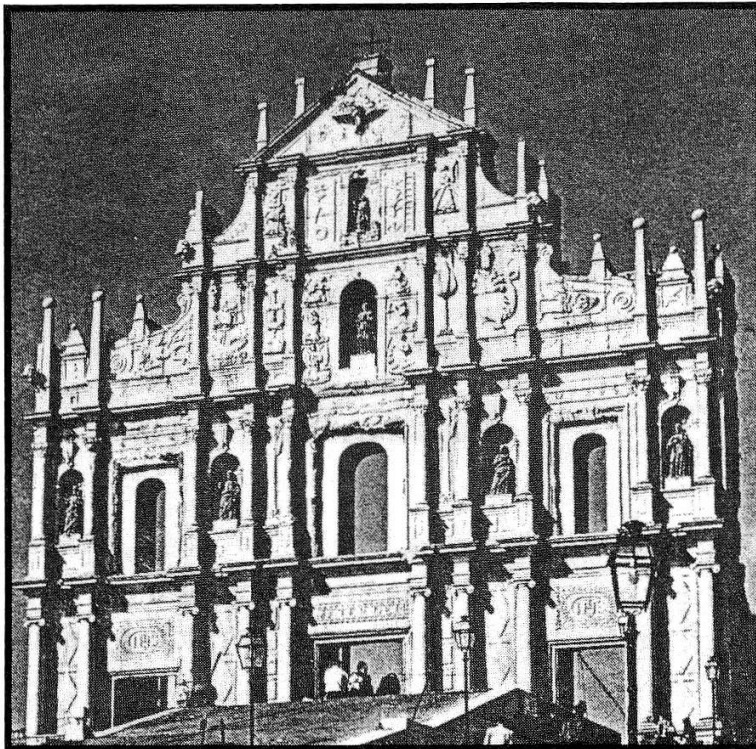
Macau, including Taipa and Coloane, has seven parish churches besides a considerable number of scholl and missionary chapels (cf. Statistics, p. 43). Some of these structures belong to religious institutes and are open only on Sunday for Mass, celebrated either in Chinese or Portuguese. Nine of Macau's churches were built in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Church of the Mother of God

The most famous church, the **Church of the Mother of God** (Mater Dei), is no longer a church since the only thing left of its glorious past is the famous façade usually referred to as the ruins of St. Paul.

The church was built in 1602, and destroyed by fire in 1835 during a violent typhoon. The Jesuits at the Church of the Mother of God held the rank of mandarins. Some stone carvings of the original church may still be seen in the citadel of São Paulo do Monte, which is located next to St. Paul.

The ruins of St. Paul have become the symbol for Macau. They are a testimony to its past glory, decline and yet to its future full of hope. They represent a unique meeting place of European and Asian cultures.



Other Churches

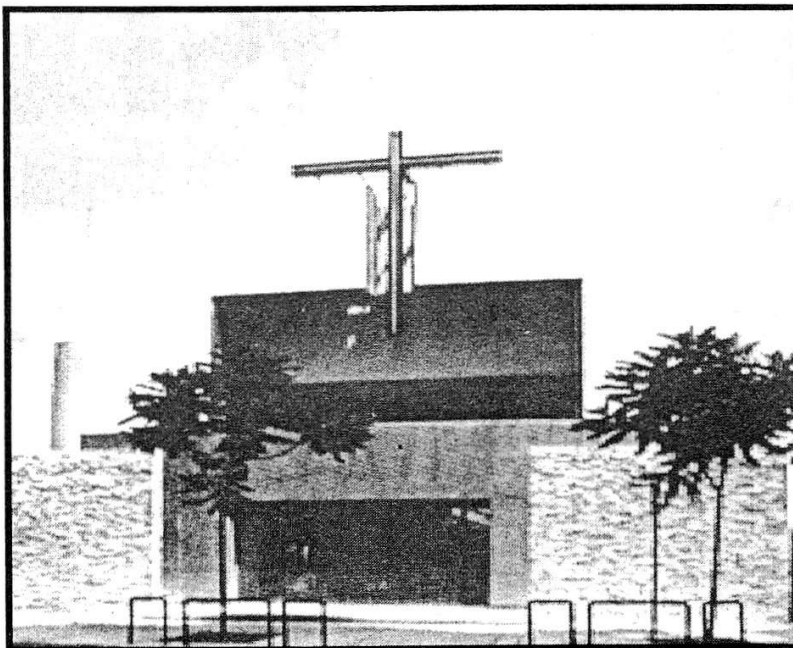
A number of churches, managed by the government, are not used for religious purposes. They have been turned into tourist and cultural attractions.



The **Church of St. Dominic** built in 1587, restored in 1721, and reopened in 1997, is generally recognized as Macau's most beautiful church. Today Unfortunately, it offers cultural activities under government management. The edifice houses a series of ancient relics and sculptures from St. Paul's as well as other churches that have now been either demolished or renovated.

Church of St. Joseph the Worker

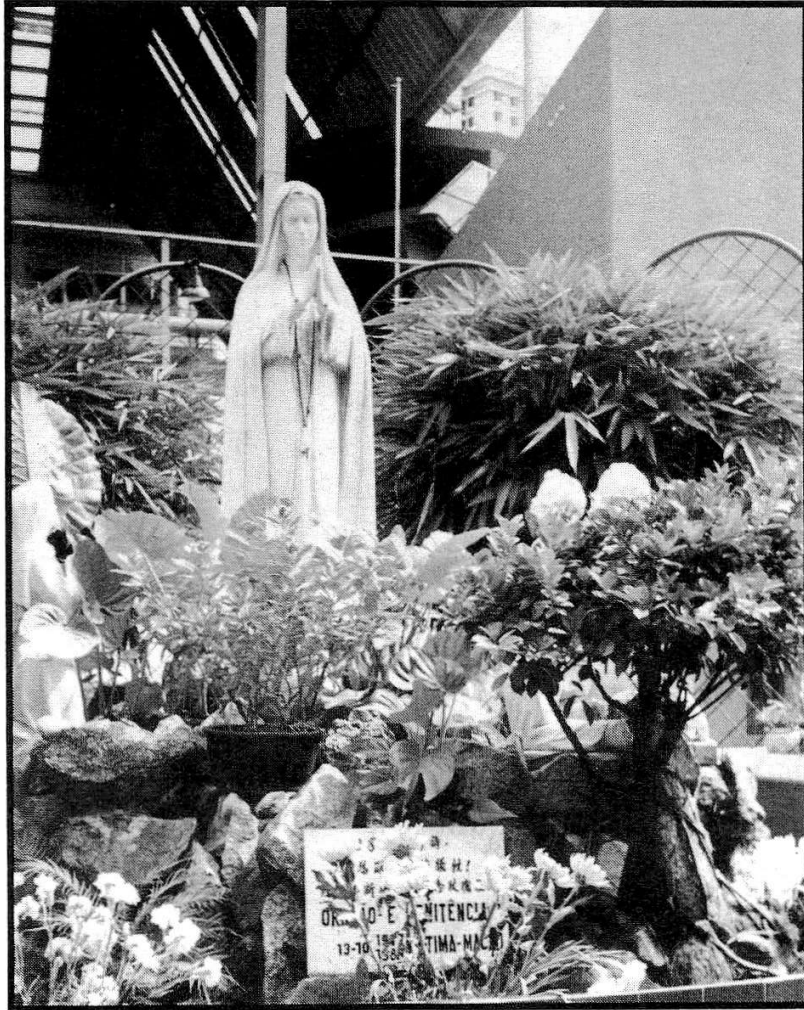
The newest church, the **Church of St. Joseph the Worker**, is the first new church to be built in the 20th century. The church was



dedicated on May 1, 1999, but it was opened in November of 1998 to serve the increasing number of migrants from Mainland China.

Many of the older churches have been renovated throughout the years.

One famous church, whose origins go back to 1565, renovated in recent years, is the **Church of Our Lady of Fatima**, originally known as the Church of San Antonio.



A shrine to Our Lady in the yard of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima.

The Church and Education

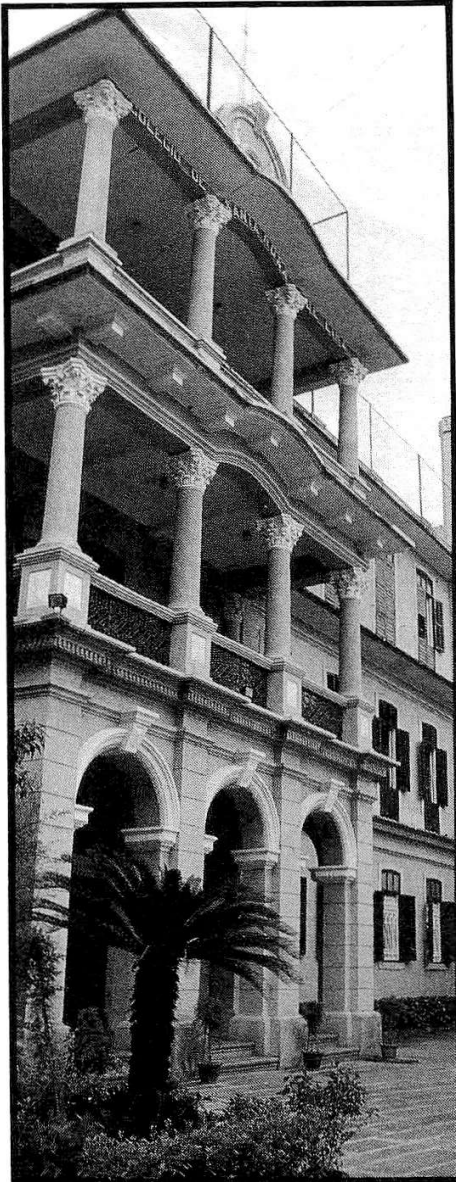
The city of Macau has always relied heavily on the Catholic Church to educate its young people. As early as 1594, the Jesuits had founded St. Paul's College, the first European-style university in the Far East. The college offered Western as well as Chinese studies, and granted both Master of Arts and doctoral degrees. Following the Rites Controversy, the Jesuits were expelled from Macau in 1792, and the college was closed down. It had made an educational contribution of almost 200 years to Macau.

Over the years, the Church in Macau has continued to make a significant contribution in the the field of education. In fact, its contribution

would be difficult to match anywhere in the world. Today, the Church operates thirty-four of the enclave's schools and helps educate 42,261 students. Of these only 1,874 are Catholic.

Besides the new University of Macau, the kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, the Church also operates an Academy of Music and an Institute of Formation for Social Assistants.

The laity, along with personnel from six communities of women religious, and three of men religious, staff and direct these schools.



The school of St. Rose of Lima, operated by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, like many other Catholic schools in Macau, has a long tradition of serving the educational needs of the enclave.



*Sisters play special
role in Macau
Church*



*Above: Sr. Mary Diggins, MM,
gives instructions in the faith.
Right: Missionaries of Charity
chat with Buddhist monk.
Below: Missionary Sisters of
Our Lady of the Angels with a
group of their novices.*





*In service
to the
elderly*

*Top: The elderly enjoy
their bingo games at
the elderly center.*

*Center: This must be
something worth
praying for.
Below:
An ecumenical group
gets together to honor
the elderly.*



The Church in Social Service

If the contribution the Church in Macau has made to education through its Catholic schools is impressive, its contribution to the field of social services is no less outstanding.

Parishes and other groups carry out a variety of social service programs to serve the youth and the elderly. Through its social services, the Church operates four homes for the aged as well as a hostel for the elderly. These two institutions serve nearly 500 elderly people. Work for the elderly is further supported through a Center for the elderly that services some 300 persons. The Church also operates a hospice care facility for nine persons.

In addition Caritas/Social Services Macau maintains a home for the handicapped, a half-way house for ex-prisoners, and a Center for the homeless, that can care for thirty-four persons. Twenty-one Sisters and 460 social workers, nurses and other helpers carry out these corporal works of mercy exemplifying so clearly Caritas' motto, *Love in the service of hope*.

The work of Caritas Macau extends far beyond the boundaries of the tiny enclave. Through Father Lancelot Rodrigues and the Spanish Jesuit, Father Luis Ruiz, and their committed and dedicated teams, the love of neighbor Jesus spoke about in the Gospel comes alive in wonderful "miracles." The lame walk again, the blind see, the deaf hear and the lepers find a home and acceptance

No place in China is too remote, no work is too humble for the Macau teams to bring healing and comfort, even if this means the teams must negotiate treacherous unpaved mountain roads, or pass a night or two sleeping in the van, in the cold, along the way. Such dedication has not gone unnoticed in China. The works of Caritas have won the praise of parents with handicapped children, the gratitude of teachers and students who now have a better place to teach and to learn. It has also won the respect of many of China's social workers who, through Caritas, have come to realize the worth and dignity of each human being. It has won the praise of government authorities wherever it has labored.



Extending social services to the Mainland



Top: Sichuan officials welcome the Macau team.

Center: Many hearing-impaired children are given hope.

Left: Helping the mentally handicapped