

EDITORIAL

At 2:28 P.M. on May 12, 2008, a magnitude 8.0 earthquake struck Sichuan Province in China, about 100 kilometers north of Chengdu. The immense proportions of the tragedy are still before our eyes, printed everyday in the newspapers. The statistics as of June 17, 2008 are: 69,170 persons confirmed dead, 17,426 persons still missing, and 374,159 people injured.

The only bright spot was the quick response of the Chinese people to this terrible natural catastrophe. In a tremendous outpouring of concern for the victims, everyone, from Premier Wen Jiabao, who arrived at the earthquake scene within hours to direct relief operations, to the soldiers, local officials and police, right down to the ordinary citizens, all rushed to the scene to lend a helping hand. People loaded their vans with bottled water and bread, drove to the disaster area, and handed out supplies to the people who had lost their homes. Parents and neighbors rushed to the schools, and tried to dig the students out with their bare hands. The soldiers hiked for days and nights over mountainous terrain to save victims in remote villages. Catholic Sisters came from Hebei Province, which experienced its own disastrous earthquake in 1976. The doctors and nurses among them joined in the effort to heal the wounded. The other Sisters counseled survivors who lost loved ones. Beifang Jinde, a charitable Catholic organization from Hebei, distributed relief goods.

There were many tales of heroism. At least three teachers were later honored at a memorial service by grateful parents for saving their childrens' lives. One 26-year old kindergarten teacher went back to her classroom several times to lead her young charges out of the tottering building. They were too frightened by the rumbling, moving ground beneath them to move on their own. The last time she went back to her classroom, she never returned.

The body of another middle-aged teacher, who had had several of the parents as her students in the past, was found

covering two of her kindergarten students. The children survived, but the teacher had died. A middle school teacher stood at the door of his classroom, shouting to his students to run for their lives. He stayed at the door until all were out. Most of the students lived, but the teacher died.

Those who could not get to the scene of the tragedy donated money. To date, 45.73 billion yuan has been donated by people from home and abroad.

The special topic for this issue, ethnic minorities in China, had already been set before the earthquake happened. There are 56 ethnic groups in China. The largest is the Han ethnic group, which comprises 94% of China's total population. 55 smaller ethnic minority groups make up just 6% of the population. At times, there are frictions among the groups, which are reflected in some of our articles.

However, during the recent earthquake disaster, everyone came together, no matter his or her race or religion. Who can forget the picture of the Han man, who welcomed members of ethnic minorities into his home to live because his was one of the few still standing in their mountainous area? How heartwarming it was to see, on the TV news, Tibetan monks lining up to place money in the donation boxes. Forgotten were the disturbances in Tibet of the previous March. Everyone was united behind the cause of helping the earthquake victims. China can be proud of this spontaneous outpouring of concern on the part of its citizens for the less fortunate in society.

Even though we focus for a moment on the differences among the ethnic groups, let us hope and pray that the spirit of unity and harmony displayed during the devastating earthquake will carry over into everyday life, and have a lasting effect on society.

Besides the articles on the ethnic minorities, we also include in this issue the pastoral letter of Bishop Aloysius Jin of Shanghai, issued at Christmas 2007. Anthony Lam has a commentary on SARA Director Ye Xiaowen's interview with *Nanfang Weekender* in March 2008. Michael Sloboda adds a book review, and James Kroeger reports on a meeting of missiologists in Poland in August 2007. May all our readers have an enjoyable summer! (PJB)