

# **Chair's Report 2001**

## **1. General**

It is evident that the Peoples' Republic of China is playing an ever increasing role in world affairs. Its attainment of membership in the World Trade Organization, its improved relations with the U.S. following the September 11<sup>th</sup> disaster, as well as its hosting of the Olympics in 2008 are some clear pointers to this.

It is incumbent on us living in the United Kingdom to face that growing reality and to become better informed about China, and find creative ways of engaging in dialogue with a people who can boast of such a long and rich culture and religious tradition. Neither must we be afraid of facing the historical truth with regard to the relationship between the UK and the Chinese people. John Paul II has given us a model in his recent message for the fourth centenary of the Jesuit, Matteo Ricci's arrival in Beijing, when in an amazing act of humility, he begged for the forgiveness of Chinese people who felt hurt in some way by the past actions of Christians in China's history.

While our goal in CEC is 'cultural' exchange with China in its broadest understanding of that word, we are concerned more particularly with inter-Church and inter-Faith exchanges. The opening up of China to the world offers huge challenges and opportunities for dialogue with Catholics and Protestants as well as with followers of the Buddhist, Muslim and Taoist traditions.

The presence of parallel 'registered' and 'unregistered' Catholic Churches in China is of great concern to both China and the Vatican. The 'registered' Catholics tend to downplay the existence of any division by claiming that 'we all belong to the one Catholic Church'. The concern for healing of the rift is reflected in John Paul's message (referred to above), where he pleaded for the reopening of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the PRC.

It is well known and documented that the persecution of Christians and peoples of other faiths as well as non believers continues in China despite the attempts of the Government to gloss over it. Human rights violations are an issue that cannot be avoided.

## **2. Clarification of Purpose of CEC**

Clarity of purpose is an essential ingredient for good organization, and a significant advance has been made in this regard by CEC.

In 1996 A small group of Catholics with interests in China began to meet regularly to explore ways of being involved with the Church In China, with a particular focus on facilitating teachers from Britain to teach English in China. The group liaised with AITECE, an organization in Hong Kong which coordinates the programme for teachers from Ireland, North America, Australia and New Zealand as well as Britain. For various reasons, our group was not able to show practical results. A complete overhaul of the structures led to the emergence of CEC.

CEC has now agreed a clear statement of purpose (Mission Statement) and goals as well as possible ways in which members can particularly implement these goals. Structures are now in place in CEC to better facilitate implementation of our goals. There is still need for clarification in some areas of the constitution drawn up by the Charities Commission.

### **3. Assisting Formation for Ministry in China**

Chinese students are eager to experience church in other parts of the world. CEC is anxious to respond to that desire through sponsorships. Efforts by students in the past to leave China have been frustrated by the difficulty of getting passport and visa clearance. We have good hopes that restrictions will be soon relaxed; two Catholic women from the Sapientia Press in Beijing are expected to arrive in early January 2002 as sponsors of CEC to do studies in language and theology in Britain.

We have begun to respond to requests from formation and Academic centres for theological literature and hope to expand this service as funding becomes available.

### **4. Exposure Trip to China**

The first Exposure Trip to China to be sponsored by CEC took place last September (we left London on that fatal day – Sep 11<sup>th</sup>) with ten people on board. It covered three major cities (Beijing, Wuhan and Shanghai) and involved substantial sharing and interaction with Church leaders and lay members, both Catholic and Protestant, as well as with seminaries, sisters' communities and academic institutions.

Important contacts with church personnel were made/ renewed, and a greater appreciation of China, its culture and the situation of its faith communities were gained by the participants. The experience showed how little we understood and how much we need to do to build bridges. The participants from Leeds, Shrewsbury and Westminster since their return have been sharing their experience through talks and local media.

There are plans for future trips to China, including small groups for Bishops, Religious Superiors, and Lay Leaders. A hoped for Ecumenical trip will not be possible until 2003.

### **5. Teacher's Programme**

The 'Teach English in China' programme was given extensive publicity through letters to COR leaders, schools, heads of RE, all Sixth Form colleges and University Catholic Chaplaincies. The response was disappointing and our strategy needs to be reviewed. One candidate was accepted who is now teaching business English in Nanchang. The prospects are better for the coming year (2002). We have two accepted and five enquiries.

### **6. Awareness in UK**

The CEC Association has been widely publicized in the local Churches in Britain. The Bishops' Conference of England & Wales and bishops from Scotland have given warm support for our Association.

A first Awareness Conference, jointly sponsored by the Archdiocese of Westminster and CEC, has been set for January 26, 2002 at St. Vincent's, Carlisle Place. The topic is "The Catholic Church in Modern Day China", with Dr. Edmond Tang and Ms. Margaret Siberry as speakers.

Knowledge of China or its faith communities is not a top priority, and the creation of much greater awareness in the local Church will present a strong challenge.

## **7. Net Working**

CEC has begun to network with other ecumenical organizations in the UK which are involved With the Church in China, such as the China Forum, Amity, Friends of the Church on China, Ming Ai, as well as the Chinese Communities in Britain. CEC will be represented at the IV European Ecumenical China Conference in Ireland set for June 12-17, 2002. It is encouraging to learn of the existence of a wide network of secular groups in Britain who already have initiated links with China.

## **8. Fund Raising**

Our plans for projects will not be realized if the necessary funding is not forthcoming. CEC is in urgent need of funds just to carry on to the end of the next financial year. Awareness programmes in the UK and plans to support Chinese students for courses of a year or longer involve a substantial outlay of funding.

## **9. Vision for the Future**

The centre-spread in this report outlines in detail a wide-range of proposed involvements over the next five years. All are grounded on the Mission Statement that reflects the basic Catholic/ Christian value system we operate from. It includes a deep respect for the dignity of the human person, promoting harmony and equity in our fractured local and global communities and caring for the endangered planet earth. It involves linking arms with peoples of other Christian and Faith traditions, and with all people of good will.

## **10. A Final Word**

Our Vision is a big challenge to our faith and our capacity for engagement as equals with a nation that comprises one fifth of the world's population. As I look ahead to this coming year of 2002, I have deep feelings of gratitude to God for the accomplishments of this past year. An organization that had been lying dormant for some years has risen phoenix-like and begun to spread its wings.

It is fair to say that this has been the result of a combined effort by all the members of CEC who have given their time and services on a voluntary basis. Thanks to all, and especially to our Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer who generously served as Officers this past year. Jim Bradley, who was 'desk person' for the group during pre-CEC times, steps down as Treasurer. We thank him for the valuable contribution he made to the group and we wish him a well-earned retirement with his wife and family in Gloucestershire.

Michael Duffy