

Cultural Exchange with China

(Building bridges between the Catholic Churches of Britain and China)

Annual General Meeting 2008 and Awareness Conference

Vaughan House, 46 Francis Street, London SW1P 1QN at 11 a.m. on Saturday 3rd May 2008

11	Arrival and Coffee
11.30 – 12.00	OPENING REMARKS Minutes of AGM 2007 The Chair The Director The Treasurer Elections AGM 2009 – Proposed Date
12.00 – 12.30	<i>A Woman's Perspective on her Experience of China and the UK</i> Ms. Maria Dong, now completing her MSc in Therapeutic Counselling at the School of Health and Social Care, University of Greenwich.
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch and Exchange
13.30 – 14.15	<i>The China Road</i> Mr. Rob Gifford, current foreign correspondent with National Public Radio (USA), after six years as NPR correspondent in Beijing, worked with the BBC for three years. His first book—China Road—tells of his 3,000 mile Odyssey across China. He has a BA in Chinese studies from Durham University and an MA in Regional Studies (East Asia) from Harvard University.
14.15 – 14.45	Buzz Session
14.45 – 15.15	Visitor from China
15.15 – 15.30	Questions and Exchange
15.30	Closing Remarks

Annual Report

January 1, 2007 – April, 30, 2008
7th Annual General Meeting

DIRECTOR'S REPORT –Fr Eamonn O'Brien ssc

Our principal goal is to build bridges between the Catholic Church of Britain and that of China. We especially seek to support the Catholic Church in China as it proclaims the Good News and faces the great challenges of modern Chinese Society. We also seek to promote understanding, co-operation and mutually beneficial friendships between the people of Britain and China, based on respect for one another and in an ecumenical, interfaith and global context.

The following pages outline how we go about 'building bridges' between the two Churches and our specific contribution to Formation for the Church of China. We see the strengthening of formation for priests, sisters and laity as the key ingredient to assist the Church of China to take up the great challenge put to it by Benedict XVI in his recent letter, namely to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. Formation/ Education

CEC has facilitated full time studies for four students from Mainland China during the year:

Maria Dong a lay woman studying at Greenwich University in her first year of a masters programme, and preparing to work in spiritual direction and formation on return to China.

Thomas Cai, a lay man, in his second year of foundational Catholic theology, a diploma course at Heythrop College and will continue to MA studies next year..

Thomas Jia, A priest from Xian completed his Masters course in Theology, and has concluded his period of studies here in the UK with a 3 months spirituality course at St Beuno's, Wales.

Sr Mary Yang, a sister from Shanghai engaged in English studies, preparing for work in the Shanghai Catholic Curial Office.

Five students engaged in short-term language studies during the summer/Autumn of 2007. 4 of them needed English to continue further studies. JB ZHANG, Director of Jinde Press and Paul Zhu of Yuce diocese took the autumn course in spirituality at St Bueno's.

All students here are important ambassadors of understanding about the Church of

China and in particular the growth in spirituality, which has been experienced by their Church over the past 50 years. In one to one contacts at college, and often in parishes they are very willing to share their experience.. Their presence confounds a widespread perception that there are 'no Catholics in China'. Further, a trickle of friends who knew them here are beginning to go to China to visit them once they have returned home, and so strengthening relationships between the Churches.

The CEC office is becoming the place that people are being referred to when something about China arises. And the oddest of requests come in!

Two Sisters and two priests in China are studying English in China preparing to come to Britain.

Formation Course based in Europe: Explorations are under way to locate a 'mini' course in Europe to train personnel for spiritual direction/formation work. The course will be run on the same lines as the current one in China (see page 8) – needless to say with much more freedom in the management of it. Its purpose is to provide opportunity for suitable candidates from the 300 or so students based in Europe to gain new skills over a three year period.

The course has the support of the European China coordinators and the Abbot of St Otilien, Germany

2. Academic Institute Links – Catholic and Secular.

In 2004, we began a process of academic dialogues with three institutes in China: The Institute for Culture and Christianity in Beijing, The Catholic Seminary in Shanghai and the Philosophy Department of Fudan University, also in Shanghai.

Good links were made with many universities in the UK, but especially with Hope University, Liverpool, with whom ongoing discussions are taking place with a view to further bridge building between China and Britain. It is hope that Fr Peter Zhao the director of Sapientia Press, Beijing will spend a month or so there as a visiting research fellow in Catholic Social teaching, with the second agenda of getting to know the Vice Chancellor and staff and hopefully having his one year theology course for lay people in Beijing credited from Hope University.

We continue to support the Journal of Catholic Theology, published by the Institute for the Study of Culture and Christianity Beijing. We also support seminars sponsored by this Institute exploring the role and contribution of Catholicism to Chinese society. The papers from these seminars are usually published in the Journal of Catholic Theology., thereby ensuring a wide readership.

With our support, Peter Zhao is encouraging young secular academic scholars to take up Catholic studies as a section of their MA or PhD. This will contribute to developing a new base of young academic 'Christians' and we are hoping to have a symposium this year bringing these latter together with young priests and sisters who have returned to China after academic training abroad, with a view to working

on a fundamental theology for China.

Fr Peter Zhao is spending a month at Liverpool Hope University during April-May 2008 on a short fellowship researching Catholic Social Teaching and building links with the University staff with a view to some engagement by Liverpool Hope with the Institute for the Study of Culture and Christianity in Beijing.

3. Theological Literature

We provide a steady flow of theological books to seminary libraries and individual scholars. The National seminary where I teach is seeking accreditation from a foreign university, so they have many requirements to fulfill to achieve that status, so we propose to help them especially with English theological literature.

Some of the material is translated – including very up to date material on ecological theology and genetic engineering as it effects the poor and creation itself.

During 2006 two of Sean Mc Donagh's books were translated, published and distributed in China. They were: *Dying for Water* and *The Death of Life. I am getting constant feedback relating to these.* Mc Donagh's book *Climate Change*, published in late 2006, is now under study for translation and distribution, but little progress was made in 2007.

4. Teachers in China

Four teachers worked in third level institutes in China till June 2007. A young couple just graduated with physics degrees, who feel very strongly that there is more to life than just simply accumulating wealth as the current culture in our society promotes so strongly, did a 6 month stint. Fr John Conroy, Mill Hill, began work in Sept 2007. A report from the VG of Mill Hill Missionaries who visited the CEC office on Feb 29th suggests that John is very well adjusted and highly involved not only in the university but also the Catholic community.

A retired doctor is now preparing to go to teach in August 2008.

Teachers who have been in China report great pleasure from their contact with Chinese young people and the extraordinary developments that are taking place in Chinese Society.

In a novel development this year, we had an exchange of teachers. A teacher from St Julies, Catholic High School, Liverpool went to Chonching University, and one of the teachers from Chongching came to teach Chinese language in Liverpool. We believe this is an important development and would like to duplicate it. Schools in Norfolk have requested dialogue on the matter. And the Chinese teacher who has now returned to her university has a strong interest in developing further links.

A number of schools including Catholic ones are building links with schools in China. During the coming year we hope to make an inventory of such initiatives and share this information with a wider audience.

5. Exposure visits to China

Cardinal O'Brien of Scotland and the administrator of his cathedral, David Gemmell, visited China for two weeks in October. It was a highlight of our year and a very valuable exchange between our Churches, even if was an intense, conflictual at times. I have just got a batch of letters received by the Cardinal from people in China expressing their deep gratitude for his visit. (With the Cardinal in the photo on the cover page is Sr Marie Gorette, superior of the Xian Convent – the community of sisters who were violently attacked and referred to in no 8 of this report.)

Discussions are underway with two groups – university Chaplains and religious Sisters – and we expect to have a **group exposure visit** to China in May 2008.

We facilitated the visit of the **Vicar General of the Mill Hill** for a two week visit to China. He was greatly assisted by many friends in China and valued the visit very much. It is hoped that this will initiate a process of greater engagement by Mill Hill with the Church of China.

6. Chinese Students Britain

We continue to explore how we can interface with the ninety thousand or so Chinese students who study in the UK. Contacts with Catholic and some ecumenical chaplains continue. Some University Chaplains will visit China in May 2008 and hopefully they will act as catalyst with in the larger Catholic Chaplaincy service in the UK on their return.

7. Public Awareness in the UK

One conferences was held in 2007 – our AGM. We had three presentations: a talk by the Exchange Chinese teacher in Liverpool on her impressions and relationships in the UK; A former High Court Judge from Ireland who spoke on the topic 'From rule by law to the rule of law in China' and one of our students presented a paper on the "challenges and opportunities facing the Church in China today".

Presentations on China were given by Eamonn O'Brien at all the masses in two Churches, one in London and the other in Birmingham, and an appeal for funds was also made.

Our students are now playing a greater role in making presentations on China, usually requested by friends, and local deanaries.

Press cuttings, mailings and in-dept articles were circulated to members, friends, local Clergy/parishes, politicians, Religious and Missionaries and large Catholic network.

8. Working with Others - Churches/Faiths

Our links with the China Desk of Churches together in Britain and Ireland is a most valuable network for us. At this time a review of this organization is taking place. We have good links with, Ming Ai, the Bahai Community and Friends of the Church in China. Initial contact has been made with Parliamentary groups, but due to lack of personnel its difficult to build on these initial contacts.

Being part of the European China network allows for valuable connections. A three day meeting was held in Paris from Feb 25-27 where we agreed to expand the services we offer to Chinese Catholic students now in Europe under Church sponsorship.

8. Programs in China

We are supporting **Formation and Social awareness for Sisters**, groups in China, many of whom are doing sterling work in rural areas where there is a great deal of poverty and now an increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS. Support continues to be given to poorer areas for education of children at primary level.

We especially support **general renewal programmes** in the west of China, which does not have the same resources as the East. We also support the training and development in Faith of lay prayer leaders. Bishop Han of Lanzho has a very good programme.

Support was given last year to a **group of sisters who had been victims of brutal violence** as a result of their struggle to get their properties back, and reports from the seminar suggested that a great deal was achieved in helping the sisters to come to grips with the severe emotional trauma they suffered.

Fr Eamonn O'Brien gave a three week course on the "Mission of Jesus" at the National Seminary, Beijing and a shorter course at the Formation centre for Sisters in Tayuan

Spiritual Directors Training course: This was the largest initiative to date to assist in the training of personnel for formation work in Seminaries/Convents and among lay people. 32 people participated from various parts of China. A team of three Mandarin speaking staff and Eamonn O'Brien managed the course. It had its frictions, especially relating to the 50th anniversary of the Patriotic Association, however we were satisfied that all participants gained something, some making great development.

It is hoped that the second session will begin on July 1st 2008 and will run for two weeks longer than the session of 2007. A fourth full staff member has been engaged and two extra staff will assist at the directed retreat which will be part of the programme this year.

The whole programme, and its preparation, provided a very great opportunity for learning

'how things happen' in China and we are clearer in our minds on how to improve many aspects in the future. Implementing our learning, of course, will be another matter.

Contemplative Life in China: There is a request from Bishop from China to assist with

the development of Contemplative Life in China and this is being actively pursued. We are seeking funding for building purposes and contemplative monastery where sisters from China could come to Britain and experience contemplative life and community.

The Contemplative communities in the UK are taking a special interest in this development. Also 4 religious sisters from the UK will be part of the exposure visit in May 2008 with the specific purpose of visiting sisters' communities and attempting to build links between communities of sisters in the t UK and in China. Carmelite Communities in the UK have offered to host potential candidates for this project for a couple of years formation. An offer has also come from Ireland.

9. Fundraising.

The more contacts we make in China, the more calls there are for financial help to aid requests that fall outside the scope of the funding received from the Columbans. We really need a part-time volunteer in the office who could take responsibility for this task for developing new ways of fundraising.

We have attempted fundraising through Catholic publications, such as The Far East, The Tablet, Catholic Life, Westminster Record. Direct appeals are made in Parishes each year. New ways of fundraising are also being investigated. **Suggestions from the readers of this report would be most welcome.**

10. Donors, Volunteers and Supporters.

We have an active group of volunteers who come to the Office without whom we simply could not go on. They attend to accounts, incoming mail, mailings and distribution, invoice payments, collation, photocopying and filing. They also take the role of tutor and spiritual directors or offer accommodation. We are now in urgent need of a copy typist with computer skills.

Without our donors and supporters, much of our work would be impossible. The donations and support in various forms we receive, both large and small, allows us to offer solidarity to the Church of China.

Our prayers and thanks to all of you.

11. Finally

The Pope's encyclical on China has marked a moment in the history of the Church in China. Its reception is a major issue both for Church and State. We can only pray for a positive response by all involved. Information on this day of prayer has been sent to all the Bishops of England, Scotland and Wales. Please promote this day of prayer in any way you can.