

Speaker Rev. Fr. John Wotherspoon, Order of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.)

Topic: Work with the underprivileged.

The OMI was founded in Aix-en-Provence, south of France in 1816. Rev. Fr. John Wotherspoon, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), is now the Prisoners Chaplain and is actively involved in preventing drugs trafficking in Hong Kong. He previously worked in China for 7 years. There are now 15 OMI priests working in Hong Kong. They are responsible for 2 parishes and 2 schools. Rev. Fr. Wotherspoon spoke on his work with the underprivileged.

(A) Pizza Supper

Fr. Wotherspoon started this Pizza Supper for street-sleepers and drug addicts so that they could gather together for fellowship and food. As the group got larger, the gathering now takes place every Sunday at the St. Paul's Church in Yaumatei between 5:15 - 7:30 p.m. and assisted by volunteers.

(B) Mercy Centre

Many poor people cannot afford proper accommodation and have to spend their night at McDonald's. Fr. Wotherspoon manages to rent an old, deserted flat and provides accommodation for street sleepers in the Yaumatei area. They gather for dinner every Thursday at the Wing Fat food stalls (dai pai dongs).

Recently, Fr. Wotherspoon managed to rent a single house on Lantau Island and converted it into a residence for street sleepers. Many of them haven't slept in a proper bed for many, many years.

With the assistance of the "Living Spring Foundation," a canteen (活水基金) was built just outside the Mercy Centre on Lantau Island to provide employment for drug addicts and ex prisoners to earn some pocket money. They have also opened a premise next to the Yaumatei Rubbish Collection Centre to provide employment for the poor and the underprivileged people. Fr. Wotherspoon showed many pictures of people benefitting from the pizza supper and Mercy Centre.

(C) "No more mules (No mas mulas)"

Drug prevention is another aspect of Fr. Wotherspoon's work. He went on a recent trip to South America countries promoting the battle against "drug mules" bringing dangerous narcotics to Hong Kong. He made a similar trip to South Africa bringing the same message. These efforts seem to pay off and fewer drug mules from Africa and South America Columbia, Venezuela, Brazil, etc. were caught red-handed by the Hong Kong Immigration Department.