

A Permanent and Constant Dialogue In Between Tzu Chi and Vatican

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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"The concept of Love from Catholicism and Great Love combined together is compassion" – in a meeting with representatives from the Vatican, Master Cheng Yen said that to practice the spirit of Four Immeasurables: loving-kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity, is to help and comfort people in need without considering their faith. This coincides with the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy announced by Pope Francis this year. Christianity talks about fraternity and Tzu Chi emphasizes Great Love. The spirit of love exists in both.

On February 18, 2016, a delegation of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue led by Bishop Thomas Manwel Dabre from Poona, India, visited the Jing Si Abode in Hualien, Taiwan. One of the main purposes of the meeting was that the council sought Tzu Chi's active participation and cooperation for the possibility of holding an international Inter-Religious Dialogue in Taiwan in the near future. The Bishop said that the goal of the Dialogue is to work together for the betterment of humanity and reestablishing peace and unity back into families. Master Cheng Yen welcomed the ideas.

Members of this delegation were Bishop Thomas Manwel Dabre, a member of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Fr. Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Fr. Sladan Cosic, Counselor of the Apostolic Nunciature in Taiwan, Bishop Philip Huang Chao-ming in Hualien Diocese, Fr. Batairwa K. Paulin, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue in Taiwan, and Mr. Sense Chen Shih-Hsien, CEO of St. Mary's Hospital in Taitung, and others. They visited Master Cheng Yen for an exchange between Christian and Buddhist.

Talk with Catholic

During the meeting, Bishop Dabre said that Pope Francis has declared the Year 2016 as the Year of Mercy -- helping people, loving them and showing sympathy. To really help families to enjoy family life and live well is also an urgent priority for Vatican. He said, "We must go to the families because the world lives in the family. And family must be in peace and in unity. And today many families have problems of breakups, tensions, and divorces." With that said, he was also happy to learn that is what Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation has been working hard on. Because of the similar missions, he hoped that his church and Tzu Chi could promote charity, mercy, and service together.

"The Catholic churches and I always have a good affinity. Fifty years ago, a conversation with three Catholic nuns about pain and suffering in the world had led me establish Tzu Chi," Master Cheng Yen recalled. Over the years, Tzu Chi has frequently worked with many Catholic congregations to offer social services; furthermore, the staff of Tzu Chi hospitals often take care of the health of Catholic priests and nuns. Tzu Chi volunteers also supported their institutions and their services.

To demonstrate, Master Cheng Yen mentioned some recent projects to rebuild catholic

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institutions after disasters. After Typhoon Haiyan devastated the Philippines in 2013, Tzu Chi worked with Catholic churches to provide immediately disaster relief and long-term rebuilding and recovery. Considering that the Philippines is a Catholic country and the survivors needed a strong faith to get them through the difficult times, Tzu Chi voluntarily repaired and rebuilt the heavily damaged Santo Nino Church in Tacloban City. This project was completed by Christmas of the same year for worshippers to held their Christmas Mass indoor.

In Haiti, another Catholic country, after the powerful 2010 earthquake, Tzu Chi saw the needs for development. After the disaster relief ended, Tzu Chi also rebuilt three schools for Sisters of St. Ann Congregation. At the first graduation ceremony took place in the newly built school, Tzu Chi volunteers were very happy to see the promising smiles back on the faces of the young students while deeply appreciated the contribution and efforts made by the sisters of St. Ann to safeguard the children of this country which is still struggling with hardship and poverty today.

During the meeting, Bishop Dabre, on behalf of the delegation, offered their condolences and prayed for the affected people and their families suffering from the powerful earthquake which devastated southern Taiwan on February 6, 2016.

To promote friendship and love, Bishop Dabre said, "We must know you and you must know us. So when we know each other, then we can work better for peace and harmony in the world." He also said that he was very impressed by Tzu Chi's works of charity all over the world.

After a guided tour of Jing Si Abode, Fr Indunil recounted, "Three things attracted my mind, be mindful, be in harmony with nature, and no work, no meal. Reflecting on these, it teaches me a deep spiritual principle. Action and contemplation are not separated. Before action, we have mindfulness spirituality; that spirituality needs some compassionate, merciful loving and serving others. And when it comes to serving, because of the deep spirituality, it goes beyond nationality, ethnicity, classes."

Fr Indunil went on and said that, in 1995, the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue held the first Buddhist-Christian dialogue with the theme of 'Liberation in Buddhism, Salvation in Christianity.' Last year the 5th Buddhist Christian Colloquium Dialogue was held in India. In 2001, Dr. Lin Chin-Lon, CEO of Tzu Chi Medical Mission, also represented Buddhist to attend the annual meeting of Catholic hospitals in Vatican. In 2014, representatives from Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation also attended an interreligious dialogue in Vatican. Fr Indunil hoped this dialogue to continue.

Master Cheng Yen agreed on the need to have inter-religious dialogues and in fact, Tzu Chi has worked very closely with Catholic fathers and nuns for years. Even though in names, we are from different religions, but we share the same essence to love and help the world. She warmly invited everyone to come back again and not to forget Hualien. With that, she looked forward to permanent and constant exchanges between Tzu Chi and Vatican.

Article by Yen Fu-Chiang