

Seniors Get Sisterly Care in Central China

Contributed by Tom McGregor
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XINGTAI, Hebei, Province: Much of the world has heard about China's economic rise over the past three decades. Yet, many rural villagers remain isolated and impoverished, as young people flock to bigger cities. Accordingly, many senior citizens, residing in the countryside, must endure worsening health conditions, while struggling to care for themselves. They feel even lonelier if their beloved spouse dies before them. Fortunately, the elderly in Xingtai city in Central China can receive proper care along with medical treatment, as they live at a senior living home named, Xingtai Jinde Elderly House. A congregation of Catholic nuns, Our Lady of All Souls, founded 22 years ago by Bishop Hou Jinde of Xingtai Diocese, runs the facility. Four sisters (Francis Li Zhongliang, Johanna Zhang Shuanghong, Pauline Zhang Huimin, and agnes Tian Chunjing) provide round-the-clock support, along with their prayers. They told the Dallas Blog that they have difficult jobs, but it's "spiritually rewarding," despite rigorous schedules. The nuns said they "feel lucky" if they get more than six hours of sleep at night. They wake up for morning prayers at 5:30 a.m. They cook and serve breakfast for elderly residents at 7:30 a.m. and they eat at 8:30 am. They spend the rest of the morning cleaning and caring for the seniors. They serve lunch at 11:30 a.m. They take a 1 ½ hour break in the afternoon, but remain on the premises to handle medical emergencies. They care for patients until 10 p.m., while cooking their dinners. They participate in evening prayers at 6 p.m. and say the rosary at 8 p.m. The center has a chapel, where the sisters and about 70 seniors join them in prayers. Many elderly converted to Catholicism after their first arrival. They were unfamiliar with the religion until meeting the sisters. They received the sacrament of Baptism from the chaplain, Fr. Paul Zhang, who celebrates Mass for the community each Sunday at 8 p.m. Zhong Shuan Hong, Sr. Johanna (Joyce), said the sisters don't try to convert anyone by preaching. "The elderly here see the sisters' actions and then they want to become Catholic, because we show them love and provide better care for them than what they would receive from outside." "The elderly who come are the first to ask us questions about our religion," she added. "When people first come to our home, they start a spiritual search for something, so they begin with a hope for God." The sisters receive much of their financial contributions from Jinde Charities, which was founded in May 1997 in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, and recognized as the first Non-Profit Organization (NPO) of the Chinese Catholic Church for social services. The NPO raises funds from Catholic parishes from the provincial region. Hebei has 10 dioceses and approximately 700,000 Catholics who attend Mass regularly. The province enjoys a nationwide reputation for having a growing and vibrant Catholic community. "Many of them are influenced by their families and friends," said Sr. Johanna. "Catholic people influence others to become Catholics here in Hebei." The nuns feel grateful for Jinde Charities to provide: disaster relief, emergency aid to individuals, care for elderly, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, scholarships and social development, according to the NPO's 2010 annual report, published in Chinese and English languages. The sisters also raise money by running in the annual Beijing Marathon, which is scheduled for October 13, 2012. They coordinate with the BRICKS Great Wall Appeal to encourage people to donate money for every mile they run. The nuns hold strong faith in God as they help impoverished and sick residents in Central China. They believe that "actions speak louder than words," and feel most inspired by the life of the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who captured global acclaim by helping "the poorest of the poor" in India. They feel called to help the Chinese who are in most need of their help. They live in a region that still faces the grips of dire poverty, but they have inspired many local-area residents to feel a "hope for God," and perhaps "economic hope" will arrive soon too. To learn more about Jinde Charities, link here: Tmcgregordallas@yahoo.com