



French priest called to minister in Taiwan

FEELING AT HOME: Francois Verry said he felt it important to learn Hoklo, which he began learning in Taichung so he could preach to the mostly farming community

BY MEGGIE LU
STAFF REPORTER

The neighborhood deep in the countryside is filled with rice paddy after rice paddy, scattered intermittently with weathered, one-story brick homes that are still occupied.

The community is known for producing rice and guava, among other things. It is easy to notice that the age of people in the neighborhood fall in two extremes forming an "M" shape — either people are very young or quite old — as others are working in larger cities.

On a lazy Tuesday afternoon, a group of school children park their bicycles in front of a Catholic church after school, chattering as they head for the entrance. Follow them in and you are in a different world.

The building, the Cingliao Catholic Church (菁寮聖十字教堂), sports a cone-shaped, Western style roof, plated with aluminum and topped with a Holy Cross.

The church is a landmark in Houbi Township's (後壁) Ting-an Village (頂安), as it was designed by renowned German architect and Pritzker Architecture Prize winner Gottfried Bohm, and built in 1960.

Under the windows embedded around the roof, through which you can see the sky, in the center of the church is a large incense burner in front of Jesus on the Cross; on the left is an ancestor plaque, and on the right a statue of the Holy Mary. But perhaps what makes the

church alive is French-native Pere (Father) Francois Verry (方方濟), who lives in it, and who has been preaching to locals in Taiwanese (or Hoklo) for the past 18 years.

When asked what brought him to Taiwan, Verry said that he was answering a call from Jesus.

"I didn't know a lot about Taiwan 18 years ago, other than having seen many inexpensive products stamped 'Made in Taiwan,' so my impression of the country was not that good," Verry said.

At the time, Verry had been serving at a church in France for two years, he said.

"However, a priest had been working in Taiwan, and when my church asked us who would volunteer to go give him a helping hand, I was touched with a calling, the calling superseded my bad impression of Taiwan and told me to come — it was my first trip abroad," he said.

Soon after coming to Taiwan, Verry said that he felt it was important to learn Taiwanese, adding that shortly after his arrival he began taking Taiwanese language lessons in Taichung to communicate to his congregation, who are mostly farmers.

"My mission in life is to serve Jesus and the church, I want to share my love for Jesus, a good friend of mine, with my good friends in Taiwan," he said. "However, I could not tell people who Jesus was before I got to know my people first;

I had to befriend them so that they would be interested in my friend Jesus."

Asked whether this was one reason why his church had an incense burner, Verry said it was only partially correct.

"We have it there, but you cannot control how each person reacts to it, everyone has a different attitude," he said. "[The incense burner is there because] you can worship with incense in Catholic churches, people do it in Europe too, just in a different way."

The idea of holding incense does not conflict with Catholicism, Verry said, as, "the meaning behind holding incense to worship Jesus is to be near him, to be deeply connected to him ... The meaning is not just the gesture, but in the heart."

With this acceptance, Verry offers Masses and Sunday school to locals each week, a group he said comprises about 20 people.

"Would I ever consider going to a bigger city for a bigger crowd? No. I like this place very much because of its tranquility. You see butterflies flutter and hear birds chirp," he said.

"If I went to a city, people may not have time to listen to what I say because they live with stress and are preoccupied with living ... More and more city people are coming to my church, and I welcome them to find quiet and comfort here," he said.

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— Pere Francois Verry

Two years ago, Verry was assigned to Belgium by his church to serve a mission, he said, adding, "I couldn't get used to it. I left after six months to come back to Taiwan."

"I now know that 'Made in Taiwan' is of the best quality, particularly the people here ... I am a 'Made in France' Taiwanese," he said, adding that after 18 years and hundreds of Masses, he had developed a deep love for the island.

"When I first came, in addition to the calling, I viewed coming to Taiwan as a challenge — there is so much I wanted to communicate and share with people, and so many obstacles."

Verry thinks that by preaching in rural Taiwan, he is getting a lot in return.

"Instead of teaching to the people, sometimes they teach me," he said. "Shortly after arriving in Tainan, I was one day walking in the night market when I was approached by a man who asked me the difference between Catholicism and Christianity ... After a short while, he said, 'You are fortunate



Right: Pere Francois Verry preaches to a group of locals in his church on Nov. 4. Behind him is Christ on the holy cross, as well as a large incense burner. The roof is constructed in the shape of a bagua. Above: Pere Francois Verry opens the baptismal font.

PHOTO: MEGGIE LU, TAIPEI TIMES

to have a faith."

"In Europe, they think that having a faith is normal, and they take it for granted. Not until the man told me did I realize how fortunate I was to have a faith," he said.

Another lesson Verry said he learned was to let go of prejudice.

"I like the simplicity and purity of Taiwanese. They are very direct, whereas some Europeans think too much and are opinionated," he said.

"When you are in one country, you may think that you are better than people in other countries ... Putting down the prejudice had set me free," he added.

As rural Taiwan is rapidly losing



its young people to larger cities, people in the countryside are losing faith and hope, Verry said.

"I have moved to live inside the church in October to be close to [the people], whereas before I lived in a nearby town ... I want our

sessions not to be a Father teaching, but a Brother sharing lessons in life," Pere Verry said. "I want to encourage them and make them discover that they are wonderful, that they don't need to have a lot to be great."

PIGEON POST

Kaohsiung mayor supports special education zone in Tapingting

CRIME

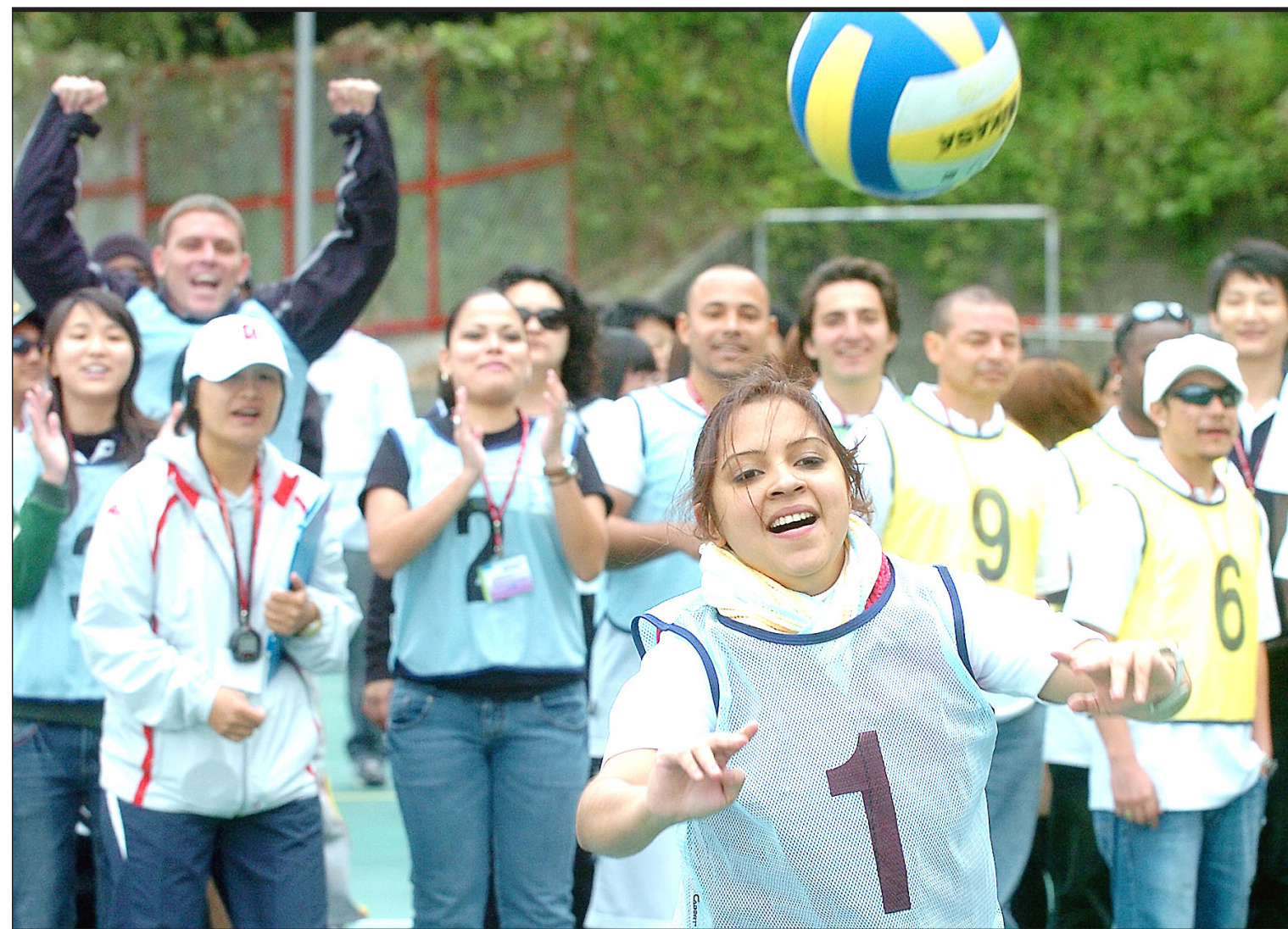
Kaohsiung Mayor Chen Chu (陳菊) on Nov. 27 expressed support for a proposal to establish a special education zone in the city's Tapingting (大坪頂) area to encourage international schools in the city to relocate there. Chen promised to have the city's Urban Development Bureau and the Education Bureau discuss how to encourage more bilingual schools in the zone. Chen made the remark in response to Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) City Council Lee Shun-chin's (李順進) call to relocate the city's international schools to Tapingting, a suburban area in the city's Xiaogang District (小港). "There are 323 students in our [Kaohsiung] American School, 182 students in [Kaohsiung] Japanese School ... There are four to five international schools in the city, but they have very small campuses in downtown [Kaohsiung]," Lee said.

Pearl S. Buck Christmas party to be held by Orphanage Club

OPENING

The Taipei American School's (TAS) Orphanage Club will hold its annual Pearl S. Buck Christmas party on Dec. 21 on its campus. In a statement issued by the club, it said it was in need of food sponsors as well as servers on that day from 11:30am to 2:30pm. Anyone interested in sponsoring food, helping serve or wishing to have more information on the event can contact Richard Arnold at (02) 2873-9900 ext 239 or Ms. Koh at (02) 2874-0902.

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA



GAMES WITHOUT FRONTIERS

Two hundred international students from 23 countries participate in games organized by the International Cooperation and Development Fund and Ming Chuan University in Taipei on Saturday.

PHOTO: LIU HSIEN-DE, TAIPEI TIMES

Foreign assistance center in Hsinchu to open its doors

'SILICON VALLEY': After learning that similar centers had been established in other Asian countries, the decision was made to establish one in Taiwan

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

The first Cabinet-sponsored foreigner assistance center is expected to open soon in Hsinchu to provide services for foreigners visiting or staying in Taiwan.

The Hsinchu Foreigner Assistance Center, to be located at No. 107 Zhongyang Road in Hsinchu City, will be a consultancy office dedicated to helping foreigners solve problems they encounter in Taiwan, Hsinchu Mayor Lin Junq-tzer (林政則) said on Nov. 27.

The center has already begun offering assistance to foreigners since a soft opening several days ago, Lin said, adding that consultants in the center include professional consultants and young men serving alternative military service who speak fluent English or Japanese.

After learning that similar foreigner assistance centers had been established in other Asian countries such as Japan, Singapore and South Korea, Lin said, the Cabinet-level Research, Development and Evaluation Commission recently decided to establish one in Taiwan. Hsinchu City was chosen to host the first center of this kind in the country.

Hsinchu is home to Taiwan's "Silicon Valley" — the Hsinchu Science Park — which is the country's first and largest science-based industrial park. As a result, the city attracts a lot of foreign visitors.

In the future, Lin said, students of Hsinchu's prestigious National Tsinghua University will be invited to work as volunteers at the center.

Consultancy services the Hsinchu Foreigner Assistance Center will be offering include help in getting settled in Taiwan, planning travel itineraries, doing business and investing, finding housing and obtaining medical care, as well as transportation information, Lin said.

When something is wrong with your wife's grandma

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN: There are times when miscommunication can nearly lead to divorce, but a sense of humor will usually defuse the problem

BY STEVE PARKER

The mastery of language can give enormous pleasure through reading, conversations and musical expression as well as in a number of other ways. Language is what brings people together. But how we communicate matters as much as what we communicate.

The process of mastering a foreign language is something that can lead to despair and anger, which is what I want to discuss in my first article for Community Compass.

My wife is Taiwanese and she has developed her English skills to an amazing level — beginning in Taiwan and continuing through her master's studies in

the UK. I can speak Chinese at a respectable level, but we still often laugh about our own linguistic inadequacies.

There have been a couple of times when miscommunication nearly led to divorce, so I wanted to share one of those situations in the hope that it may put some perspective on language learning.

On a slow weekend we were killing time lazily chatting on the sofa. Suddenly my wife turned to me with a pained look on her face and said — somewhat randomly it seemed to me — "There's something wrong with my grandma!"

Knowing from past experiences

that a lifeless response is not what she would expect from such a remark, I immediately sprang to life and responded emphatically: "Really, what's wrong with your grandma?"

"What's wrong with my grandma?" she replied. "What do you mean what's wrong with my grandma? You're the one who should tell me."

My brain had stepped into the quicksand of incomprehension and it started to drag me down. I had absolutely no idea how to respond, but I knew I needed to.

I slowly responded: "Why would I know what's wrong with your grandma?"

"Weren't you listening?" she said, getting a little heated. "You weren't listening," she said, which most men hate to hear.

What had I missed? I pride myself on being a great listener — for a man.

"On a slow weekend we were passing the time by lazily chatting on the sofa. Suddenly my wife turned to me with a pained look on her face and said — somewhat randomly it seemed to me — 'There's something wrong with my grandma!'"

But my years of reading *Vogue* for tips on communicating with women had somehow failed me. I really had no idea what was wrong with her grandma, when she told me and how.

"If you cared about me you would be able to tell me what is wrong with my grandma," she said loudly.

I wasn't quite sure where she was coming from but, oh my word, somehow it had gone from a "question" to "test of devotion" — never a comfortable place to be in a marriage.

Being suspected of some unknown offense was starting to make me angry — Why does that happen? Someone please tell me — but I was sure she had never told me anything about her grandma.

She asked again. "Are you going to tell me what's wrong with my grandma?"

"What, am I psychic?" I said compulsively before I could stop myself — why do we resort to attacks when we are unsure?

She looked at me for what seemed like a week, her eyes expressionless. I was scared.

Then suddenly her expression changed and her eyes mellowed. She got that smile I had seen so many times.

When you marry someone more intelligent than you are you get used to it — she knew something I didn't — and I would have to wait for her to tell me what it was.

"Not grandma, you idiot, I was asking you what was wrong with my *grammar*," she said. "The last sentence I said sounded odd to me."

Divorce averted, equilibrium restored and lesson learned.

Steve Parker is the head of the Community Services Center.



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My STORY