

## Kowloon

Since the Catholic Mission in Hong Kong expanded to Xin'an, Huiyang, Haifeng and Shanwei in the 1860s, the Foreign Missions of Milan (now the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions) used Hong Kong as a base to enter and serve in the mainland. In October 1860, the Qing and British governments signed the Convention of Peking, in which areas to the south of the Boundary Street in Kowloon Peninsula was ceded to Britain. Two months later, a priest already came to the southern tip of the Kowloon Peninsula from Hong Kong Island every week to celebrate Mass for the British soldiers stationed in Kowloon. Many reclamation works were carried out in the Peninsula since then, but most of them were done privately before the Second World War. Various factors had limited the development in Kowloon, where the central part was still labelled as "barren land." It was until the Qing government and Britain signed the Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong Territory to lease the New Territories to Britain for 99 years in 1898 that missionary work there developed rapidly. At this time, Kowloon were still mostly rural areas, scattered with many traditional villages. As more Portuguese faithful moved to this area and the Canossian Sisters began their missionary activities at the southern tip of the Peninsula, the Rosary Church was built to become an important mission station in Kowloon. The missionary work

then extended to the north to Sham Shui Po and Kowloon Tong ever since the “New Kowloon” was counted as an urban area. St. Teresa’s Church and St. Francis of Assisi Church were built successively.

After the Second World War, the Civil War between the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) and the Communist Party led to the influx of refugees into the British colony in the 1950s and 1960s. Many squatter settlements appeared in eastern Kowloon, such as Wong Tai Sin, Diamond Hill and Lei Yue Mun. The poor living environment eventually led to a serious fire accident affecting six villages in Shek Kip Mei in 1953. In response, the government built some two-storey temporary shelters to resettle the victims. The Catholic Church assisted these refugees and victims through social services and relief and spread the Gospel among them.

In response to the needs of the residents of Kowloon City, the Canossian Sisters opened a small school in 1940. It was officially opened as the Holy Family Canossian School, a primary girls’ school, in Kowloon City in 1954 after the World War. The school was located in a post-war thriving area with more than 800 students in the 1960s. In addition, Po Yan Primary School in Tung Tau Estate was founded in 1965 by the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (ICM) from Belgium. It was the first primary school in the new districts of Hong Kong with an independent school building and 24 classrooms that were in line with

government's standards. It became a model school for foreign guests to visit. In 1969, the Canossian Sisters set up Canossa Primary School in Wong Tai Sin for the children of the local police. Three years later, in 1972, the nuns also set up a high school: Holy Family Canossian College. Meanwhile, Tang King Po School, located at the junction of Farm Road and Tin Kwong Road in Kowloon City, was established by the Salesians in 1953. It was named after philanthropist and industrialist Tang King Po. The school was a technical school in the early days. It had a primary section and high school with a vocational and industrial department. Two years later, it also ran a free six-year primary evening school. The vocational department offered courses in printing, font foundry, binding, tailoring and shoemaking. The industry department was designed for students who were preparing for the engineering profession after graduation. In the 1960s, it had enrolled more than 1,500 students. In addition, the Columban Sisters from Ireland also moved to Hong Kong after the outbreak of the Civil War in mainland China. They first served at the Ruttonjee Hospital in Wanchai and later engaged in education. In 1977, they established the Leung Shek Chee College in Sau Mau Ping.

## Rosary Church in a Sino-Portuguese Community

Rosary Church is the oldest church in Kowloon, witnessing the history of co-development of Chinese and Portuguese parishioners. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, political turmoil, such as the Boxer Uprising and the Eight Power Expedition, took place in China. In order to strengthen defense, the colonial government in Hong Kong set up a military camp in Chatham Road of which many Irish and Indian soldiers were Catholics. Missionaries came and served at the army barrack on weekends. Owing to its colonial status, Hong Kong was not greatly affected by China's political turmoil. Local industry thus gradually developed in Hung Hom and Yau Ma Tei in the next few decades. The establishment of dockyard in Hung Hom and the accelerated development in the Peninsula attracted many people to move to Kowloon. This was especially the case in Tsim Sha Tsui, where many of those who settled in Kowloon were Portuguese Catholics.

In 1900, Father Giovanni Spada (PIME, 1867-1950), a pioneering preacher in Kowloon, borrowed a large room on the land purchased by the Canossian Sisters at the junction of Austin Road and Chatham Road in Tsim Sha Tsui for Sunday Mass. Due to an increase in the number of newly-populated Catholic families, the Vicariate Apostolic built a chapel with a capacity of 800 in 1901 but soon it proved to be too small. With the

donation from Dr. Anthony Simplicio Gomes, a Portuguese Catholic, the Rosary Church was built and completed on May 8, 1905. Father Spada was the first priest to work there. This typical Gothic-style building became the only Catholic Church in Kowloon that was open to the public for more than a quarter of a century. It was also the origin of faithful associations, such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Catholic Women’s League, and the Youth Association. Initially, the faithful were mainly the Irish and Indian military and police officers, foreign merchants, and Portuguese immigrants from Macau. The development of the urban area drew in many Chinese people to settle in the vicinity. Believers of different nationalities thus formed and enhanced a multi-ethnic Christian community in communion.



Photo: Rosary Church after renovation in 2003

In the 1920s and 1930s, the clerics of the Rosary Church also needed to take care of all Catholics in the territory from Kowloon City to Yau Ma Tei. This situation lasted until the building of St. Teresa's Church in Prince Edward Road in 1932 and St. Francis of Assisi Church in Sham Shui Po in 1955. In 1949, the Rosary Church was erected to the status of a parish. It was rebuilt in the 1950s to accommodate the influx of refugees from China and the growing number of local believers. The Antiquities Advisory Board listed it as a Grade II historic building in 1990 and reclassified it a Grade I historic building 10 years later.

The Canossian Sisters began its service in Kowloon in 1887. They built the St. Mary's School (now St. Mary's Canossian College) with funding from Dr. Gomes at the waterfront of Tsim Sha Tsui. The school was officially opened in 1900 with only 30 pupils, mainly Portuguese boys and girls. It continued to expand. In 1903, two buildings were added to the campus while the St. Michael's Building which facing Chatham Road was built two decades later. The school evolved into a girls' school in the 1930s. It was suspended during the Japanese occupation and reopened in 1945. By 1953, it became the largest girls' school in Kowloon as the number of students increased gradually. It once enrolled more than 2,700 students. This school, built in Western-style architecture, was founded by foreign nuns. As they grew old and deceased, the baton was passed to Chinese nuns.

## St. Teresa's Church: A Compromise of East-West Style

Before the completion of St. Teresa's Church, Catholics in Kowloon Tong needed to go to the Rosary Church in Tsim Sha Tsui or the chapel inside St. Joseph's Home for the Aged in Ngau Chi Wan. The Masses there were presided by the priests of Rosary Church.

In 1923, due to population growth in Kowloon, the Vicariate Apostolic began to look for places to build new churches. On February 11, 1924, a group of influential Catholics wrote to Bishop Dominico Pozzoni (PIME, 1861-1924), the then Vicar Apostolic, expressing their willingness to raise funds for a new church and urged the establishment of a preparatory committee. At that time, the Church authority has purchased a piece of land on Austin Road, but it was too close to the existing Rosary Church. At the same time, the Sisters of the Precious Blood planned to construct their General House in Sham Shui Po with a chapel attached. Kowloon Tong was thus chosen as the district, taking into consideration that a huge housing programme was developing there. The idea was supported by many Portuguese families living in the area. On November 13, 1928, the Catholic Church won the bid on the land plot at the junction of Prince Edward Road and Waterloo Road.

Bishop Valtorta then invited Fr. Adalbert Gresnigt (OSB, 1877-1965) to design the church. The Dutch Benedictine was the acclaimed designer

of the Chinese-style buildings of Fu Jen University in Beijing and the Siheyuan-style South China Regional Seminary at Wong Chuk Hang. Bishop Valtorta wrote to Father Gresnigt, hoping that he could build a Chinese-style architecture to commemorate St. Theresa of Lisieux. At the same time, he also said in the letter that a Chinese-style design might not be acceptable in Hong Kong. Fr. Gresnigt sent back a draft in January, 1929. As expected, the design was not well received. Fr. Gresnigt thus combined the ideas of two other architects, A.H. Basto and M. Van Wylick, to turn St. Teresa's Church into a Byzantine church with a domed roof and a tower.



Photo: St. Teresa's Church in its early days



Bishop Valtorta consecrated St. Teresa's Church on December 18, 1932. It was officially raised to a parish in 1949. Ever since it was established, St. Teresa's Church has been playing a significant role in worship, education, medical care and social service in the district. The nickname "Bishop of Kowloon District" was given to the parish priest during the ministries of Fr. Carmelo Orlando (PIME, 1907-1979), an Italian priest, and Fr. Francis Wong Tak-Cheung (1930-1993).

St. Teresa's Church is designed in Byzantine-style. Its shape is like a Latin cross and features a balanced symmetry in a Romanesque style. The aisles are defined by circular arches supported by Corinthian columns. Cement and steel were used as the materials of the top beam, but it still reveals a sense of the solemn atmosphere of Chinese palace architecture.

There is a small room outside St. Teresa's Church used by the 13th Kowloon Scout Group. Next to the church were the primary and kindergarten sections of St. Teresa's School Kowloon in a three-storey building. The school received great support from the Portuguese Catholics when it was built. Despite of its closure in 2008, the school had witnessed a close interaction of Chinese and Western cultures in its 57-year history. In addition, there is the building of the Caritas Community Centre—Kowloon next to the Church, which has provided various social services to the district since its completion in 1967.

## **St. Francis of Assisi Church: A Church Developed in a Chinese Settlement**

Before Kowloon was developed, there were already some villages (tsuen) in Sham Shui Po area, including Un Chau Tsuen in the north, Tin Liu Tsuen in the southeast, Om Yau Tsuen in the west and Ma Lung Hang Tsuen in the northwest. The government was not keen to develop this region in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tai Po Road built in 1902 was the only main road there. It was followed by the Castle Peak Road. The rest of the development, such as reclamation from Nam Choeng Street to Kweilin Street, was carried out on a small scale by private developers.

The Precious Blood Sisters, originally the Third Order of the Canossian Sisters, established their General House and a clinic near Tai Po Road in Sham Shui Po in the 1930s. They also had a small chapel that allowed local Catholics to come to Mass. In the early 1950s, the diocese intended to build a new church in this area. In 1953, a notorious fire broke out in Shek Kip Mei squatter area and the government implemented an emergency mass housing scheme to resettle the victims. In the following year, a total of 250,000 square feet of land behind Shek Kip Mei Tung Lo Garden and the nearby hills was allocated for the purpose of building a church. Bishop Lorenzo Bianchi (PIME, 1899-1983) presided over a foundation stone-laying ceremony for St. Francis of Assisi Church on March 25, 1955. When it was opened on Christmas Eve in the same year, it was the tallest building in the district.



Photo: St. Francis of Assisi Church

The church has Gothic-style architecture mixed with Chinese elements. The top of the Church is a red-tiled sloping roof with a Chinese-style bell tower. The interior has pointed arches decorated with stained glasses to highlight the solemn sacred space. The church has three archway entrances and two spiral staircases on both sides of the front foyer that lead to the upper floor. It seems like the master opening his arms wide to welcome all people who enter to his house. When going up the stairs, one can see the “dougong”—a Chinese-style supporting architecture—supporting the ceiling. The entrance of the church is located on the second floor with Chinese-style roof beams. Three Chinese-style doors echo with those archway entrances. The church is supported

by 12 arched pillars, which symbolise the Catholic Church inheriting the teachings of the 12 apostles. The marble altar and baptismal font were given by St. Teresa's Church when it was built. This shows the close relationship between the two communities. In 1994, the altar was moved forward during a major renovation in order to conform to the liturgical reforms of the Vatican II.

In October 1955, the church's affiliated St. Francis of Assisi's English Primary School was completed. In addition to pastoral care and education, the parish also pioneered in setting up the first government-registered credit union among other church bodies. The St. Francis Credit Union was initiated by pioneers of credit union, Fr. John Collins (SJ, 1912-1997) and Mr. Andrew So Kwok-wing. It has been running for half a century since it was established on September 17, 1964. The Credit Union Movement was driven by the West and introduced to Hong Kong to provide mutual economic assistance to the Chinese people who suffered a lot of poverty after the Second World War. Its purpose is "not for profit, not for relief, but for service" with the parishioners and their immediate family members as its service target. It encourages the members to make good use of money, to develop thrifty habit, and to save money in a planned way. It also lends money through secure process to members who are in urgent economic need. The Western initiative turned out being a perfect match with traditional Chinese custom of saving and the spirit of mutual help.

## **St. Cecilia's Church: A Stone Church Standing on Diamond Hill**

There were many ancient Hakka villages in eastern Kowloon, such as Nga Tsin Wai Tsuen, Chuk Yuen Tsuen, Ngau Chi Wan Tsuen and Tai Hom Tsuen. Tai Hom Tsuen, located at the foothill of Kowloon Peak, was originally a village dominated by inhabitants all surnamed Chu. The Chu clan originally resided in Changle County of Guangdong province (renamed Wuhua County after 1911). Their ancestor was Chu Kui-yuan, a Hakka stone mason who lived in Shek Tong Tsui on Hong Kong Island. During the rule of Qing Emperor Qianlong, he brought his wife and eight sons to move to Sha Po Tsai in Kowloon and made his living by quarrying. After the Second World War, this area became settlement of the mainlanders who escaped the subsequent Civil War. The new immigrants built shanty town near the Diamond Hill. Therefore, when the descendants of the Chu family returned to their native place after the war, they found it had turned into a squatter area.

Seeing the needs of the huge group of refugees, the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese set up the first permanent mission station in Diamond Hill in 1952. The first priest to work there was Fr. Luciano Aletta (PIME, 1910-2000). Diamond Hill at the time was divided into Tai Hom Tsuen, Upper Yuen Leng and Lower Yuen Leng. There was a quarry famous for white granite, so the place was named "diamond." Similar to many ancient churches, be them in China or abroad, built by stone, the Holy Family

Chapel in Upper Yuen Leng, near Hammer Hill Road, was also built with this local material commonly known as hemp stone. The church was completed in 1953. The granite wall was visible on the façade. Since the houses in the village were also built with granite, the chapel integrated perfectly into the local community. By 1957, Holy Family Chapel and the nearby Ngau Chi Wan Tsuen were carved out to become an independent parish. Since it was erected in the area for many years, a number of faithful associations were formed, such as Chinese and English lector ministries, altar servers and choirs. There were as many as 3,000 parishioners while many people received baptism every year. Every Sunday, the homilies were conducted in Cantonese, Putonghua and English, making it a special place in the early days for cultural exchanges between East and West. In addition, a Caritas Centre was also attached to the parish to provide general medicines and relief supplies. Behind the chapel, there was also the now-closed St. Rose Kindergarten.

In 1963, a new low-cost Choi Hung Estate was built on the eastern side of Tai Hom Tsuen. It was one of the earliest public housing estates in Kowloon. In response to the government's plan to redevelop the district, Holy Family Church was moved to Choi Hung Estate, which enjoys a more central location in the district, and continued to serve residents there. The chapel in Diamond Hill was thus renamed St. Cecilia's Church and affiliated to Holy Family Parish in Choi Hung. In 1979, the Catholic Diocese

erected Diamond Hill as an independent parish again until it was re-affiliated to the Holy Family Parish in 1996.

Although St. Cecilia's Church had been demolished and the parishioners were integrated with Holy Family Church, they still had deep affection to Father Aletta, their longtime pastor, and a memorial Mass was held on the 10th anniversary of his death in 2010. What's more, there is still a Facebook page of the Diamond Hill St. Cecilia's Church today.

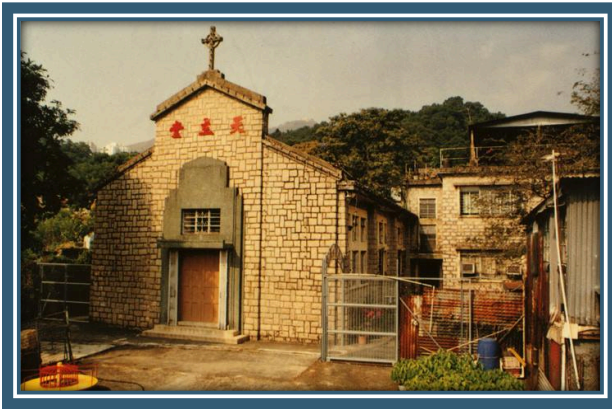


Photo: St. Cecilia's Church, built with granite, formerly named Holy Family Church



Photo: A Stamp Chop of St. Cecilia's Church

## St. James Church In Lei Yue Mun

Besides Diamond Hill, Lei Yue Mun was another main post-war squatter area. During the rule of Qing Emperor Daoguang, Lei Yue Mun, Cha Kwo Ling, Sai Tso Wan and Ngau Tau Kok in eastern Kowloon were collectively known as the “four quarry hills,” inhabited mainly by the Hakka people. At the foothill of Devil's Peak, north of Lei Yue Mun Village, it was a wilderness area with only terraced field and arable land, and was filled with many graves. From the late 1940s to the early 1950s, some of the soldiers of the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) and refugees who fled from the north during the Civil War in China built a village called Ling Nam San Tsuen and settled there. In the 1960s, the government reclaimed Tsau Wan into Sam Ka Tsuen Typhoon Shelter and flattened the hills in Sam Ka Tsuen to develop the Yau Tong industrial zone. As the surrounding area began to develop, transport network was also extended to the area.

In the 1960s, missionaries began to evangelise to the fishing communities in Sam Ka Tsuen and nearby. Fr. Octaaf De Vreese (1900-1996) of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) built St. James' Chapel, St. James' Kindergarten (now converted into a factory), Tak Kei School, and a clinic there. Outside the chapel (now not in use) of Tak Kei School, there was a grotto of the Virgin Mary, who represents protection to the fishing people in the area. For the Chinese fishermen who believe in folk religions, the image of the Virgin Mary is like the Goddess



of the Sea, who likewise represents a source of blessings to them. St. James' Chapel was elevated to the status of a parish in 1979. A new church was built in Yau Tong to replace it in 1990. Besides, the CICM missionaries also established Po Chiu Catholic Secondary School and Po Yin Social Services Centre in the district.



Photo: Father Octaaf De Vreese, CICM



Photo: St. James' Chapel in Lei Yue Mun

## **Apostleship Of The Sea: An Ecumenical Pastoral Ministry**

Apart from missionary work to the grassroots community, trade unions were also a pastoral focus of the Catholic Church when Hong Kong's industry started to develop rapidly after the Second World War. The Mariners' Club was originated from the "Sailors' Home" in Sai Ying Pun, Western District in 1863. It served as hostel provided by Jardine Matheson and other firms for seafarers working on foreign vessels. Inside the Sailors' Home, there was an inter-denominational church: St. Peter's Church. In 1885, a year after they arrived, the Missions to Seamen, formerly under the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican Church), was given permission to hold services at St. Peter's Church. In 1901, the Missions to Seamen opened its hostel at Johnston Road, Wan Chai. In 1930, it jointly registered with the Sailors' Home as a seafarers' organisation. Three years later, they opened a new clubhouse at No. 40 Gloucester Road in Wan Chai. However, it was severely damaged during the Japanese occupation. The new Mariners' Club at Middle Road in Tsim Sha Tsui was opened by Governor Sir David Trench in 1967. Two years later, the Catholic Apostleship of the Sea joined in to form an ecumenical ministry. The Danish Seamen's Church and the German Seaman's Mission also joined the ministry later. The second Sunday of July is marked as "Sea Sunday." St. Peter's Seamen's Church was the only ecumenical venue in Hong Kong that could have Catholic Mass and Anglican worship service.

In line with the reconstruction of the Mariners' Club, where St. Peter's Church located, a thanksgiving Mass and de-consecration rite were held at the end of February 2018. It was then moved to a temporary location in Jordan to continue its service.



Photo: The Mariners' Club in Middle Road

St. Joseph's the Worker Chapel was another diocesan establishment closely connected to workers. It was located at the junction of Hamilton Street and Nathan Road in Yau Ma Tei. The chapel was established in 1957, initially with the name St. Joseph's the Worker Catechumenate. It was built

because the diocese felt that there was a need for more churches in Kowloon to fill the geographical gap between Rosary Church and St. Francis of Assisi Church for the increasing Catholic population. At the beginning, the chapel only held Mass, and administered the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation; whereas, the Sacrament of Marriage had to be held in Rosary Church. At the time, the Canadian Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (MIC) ran full-time catechism classes in Cantonese and Mandarin with the help of local evangelists. Catechism classes were opened to children and workers in their free time. In the first five years, more than half of the 5,000-strong catechumen got baptised, achieving an ideal result of cooperation between foreign missionaries and Chinese evangelists. These foreign nuns also visited the poor and sick people in neighboring Kwong Wah Hospital. The chapel was integrated to St. Paul's Church in Yau Ma Tei in the late 1960s.