



24th NATIONAL CATHOLIC CHINA CONFERENCE

*co-sponsored by
Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western and Cultural History
at USF Center for the Pacific Rim;*

September 24-26, 2010

Our Lady of the Snows Conference Center, Belleville, IL

A Chinese Catholic Life of Faith:

Sharing God's Love with the Chinese as a Chinese

St. Lucy Zhang

"The 21st Century will be a century of spiritual emptiness because of new technology and rapid economic development. As the people are satisfied with their material lives, their spiritual fields become empty. Many people face the challenges of employment, intense work, and difficult marriages that lead to depression, anxiety, and fear. The same problems appear in China. Marriage and Family Therapy would help the Chinese to overcome these obstacles. I believe that I have the motivation, research, teaching experience and religious background to participate in your program." This was the introduction of my personal statement when I applied to the Marriage and Family Therapy program in Seton Hall University. I want to use this same statement as my introduction in this conference. As a missionary, I base my decision on the needs of society. I chose Marriage and Family Therapy because I want to respond to the needs of China by providing efficient service to her people.

I was born into a traditional Catholic family. My family is like a community. My parents are the coordinators. They love all their children and helped them as they grew up. Under their loving care, their children learned how to love and help each other, how to cherish and forgive each other, how to pray and bless each other. I am sure that my life has been greatly influenced by them. Since my early childhood, my motto has been: Nothing is truly difficult; what counts is the willingness of the heart.

During the ten years of the Chinese “Cultural Revolution”, I experienced persecution and discrimination because my family was Catholic. However, there were no complaints in our family. Rather, we saw through this experience the grace and love of God that my grandparents and parents taught us. I entered high school when the “Culture Revolution” ended. The churches started to open, so I joined a church choir. One day, our church choir was invited to attend a Sister’s funeral. I was touched by the Sister’s spirit. In a pilgrimage to Our Lady of the Mountain in my hometown, I heard a call from God. I decided to become a Sister. However, at that time, China did not have any religious orders for young women. During my period of waiting, I was a volunteer who assisted the parish priest to organize the youth program and exchange program between the parishes in the diocese.

Two years later, I accepted a position with a large Chemical Company and worked for 14 years as an accountant and an auditor. Fortunately, I often accompanied salesmen traveling to different cities and provinces to negotiate with customers. My responsibilities also included coordination of various agencies and the government. I also prepared financial reports on a monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, and annual basis. I am thankful that I had the opportunity to travel so often and to meet so many fascinating people. My research paper, “Cross-Cultural Communication---the Way to Do Business in China,” which was based on these business experiences, won an award from the Allied Academics Organization in Las Vegas and was published in a professional journal.

Although I had a great job, I never forgot my vocation. I trusted in God and prayed for others who surrounded me every day. God answered me. I became a sister.

After I took my first vows, I came to the USA to study Business Administration. Because of Felician Sisters' generosity and kindness for the China mission, I graduated from the Felician College *summa cum laude* and received several academic awards.

I worked in Sacred Heart School as an assistant directress in charge of the offices of Finance and General Affairs, an advisor for the Chinese teachers of kindergarten, and was a board member of Sacred Heart College in Philippines. Through this experience I really learned how to accept and enjoy different cultures, traditions, and customs.

Later, I returned to China to help the parish priest. The parish was small and the majority of people in that city were ethnic, poor, and without religion. The parish priest and seven

parishioners gave us warm hearted greetings and welcome. The priest told the parishioners to call us teachers because we were his partners. After lunch, we came back to the parish court which was covered by the little stones with weeds everywhere. The apartment located on the 2nd floor of a simple three-storey building with three bedrooms and one living room. We went shopping for office tables and cabinets after mass the following day. On the third day, we bought vegetables from the flea market and cooked our first meal in China.

We began our work in earnest. We cleaned the court and the storage rooms and washed the chairs of the chapel to prepare for Sunday. We proceeded to assist the parish priest by taking care of liturgy services, making plans to offer free English enrichment classes to children, initiating Bible sharing groups, and visiting the elderly and sick parishioners. In preparation for the coming Sunday, we taught the hymns and introduced the reading and gospel before mass. After mass, we and the group leader went to some families to visit the parishioners who could not come to chapel.

We continued to work on our new mission. As a result of a generous donation from the Bishop, we purchased a set of 15 desks for our free weekend English classes for the children and a Bible sharing class for the parishioners. We also opened a small library for lay people and non-Catholics. We went to the homes of parishioners, we comforted and listened to them to help them overcome their difficulties. Some parishioners had a poor relationship and misunderstandings with their children; others faced unstable marriages. Visiting, listening, and talking to the couples was my work. Here is one example of an old couple's problem. The wife complained that her husband didn't take care of his family in their marriage so that her left leg was broken; she accused him again and again and she couldn't forgive him. Her husband could not suffer the accusations any longer and ran away from home for half a year. When we heard of this case, I and other sisters went to their house, talked to the lady, contacted her husband and talked to him. Now they have reconciled with each other. Because of this, their children are happy.

The situation of parish population was: old people and children stay home while adults went outside the city to look for work. The remaining adults were busy with their own businesses. Most parishioners lived in the countryside. In the city, old people have limited money to pay their fares. We could not open a one-year preparation program for RCIA. It was

difficult to gather all the people in the church at the same time. We changed the traditional RCIA way to door to door evangelization in order to satisfy their needs, especially for business people. One RCIA candidate owned her own warehouse store. Although she was interested in joining the church, she had no time to go to church for RCIA because there was nobody watching the store. According to their needs, I went to their houses and stores to give the lessons of RCIA to them. At the same time, we gathered some old parishioners who lived nearby to participate in prayer, sharing, and singing. During the summer, I gave RCIA classes to children, taught them how to read the Bible, and how to recite the Rosary while helping them to finish their assignments. Before they were baptized, I would give them a test about sacraments and make sure they really understood who God is and what we believe.

Chinese New Year celebrates the unity of the family, just like Western Christmas. Wherever they are, the Chinese will go home to meet their family members. Chinese New Year became our only opportunity to meet people who worked out of town and returned home to be united with their family. We went to their villages to celebrate with them and share in their feelings, suffering, pains, complaints, emotions, joys, happiness, and values which they experienced while away from their families. These experiences helped us understand how difficult it was for them to earn money to support their families and to save for their children's education.

Six brothers and sisters joined the church on Christmas Eve, and this became the greatest news for our parish. On New Year's Eve, we held a special blessing --- Tazi prayers for the people who were to receive the New Year's Blessing for the first time. We adapted Tujia culture and customs, and our mission went through smoothly.

We invited old parishioners, business men from out of town, and college students together to celebrate our first Chinese New Year in church. The priest and people commented that it was the first time that Catholics and Non-Catholics shared a meal together on Chinese New Year since the parish began. In Holy Week, the traditional and solemn liturgies attracted people to church, included the family of the Protestant pastor at the Easter Vigil.

Training youth is our main work since we agree that young people are the future of our church and country. The church offered bi-lingual activities once a month. We often invited foreign teachers who gave lectures to the young people. Because the young people lived in

different areas, schools, and colleges, we invited some of them to live with us; some of them came for the summer. As a friend, we discussed the events, movies, college life, society, and business while sharing our own opinions, comments, and feelings. While doing this, I taught them how to study, to be open and honest; share and communicate with others; have a good manner of communication in social work, and meet the challenge of the 21st century. After students lived with us, they really changed their attitudes, personality, character, and values. Now some of them have become the leaders and active members of the students' organizations of universities and colleges. There were 40 more students, ages from 6 to 16 years old, lived with us in church for 20 days. We also invited college students as volunteers to tutor the children and to prepare meals for the children. At the same time, we taught them how to do chores. The older ones helped younger ones. They learned not only English but also the Bible and moral ethics, such as how to respect, share, forgive, accept, and cherish each other, and how to work together. They became close friends like brothers and sisters. Some of them were baptized. Before they left, they asked me: "Sr. Lucy, are you going to open the class next summer?" Although apostolic work is progressing, I think the range of people is limited. We should have different channels to meet the people.

I was a substitute teacher in a college. I taught the students not only knowledge of books but also how to build their worldview of life; and how to respect the dignity of other human beings. They know that honesty is important in their lives. They learned from my lectures, watching movies, investigating internet, and the materials which I shared with them. Therefore, the students and I have a close relationship. When they have any questions, struggles, problems, anxiety, or depression they come to me and tell me their feelings. I often listen to them, give them advice, and encourage them to overcome these obstacles. Many of my students still contact me right away when they meet challenges in their daily lives. For example, the city is an area of minorities of Tujia and Miao. Some of students wanted to open an association which researches, seeks, and studies Tujia tradition, customs, architecture, and food. They came and talked to me about their ideas. I knew this association would help the students to be familiar with their own culture and folklore. However, although the freshmen were full of inspiration, they lacked experience. In order to support them, I became their adviser. The association was established and it provided various activities to help the students

to understand their people and culture and became one of the largest student organizations and associations in their College. We invited these students to church for the celebration of Easter and Christmas, and the liturgy of Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve. From my relationships with the students and the parishioners, I experience and understand the meaning of God's love, the power of prayer, life sharing, forgiveness, blessings, mercy, communication, and God's mission for our lives. The following words are from a student of mine: "The blessing and happy to you who are not only a teacher but also an elder sister, and like a friend."

There were five American teachers in the college and university of the city. They felt alone when they arrived in China after they graduated from the American universities and colleges. Some of them were my colleagues. We talked and shared more than other Chinese teachers since I was familiar with the US lifestyle. We became good friends. I understood how difficult it was to live and teach as a foreigner in a new culture; also, they were aged 22 to 24 and were homesick. I invited them to the church as family members during weekends and cooked American food for them. They helped us to lead youth activities once a month. We became brothers and sisters till today.

We offered English enrichment classes, RCIA, pilgrimage, assisted others in English training classes, Taze prayer, and we sponsored monthly college student activities. During this time, 46 people joined the church.

Rapid advances in economic development seem to create new moral questions and ideas every day. Arguments on traditional values occur between old people and young people. A family crisis has appeared due to the changing values of lifestyle and personal goals. The one-child policy of China is a problem for many families. When the young generation enters the colleges and universities, their parents are still young, most of them not over 50 years old. These adults feel emptiness after working, so they go out to look for satisfaction, and this leads to a family crisis. The traditional marriage is shaken. The moral family is challenged. Single families are increasing every year. Many children have no peaceful and quiet studying time or constructive environment to grow up. Innocent youngsters become victims of family and marriage breakdowns. These children will have an unhealthy personality and unhealthy values in their life. If the children follow the example of their parents after they grow up, the

cycle of family and marriage crises will continue for generations to come. Many people are aware that it's serious, and seek help. But they are not satisfied when they look for assistance mainly because of non-professional guidance. This phenomenon is common in China. To be a missionary sister, I should stand in front of society to serve the minorities so that they may not be marginalized. However, there are a few people doing Marriage and Family Therapy; professional therapy is difficult to find in small cities and rural areas in China. The Chinese church needs this new mission as another way to announce Christ to the Chinese people. Marriage and Family Therapy is in great demand in mainland China. I know that it is a big challenge for me to take the Marriage and Family Therapy program, but I have the confidence to do my best.

In my internship, I work with American people who live in poor areas and, aware of their problems and difficulties, I am encouraged to reflect and properly respond as a religious sister and professional to help them face the challenges in their daily lives. Sitting in their circle, listening to their experiences, feelings, thoughts, and struggles allows me to better understand them while I see my own bias. I cherish this experience which leads me to understanding psychology across cultures while living and working in a changing world, and I reflect on how to adapt and apply the approaches which I learned for the benefit of people of China in the future.

I am sure that doing marriage and family therapy is not only dependent on our knowledge but also on our faith and wisdom.