

A letter to my family in Christ



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

May the peace of the Lord be with you!

Three years ago when I was 75 years old, I submitted my resignation as the Bishop of Hong Kong to His Holiness in accord with Canon Law. However, Pope Francis postponed my retirement for three years.

On July 31 this year I will turn 78 and will then officially retire from the episcopal ministry of Hong Kong. Coadjutor Bishop Michael Yeung will succeed me.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude in this letter to all the members and staff of the Curia, all priests, deacons, Sisters and Church members, as well as friends I have made over the past years for their support and encouragement. May the Lord abundantly reward your sacrifices and hard work.

In his apostolic letter for the Year of Consecrated Life in 2015, Pope Francis advises us "to look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion and to embrace the future with hope."

Following this line of thought I want to share with you some things from my experience as the Bishop of Hong Kong over the past eight years.

First of all, looking to the past with gratitude. I thank God for having given our Diocese wise leaders, particularly Cardinal John Baptist Wu and Cardinal Joseph Zen, whom I have worked with during these years.

They have contributed to establishing a solid foundation and an effective system in the Diocese. This enables all the faithful to have a deeper faith and to serve others as Jesus teaches us. "Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

As early as 25 years ago I started working in the Bishop's Office assisting with diocesan matters. I have been through many upheavals during this time, with some of the unforgettable events being the exodus of people from Hong Kong before the 1997 reversion, the SARS epidemic in 2003 and the striving for universal suffrage in recent years.

In the face of with these challenges, I have learned to trust in God.

The Church needs to listen to the voices of young people; to understand the needs of the elderly and the underprivileged; to express demands against injustice. I felt the Church's great concerns in society, sharing the public's "joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties" (Gaudium et Spes,1).

Secondly, when it comes to enthusiasm, I have tried to live in the present and to live out the witness of faith. As a cardinal, I have been appointed as a member of various Dicasteries of the Holy See, including the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, the Congregation for Catholic Education, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Council for the Economy of the Holy See.

I will continue to participate in these apostolic ministries to show support for the Universal Church and to uphold the principles of unity and universality of our Church. This is also an expression of a response to the Popes in modern times, especially Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, who have expectations of us.

As the Bishop, I am grateful to all the priests and sisters, especially missionaries serving in Hong Kong and their collaborators. Through their service, they are nurturing the People of God in areas of pastoral work, spirituality and formation with dedication and

diligence. They make the witness of our parishes, schools and social services, to the three pillars of faith possible.

Together with the parishes and other communities, the local Catholic Diocese has devoted itself to evangelisation work. Over the past eight years, nearly 60,000 persons have been baptised and half of those were adults, who received at least 18 months formation in the catechumenate prior to Baptism.

At present, the Diocese has about 600,000 Catholics, approximately seven per cent of the total 7.4 million population of Hong Kong. Among our believers, many are non-ethnic Chinese Catholics.

Today, I am very pleased to see that most of our parishes have arranged at least one Mass in English or other foreign languages on Sundays. This enhances the non-Chinese Catholics' participation in parochial groups and activities, as well as a more active participation in the liturgy.

Even though the number of vocations in our Diocese is few, our faithful continue to pray fervently for more. The Diocesan Vocation Commission, led by Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha, fosters young people in exploring the meaning of life and discerning a possible vocation.

With the efforts of those Catholic groups for faith and vocations, the number of young men inspired under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to pursue a religious vocation is showing some improvement.

It is hoped that a culture of vocation is gradually being established in the local Church.

My vocation to the priesthood stemmed from the testimony of missionaries who showed their love, joy and selfless dedication to people. I hope, both for myself and for all clergy, to live in joy and love, letting young people from in and outside the Church see the joy and hope in our faith.

In the light of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Father Dominic Chan, the Vicar General, has guided a team of permanent deacons since the ministry was inaugurated in the Diocese about 20 years ago.

There are now more than 20 ordained as permanent deacons, serving in diocesan

organisations, parishes and social institutions. I am pleased to see that they are encouraged by their families and are well received by parishioners for their love and support.

On the formation of the laity in the Diocese, education needs to be suitable for the times. I am glad to see members of the Church active in studying philosophy, theology, spirituality and subjects connected with various ministries.

Also, a number of laypeople who have pursued religious studies for higher education are now assuming teaching professorships in philosophy and theology at the Seminary College and other institutes.

I do hope the Diocese will further develop the field of religious education by sowing, watering and bearing fruit in evangelisation.

In recent years, the Popes have established Years of Priests, Faith, Consecrated Life and Mercy; and convoked World Synods of Bishops on New Evangelisation and the Family.

Our Diocese is pleased to follow the pace of the Universal Church and the themes have motivated our faithful to deepen their spiritual encounter with the Lord and the Universal Church.

Pope Francis, like his predecessors, has published apostolic exhortations. He has written on the Joy of the Gospel and the Joy of Love, in addition to an encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, providing a wealth of knowledge and Church teaching.

Reading these Church documents, I must say I have benefited a great deal from their teaching. I hope all of you will soon find time to read them, as it will help increase knowledge of the Church, broaden the vision of spirituality and better serve others.

While the Diocese was preparing translations of those documents, we collaborated closely with the neighbouring Churches in Taiwan and Macau. I rest assured that more cooperation will be undertaken.

Furthermore, we maintain contacts with the Churches in the Mainland and promote friendly exchanges with our counterparts there.

Finally, upholding the principle of hope towards the future will give the Diocese a brighter future.

The motto on my coat-of-arms is The Lord is my shepherd (Psalm 23:1). It always reminds me: The Lord cares for us and we will lack nothing, because He knows us and grants us the graces needed to meet all challenges.

I am confident that under the wise leadership of its new Shepherd, the Diocese will, in unity, implement all pastoral plans fully, including the opening of the Catholic university, a pastoral priority adopted as a resolution at the Diocesan Synod in the Millennium Year 2000.

Dear brother-priests, brothers and sisters in Christ: For the past eight years, I thank you for accompanying me on the journey of faith. For my faults and shortcomings, I ask you to forgive me and to continue to pray for me.

After my retirement I will continue to engage in research work at the Holy Spirit Study Centre and to maintain my usual exchanges with friends. May I also encourage the Holy See to be in accord with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and try to move dialogue between China and the Vatican forward.

May I ask you all to pray for this. As I always describe myself as a golden-jubilee resident of the Holy Spirit Seminary, I will continue to live in the Seminary, a place that nourishes my life of prayer and helps to deepen my I-thou relationship with the Good Shepherd; and certainly, a place for plenty of physical exercise!

May God bless you all!

+ John Cardinal Tong
Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong
June 29, 2017
Feast Day of Saints Peter and Paul the Apostles