

University Pastoral Care – Taipei

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Background Information

The population of Taiwan is 23.4 million (June 2023).¹ 2.5% are Indigenous people in 16 tribes of Indigenous people, around 591,000 people.² The primary section of Taiwan's population is Han people (Hanren 漢人). The statistics in 2013 show 577,904 Christians; 181,215 people registered as Catholics.³ The Catholic group is less than 1% of Taiwan's population, the whole Christian population is only 2.53%. The Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, points out that the Catholic population increased to 1.4% in 2021, and the majority of Indigenous people believe in the Christian faith.⁴ Nearly 50% of the Taiwanese people have acquired their bachelor's degrees.⁵ Among 145 universities and technical colleges in Taiwan, the Catholic Church owns six private institutes. One of the six is a pontifical university – Fu Jen Catholic University (FJCU).

January 2020: Indigenous people (source: see footnote 2)

Amis (阿美族)	223,921	Yami (雅美族)	4,923
Atayal (泰雅族)	97,704	Thao (邵族)	855
Paiwan (排灣族)	108,312	Kavalan (噶瑪蘭族)	1,626
Bunun (布農族)	62,633	Truku (太魯閣族)	34,793
Pinuyumayan (卑南族)	15,501	Sakizaya (撒奇萊雅族)	1,099
Rukai (魯凱族)	13,902	Sediq (賽德克族)	11,327
Cou (鄒族)	6,816	Hla'alua (拉阿魯哇族)	477
Saisiyat (賽夏族)	7,080	Kanakanavu (卡那卡那富族)	436

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- 1 *Statistical Yearbook of Interior* (2.01 Population by Age), <https://statis.moi.gov.tw/micst/webMain.aspx?k=menu> (accessed June 21, 2024).
- 2 Council of Indigenous Peoples (Yuanzhu minzu weiyuanhui 原住民族委員會) 2024, Yuanzhu minzu weiyuanhui quanqiu zixun wang 原住民族委員會全球資訊網, www.cip.gov.tw/zh-tw/index.html (accessed June 21, 2024).
- 3 *Statistical Yearbook of Interior* (6.01 General Conditions of Religions), <https://statis.moi.gov.tw/micst/webMain.aspx?k=menu> (accessed June 21, 2024).
- 4 Ait (ed.) 2023, "2022 nian guoji zongjiao ziyou baogao – Taiwan bufen" 2022年國際宗教自由報告—台灣部分, Meiguo zai Tai xiehui 美國在台協會, www.ait.org.tw/zhtw/zhtw-2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom-taiwan/.
- 5 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (no date), www.taiwan.gov.tw/content_9.php#:~:text=With%20an%20increasing%20emphasis%20on,increase%20over%20the%20past%20decade (accessed June 21, 2024).

Brief Structure of FJCU

FJCU is the only Catholic university in Northern Taiwan. The university was founded by three units – the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), the Society of Jesus (SJ) and the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference (CRBC, 臺灣主教團). Besides the high-ranked managerial work, the founding units provide pastoral care to each college through their own mission office. For example, three full-time staff members work in the SVD Mission Office for the College of Science and Engineering, the College of Foreign Languages and Literatures, the College of Human Ecology and the College of Fashion and Textile. The colleagues are involved in the college meetings at different levels to maintain the Catholic faith and arrange activities to promote SVD's charisma.

Similarly, SJ and CRBC take care of eight other colleges separately. Around 20 full-time staff members work in the chaplaincy, SVD Mission Office, SJ Mission Office and CRBC Mission Office to serve approximately 25,000 people in FJCU. These colleagues also prepare the formation of those who want to be baptised.

Catholic Youth on the Campus

Among the many student clubs in FJCU, one is for Catholic students and those interested in the Catholic faith. Usually, most of the club members are also active in their parishes. These students mainly study in Catholic Studies (天主教研究修學士學位學程). For the rest, they come from different departments of FJCU. This club is also a member of the UCCSA – North District (University Chinese Catholic Students Association, Zhonghua tianzhujiao dazhuan tongxuehui – Beiqu 中華天主教大專同學會-北區). Its student leaders arrange regular meetings and invite fellow students to join uni activities irregularly. Their advisor is a senior lay missionary from the Philippines who works as a full-time staff member in the chaplaincy. Her office is located in the chapel.

The chapel provides many religious activities for the whole university, especially liturgical services. Catholic students are invited to serve in these activities, which leads to a strong relationship between the chaplain and the students. The current chaplain is a diocesan priest and an assistant professor at FJCU.

Accessible Spiritual Space & Pastor

In the academic year of 2022–2023, I joined the campus ministry at FJCU. My office is located in one of the boys' dormitories. The priest's office was inside the restricted area of the dormitory. With the permission of the current vice-principal of mission, I moved it to the lobby. That space allows the students, colleagues or other youth outside FJCU to visit me any time. The space in the SVD building, FJCU, was considered my workplace. It is also the language centre and the College of Science and Engineering administrative unit. The visitors in this building are irregular and only stay for a moment. The dormitory is not close to the teachers and other administrative staff members. The students feel more comfortable and at ease to stay here doing nothing. With the cooperation of the dormitory

office, the priest's office was also converted into two spaces. The first part is a formal working area for meeting people individually. The second part is for gatherings or self-study. A prayer corner is here as an essential symbol of the presence of God.

The mission offices of the three founding sections and the chaplain's office have similar spaces, but their style is very office- or study-room-oriented. Also, several unit staff members use the same space for administrative work, activities and pastoral care. It is not easy for a pastoral worker to care for a person individually in a very relaxed or spontaneous way, although colleagues can book a room for individual consultation.

Image of the Christian Faith

The people in Taiwan sometimes misunderstand that the Christian faith heals the psychological wounds only. First, this is the influence of the folk religions. From the 1940s to the 1950s, Han people primarily migrated to this land from Mainland China due to the end of the war with Japan and later due to the victory of Communist China. Han people are used to asking favours from gods when they encounter difficulties. Second, the influence of the political restriction in education. The government does not allow religious education. Thus, to introduce our faith, the Church can only name counselling, life education, religious exposure, etc.

In the university chapel, one of the compulsory modules for every student is the "Orientation of the University." The founding sections use this module to introduce the Church and one's charism. The founding sections expect to implant spirituality into one's colleges and activities. After the introduction of the relationship between the Church and FJCU, the class master always says, "Find Sou-si (Brother) if you are sad." Thus, we need to change the impression of the students. We shall tell them: you are already good; Jesus improves your life (cf. Jn 10:10).

Lack of Holy Vocations is a challenge to the Church, reducing the presence of the consecrated person in the university. Now, the representatives of the Church sit mainly on the university board. The number of priest-professors (or nun-) is falling semester by semester. Last semester, only four SVD priests and one diocesan priest worked as professors on campus. Next academic year, only 3 SVD priests will likely continue their full-time teaching. For colleagues and students, therefore, the clergy and the religious only seem to appear on the authority board of the university.

Living with the Flock

A pastor stays in the university to accompany the students, which is vital for every student. First, Catholic students realise pastors are not only there for solving or working on practical matters, like liturgy and other religious activities. Catholic students need their pastor as a companion, listening to their point of view, discussing the Church's teachings, seeking the possibility of dealing with secular issues and giving spiritual guidance. That helps that the youth here consider themselves valuable rather than volunteers or non-paid workers of the Church.

Second, non-Catholic students gradually learn that the Church and its representatives are not a university operator only. An engineering student was wondering about a man wearing a black robe. Later, he understood that it was a religious habit. That reminded him of FJCU as a Catholic institute. Another engineering student had never met a priest personally in his six years of secondary school life. Until his final year at university, he could talk with a religious brother at any time. The folk religious experience of his family is not a matter of living but of avoiding bad luck. The caring and the pursuit of truth became his new concept of religion. The Church representative now is also a pastor and a father. A similar experience is shared in FJCU.

Moreover, colleagues like approaching the pastor out of the sight of the superior. The relationship with religious people begins with staff meetings, student activities and teaching programmes. Later, it becomes an official reason or an excuse to share their concerns with the pastor without embarrassment. This kind of companionship leads to the nourishment of the university members.

Outside the office, four well-known religious paintings were selected and are shown in the lobby of this boys' dormitory according to the liturgical year: the "Mystical Nativity" (Sandro Botticelli, 1500); "Le Bon Pasteur" (Philippe de Champaigne, 1883), "Crucifixion" (Jacob Jordaens, 1620) and "San Francesco al Prato Resurrection" (Pietro Perugino, 1499). These pictures immediately became a point of discussion among the students, especially those from other religions. Each unit of FJCU has funding for its religious expression. Thus, another dorm manager ordered another set for her female dormitory.

The Flock in the Missions

The number of Catholics is as low in the university as in the local society. When Catholic students enjoy staying together in a relatively comfortable and sacred place, they should invite and welcome others to study and have fun together in the same place. As a mission-Church, the university chapel, the founding sections and the colleges will organise different kinds of catechesis groups according to the nature of the participants. Though the group size can be two to ten, the coordinators invite different religious or catechists or other faithful to introduce various topics. It is not easy to run the traditional Catechumenate in 1.5 years due to the influence of the university calendar. Instead, Sr. Feliza Liu, SSpS, divides 12 themes of the Apostles' Creed into different gatherings throughout the academic year. When the programme is completed, the Sacraments will be only separately introduced to those who ask for baptism.

Indigenous nature is different from the academic aspect. In recent years, a Catholic indigenous philosophy student has continued to form one catechesis group for several non-Catholic indigenous students. The chaplain allows this youth to be the catechist of these students. This group always organises regular meetings for catechesis and prayer in the indigenous resource centre of the university.

On Easter of 2023, eight Han people (students and colleagues) and four indigenous students were baptised. In my opinion, this proportion reflects the reality of the Church in Taiwan; the indigenous people are more open to accepting our faith.

Conversations on the Campus

Many personal issues will be discussed when the youth join together. This discussion is spontaneous according to one's current living experience. Since they are Catholics, Christian values become part of the decision-making. However, the pastor or catechist must respond or clarify the relevant Church teachings. The discussion always begins with the altar service's liturgical matters and ends with the ethical choice in the social action. For example, understanding the meaning behind the liturgical action helps to face the conflicts referring to the altar service. The youth are open-minded and want to learn more about the biblical foundation, Church Tradition and community customs.

Another example is participation in social politics. From 2024, citizens who are eighteen or older have the right to vote for the president. Before 2024, young adults had to wait until twenty for their voting rights. Thus, it became a hot topic on the campus. Shall we vote? What is the role of the Church in a secular election? What values should Catholics support? Some students even desire a more theological or philosophical discussion.

In a personal aspect, the youth enjoy individual spiritual direction. Friends, lovers, family, study and career development are the common concerns of the youth. In addition to these concerns, Catholic students want to integrate their plans further with the Church. Therefore, they hope to contribute professionally to the Church or to receive some specific formation from the Church. Being a staff member of the Church or permanent deacon would be possible. Some first fruits are mature now. A few young couples have worked in the Church for the youth ministry, media ministry and pastoral care in the hospital. Some students also consider the Holy Vocation.

Increasing the Consolidation of Catholic Students

Most students prefer staying in the dormitory to reduce the rental expense and shorten the commute time. However, many students will be refused due to insufficient beds, so they must meet specific criteria to remain in the dormitory. As a Catholic university, it is possible to prioritise Catholic students.

Each dormitory has a group of student leaders to assist the dormitory managers. This service is one way to ensure beds for the current and coming semesters. The Catholic students could be trained to do this job. First, they have more chances to live with a pastor. It is good to form and to maintain their spiritual life. Second, this service can be recognised as a credit for graduation. Third, the Church also needs the opportunity to form youth leaders. It is a chance to create future lay partners and an entrance to the consecrated life. Because the students can organise the dormitory activities with some Church characters, the bed offer may attract some dormitory students to consider baptism.

The Bachelor's Programme in Catholic Studies attracts many youth from different parts of Taiwan. They need beds in the dormitory and the chance to practice what they learn. Under the pastor's guidance, small groups of catechumens from other colleges/departments can be incorporated. All these strategies are to build a Catholic environment in the dormitory.

A Partner of the Front-line Staff

This preliminary idea comes from discussing with non-Catholic colleagues in the dormitory centre. The students and colleagues welcome the full-time presence of the pastor in the dormitory because they enjoy the fatherly love that makes the atmosphere peaceful. One colleague in this non-teaching unit must take care of a few hundred students. A pastor shares their workload in the aspect of personal care. He is also a trusted partner in the activities and the decision-making. The management of the colleges and the front-line colleagues always welcome the participation of this kind of pastor. This kind of cooperation can be an efficient way for the clergy to enter the university. It is also a way to face the barriers of the clergy, such as academic qualifications, language, cultural background, etc.

The specific social welfare and university resources ensure Indigenous students' learning opportunities. These students deserve to interact more with others. The Indigenous priests outside the campus shall be invited because they are familiar with their cultures and the norms of the Universal Church.

Religious Person Formation

Lack of vocations implies a need for more priest-professors. In the coming semester, fewer than five priests will continue their teaching jobs, and few religious sisters work as supporting staff. Until now, these sisters are not expected to stay for long-term service. Education or campus ministry is unique for some religious people. The Church can provide the opportunity to the seminarians, especially to the native ones. They may discover this charisma, at least to understand more. That can enhance the cooperation with the parishes, dioceses and other Catholic institutions.

CRBC, SJ, SVD and the Chaplaincy in the university face the same challenge – the need for more priests. The active support for each other becomes more important. Meanwhile, retaining each charisma becomes another challenge in cooperation. The effort we make can present the unity of the Church, first to the lay partners of each founding section. According to the current situation, the number of Catholics, the number of religious persons and the number of priest-professors are declining. Each founding section's lay partners' role will become more significant a decade later. Communication skills and modern technology may help the current working religious personnel.

Converting My Colleagues' Workload into My Opportunity for Evangelisation

Secularisation and the independence of the educational system accelerate the fading-out of the Church in FJCU. The lack of Holy Vocations and priest-professors are internal factors in the Church. We retain our authority in the extreme high-end only as the board members. However, delivering salvation requires us to reach out to the people differently. Building relationships with colleagues, cooperating with lay partners and trusting Catholic students are the solutions for the university model. Last but not least, we cannot control the university directly as in the past, but we can do something to reduce the workload of

our colleagues. This workload becomes the opportunity for us, the Church, and the missionaries to approach the people.