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ASIA/TAIWAN - The celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the evangelization of Taiwan have led local Church "to a greater awareness of their missionary identity" National Director of PMS, Fr. Felice Chech, tells Fides; Saturday 21st scheduled closing presided by Cardinal Tomko

Taipei (Agenzia Fides) - On the afternoon of Saturday, November 21, Solemnity of Christ the King, Special Envoy of Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, will preside the closing celebration for the 150th anniversary of the evangelization of Taiwan to be held in the great Lin Kou stadium of the capital, Taipei, which has a capacity of 20,000 people. Several cardinals and bishops have confirmed their attendance, as well as many priests and missionaries, and various political authorities including the President of the Republic, Ma Yin Jiou. In light of the upcoming event, Fides spoke with Fr. Felice Chech, Camillian Religious, National Director of Pontifical Mission Societies in Taiwan, who since 1971 has been a missionary in Taiwan, where he has held several positions in the field of pastoral care and health care. In 2004 he received the National Award for merit in the health field, in particular for his service among the A-Tayal aborigines.

Father Felice, how has the Catholic community in Taiwan lived out this 150th anniversary of evangelization?
The celebrations began May 17, 2008 in Kaohsiung (the place where the Dominican missionaries first landed and evangelized), whose Emeritus Bishop is Cardinal Paul Shan, SJ. We could say that the whole Church in Taiwan has been mobilized for this important occasion. Throughout the year there were inter-diocesan activities, such as competitions in painting, music, literature, liturgical music and theater, always in relation to the celebration. Each diocese has tried to revive the missionary spirit with the initiative "St. Andrew 1 +1," following the example of the Apostle Andrew, who led Peter to meet Jesus. This was the task entrusted to every Christian: with prayer and initiatives for a non-Christian, friend, relative, work partner or classmate, etc.. take him to meet Christ. The various catechism and religious education courses have been intensified.
There have also been various initiatives on a charitable level, especially after the floods of August 8, 2009. The priests of various dioceses have chosen to do their annual spiritual exercises together, placing greater emphasis on evangelization. Catholic parishes and institutions, schools, hospitals ... have organized courses of catechesis inviting non-Christians to meet Christ.
An especially successful initiative, without a doubt, was that of the pilgrimage from the Minor Basilica of Our Lady of Wanchin, southern Taiwan, which was widely attended by almost all the parishes of the island. Even ecumenical dialogue has also been promoted through several meetings of prayer and dialogue, involving Catholics, Protestants, and Buddhists.

What are the major difficulties found in the evangelization in Taiwan?
The historical legacy is unfortunately the fact that the Catholic Church is still seen as a "foreign religion", so sometimes there are signs of distrust. Among Chinese in Taiwan, the biggest difficulty is the strong influence of superstition that still exists in popular religion. As the indigenous peoples (most are Catholic or Protestant) lack of training and the limited presence of catechists and priests in the mountain villages, this makes the Christian formation less secure, which is compounded by the instability of the indigenous person. The lack of work then pushes the indigenous people out to the city, where they are most likely to become disoriented, with rather dire consequences for their family life. Thus, the young people no longer have a religious education and can become easy prey for alcoholism and become more fragile on an emotional and moral level. In the villages, elders and children are often left alone.

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What possibilities for the future of the mission are opened after this celebration?
The various activities to celebrate 150 years of evangelization called for a general mobilization for the Church in Taiwan, leading to a greater awareness of their missionary identity, making it more capable, active and eager to witness. Volunteering in parishes has been affected positively and is enriching many people and communities. There will be more collaboration not only between parishes, but also between the various dioceses and religious institutes. We continue to call for an ever greater sense of belonging and of Christian witness to address the challenges of society. The press and the media seem to be aware of this reality. The churches will be open so that all those who visit can find an environment of acceptance and testimony. This will then continue in lifelong formation and organization of various courses of catechesis. (SL) (Agenzia Fides 20/11/2009)

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