

## 'Eternal Father' gets help with dream

**DETERMINATION:** The 101-year-old Reverend Franz Burkhardt wants to build a center for the handicapped, and yesterday he received some assurances that aid is coming

STAFF WRITER

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VIP's yesterday descended upon the hospital room of 101-year-old Swiss Reverend Franz Burkhardt, bringing news that help is on the way for the realization of his dream: building a center for the care of severely handicapped adults in Tungshih township in Chia Yi County.

Minister of the Interior Yu Cheng-hsien (余政憲) yesterday visited Burkhardt at the Cardinal Tien Hospital in Hsintien, where the Swiss father is receiving care for pneumonia and pleural effusion.

He was accompanied during the visit by Vice President of the Taiwan Sugar Corporation (Taisugar), Huang Che-hung (黃哲宏) and KMT Legislator Chiang Yi-wen (江綺雯).

### Must stay within the law

Yu said that as far as the law allows, he would do his utmost to assist Burkhardt. He added that there is a continuity to government policies and that once a decision is made, it would be thoroughly implemented and any difficulties overcome. He also acknowledged Burkhardt's many contributions to Taiwanese society.

Yu explained that the Ministry of the Interior's regulations regarding subsidies for the development of social welfare services focus on construction, changes and expansion of buildings and facilities and do not include funds for land purchases.

He said that under the present legal framework, the government is unable to unconditionally donate land to any civic organization, but it could assist through construction subsidies as well as by facilitating administrative procedures.

Yu has also asked that the Department of Civil Affairs and the National Police Administration assist in issuing a permanent residence permit to Reverend Burkhardt in recognition of his services to the nation.

Huang said that Taisugar is a privately managed company, and that there are rules regulating its lease and sale of land and that it would be easier if land was leased.

But, he said that if a land purchase is preferred, a decision would have to be made by the company's board of directors. He also said that whatever Burkhardt decides to do, he hoped it would be possible to offer him a below market price.

Burkhardt, who is unable to speak due to his illness, beamed with joy upon hearing the news that the government was pulling out all the stops to help him.

Burkhardt hopes to see the center built during his lifetime.

### **Denial by Chang**

During his 100th birthday last year, Burkhardt received a visit by then premier Chang Chun-hsiung (張俊雄) who said that he wanted to help make the reverend's dream come true.

Chang yesterday denied that while premier, he had agreed to Taisugar donating land for the center's use. Chang said that while he had encouraged the company to do its utmost to assist Burkhardt, he never suggested that the land be given away.

Since state-run company land must be sold through public tender, it must first apply for an amendment to regulations allowing it to sell land to charity organizations.

Burkhardt was admitted to the St. Martin de Por Hospital in Chia Yi with pneumonia in March this year. Due to pleural effusion, he was transferred to the Cardinal Tien Hospital on May 29.

Burkhardt's doctor at the hospital, Chang Yen-teh (張炎德), said that he was doing better following treatment.

Burkhardt, who is from Basel, Switzerland, came to Taiwan 55 years ago.

In 1980, he founded the Sacred Heart Home for the Severely Retarded (聖心教養院) in Tungshih township in Chia Yi County. The home is dedicated to the care of people with severe mental or multiple handicaps, and Burkhardt has therefore been called the "Eternal Father" and the "Father of the mentally handicapped."

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