

Chen wants to help fulfill Swiss' dream

QUEST: The president told Franz Burkhardt in the hospital yesterday that he hopes to help realize the clergyman's lifelong goal of establishing a center to care for the severely handicapped in Chiayi

By Sandy Huang / STAFF REPORTER

Sun, Jun 23, 2002 - Page 1

President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) yesterday paid a visit to the 101-year-old Reverend Franz Burkhardt in the hospital yesterday to convey his get-well wishes.

The Swiss father, who has been in Taiwan for the past 55 years caring for people with severe mental or physical handicaps, was admitted to the Cardinal Tien Hospital in Hsintien on May 29 for pneumonia and pleural effusion.

Aside from wishing Burkhardt well, Chen also told Burkhardt that he wanted to help make the reverend's dream come true: to build a center for the care of severely handicapped adults in Tungshih township in Chiayi County.

"Though unable to speak due to his illness, you could tell that Father Burkhardt's spirit was greatly cheered up by President Chen's remarks, as his eyes had been closed, but then lit up upon hearing the words spoken by President Chen concerning the building of the center," said Liu Chen-wan (劉振旺), president of the Sacred Heart Home for the Severely Retarded (聖心教養院).

Sacred Heart was founded by Burkhardt in 1980 in Chiayi to care for people with severe mental or physical handicaps.

Liu added that it has been Burkhardt's hope to see the center built during his lifetime.

"Though President Chen did not elaborate further, it's still a great encouragement," Liu said.

According to Liu, the organization doesn't have sufficient funds to buy the land it would like for the site, which is owned by Taiwan Sugar Corporation (Taisugar).

"To our understanding, the land's market price is approximately NT\$60 million," Liu told the *Taipei Times*. "Yet the funds we have so far, roughly NT\$30 million, are not enough to purchase the land"

Liu added that the Sacred Heart Home for the Severely Retarded houses 100 severely handicapped patients, while the new center could house another 200 patients.

"It's our hope that the Taisugar could sell us the land at a below-market price" Liu said.

On Friday Minister of the Interior Yu Cheng-hsien (余政憲) visited Burkhardt to give him a

perm-anent residency permit in recognition of his decades-long devotion to Taiwan's underprivileged.

The Ministry of the Interior will meet with Taisugar on Tuesday to discuss the possible sale.

Published on Taipei Times :

<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2002/06/23/0000141465>

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