

Reverend Burkhardt dead at 101

PUBLIC SERVANT: The long-time Taiwan resident died yesterday, leaving behind his dream to build a center in Chiayi for severely handicapped adults

By Tsai Ting-I / STAFF REPORTER

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The Reverend Franz Burkhardt, a recipient of presidential and papal honors for his services to Taiwan over almost half a century, died early yesterday morning. He was 101.

A statement released by the Sacred Heart Home for the Severely Retarded, which Burkhardt founded in 1980 in Chiayi, said that he had died of respiratory failure.

Burkhardt was admitted to the St. Martin de Por Hospital in Chiayi with pneumonia in March.

He was transferred to the Cardinal Tien Hospital on May 29 after being found to also be suffering from pleural effusion.

Following his death, Minister of the Interior Yu Cheng-hsien (余政憲) yesterday reiterated a promise that his ministry would do its best to facilitate the building of a center for the care of severely handicapped adults which Father Burkhardt and Sacred Heart Home had planned.

"We'll progress the case as a special program, and complete the center's establishment as soon as we can," Yu told the *Taipei Times* yesterday.

Burkhardt, a native of Basel, Switzerland, was a missionary of the Society of Jesus.

He moved from China to Taiwan in 1953.

For his half-century contribution to the nation, Burkhardt received the Order of the Brilliant Star with Special Grand Cordon (聖心教養院) in 2000 from President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁).

At the age of 100, Burkhardt was awarded by Pope John Pul II with the Order of St. Gregory Gold Cross Star, which was presented to him by a Holy See envoy in Taiwan.

Burkhardt and the Sacred Heart Home had raised approximately NT\$10 million to build a center for severely handicapped adults in Putzu township, Chiayi County but its preferred site for the center is owned by Taiwan Sugar Corporation (Taisugar) and priced at approximately NT\$40 million.

Yu proposed yesterday that Sacred Heart consider leasing the land from Taisugar, which stated last month that it was prepared to lease the land to the home.

"It would be very cheap to lease the land, and the MOI will offer some NT\$60 million in construction subsidies and facilitate administrative procedures," Yu said.

The ministry's regulations regarding subsidies for the development of social welfare services do not allow for funds for land purchases or leasing.

But Yu said that the government would make an exception in this case.

"Both former premier Chang Chun-hsiung (張俊雄) and former interior minister Chang Po-ya's (張博雅) promised to help Father Burkhardt," Yu said.

Chen promised in a visit to the father at the end of last month that the government would assist in the building of the center.

Liu Chen-wan (劉振旺), president of the Sacred Heart Home for the Severely Retarded, said that purchasing the land remained the home's preferred option, but they would make the final decision at a board meeting today in reaction to Yu's proposal.

Liu added that ministry officials had arranged an appointment to discuss the matter with them today, after Yu's remark yesterday.

An official from Taisugar, surnamed Liu, said that the matter is to be submitted to its board shortly.

Yu had asked Taisugar, during a visit to Burkhardt in hospital last month at which he granted the priest permanent residency, to study the possibility of either leasing or selling the land at below market price.

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