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To create a more harmonious society, helping the poor and marginalized communities in China achieve their sustainable social and economic well being and self-sufficiency, empowering them individually and as a community to become masters of their own destinies and as such become a contributive force in the nation's integral development

Christmas & Fr. Ruiz' 4 lessons

Dear Friends,

One year ago I asked a group of Casa Ricci's collaborators: "What will happen if Fr. Ruiz passes away?, Who would continue the mission he has started in China? Who will be his successors?". After a very deep silence, one of our most senior collaborators spoke. Looking at the rest of the group she said: "We will continue his mission. People will find him working through us and among us". Special persons influence not only individuals but also communities and institutions as well. Fr. Ruiz is one of these persons. But, how has he influenced us? What has Fr. Ruiz taught to Casa Ricci as a community or institution? I believe that he has taught us four fundamental lessons.

The first lesson Fr. Ruiz has taught us is that **solidarity means personal friendship with those who suffer**. Fr. Ruiz never understood discrimination and marginalization as abstract problems, but through their concrete effects in people's lives. For him discrimination and marginalization were against people's dignity and right to live as beloved sons and daughters of God because they destroy people's health, people's joy and hope, people's education and future, people's socio-economic possibilities, and people's cultures. In order to understand their suffering, Fr. Ruiz wanted to see, to hear and to touch the leprosy patients, the HIV-AIDS patients, the orphans and the abandoned. For him, the only "solution" to the suffering he saw in their faces and bodies was personal friendship and solidarity. This kind of friendship requires a lot of courage,

personal commitment and self-sacrifice. It requires the grace to make a personal option for those who suffer. The grace to feel their suffering as your own suffering, their problems as your own problems.

The second lesson Fr. Ruiz has taught us is that **real friendship with the poor and marginalized means to live with them and build communities with them**. The best strategy to defeat the selfishness and egoism that has created discrimination and marginalization is to build communion. We should work as a community which has the mission to build other communities. In these communities people will learn together how to defeat all kinds of discrimination by practicing solidarity. In these communities, physical, psychological and social wounds will be healed, human dignity will be affirmed, and communion restored and recreated. Fr. Thomas Peyton MM described our mission to build communities as the work of a "movement". During the last fifteen years of his life, Fr. Ruiz invited more than one hundred religious Sisters to



*Nothing happier than to
make people happy!
- Fr. Luis Ruiz*

leave the safety of their places and religious communities to go to live together with the leprosy or HIV-AIDS infected and affected patients, not only to care for them, but also to learn from them.

The third lesson Fr. Ruiz taught us is to **neither trust too much your own strengths, nor be discouraged by your own limits. His secret was to rely only on God's powerful love and to not be afraid to follow His inspirations to start new and challenging works**. Without denying the complexity of our mission, problems, hardships, challenges or our own miseries, Fr. Ruiz

taught us to smile and put our eyes, our confidence and our hope only in the Lord.

Finally, the fourth lesson he taught us is that ***we should firmly believe in every person's capacity to love.*** Fr. Ruiz used to describe his work in Macau and China through writing short personal appealing letters to his friends and benefactors. He was continuously inviting new companions to join him in the mission. He wanted them to be personally involved in his service to the poor and marginalized people in Macau and Mainland China. Fr. Ruiz firmly believed that God has given to every person the capacity to love and to give. It doesn't matter how much you give, provided you give from the bottom of your heart. Everybody, even the poorest of the poor, can give and show solidarity to those who are in need.



Fr. Ruiz was ordained in 1945 in Hebei, China

Friendship and solidarity with those who suffer, build community with them, put all your confidence and hope only in God, trust in people's capacity to love. These are the four lessons that Fr. Ruiz has taught us in Casa Ricci. These are the lessons that the Lord has taught to Fr. Ruiz. Finally, these are the lessons that the Lord has shown to us when he decided to be born in the poverty of the manger in Bethlehem. These four lessons that can be simply summarized in one word: **"Love"**, the big Chinese character painted by the HIV-AIDS patients of our center in Hongjiang, (Hunan) on the calendar they have made for you for 2012.

In this issue of Encounter you will find stories of how Fr. Ruiz has influenced all kinds of peoples. I am sure you will like them. In the name of Casa Ricci and all the people we serve, I wish all of you a Merry Christmas and a year 2012 full of joy and hope!

In Christ,

Fr. Fernando
Macau, November 2011 ☺

LOVE is eternal

(Author is a HIV-infected patient)

So he left us just like that....., leaving us deeply regret with endless thoughts. This is a real story without any exaggeration and lies. At that time I still did not know the Hongjiang Loving Care Center that he founded. I read a newspaper article that a 90-plus years old Father in Hunan is helping those people who are vulnerable, living a difficult life, or with various physical diseases. I am deeply shocked and influenced by this report. Really, I was moved by the sun-shining and faithful deeds of this old man.



Fr. Ruiz visiting & consoling a HIV-infected patient

What is unthinkable to most people is that such an old priest with noble faith, coming from afar to our country, has to abandon his own country and his loved ones to help those of us who have diseases and a variety of vulnerabilities. This is such a great mind and is our luck to meet him. It was a day in fall of 2006, an elderly holding a stick was in our Loving Care Center inspecting the work of the center and chatting with our patients. Oh, there he was....Father Lu Yi (Fr. Ruiz's name in Pu Tong Hua)! He was tortured by disease too, as he has to take insulin injections every day. But he told us to be strong, not be afraid of our illness and how to maintain a balanced state of mind. Really his words echoed around me for a long time. I really appreciate you, Fr. Lu Yi, that your teachings for me to understand the value and meaning of life. You helped me find the dignity of a man. Due to illness I was discriminated in one way or another in the community, and sometimes depressed and cannot find a job. It is the Loving Care Center that you founded that I find the family warm and fragrant. Now I am really happy and comfortable. I am willing to be a volunteer to help those people in need and assist the nuns and sisters in whatever way I can. I feel very happy to plant some vegetables. Every time our home grown vegetables are ready to eat gives me a sincere pride in my heart. I often remember what Fr. Ruiz told me: Everyone is useful to society, do not look down on ourselves and to be

strong to face the difficulties. Fr. Lu Yi, I will inevitably make mistakes sometimes, but that is also the time I think of what you have taught me. Now I finally understand that a man of faith can feel more the happiness of life than those with no faith. But this I understand all too late. Thank heavens, I finally have the opportunity to know you Fr. Lu Yi.

It was another golden day in Autumn. With an ultra senior age of ninety-six, you came to visit our center to console patient and inspect our work. But this time you were different...you were in a wheelchair. You tried to stand up to talk to patients even though it was painful with every step you made. Such move was invisibly telling us how strong you are to overcome the disease. Looking at such sores, we have to hold back the tears flow out of our eyes. Although you are confined by the disease in your body, your smile is like a ray of sunshine that melts our hearts. Your love is telling us that life is a process of constant devotion, life is a continuous process of giving for others. If it is not your quiet giving, can we have such a better life and world? Fr. Lu Yi, I firmly believe that you are now in heaven watching and loving us the same way. I assure you that the seeds of love you diligently sow will take root and grow. Your teaching will always be in our mind. ☺

Deep mourning of Fr. L. Ruiz

(Author Mr. Tan Hong is a former Yunnan government official)



Fr. Ruiz's first visit to Yunnan high land in 1996.

Photo with courtesy of Mr. Tan Hong

Photo with courtesy of Mr. Tan Hong

Fr. Ruiz's first visit to Yunnan high land in 1996.

Turning on my computer a few days ago, I was shocked to learn the unfortunate death of 97-year-old Fr. Lu Yi of Casa Ricci Macau. Pain hit me again and again as the photograph "Affectionate" that I took a dozen years ago always appeared in my eyes. My mind was constantly playing back the difficult process during the first time I accompanied him at his senior age to climb over the mountains to visit the leprosy pa-

tients in Mile County, Yunnan Province.

In August 1996, Honghe was raining continuously. Fr. Lu flew to Kunming from Macau. He told me that he wanted to visit lepers in a village in Mile. I told Father that there is no formal road to the village. What the villagers usually walk is only one buffalo cart sidewalk. Yesterday I tried to explore the way on a jeep and the car almost slid into the ravine. Fr. Lu insisted that we have to go. If he cannot see the living condition of the leprosy patients, he can not determine how to help them in the future.....

In the morning of next day, under the direction of an old villager, I and several other staff took shifts to help this 83-year-old elderly Father to embark on a visit to the lepers through the winding track.

Yunnan is known as laterite plateau. This kind of red clay after soaking in the rain is highly viscous. There will be a layer of mud stuck to the soles for every step, and the soles became extremely heavy after a few steps. We were struggling to inch forward as we were suddenly stopped by the thunderstorm. That was such strong wind and downpour that almost blew us down the valley and swept us away. Several of our desperate young men held hands tightly around Fr. Lu to the inner layer, physically blocked the raging storm, and pushed through the tough weather unharmed. At last, we gasped and crawled through the 3-Km long muddy mountain road under wind and rain for four hours!

As Fr. Lu entered the leprosy village and stretched his warm hands to touch the dozens of leprosy patients, all of them were moved and bursted into tears for such a white-haired old people to come to visit them in person.

It was still raining when we left the leprosy village. The mayor of the village said that going uphill is easy but going downhill is difficult. At time of such ghostly weather, even young man can fell into the ravine inevitably. So we have to employ a buffalo cart, and use another bypass muddy road to send Fr. Lu out of the village.

The return muddy road was so bad that it can hardly called a road, with potholes here and there big enough to have one foot deep. The cow towed the broken cart step by step forward. The lepers and villagers that escorted Fr. Lu were all covered with mud. They clutched the cart to help, with one foot high and one foot low, while pushing and drawing alternatively. We finally reached the edge of the Rainbow Creek basin that evening.

That day was the first time I accompanied Fr. Lu Yi to walk into leprosy village. It is also my first time to come in contact with those daunting leprosy patients. For 10 plus years since that day, I have accompanied Fr. Lu Yi to visit dozens of leprosy villages in Honghe Prefecture, Wenshan Prefecture, Xishuangbanna Prefecture, and Qujing City. For each visit with senior Fr. Lu there was always strong impact and severe test deep in my heart.



In order to help them, Fr. Ruiz insisted to visit the lepers so as to know their living conditions

So in the last 10 plus years, I worked closely with Fr. Lu Yi and completed the reconstruction of the nursing homes and dozens of charitable projects in Honghe Prefecture. These helped thousands of leprosy patients in the poor mountainous areas at time of most difficulty and most help needed. That were like drops of water during arid period and filled with warmth and care to these patients.

What Fr. Lu Yi have left with us are affections and loving care, and these will always remain as treasure in the hearts of all the people of Honghe.

Tan Hong
28th July 2011 ☺

The most beautiful smiling angel in our heart

(by Sr. Wang Yong Lin, one of the center-in-charge of Casa Ricci children homes)

Dearest Father,

You appeared at the crossroad of our life and death. You had been walking hurriedly in the Mainland, overnight under the moon and the stars, with wet clothes and in heavy steps, to light the life of those at the verge of death. You are the torch of light, with no murmur or regrets.

You are a holy priest, fully committed to serve others, and let God's glory be with you. You were always smiling and full of love, making sacrifice without rewards.

Looking back to our path of growth, you had done uncommon deeds on us year after year. While others were fighting for their career, wealth and fame, you (our respectful Father Lu) were a loyal follower of Jesus Christ, working unselfishly and wholeheartedly to serve God and people in need. You were contented and lived splendidly and happily. You are a smiling angel in our heart. You are our lovely father and grandfather. You have set a good model for us. Love makes things perfect.

Your visit on 6 June 2011 was a special gift from God for us to meet you. Though you were at the age of 97 on wheel-chair, you were full of courage and passion, bringing us a hope in life. Your kindness and action with love had spoken more than words. We were moved and speechless during your 3-day visit, also in love and joy, with cheerful tears in our heart.



You are the most beautiful rose in our heart. Your smiling love and unselfish sacrifice are kept deeply in our heart forever. We remember what you had taught us and will live on positively. While letting God play its will on us, we will not be miser of our strength and ability but be a person with love to serve others. We will spread God's love to the world and help those in need. No matter in what circumstances, we are joyful in the Lord and trust that God will take care of us during ups and downs. Faithful to God is a blessing and we have everything in God. Our life is full of hope in no fear, as we are protected by the holy angels in their full wings. Father, wishing you live happily with our Lord in heaven. We hope to join you in the paradise in future!

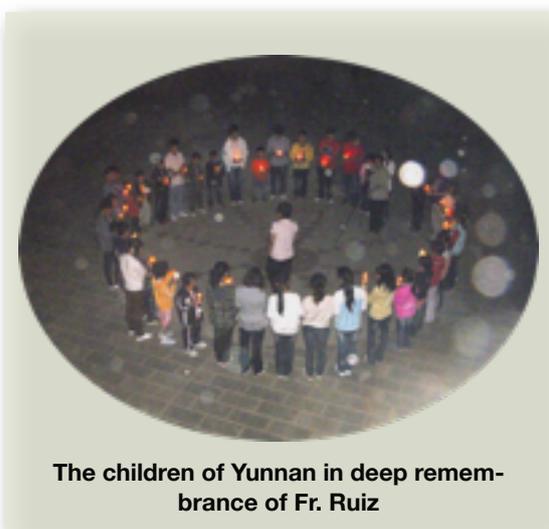
Sr. Wang Yong Lin,
September 2011 ☺

Mourning of Fr. Luis Ruiz

(by Sr. Cecilia Zheng, one of the center-in-charge of Casa Ricci children homes)

On the way I returned home from Fr. Ruiz's funeral held at the Macau Cathedral on 3rd August, pictures of Father meeting the kids many times in "Joy Children Home" flowed in my mind. It was our honor to have Father come and celebrated his 95th and 97th birthday with us in our Children Home. Each of us, the olds and the young, gave their performance in the party. No matter how funny it was, Father laughed joyfully. His continuous and satisfied claps made kids happy.

Kids all came back from holidays after family reunion joined the "Life Camp" held from 25th to 29th August, before the commencement of school term. Once I mentioned to the kids the death of Fr. Grandpa Ruiz,



The children of Yunnan in deep remembrance of Fr. Ruiz

founder of Children Home, has gone to Heaven, the crowd became solemn with dead silence. After we intentionally played "The Source of Joy", a DVD telling the story of Fr. Ruiz, all the kids wrote letter to express their own gratitude to Fr. Ruiz. Then they went to the yard, stood around the Cross with a candle on hand, and freely spoke what they had written or prayed in silence. Finally the letters containing the hearty wish of the kids, were burnt with smoke rising up to Fr. Grandpa Ruiz in Heaven. The kids cried in whisper one after another in a strong atmosphere of sadness, gratitude, remembrance and cordial wishes. The kids bursted out their touching cry that last a long time at the moment they knew Fr. Ruiz had told his friend Fr. Thomas Peyton that he wanted to go to our Children Home to see the kids next month (August). Fr. Ruiz cared and assisted countless people. He remember our kids even at his final breathes. That made us feel touched and gratified. The importance, safety, warmth...etc of Fr. Ruiz to the kids cannot be replaced by anyone. His selfless love, the pure and sincere smile from deep in his heart invited our whole family to further engraved Father in our mind.

Although I am a Sister and have chance to join the work of spiritual cultivation, I still felt that I was lacking something. How could I fulfill what Jesus said in the Bible: "whatever you did for one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me". This is what I always yearn for from the bottom of my heart. Thanks God for listening to the wish of His humble person. In June 2005, I was invited to set up the first Children Home for the kids of leprosy patients and helpless orphans in Lufeng of Yunnan Province. "Serve the neediest people" becomes my motto thereafter.

After living with children and communicating with outsiders for more than 6 years, I realized Fr. Ruiz's saying: "Nothing happier than to make people happy". From Fr. Ruiz, I am also aware of who is "God's people". God's people are those who give up one's own will to respond wholeheartedly to those of God, and implement God's will gracefully. Free ourselves and let God perform his surprising and splendid plan in an unrestrained way, especially for those who are being neglected, and living in darkness and marginalization. Fr. Ruiz's will power and vitality are not inferior to youngsters even in his 90's. As in Isaiah: "Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah 40:31). This is the portrait of Fr. Ruiz's deeds and life. Inspired by the spirit of Father, I am able to boast shamelessly that my vitality is not inferior to those young fellow workers, even I have already reached the age of grandma.

I was also affected by the concept of "retreating to poverty and truth" and "rejuvenation", which were fully manifested through the life of Fr. Ruiz. He taught me to find out the truth by going back to the origin. I always keep the heart of a newborn baby in front of God. What Fr. Ruiz said and did had proved that "it is never too old to learn".

Sr. Cecilia Zheng,
2011-9-14 Glory Cross

A Tribute to a Smiling Face

(by Fr. Thomas Peyton MM, one of CRSS's long term partners)

During the funeral Mass for Fr. Luis Ruiz, S.J., one of the homilists remarked, "Today we celebrate the birth of a Saint." I just sat in the church and watched the seemingly endless line of all sorts of folks who came to view Fr. Luis for the last time. Each owed something to Fr. Luis' deep compassion. The Buddhist have an expression: "In memory resides the mystery of redemption."

Fr. Ruiz's passing was a deep shock to me, even though he had already lived for 98 years (67 as a priest)! I had followed him for the last 18 years of his life when he traveled throughout China in search of its poorest, — the isolated leprosy patients. During these years he taught me two lessons for life. One was that *the fire of love in one's own heart must be fueled by sacrifices, especially for the Poor and Unwanted*. The second was that *if we choose to live a life of service for others then the best years of our life are always still ahead of us*. Fr. Ruiz was planning still another trip to China a week before his passing.

Fr. Luis had a "heart on fire" with love for the Poor and Unwanted. I have many photos of our trips into China seeking out these isolated leprosy compounds / villages. In every picture there is always a broad smile on his face. He loved to walk about the compound / village and shake hands or give a big hug, and even, on occasions, I saw him kiss the scared and still ailing limbs of a patient. He would listen to their needs and also consult with the government officials before coming up with a plan "to put smiles back on the patients' faces." He always talked in terms of whether the leprosy patients were "smiling" after our assistance to them. That's why we always returned in person to check on projects.

When Fr. Luis started his vast work in China, he had no idea of its scope or the depth of the needs he would meet. Each leprosy village / hospital was its own priority. One visit to a remote village would lead to a letter from another who had heard of Fr. Luis's work. Food supply, clean water supply within reach of each compound, and a reliable source of electricity for lighting were the basics of his assistance. However, he would talk to each patient to listen to their needs: artificial limbs, a mobile clinic to perform cataract operations, sending children to school, fixing roofs, building access roads and even constructing new centers for leprosy patients with Sisters living with them and caring for their flesh wounds were the results of Fr Luis's "visits."

I used to think of Fr. Ruiz as a "genius" social worker, but then I realized that the source of his fearless, speedy solutions and the fulfilling of the dreams of many patients was his deep faith in God's own love for the poor and sick. When we came back from a trip with several proposed projects on hands to be shared within a few weeks or months, I would ask him, "How can we manage these new projects since we already have many commitments?" Fr. Luis would answer, "I don't know but God will provide!" And then he would add, "Our sponsors / friends are also very generous."

I hope that you can now understand why Fr. Luis al-

ways had a broad smile on his face. He was filled with the Lord's own love of the poor and sick, and he wanted others to share that love. The poor and unwanted live in fear: they are so vulnerable. But once that are touched by God's love, the fear disappears. This is what happened when China leprosy patients came into contact with Fr. Luis. Whatever he did for people always had to be measured by the change in their faces, a "big broad smile."

There is only one memorial we can give to the memory of Fr. Luis Ruiz. We need to make sure that all the poor folks he touched in China are still smiling. We need to evaluate the work of "Casa Ricci Social Services" as to how it can continue to do outreach to the poorest and isolated in China. That "broad smile" must go on! ☺

CRSS News

We at Casa Ricci Social Services are committed to continue Fr. Ruiz's mission to serve the poor and marginalized people in China. Please continue to support us in whichever way God leads you using one of the three means as per our website: <http://www.casaricci.org/en/help/index.html>. Here are some selected the highlights of recent events:

- ☑ A new HIV counseling center will be opened in December in Zhu Hai, Guangdong province.
- ☑ Held two "Friends of CRSS" gatherings in Macau in 2011 to establish contact with those in Macau interested in our activities.



Fr. Ruiz attended the "Friends of CRSS" gathering in Macau in May 2011

Due to lack of space, please visit our website: <http://www.casaricci.org/en/whatnew/index.html> and blog at <http://casaricci.blogspot.com/> for other updated news and stories.

Wishing you and your family a merry Christmas and happy 2012 year!

The CRSS' Team, November, 2011 ☺