



Cardinal Cordes, President of Pontificum Council Cor Unum (second from left) and Archbishop Nicholas Chia (fourth from left), with (from left) Willie Cheng, Raymond Yong and Jeannie Tien at the Spiritual Exercises in Taipei. *Photo from Raymond Yong*

Spiritual Exercises for Asian leaders of Catholic Charities

By Raymond Yong

OVER 400 LEADERS from Catholic charity organisations across Asia congregated at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei to reflect on the Church's mission of charity from Sep 6 to 11. The 2009 Spiritual Exercises was organised by The Pontifical Council Cor Unum, a body of the Holy See responsible for orienting and coordinating the care of the Catholic Church for the needy. The first Spiritual Exercises which was organised in 2008 for the American continent was very well received and encouraged the Vatican to repeat this experience for Asia.

The participants included five cardinals, over 60 bishops, 200 priests, with the rest lay leaders from Catholic charities, who came from 20 nations across 260 dioceses. The Singapore Archdiocese was represented by Archbishop Nicholas Chia. He was accompanied by Willie Cheng and Raymond Yong from Caritas Singapore and Jeannie Tien from Assisi Hospice.

The retreat's theme, "You did it to me" was based on Jesus words of what we do "to the least of My brothers" (Mt 24:40). The "Gospel of the Five Fingers" by Mother Teresa was taught by the Missionaries of Charity Brothers of Calcutta. Participants also listened to inspiring stories of Blessed Pedro Calungsod of Philippines, Blessed Francois-Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan of Vietnam, and Blessed Antoine Frederic Ozanam of France.

One highlight on the final day was a surprise visit by Ma Ying-jeou, the President of the Republic of China (Taiwan) who addressed the assembly, sharing his support and thanks for the charity of the Church.

Reflecting on the five-day retreat, Jeannie Tien said, "The teachings of 'The Gospel of the Five Fingers' has shown me how to serve the poorest of the poor by living with the poor and loving them; this is the real work of the social workers." She hoped to visit the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta sometime. □