

Catholic Mission and Cardinal Marengo Discuss Deepening Ties and Pope Francis' Landmark Visit to Mongolia

Last month, Pisey Soeurn, Catholic Mission's International Programs Coordinator, based out of the Regional Mission Development office in Cambodia, traveled to meet with Cardinal Giorgio Marengo, Apostolic Prefect of Ulaanbaatar, in the capital of Mongolia, to discuss their long-term partnership in the country. Cardinal Marengo, who first arrived in Mongolia as a missionary in 2003, is the youngest Cardinal in the Catholic Church, ordained in August 2022, at just 49 years of age.

This meeting came at a key moment, a week after the announcement of a possible journey to Mongolia for Pope Francis later this year.

During this meeting, Cardinal Marengo shared his enthusiasm and his hope about the visit of Pope Francis, which would be the first papal visit to Mongolia. Catholics within the country only number 1,300, making it one of the smallest Catholic populations in the world. This visit is a significant and long-awaited moment.

"For the Catholic community in Mongolia, the Pope's visit is both a sign of closeness and a source of encouragement. By coming here, 9,000 kilometres from Rome, the Holy Father is demonstrating the attention of the Successor of St Peter to local realities and to what he calls the "peripheries", i.e. distant countries, because he believes that their witness, the way they live, is a gift and a teaching for the whole universal Church," shared Cardinal Marengo.

This meeting between Catholic Mission's representative and Cardinal Marengo was also a key moment to evoke the long-standing relationship and the importance of carrying the great work of Mission in the country, that is not often spoken about on the international scene.

Visiting places where Catholics are a minority is also part of Francis' policy of drawing attention to people and problems in what he has called the peripheries of society and of the world.

"In fact, there is a kind of freshness and spiritual fervour here, typical of the early Churches and reminiscent of the Acts of the Apostles in the Gospel: small, simple communities, lively and open, where people pay attention to each other. It is also an encouragement for our young Church to continue along the path we have begun, a path of dialogue and friendship, in the footsteps of the missionaries who have gone before us, and who silently gave their lives for the Gospel and for this people," says Cardinal Marengo.

Working hand-in-hand with local partners for over a decade, this trip comes ten years after the visit of the late Bishop Wenceslao Padilla, CICM, Bishop and Prefect of the Apostolic Prefecture of Mongolia, at the occasion of World Mission Month in 2013. He was one of the key founders of the Catholic Church in Mongolia.

Invited by Catholic Mission to Australia, Bishop Wenceslao Padilla shared the missionary journey of the Catholic Church in Mongolia, stating that:

“There was nothing. There was no church structure. There was not Catholic – no Mongolian Catholic. We really started from zero”.

Catholic Mission, as part of Pontifical Mission Societies, was able to help this young Church by funding the construction of Ger churches and purchasing of furniture, as well as providing support to communities most in need by supporting programs for children with disabilities.

Continuing this long-standing relationship, early this year, Catholic Mission’s Regional Mission Development Office in Cambodia welcomed one of the Cardinal’s delegates to engage in workshops and visit several Catholic Mission supported projects in Cambodia, a great opportunity for collaboration and developing further opportunities.

Catholic Mission is now supporting the Salesian Fathers Vocational Training Centre in Mongolia, dedicated to providing skills training for young people. Over the coming years, Catholic Mission’s commitment will extend to facilitating the upgrading of equipment and the launching of an electrical training program. This project is in addition to supporting the Prefecture in launching the House of Mercy Project.

Catholic Mission is looking forward to continuing to accompany the Church in Mongolia in the coming years.

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About Catholic Mission

Catholic Mission is the Australian agency of the Pontifical Mission Societies – the Catholic Church’s global organisation dedicated to continuing Jesus Christ’s mission in the world: that all may have life to the full. Catholic Mission contributes funding and project support to critical church-run initiatives in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and South America. These include spiritual formation, pastoral care, education, health, sanitation, and agricultural programs. Here in Australia, we form people to go out and be missionary in their professional and personal lives; to pray, advocate and act for those on the margins. Catholic Mission has offices in 27 Australian dioceses.