

# The Guild of St Luke, St Cosmas and St Damian

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<https://doi.org/10.12809/hkmj-hkmms202602>

The Catholic Church was established in Hong Kong soon after the island was proclaimed a British colony. St Francis Hospital was built in 1852 in Wanchai, and in 1869 the Canossian sisters took over its operation. It was replaced by the Canossa Hospital on Old Peak Road in 1959. St Paul's Hospital also began in Wanchai around 1894 before relocating to its present site in Causeway Bay in around 1918. Two more Catholic hospitals—St Teresa's Hospital and Precious Blood Hospital—were opened before the Second World War. More Catholic hospitals, including Our Lady of Maryknoll Hospital and Caritas Medical Centre, were built in the 1960s to meet the unmet demand created by a rapidly increasing population.<sup>1</sup> By the mid-1960s, various Catholic bodies operated 32 clinics serving the poor.<sup>2</sup> Some of these clinics were served by local Catholic doctors who worked *pro bono*.

The Guild of St Luke, St Cosmas and St Damian Hong Kong (the Guild) is an organisation of Catholic doctors in Hong Kong. Its story began in 1953. In March 1953, a number of Catholic doctors were invited to a 3-day retreat at Ricci Hall of The University of Hong Kong. During an after-dinner discussion, it was decided to establish a Catholic doctors' guild. They wrote to Bishop Lawrence Bianchi who granted approval.<sup>3,4</sup> The Guild was formed on 28 May 1953 to promote mutual welfare—both professional and spiritual—among Catholic doctors, and to provide opportunities and facilities for social gatherings and medical discussions, especially in relation to the principles of Catholic medical ethics.<sup>4</sup>

The Guild was named after the patron saints of the medical profession: St Luke, St Cosmas and St Damian. They were all doctors. St Cosmas and St Damian were twin brothers and early Christian martyrs, known for providing free medical services. St Luke is the evangelist who wrote the Gospel of Luke.

The Jesuit Fathers, founders of Ricci Hall, were instrumental in the establishment of the Guild. Fr Fergus Cronin, warden of Ricci Hall from 1947 to 1955, was a strong advocate for its founding and served as its spiritual advisor from the beginning until 1980. He was succeeded by Fr John Russell and later by Fr Robert Ng (from 2008 to the present).

Although the Guild does not have great influence on local medical developments, some of its founding members have made significant contributions. More importantly, they are living testimony to the Catholic faith that advocates for serving our poorer brothers and sisters.

Among the founding members were two Columban sisters, Sr Mary Aquinas Monaghan and Sr Mary Gabriel O'Mahoney, fondly remembered as the Guardian Angels of the Guild. They played a pivotal role in the fight against tuberculosis in Hong Kong and were highly respected for their decades of service at the Ruttonjee Sanatorium. They provided invaluable support to the Guild in both spiritual and ethical matters. Apart from her medical work, Sr Aquinas helped drug addicts from the early 1960s and chaired SARDA (The Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers) from 1981 until her death in 1985.<sup>5</sup> Sr Gabriel was a pioneer in hospice care in Hong Kong, showing great compassion for dying patients and their families.<sup>6</sup>

Prof Gerald Choa was one of the founders of the Guild, serving as Master from 1954 to 1955 and making significant contributions to the medical profession in Hong Kong. He was Director of Medical and Health Services and the founding Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. After retiring from the University, he volunteered to care for patients at the Ta Kwu Ling clinics run by the Columban Sisters.<sup>7</sup>

Prof Rosie Young graduated from The University of Hong Kong in 1953, the same year the Guild was established, and she remembers Prof Choa well. He was her mentor and supervisor during her internship at Queen Mary Hospital, and was the one introduced her to the Guild.<sup>8</sup> She remains a devoted member and has fond memories of Fr Cronin whom she admired and trusted implicitly.

Prof Harry Fang, a past Master of the Guild, is widely known as the 'Father of Rehabilitation' in Asia. He was a long-term champion of the disabled and one of the founders of the Joint Council for the Physically and Mentally Disabled in 1964. He served as its chairman from 1966 to 2000, believing that entering the field of rehabilitation "was more of a natural evolution of my care and concern for the patient".<sup>9</sup>



FIG. Annual retreat in 1973 at Wah Yan College, Hong Kong. Among the participants were Bishop Francis Hsu (centre, front row), Fr Fergus Cronin (third from right, front row), Fr Anthony Farren (fifth from left, front row), Dr Irene Osmund (fourth from left, front row), Dr Ramon Ruiz (fourth from right, second row), Dr Alberto Rodrigues (fifth from right, second row), and Prof John Ho (fourth from right, third row). This photograph was donated by Dr Sin-giap Chua (fifth from left, second row) to the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences

In a photograph of the 1973 retreat (Fig), we see Dr Alberto Rodrigues and Prof John Ho. Dr Alberto Rodrigues, like Prof Harry Fang, was a member of both the Legislative Council and the Executive Council. Both served as Medical Superintendent of St Paul's Hospital. In 1973, Dr Rodrigues chaired the newly formed Medical Development Advisory Committee of the Hong Kong Government, playing an influential role in the development of medical policies. He was also well known for his concern for the welfare of drug abusers and co-founded SARDA in 1961.

Prof Ho is widely respected as Hong Kong's Father of Radiology and Oncology and was a key contributor to the development of oncology

services in the city. He also founded the first non-governmental organisation for cancer, the Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society, and established Nam Long Hospital, the first hospital in Hong Kong dedicated to cancer patients and hospice care.

Also present at the 1973 retreat were Dr Ramon Ruiz and his wife, Dr Irene Osmund, who together pioneered natural family planning and family life education in Hong Kong. They helped to found the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council in 1965 and devoted their lives to serving the Council.

Such were the good old days, when the post-war Catholic doctors fostered fraternity through their shared faith.

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