

# Catholic Courier

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THE CHURCH IN

# CHINA

## Exiles share stories of besieged faithful

Catherine Ho, a Chinese Catholic exile, spent 1958 to 1979 in Chinese labor camps for what the government considered a "reactionary" crime — belonging to the Legion of Mary.

"They think the Legion of Mary may be an army," she recalled her communist captors telling her when she was 16. "I was asked to renounce my membership. I didn't do it because my conscience won't let me do that."

In the 1950s, Ho — who was in Rochester this month — claimed she and most other Catholics did not actively oppose the new communist government, but only wanted to practice their faith in peace after the communist triumph in 1949. But the Chinese communists viewed the Catholic Church as a Vatican-controlled front for Western imperialism that had to be contained. The new government wanted Catholics to publicly put loyalty to China above loyalty to the pope.

Many like Ho refused to join the government-approved church — the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association — because it did not recognize the pope as the church's supreme leader. Hence, thousands of "underground" Catholics were imprisoned. Most, including Ho, suffered some torture or ruthless interrogation, and several were killed.

Ho related her story to the *Catholic Courier* in an interview June 6, after her talks at St. Thomas the Apostle Church, Irondequoit, that morning and the previous evening.

Ho's visit to the diocese was sponsored by the parish's Pro-Life Committee and its Legion of Mary. Both speeches about her experiences in Chinese labor camps drew 75 people each.

Ho has spoken throughout the United States and abroad about her life, which she detailed in the 1988 book *The Lark and the Dragon*. The book also recounts what happened to Chinese Catholics who refused to renounce their allegiance to the pope.

Ho's visit to Rochester came at a time when President Bill Clinton is facing increasing calls to temper his promotion of better relations with China. For example, a number of U.S. bishops want Clinton to make more of an issue of China's human rights abuses than he has to date.

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STORY BY ROB GULLIVAN

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