

special report: interfaith advocates

Important to be prudent sharing beliefs

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By M. Nirmala

In good faith

FATHER SAMUEL LIM

Some people were surprised when Pope Francis, leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, shared his secrets for happiness in July and included on his list: Do not proselytise.

He said it was better that the church "grows by attraction, not proselytising" and that Catholics have dialogues with those of other religions.



Father Samuel Lim began doing inter-religious work three years ago and says it is better that the church grows by attraction and not proselytising. -- ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

Father Samuel Lim, 36, told The Sunday Times the Pope's remarks were a timely reminder of the need for interfaith dialogue and consistent with Church teachings dating to the 1960s. "We need to dialogue, work together and know more about other religions," he said.

While the Church frowns on proselytisation, Catholics are expected to evangelise by telling others about the joy their faith brings them. Even so, Father Samuel stressed, it is important to be prudent. This will help build friendships with those of other faiths.

"It is fine if someone does not want to listen to my views on my religion and I will respect his wish," he said. "I elaborate only when the listener asks for more information on the Catholic faith."

Father Samuel, who is attached to the Church of St Bernadette in Zion Road, said he visits patients in hospital when family members invite him.

While he is in the wards, relatives of other patients sometimes ask him to pray for their sick family members as well. "I do so only when I'm asked," he said.

He began doing inter-religious work eight years ago and believes that when it comes to interfaith interactions, it is important to respond to the initiatives of others.

He recalled how during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) invited some Catholics and Buddhists to break fast at a Beach Road restaurant.

The July event saw participants of the different faiths sharing how fasting figured in their own religions. A week later, some AMP members asked to visit the Catholic Church of St Mary of the Angels in Bukit Batok.

Interfaith work also goes on between Catholics and Christians of other denominations here. Some Christians do not accept Catholic practices such as venerating the Virgin Mary or having the Pope as leader. Father Samuel said it was a positive development when about 700 Catholics and Protestants attended an ecumenical service at Aldersgate Methodist Church last month. Among those present were Methodist Bishop Wee Boon Hup and Lutheran Bishop Terry Kee.

Father Samuel, who has a degree in mechatronics engineering, trained for eight years at the Catholic seminary here to become a priest. His training included lectures on Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and the philosophies of other faiths.

"It was tough but the lessons helped me understand the other religions and, in that sense, I'm not stuck in a fixed world view," he said.