



## Verbiest Update

Information on the activities of  
Verbiest Institute KULeuven, Verbiest Institute Taipei  
And Chinese College Leuven  
sent by e-mail, occasionally by **Verbiest Foundation** to its friends  
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### The China Winter Olympics

#### Invite us all to celebrate



The Olympic Games have always been a time for athletes and citizens of all countries of the world to celebrate together as one community. The athletes represent different races and cultures. They travel long distances to gather and compete among them in different sport activities. That is unique. Athletes live together for weeks in the Olympic Village. They march into the stadium proudly carrying their national flag

receiving the welcoming applause of the local citizens and millions of people all over the world who are watching. The Olympic flame which before the games has been carried by athletes through their home countries arrives finally at the stadium and is lit up as a symbol of the joyful event. High above the stadium the flame burns during the games reminding all athletes of the spirit of the Olympic Games: *friendship, unity, participating is more important than winning*. A lofty goal to pursue and a cause for celebration. No other event in the world is comparable to this. It is an invitation to the whole world to look beyond the dramatic events with which we are daily confronted: racial prejudice, wars and other dramas which are the opposite of this Olympic spirit. Olympic Games invite us all to celebrate. Time has come for us to become aware that February 2022 when the China Winter Olympics will start is nearing.

In Verbiest Institute and the Chinese College at Leuven University (Belgium) we feel privileged for having been able to witness during the recent years the intensive preparation to the Chinese Winter

Olympics at the site where the ski events will take place, namely Chongli (崇礼县)(Xiwanzi 西湾子) 50 km North of Zhangjiakou (张家口). We have a century-old relation of friendship with the people of Chongli district and the cities of Zhangjiakou and Xuanhua (宣化). Several friendship delegations from Leuven visited there in recent years. We met with our friends and local authorities and witnessed how the intensive preparatory activities during the recent decade transformed the old isolated little village of Xiwanzi with its 3000 habitants into a modern ski resort with its Athlete Village, a new modern city of 60.000 inhabitants living in dozens of newly built high rises. Chongli (also called Xiwanzi) is now a city linked with Beijing by a high-speed train line, ready for the Winter Olympics.

150 years ago, Xiwanzi already had its own Catholic church. In recent years, long before preparations for the Winter Olympics started, local Christians using their own means and techniques have built a new church. It towers amidst the high rises with two high steeples like a beautiful cathedral fitting perfectly and beautifying the new city. Several times our delegations from Leuven (Belgium) met with local friends in the beautiful cathedral confirming and celebrating our old friendship. We were hoping and planning to be present at the Winter Games in 2022 to confirm and celebrate our friendship even more openly with the whole country and the world. Just imagine during the Olympic Games at ski resort Xiwanzi, friends of Chongli Zhangjiakou and Xuanhua together with friends from abroad, an international community celebrating their unity and old friendship in their new cathedral!



*The chapel of Hadriaan van der Heyden cism (Waalwijk) in Qipanliang built in 1904, near the highspeed Chungli train station, and which is now declared a monument of cultural exchange.*

Several old French, Belgian and Dutch pioneers who were active in Xiwanzi in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries still lay buried at the nearby cemetery. They would have witnessed the most meaningful event in the local history. Near the newly built highspeed train station of Xiwanzi in the town of Qipanliang (棋盘梁) stands an old chapel built in 1904 by Dutch CIMM missionary Hadriaan van der Heijden (born in Waalwijk). He died and was buried there in 1910. The old chapel has now

officially been declared a monument. It reminds us of centuries of intercultural exchange history and building up friendship among people that took place in this remote village. What a disappointment that the Covid 19 pandemic has prevented our presence and celebration at the Games. We could have revived the old friendship by visiting together the old tombs of the pioneers at the cemetery and the old chapel of Fr. van der Heijden. Old friendships never die. They bring us together while we struggle to keep our own unity.



But we remain decided: Covid 19 will not stop all of us from celebrating. The Winter Olympics will happen as planned albeit without us, foreign visitors. We trust that local friends – particularly the friends of Chongli, Zhangjiakou and Xuanhua -- will not fail to celebrate among them and together with the athletes. They will remember to celebrate together keeping in mind that all of us, *friends afar* will also

be with them in China in our mind and heart. We will not allow Covid 19 to take away from us this unique opportunity to celebrate our precious unity among us, friendship with China and with the whole world. Failing to celebrate this historic event would mean failing to forge the unity which remains part of our identity. It is a reason for our local friends to intensify and multiply during the Games the joint celebrations in the Xiwanzi cathedral, the visits to the cemetery and even to the old chapel at Qipanliang (which would look more *inviting to visitors* if it was restored and refurbished a bit). If we all join in celebrating the Olympic Games in this spirit it will undoubtedly become the peak event in the 200 years Church history of Chongli, Zhangjiakou and Xuanhua, and even a historic moment of growth for the local Church.

Best wishes for the success of the Winter Olympics from an old friend.

**Jeroom Heyndrickx cism**  
Verbiest Foundation Leuven

### **Know and support the China Programs of Verbiest Foundation**

- The **Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation** is named after the Belgian Jesuit missionary Ferdinand Verbiest who was a famous astronomer and teacher of Emperor Kangxi in the 18th century. The Foundation was established by CICM missionaries in 1982 at the **Leuven University (Belgium)**.
- Verbiest Foundation is chaired by **Cardinal Jozef De Kesel of Malines (Belgium)**. Members represent the missionary congregations: CICM, CMF, Brothers of Charity. The Foundation sponsors the activities of **Verbiest Institute at Louvain University (Belgium) and of the Verbiest Institute in Taipei** (Central Building, 8<sup>th</sup> floor). Since May 1, 2009 the Foundation also sponsors the **Chinese College Leuven**. Through these institutes it promotes academic research on the history of the Chinese Catholic Church and pastoral cooperation with the Church in China.
- The **priority concern** of Verbiest Foundation is: to develop a new relationship with the Church in China. **In line with the letter of Pope Benedict XVI it promotes reconciliation and unity inside the Catholic Church without prejudice for or against anyone of the two Church communities in China.**
- The **most efficient way** to help the Church in China is **to invest in the formation of Church personnel**. Therefore the Foundation offers support for **the formation of ministers** (priests, religious, lay catechists) for the Catholic Church in China. The foundation offers scholarships for the formation of priests, religious and also lay ministers. Priority goes to supporting **formation programs inside China**. We invite also priests and religious to come abroad for obtaining a more specialized **formation in the field of evangelization** in institutes in Europe, the USA or the Philippines. Scholars are expected to return to China and teach in Catholic seminaries and formation institutes. We are in direct contact with the dioceses or religious communities in China and we **see to it that the money of donations is well used.**
- The Foundation also responds positively to requests from China to support (small scale) **development projects** in dioceses of N-W China: **Gansu, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia.**
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