Belgian priest awarded Plum Blossom Card for major contributions



Father Joseph Emile Corneille Hermans (second right). Photo courtesy of the NIA

Taipei, Sept. 19 (CNA) A Belgian priest has been awarded a Plum Blossom Card for his dedicated service and contributions in the northern Taiwan county of Hsinchu over the last 26 years, the National Immigration Agency (NIA) said in a statement Sunday.

Father Joseph Emile Corneille Hermans (□□□), who came to Taiwan when he was 30 years old and has since been engaged in missionary work in Indigenous villages in Hsinchu County, received the special version of the alien permanent resident certificate (APRC), given to foreign nationals who have made special contributions to Taiwan.

Hermans is known for tirelessly commuting between Zhudong Township and communities such as Xiuluan and Tianpu villages in the mountainous Jianshi Township to promote social welfare in retirement homes, correctional houses, and underprivileged households, the NIA said.

In the statement, Hermans was cited as saying that Taiwan is

his home, and that he often feels he loves this land more than even some Taiwanese do.

As such, receiving the Plum Blossom APRC status ahead of the family-oriented Mid-Autumn Festival was a very meaningful form of recognition.

Many families in the villages need social support and attention, Hermans said, but while NGOs provide financial support, the responsibility of a priest is to visit and listen to people and offer them spiritual support and religious blessings.

The Belgian priest has gone beyond that, however, to help children in Indigenous villages.

Seeing that children in those villages often lack education resources, usually due to family or financial difficulties, Hermans has organized afterschool programs, summer and winter camps, and commuting services to help them, he said, according to the statement.

Huang Ching-chin (□□□), the director of the NIA's service office in Hsinchu County, said Hermans qualified for the Plum Blossom card with his selfless missionary work in the county and social contributions in rural neighborhoods and Indigenous villages.

In Hermans' case, the Plum Blossom card served both as an APRC and an acknowledgement of his contributions, Huang said.

Plum Blossom Cards are also granted to foreign nationals who are "senior professionals" or "investment immigrants," according to the NIA.

(By Lu Kang-chun and James Lo)

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