NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

# Pope Francis pitches in for mooncakes for Hong Kong prisoners

Megan Fincher | Sep. 11, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

What to do when you need 10,000 mooncakes and you need them fast? Might as well write to the pope.

Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun of Hong Kong is raising funds to purchase a mooncake for every prisoner in Hong Kong by Sept. 19, China's Mid-Autumn Festival. Mooncakes are traditionally eaten with loved ones while gazing at the harvest moon, and pieces of mooncake are placed out for loved ones who live far away or who have died. The mooncake signifies reunion, so offering mooncakes to prisoners is a touching gesture.

Knowing that Francis is charitable and often extemporaneous, Zen said, "I guessed he would also be interested in donating mooncakes to prisoners here," according to the Union of Catholic Asian News [1].

The cardinal guessed right. He received a letter from Francis in Italian that read: "Dear Faithful, I gladly join with you to donate mooncakes to our brothers and sisters in the prisons of Hong Kong. Jesus will recognize us at the door of Heaven. Happy Moon Festival! I cordially bless you, PP Francesco."

Seizing the opportunity, Zen translated the message and sent it to Hong Kong's Catholics, asking if they would follow the pope's lead. About HK$170,000 (US$22,000) poured in.

Now Zen can buy more than 10,000 mooncakes with the donation money, giving everyone in a Hong Kong prison, correctional facility, rehabilitation center or an addiction treatment center the chance to savor this Chinese delicacy.

Mooncakes are filled with one or more whole salted egg yolks, and in some parts of China, they are also stuffed with red bean, black bean or lotus seed paste. The rich sweet packs in more than 1,000 calories.

The Mid-Autumn Festival originated in Chinese folklore. In ancient times, the story goes, 10 suns rose in the sky, scorching crops and tormenting everyone on Earth. A hero named Hou Yi shot down nine of the suns with his bow, and in gratitude, the Empress of Heaven gave him a vial of immortal elixir. Hou Yi refused to drink it because he loved his wife, Chang E, dearly.

He hid the elixir in their bedroom, but one of Hou Yi's martial arts students discovered its hiding place. Pointing a sword at Chang E, he demanded she hand over the potion. In a snap decision, Chang E swallowed the elixir to keep it out of his evil hands. Immediately, Chang E flew up to heaven.

When Hou Yi heard what had happened, he was heartbroken. Walking outside in grief that evening, Hou Yi cried out Chang E's name to the sky. The moon was exceptionally large and bright. As he gazed at it, Hou Yi saw his wife's silhouette. Chang E's great love for Hou Yi had drawn her to the moon, the closest place in the heavens to the earth.

Hou Yi made an altar for his beloved wife, and every year when the brilliant harvest moon rises, people reflect on those they love, both near and far. This year, Catholic Hong Kong prisoners may set a slice of mooncake

aside for Francis.

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