

Historic Singapore church, now restored, reopens to continue ministry

SINGAPORE (CNS) – A historic Catholic church built by French missionaries on the outskirts of Singapore has reopened to the public after two years of closure for restoration; it will continue its mission to serve seafarers and the local Chinese-speaking community.

The Church of St. Teresa sits on a hill overlooking the port of Singapore. Paris Foreign Mission Society priests built the church in 1929, making it the first rural church in Singapore, reported ucanews.com. The missionaries aimed to carry out a mission among the rising number of Chinese-speaking Catholics in the area, according to the church's historic records. Later, missionary activities included seafarers.

Besides serving mariners and Chinese Catholics, the church has also opened to people in distress.

In 1961, when a nearby fire left four dead, about 50 injured and thousands of houses destroyed, the church offered shelter to many homeless people.

Over the years, the church also has offered educational and social services to the community.

This is the only Catholic church in Singapore built in the Roman-Byzantine style with its large domes, arches on the facade, and cupolas, according to the National Heritage Board of Singapore.

Father Jean M. Ouillon, procurator of the Paris Foreign Mission Society in Singapore, was inspired by the architecture of Paris' Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Montmartre when he

drew the initial sketches of the church's design, the National Heritage Board noted. Construction materials were imported from France and India.

In 1958, the Singaporean wing of the Apostleship of the Sea, an international Catholic association that serves the spiritual needs of seafarers, was launched in the Church of St. Teresa and is still based there today, ucanews.com reported.

In 2009, the church was listed as a national monument due to its historical and social significance, architectural value and importance to the local community.

Singapore was a Malay fishing village when it was founded by Sir Stamford Raffles, who made it a British colony in 1819. Soon afterward, Catholic missionaries arrived, and the Catholic Church is credited with vital contributions in nation building through education, health care and social welfare.

With a population of about 5.6 million, Singapore is a multiethnic and multireligious country. Most Chinese are Buddhists and most Malays are Muslims. Christians constitute about 15% of the population.