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# A dignified completion to the life journey of the underprivileged

HONG KONG (SE): “We were all glad to see that the deceased was finally buried with dignity,” said Eddie Chan Chi-kong, director of *Mercy HK*, after seeing, in a photo sent by her family, Prudence Nkobolo buried in her hometown in Africa in mid-August. This was the first case of the group’s funeral assistance programme, “Love Forever.”

In Hong Kong, the unclaimed remains of street sleepers, refugees, drug addicts and the poor are buried without dignity in the Sandy Ridge Cemetery without names, only numbers.

Chan recalled that a friend of Nkobolo first contacted Father Franco Mella for help when she died. Father Mella referred the case to the charity group founded by Oblate Father John Wotherspoon. They contacted the family of the dead African refugee in early July and later transported the ashes to her hometown in Botswana.

The family later sent a picture of her grave to the group and expressed their gratitude.

“This way, dignity is preserved for the dead, and the family and friends of the deceased can feel at peace,” Chan said.

Chan said that Nkobolo’s friend had applied for help for the funeral from other non-government organisations but finally gave up as she found the application procedures quite complicated and it would take more than a month, which was too hard for her.

Chan said her example shows that many applicants need funeral assistance services with more simple application procedures. It is a necessity for the bereaved who are in a state of mourning. Further, the Church has many volunteers willing to help bury the poor or those without a family. “Love Forever” was set up in July to bring together the efforts of the helping hands in the Church.

The service kicked off with a



ry week, thanked *Mercy HK* and Father Wotherspoon. “We need to thank them for helping the homeless to finish the last step of their journey on earth with a beautiful full stop,” he said.

Deacon Lee said that although the homeless are normally care-free people without worries about how their lives will end or related plans, they should be buried with dignity like everyone else.

Registered in 2020 as a tax-exempt charitable organisation, *Mercy HK* Limited provides various services, such as giving subsidies to the homeless, distributing daily necessities to low-income groups, etc.

“Simply put, we do what is lacking in society. For example, we provided shelters to the infected foreign domestic workers at the beginning of the year when they had no place to stay,” Chan said.

Currently, they are also taking care of the senior people living alone, referring them to the Legion of Mary for home visits, and encouraging them to go to old people’s centres.

Before the mid-autumn festival, it will work with *Footprint of Grace* to distribute moon cakes and fruits to the homeless on September 3. *Footprint of Grace* welcomes donations for this project.

Chan said God guides their work as support and donations often come when necessary. “If what we do is in accord with the will of God, we can work smoothly. I believe God is telling us to put in more effort,” Chan said.



**Above: the final resting place of Prudence Nkobolo.**

**Left: the Social Concern Group of the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception during a visitation with the homeless.** File photo

**Above right: Prudence Nkobolo.**

Mass celebrated by Father Dominic Chan Chi-ming on July 9, the feast of the Martyrs and Blessed of China.

Chan said they set up the project to help people who are faced with the death of their loved ones and at the same time feel helpless about the funeral arrangements due to financial difficulties. It is necessary to declare the assets and income of the applicant, who may be a friend or family member of the deceased, to prevent abuse of their services.

The group can release the subsidy within two days after gather-

ing enough documentation.

In its second case, the group put up a funeral subsidy for a woman who had lost contact with her family. Her boyfriend approached the them for financial assistance, and his application was accepted. A funeral Mass was also arranged at the Holy Cross Church, and her remains were buried at Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery, Chai Wan.

Besides financial support for applicants of all religions, the services provided by the project include emergency assistance, counselling for the relatives and

friends of the deceased, and regular memorial Masses for them.

Chan said the group would later provide information for the government to see if the name could be included in government leaflets for the bereaved. Above all, the group has connections with the hospital chaplains, bereavement groups, and groups which regularly visit the homeless in different parishes and will refer cases to them if necessary.

Deacon Victor Lee Hon-kit of the parish of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, who visits the homeless in different districts in Hong Kong eve-