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From Malaysia to Vienna: "Mom, I want to be baptized!"

A Malaysian woman and her daughter found a new home in Vienna – and also their new faith in Christ. They discovered the beauty of the Catholic faith through the Stella School in Vienna.

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In November 2021, I met Wan Jye and her daughter Kaiya. Wan Jye

comes from Malaysia and has been living in Austria for several years. She works as a day care worker at the Stella School in Vienna, which stems from an initiative of parents connected to Opus Dei. When her daughter Kaiya was still in kindergarten, she said one day, “Mom, I want to be baptized!”

This came as a surprise to Wan Jye, who is a Chinese Buddhist. She told her daughter that she was too young to make such a big decision. In first grade, six-year-old Kaiya again expressed her wish to be baptized, and then again at age 8, when her classmates had already made their First Communion. Finally her mother agreed to her daughter’s request and decided to take part herself in the preparations for baptism. She knew almost nothing about the Catholic faith and wanted to be able to answer her daughter's questions.

What had previously attracted Wan Jye to Christianity was the wonderful atmosphere at the Stella School, where she and her daughter could experience the Christian spirit in a practical way and see how they were lovingly supported in difficult circumstances. The single mother didn't yet know what she was longing for. Now she wanted to know more about Christianity.

I myself am a member of Opus Dei and it was a great joy to be able to prepare the catechumens for baptism. We began meeting twice a week as the next adult baptism date was in the Easter season. During this time I learned a lot about the Malaysian culture and traditions. The country is predominantly Muslim, and people don't talk about their faith, since doing so could be dangerous. Worries, feelings and inner life are also generally not talked about.

Apart from ancestor worship, Wan Jye had no religious practice. She speaks excellent English. Basic concepts of the Catholic faith, which are common in our culture, were completely new to her. The lessons were quite varied. There were many questions and numerous misunderstandings that had to be cleared up. At first she thought that Christ, Messiah, Redeemer, Lord, Savior, Jesus and the Son of God were different persons and gods.

God is a loving Father

It is especially important for someone seeking to grow in their faith in Jesus to discover and learn to pray personally. Wan Jye was very receptive to prayer. She found that she had actually always prayed, without knowing to whom. Now she realized that the one she was praying to is a loving Father.

She began to read the Scriptures. I explained to her Christian symbols, concepts and stories of saints and themes from salvation history using works of art in churches. She provided herself with numerous apps to learn faster, read the Gospel each day and parts of the catechism. Again and again she found that the Catholic faith gave her answers to many relevant questions in her life. She felt that she was being guided and supported by the Holy Spirit, while also trusting what I was telling her.

Her daughter Kaiya was prepared for baptism and first communion at school. Sometimes when she was present at our meetings, she would surprise her mother with the knowledge she had already received from her religious education and preparation for First Communion. In church she explained to her mother the meaning of the Eternal Light:

“Jesus lives in the tabernacle!” When I once jokingly asked her what the Easter Bunny had to do with the Christian Easter, she laughed out loud and cried: “Nothing! ”

In the archdiocese two meetings were held for all the adult catechumens in Vienna. In spring 2022 around 60 people were anointed with catechumen oil and solemnly admitted to baptism. However, this was all done very discreetly, mainly out of consideration for the Muslims who were among the catechumens; there was police protection and photography was forbidden.

The day of their baptism, which was to take place in Vienna’s St. Peter's Church, was drawing near. We prepared the christening candles together, while two white scarves served as christening dresses, and Kaiya made souvenirs for the invited

guests, especially her classmates. The baptism date was set for May 1st.

Kaiya wanted to be baptized with the name Maria, so Wan Jye chose Anna as her baptismal name. Right before Mass, I recommended that she ask the Holy Spirit for his grace. She replied, “Kaiya and I prayed together this morning and did just that.” The Baptism took place during a family Mass, which included many children who had never experienced adult Baptism. In addition to Baptism, Wan Jye also received Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist. Kaiya will make her First Holy Communion in June.

Most of Kaiya's classmates were present and rejoiced with her. She and her mother went into St. Peter's Church as Wan Jye and Kaiya – and came out again beaming with joy as Anna and Maria.

One more thing. When Wan Jye decided to be baptized, her parents

in Malaysia were not at all happy about their daughter becoming a Catholic and said that she and her daughter would no longer be considered part of the family. But over time something changed in them, and they retracted their opposition. One day her parents called her and said they had already located two Catholic churches nearby where Anna and Maria could attend Holy Mass on their next visit to Malaysia. And they said they wanted to give each of them a Miraculous Medal as a baptismal gift... What joy!

Anna and I continue to meet regularly. A new path in life has begun for her and her daughter Maria.

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