

MERTON'S WORDS IN CHINA

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Mel Madden, a Pittsburgh native, was in China teaching English at Shen-yang Teachers College when students there began solidarity marches for those massacred in Tiananmen Square. To contribute to their effort, Mel took a small discarded piece of paper, copied one of the quotes from the Pax Christi book, *Peacemaking: Day by Day* and tacked it in the corner of the student bulletin board.

The message read:

“The desire to kill is like the desire to attack one another with a red hot iron. I have to pick up the incandescent metal and burn my own hand while burning the other person. Hate itself is the seed of death in my own heart while it seeks the death of another. Love is the seed of life in my own heart while it seeks the good of another.”

— Thomas Merton
American poet and monk

In a matter of hours students had translated the quote onto a huge poster in Chinese characters and placed it in the middle of the bulletin board. Students milled near the poster, busily copying the quote into notebooks, and many approached Mel to ask, “Who is Merton and what is a monk?”

The next day Mel and other foreign teachers were forced to evacuate China. As he prepared to leave, students asked him for other messages of peace to place on the bulletin board. Mel gave them what he had. He writes: “I have since heard that at least one of my students is in jail and that many others were sent to the countryside to teach under difficult conditions. I am angry and sad, but hopeful, because I know that some of those teachers have in their notebooks the words of King, Gandhi, Berrigan and Merton.”