

**MEMORANDUM FOR MEMBERS OF THE
ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD**

**REAFFIRMATION OF THE RECOMMENDATION TO DECLARE
THE BÉTHANIE AS A MONUMENT**

PURPOSE

To seek Members' reaffirmation of the Antiquities Advisory Board ("AAB")'s recommendation to declare the Béthanie (伯大尼修院) at 139 Pok Fu Lam Road, Hong Kong as a monument under section 3(1) of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance ("the Ordinance") (Cap. 53).

HERITAGE VALUE

2. The Béthanie was completed in 1875 by the Société des Missions Étrangères (法國外方傳道會) ("the Society"), which is also known as the Missions Étrangères de Paris (巴黎外方傳教會) as their first sanatorium in the East Asia for sick missionaries. Since its opening in 1875, the Béthanie received some 6 000 missionaries working in the East Asia and served as an important base of the French Catholic missionary work in the East Asia until its closure in 1974.

3. Father Pierre-Marie Osouf (奧塞神父), who was the Procurator (司帳) of Hong Kong responsible for the administration of the Society in China, purchased the Pokfulam site for the erection of the House of Béthanie in 1863. The construction commenced in late 1873 and was completed in 1875. The Béthanie served as a place for priests and missionaries from all over Asia to recover from tropical diseases before returning to their missions.

4. On the opposite side of the Béthanie on Pok Fu Lam Road, there was another building called the House of Nazareth (“the Nazareth”) (納匝肋修院), which was originally known as “Douglas Castle” (杜格拉斯堡).¹ The Nazareth was originally a retreat to restore the spiritual health of missionaries who needed to rekindle the flame of their missionary zeal, while the Béthanie was a sanatorium to restore sick or tired missionaries to physical health. The Béthanie and the Nazareth were regarded as the twin foundation of the Society in the East Asia to take care of the health of souls and bodies of the French missionaries.

5. During the Japanese Occupation (1941-1945), both the Béthanie and the Nazareth were requisitioned by the Japanese. After the war, the Béthanie, similar to many other surviving European buildings in Hong Kong, was left an empty shell without furniture. The Béthanie was reopened as a sanatorium in February 1949 after refurbishment.

6. Following the close of China and other countries in Asia to Catholic missions in the 1950s, the Society turned their focus from servicing the missionary work in the neighbouring countries to local pastoral work in Hong Kong.

7. The Béthanie was finally closed in 1974. The premises was sold to Hongkong Land and was later taken over by the Government. It was then leased to the University of Hong Kong from 1978 to 1997. In 2002, the Government decided to restore and lease the Béthanie together with the adjacent Old Dairy Farm Cowshed Building (Grade 2) to the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (“HKAPA”) for conversion into their second campus. The conversion was completed in 2006 and the Béthanie has served as the School of Film and Television of the HKAPA since then.

8. The Béthanie consists of three parts: the chapel, the sanatorium and the service wing. The predominant architectural style is Neo-Gothic featuring pointed lancet windows, pointed arched colonnades to verandahs, flying buttresses, pinnacles, crockets and trefoil ornamentation to parapets. The Béthanie remains fairly authentic despite the additions and alterations it has undergone in the past 140 years. The role of the Béthanie as the focal point of

¹ The Nazareth has been used as the University Hall, which is a student residence of the University of Hong Kong, since 1956 and was declared as a monument in 1995.

the Pokfulam area has been further strengthened after the successful restoration and conversion of the Béthanie by the HKAPA, which was awarded an Honourable Mention at the 2008 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Cultural Heritage Awards.

9. The Béthanie is one of three surviving pre-war buildings of the Society in Hong Kong. The other two pre-war historic buildings in connection with the Society have been declared as monuments, namely the Former French Mission Building at Battery Path, Central and the Nazareth (now housed the University Hall) in Pokfulam. These buildings form a unique ecclesiastical building cluster depicting the history of the Society in Hong Kong and their missionary efforts in the East Asia.

10. A heritage appraisal of the Béthanie and photographs of the building are at **Annexes A and B** respectively.

GRADING AND DECLARATION

11. In recognition of the historical and architectural values of the Béthanie, the AAB accorded a Grade 2 status to the Béthanie in 1981. In 1993, the AAB recommended declaring the Béthanie as a monument in view of its outstanding historical and architectural merits.

12. The previous grading of the Béthanie was reviewed by the AAB as part of the recent assessment exercise of 1 444 historic buildings. After reviewed by the Assessment Panel of the AAB, the Béthanie was proposed to be given a Grade 1 status, which was subsequently confirmed by the AAB on 18 December 2009.

13. At its meeting on 26 November 2008, the AAB endorsed the establishment of a formal relationship between the statutory monument declaration system and the administrative grading system for historic buildings. Under the endorsed arrangements, Grade 1 buildings, defined as “building of outstanding merit, which every effort should be made to preserve if possible”, will serve as a pool of highly valuable heritage buildings for consideration by the Antiquities Authority as to whether some of these may have reached the

“high threshold” of monuments for the statutory protection under the Ordinance.

14. The Antiquities and Monuments Office (“AMO”) considered that with its significant heritage values as explained in paragraphs 2 to 10 above, the Béthanie has reached the “high threshold” to be declared as a monument and protected permanently under the Ordinance.

ADVICE SOUGHT

15. Members are requested to reaffirm the AAB’s previous recommendation made in 1993 for declaration of the Béthanie as a monument under section 3(1) of the Ordinance. The proposed boundary of the declaration is at **Annex C**

NEXT STEP

16. If Members support the proposal to declare the Béthanie as a monument, we shall take this forward in accordance with the provisions of the Ordinance.

Antiquities and Monuments Office
Leisure and Cultural Services Department
December 2012

Ref: LCSD/CS/AMO 22-3
LCSD/CS/AMO 21-3/1
LCS AM 51-3/5