

100 monks and nuns set to vote on Lantau

AT least 100 Buddhist monks and nuns have registered as voters in Sunday's poll, giving a divine touch to the secular district board elections.

The Reverend Miu-yung, of the Po Lin Monastery, said at least 100 monks and nuns living in the Ngong Ping area had registered as constituents of the Lantau constituency.

Only about 20 of them lived in the monastery. The rest were living in seclusion in study houses built by themselves in the area, she said.

"There is a misconception among the public that Buddhist monks and nuns should not be and are not concerned about worldly affairs. That is wrong. We shouldn't be cut off from society," Reverend Miu-yung said.

"What we champion is that we shouldn't take success or failure too seriously."

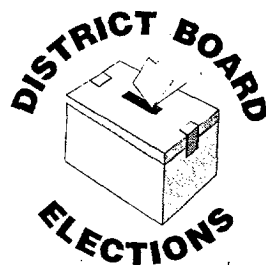
Islands Assistant District Officer Betty Tam said one of the 10 polling stations on Lantau would be in the conference room of the monastery.

Reverend Miu-yung said the turnout rate was unpredictable as many of the voters were in their 60s, 70s or even 80s. Some could not even walk properly.

One of them, the Reverend Ching-sui, who looks after the fortune-telling hall and keeps children away from the Buddhist statutes,

Buddhist monks and nuns are ready to exercise their right to vote in the Islands District, reports

Connie Law in the latest of our district board election profiles; as So Lai-fun looks at the United Democrats' fight for Wong Tai Sin.



did not even know she had registered.

In her 70s, she said she was illiterate and knew nothing about the district board nor the two candidates.

"It doesn't matter if old people like me vote or not," she said.

She said she might be too busy to cast her vote on Sunday and would only do so if it were convenient.

Reverend Miu-yung, who is not a voter as she has just returned from a 10-year stay in the United States, said she organised an informal seminar last week, telling the others about the particulars of the candidates, the functions of district boards and how to vote.

She said she would pay a visit to their study houses towards the end of the week to hand out polling cards and the candidates' leaflets. She estimated it would take her a full day as the study houses were scattered

around Ngong Ping and were only accessible on foot.

Two candidates, Chau Chuen-heung and Tsang Koon-hing, are contesting the constituency. Ms Chau is supported by the pro-China Hong Kong Graziers' Union.

Reverend Miu-yung said the monastery would not tell people who to vote for, but would make recommendations.

She said that while Mr Tsang was an indigenous Lantau villager, he had an American passport.

Ms Chau, on the other hand, was supported by three rural committees, including Tai O and Mui Wo, and had spent a long time working for Lantau residents.

Reverend Miu-yung said they would usually follow the rural committee's advice.

Ms Chau said there were more than 10 monasteries in her constituency.