

China Church and News Update (January to December 2009)

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Death of Bishops

1) Bishop Andrew Tsien Chih-Ch'un (1926-2009), Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Hwalien, Taiwan, died on February 17, 2009.

2) Bishop Damas Zhang Hanmin (1926-2009), Bishop of Jilin, in Changchun, died on July 19, 2009.

3) Bishop Domingos Lam Ka-Tseung (1928-2009), Bishop Emeritus of Macau, died on July 27, 2009.

4) Bishop Bartholomew Yu Chengti (1919-2009), unofficial Bishop of Hanzhong, Shaanxi, died on September 14, 2009.

5) Bishop Nicholas Shi Jingxian (1921-2009), recognized by the Chinese authorities and the Holy See, of Shangqiu Diocese, died on September 14, 2009.

6) Bishop James Lin Xili (1918-2009), unofficial Bishop of Wenzhou Diocese, Zhejiang, died on October 4, 2009.

7) Bishop Peter Chen Bolu (1914-2009), retired unofficial Bishop of Handan Diocese, died on November 5, 2009.

8) Bishop Matthew Luo Duxi (1919-2009), recognized by the Chinese authorities and the Holy See, of Leshan (Kiating), Sichuan, died on December 4, 2009.

9) Bishop Leo Yao Liang (1923-2009), unofficial Coadjutor Bishop of Xiwanzi, Hebei, died on December 30, 2009.

GENERAL NEWS

January 2009

January 1: The Taizé community will print and distribute 1 million Catholic Bibles in China during 2009, Brother Alois Loser, the community's prior, announced at the closing of the community's 31st European meeting for youth, held from December 28 to January 1, in Brussels.

January 4: The *Kung Kau Po*, the Catholic weekly of the Hong Kong Diocese, reproduced a letter of Cardinal Joseph Zen regarding the December 19, 2008 celebration in Beijing of the 50th Anniversary of the first self-elected and self-consecrated bishops in China.

January 7: At a national conference on religious work, Jia Qinglin, chairman of the national Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), told religious workers to continue to protect the citizens' right to freedom of religious belief, and to encourage religious believers to play an active role in the country's social and economic development. Religious believers should participate in the effort to transform China into a moderately well off society, the influential Chinese official said.

January 9-13: The superiors general of 11 Chinese religious congregations of Sisters in Hebei Province visited the earthquake-affected areas in Sichuan, in collaboration with Jinde Charities, the Chinese Catholic charitable organization based in Shijiazhuang, Hebei.

February 2009

February 11-12: Members of the commission of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, raised questions about the official review of the situation of human rights in China, especially regarding the restriction of religious freedom in Tibet and in other parts of the country, censorship, the persecution of pro-democracy activists, illegal detention, re-education through labor camps, child labor, the independence of judges, and the rule of law. China's ambassador to the UN, Li Baodong, rejected claims that his country restricted freedom of speech and religious freedom, or persecuted people with different opinions.

February 12: News reports stated that Public Security officials released Bishop Leo Yaoliang, 85, the unofficial Bishop of Xiwanzi, Hebei, shortly before the Spring Festival, after almost three years in detention (since July 30, 2006).

February 13: The Taiwan Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference published a Pastoral Letter commemorating the 150th Year of Evangelization in Taiwan.

February 17: Death of Bishop Andrew Tsien Chih-Ch'un (1926-2009), Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Hwalien, Taiwan, and an outspoken champion of the underground Church in China.

February 25: The State Department of the United States issued a report on the state of human rights around the world. The report accused China of stepping up "severe cultural and religious repression" of minorities in Tibet and elsewhere, as well as increasing its detention and harassment of dissidents. The following day, Chinese state media criticized the report, calling the allegations groundless, and accusing Washington of interfering in China's internal affairs.

March 2009

March 3-12: The 2nd Session of the 11th National Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference was held in Beijing. On March 3, in his opening speech, Chairman Jia Qingling, emphasized the efforts to build a "harmonious society", even during the present global economic crisis. He asked the representatives of ethnic minorities and of the various religions to cooperate in striving for unity and religious harmony in the country. The yearly meeting of the National People's Congress followed. The emphasis was on the "economy" and "social stability". Police imposed tight controls on thousands of protesters, who gathered in Beijing to present their grievances and to submit petitions.

March 16: Security personnel from the mayor's office beat up Fr. Gao Jianli, 37, of Fengxiang Diocese, Shaanxi, who objected to the town government's taking over a piece of land owned by the Church.

March 18: A section in the Chinese language was added to the www.vatican.va website.

March 30: The authorities in Hebei Province detained Bishop Jia Zhiguo, the unofficial Bishop of Zhengding.

March: During the month, the National Catholic Philosophical and Theological Seminary began its 6th updating course for priests, with about 30 participants.

April 2009

April 13: In answer to an appeal from the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, China published the *National Human Rights Action Plan (2009-2010)*, reiterating its guarantee of the freedom of religious belief.

April 13: Death of Fr. Tan Tiande (1916-2009), an old priest of the Guangzhou Diocese, who had spent almost 30 years in a prison camp in Heilongjiang.

April 15: The Holy Father accepted the resignation of Card. Joseph Zen as Bishop of Hong Kong. Bishop John Tong Hon succeeded him. Bishop Tong was officially installed as Bishop of the Hong Kong Diocese on April 30.

April 16: Members of all branches of the Franciscan family living in China met in the Diocese of Fengxiang, Shaanxi, to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the approval of the Rule of Saint Francis by Pope Innocent III.

April 22: According to statistics by *Faith Press*, the Catholic newspaper from Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, 22,308 people received baptism at Easter in 90 dioceses in Mainland China.

May 2009

May 1: Although the Bishop's Conference and the Patriotic Association repeated, as last year, their calls to Catholics to hold local services in honor of Our Lady instead of trans-provincial pilgrimages, more than 3,000 pilgrims from Shanghai and neighboring provinces flocked to the Marian shrine at Sheshan for religious services.

May 18: Pope Benedict XVI sent a message to Bishop Claudio Giuliadori, Bishop of Macerata (Italy), to mark the beginning of the celebration of the fourth centenary of the death of the Macerata native, Father Matteo Ricci.

May 23: On the eve of the World Day of Prayer for the Church in China, which Pope Benedict called for in May 2008, the Hong Kong Diocese's Justice and Peace Commission made an appeal to

the Chinese government to ensure people's rights to religious freedom and to halt undue pressures on mainland Catholics.

May 23-24: Pilgrimages and celebrations of the Shanghai Diocese at the Sheshan Marian shrine.

May 24: The Holy See issued a Compendium of the Pope's Letter to Chinese Catholics, which addresses the themes of the Letter in a question and answer format, in order to provide a better understanding of the original document. The Compendium was published in both simplified and traditional Chinese characters, as well as in English.

June 2009

June 7: Bishop Li Jingfeng of the Fengxiang Diocese in Shaanxi Province issued a Pastoral Letter for the Year of Priests on the feast of the Most Holy Trinity.

June 8, 14: Police in northern Hebei detained two priests from the Xuanhua Diocese, Fathers Liu Jianzhang and Zheng Cunhui, while in July, Fr. Zhang Jianlin was put under house arrest.

June 19: Many churches and seminaries in China celebrated the opening of the Year of Priests. The Shanghai Diocese started the celebration with the ordination of five deacons on June 20.

June 29 – July 1: The Diocese of Jilin held its 1st Evangelization Congress. Participants dealt with the themes of social service as an instrument in evangelization, the role of every member of the Church in evangelization, reflections on the four Constitutions of the Second Vatican Council, an assessment of the Year of St. Paul, and a missionary program for the Year of Priests.

July 2009

July 5: A peaceful demonstration of Muslim Uyghur people in Urumqi, Xinjiang, to protest the death of two Uyghur workers in turmoil in Guangdong the previous month, suddenly turned violent, leading to riots and unrest, leaving at least 192 dead and 1,680 wounded.

July 19: The death of Bishop Damasus Zhang Hanmin (1926-2009), Bishop of Jilin Diocese, in Changchun. He was born in Bajia village, regarded as the cradle of Catholicism in Jilin. After the seminary in Beijing stopped functioning in early 1950s, he worked as a foreign language teacher from 1953. He was able to speak Latin, English, Japanese, Russian and French. In 1983, he returned to Jilin Diocese and was ordained a priest in 1984. He was elected as diocesan administrator in 1995 and ordained as Bishop of Jilin in 1999.

July 20: The funeral of Sr. Gonzaga Han Xiaojuan, of Jilin Diocese, whose body, apparently frozen to death, was found in June after having gone missing for nearly six months.

July 21-31: Beijing Diocese held its first training course for lay catechists to meet increasing pastoral needs. It attracted 120 laypeople from 20 parishes, mostly middle-aged laywomen. On July 31, also the closing ceremony of the first formation course for spiritual directors, with more than 30 participants, was held in Beijing.

July 27: The death of Bishop Domingos Lam Ka-Tseung (1928-2009), Bishop Emeritus of the Macau Diocese. He was ordained a priest in 1953, and coadjutor bishop in 1987. He became the first Chinese bishop of the former Portuguese territory in 1988, and served in that office until 2003. He led the Catholic Church of Macau at the time of the return of Macau to China in 1999.

August 2009

August 15: Priests at the South Church (Nantang) in Beijing baptized 161 catechumens.

August 22: In Yinchuan Diocese, Ningxia Province, old retired Bishop Liu Chingshan, 98, and the present ordinary Bishop Li Jing presided at a solemn celebration for the Year of Priests. All the clergy of the diocese and a large congregation of faithful also attended.

August 26: The Five Religions in Shanghai donated the sum of 2,100,000 yuan to aid the victims of the typhoon that struck Taiwan earlier that month.

August 31: Orthodox clergy consecrated the Church of St. Innokenty of Irkutsk in the city of Labdarin (in the Inner Mongolia autonomous district) of north China. It was the first time in 50 years that such a consecration was held.

August 25 – September 4: The 4th updating course for middle-aged and younger aged Catholic patriotic leaders was held in Beijing, with about 180 participants (110 priests, 40 sisters and 27 lay leaders).

September 2009

September 10: During the third assembly of China's Committee on Religion and Peace (CCRP), top political advisor Jia Qinglin, President of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, urged the country's religious circles to organize high-level teams for overseas exchanges.

September 14: Death of Bishop Bartholomew Yu Chengti (1919-2009), unofficial Bishop of Hanzhong, Shaanxi. Bishop Yu

was ordained a priest in 1949 and a bishop in the underground Church in 1981. He was a witness of fidelity to the Pope, and revived many Christian communities. He became reconciled with the official bishop, Bishop Louis Yu Renshen, in 2005.

September 16: The government appointed Ye Xiaowen, since 1995 the Director of China's State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), to a new posting at the Central Institute of the Chinese Communist Party. His deputy, Wang Zuo'an, 51, succeeded Mr. Ye as head of SARA. According to the official press, the change of personnel does not mean any change in policy, especially regarding Tibet and the relationship with the Vatican. From September 24-26, the new director held meetings with the leaders of all the official religious bodies. To the Catholic leaders of the Bishops Conference and Patriotic Association, Director Wang emphasized three basic points: firmly hold to the principle of the three autonomies, maintain the democratic way of administering church institutions, and assume a practical attitude for solving the present problems within the church.

September 16: The death of Bishop Nicholas Shi Jingxian (1921-2009) of Shangqiu (the former Guide) Diocese in Henan Province. He was an Augustinian Recollect friar, recognized by both the Holy See and the Chinese authorities. He was ordained a priest in 1948. After years of re-education camp, prison and work as teacher, he returned to Shangqiu and was ordained a bishop on May 8, 1991. He was a person of profound spirituality and steadfast faith.

September 16: Visit of 15 abbots of the Benedictine Order from Europe to the National Catholic Major Seminary in the outskirts of Beijing.

October 2009

October 1: Celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the People's Republic of China. In Beijing, Catholic leaders participated, including Bishop John Tong and Bishop José Lai, the bishops of Hong Kong and Macau respectively. Local Catholic communities in China celebrated National Day with prayers, a singing contest, fireworks and performances. Young adults in Shenzhen organized a candlelight prayer service at the seaside on October 2. The Nanchong Diocese, Sichuan, organized a singing contest on September 26, with the theme "Celebrate National Day and Promote Evangelization". Some dioceses chose to mark the day in a low-key manner by celebrating a special Mass. At the same time, Chinese authorities tightened control over some mainland Catholic websites and some "underground" Catholic communities.

October 4: The death of Bishop James Lin Xili (1918-2009), unofficial Bishop of Wenzhou Diocese, Zhejiang Province. He had been hospitalized since last September. Bishop Lin was ordained a priest in 1944. He graduated from Furen Catholic University in 1948, and was ordained a bishop in 1992. He had been kept under house arrest since 2000.

October 11-15: The 4th Worldwide Overseas Chinese Pastoral and Evangelization Convention (WOCPEC) was held in Sydney, Australia. The convention this year focused on the evangelization of Chinese descendants.

October 12-16: Father J.B. Chiang, CM of Taiwan conducted a retreat for 21 priests of the Tianjin Diocese. The retreat was held in the Tianjin Diocese's new Catholic Pastoral Center, which was recently inaugurated.

October 16, 19: According to the Fides News Agency, various Chinese Catholic communities celebrated the missionary month of

October, with the blessing of 9 churches, diaconate ordinations, and Sisters' profession of vows. The Congregation of the Holy Spirit Comforter, in Handan Diocese, Hebei Province, welcomed five new Sisters. In the Cathedral of Nanning Diocese, Guangxi Province, Bishop Tan Yanquan ordained 3 diocesan deacons. During the same Mass, 6 religious of the Congregation of the Holy Family took perpetual vows and 4 renewed their temporal vows. Charitable works and pilgrimages also marked the month.

October 18, Mission Sunday: On that day the parish of Wu'an in the Diocese of Handan, Hebei, gave out awards to the "Best Evangelizers of the Year". Over 70 people, of all ages, received a cross and a prize, for a mission well done.

November 2009

November 5: The death of Bishop Peter Chen Bolu (1914-2009), retired Bishop of Handan Diocese. He was born in 1914 and ordained a priest in 1944. During the Cultural Revolution, he was sentenced to a labor camp. He was ordained a bishop in 1986, and retired in 1999. He died in the hospital that he had built in 1994.

November 16: Publication of the letter of Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, SDB, Vatican Secretary of State, to all the priests in China on the occasion of the Year of Priests.

November 21: In Taipei, Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Pope Benedict's Special Envoy, presided over the closing ceremony of the celebration of the 150 years of the Catholic Church's evangelization of Taiwan. The celebrations of the 150th anniversary began on May 17, 2008, in the Diocese of Kao Hsiung. Later, on September 8, 2008, the pilgrimage of the image of the Virgin Mary of Wan Jin (The Shrine of Our Lady of Wan Jin was built in 1896) began a tour around the island, which lasted the whole year. It

aroused great enthusiasm and devotion everywhere. At the same time, a campaign called “Operation St. Andrew 1+1” was launched, consisting of preaching the faith to others, interceding for them with prayer and fasting twice a week, meditating on the Book of Acts of the Apostles every day, and reciting the rosary once a week.

November 23: The official Xinhua Agency published a long article entitled “A Model for the Inculturation of European and Chinese Civilizations,” which described the life of Fr. Matteo Ricci, using expressions which have since become well-known: “bridge between East and West,” “great sage of the West,” “promoter/model of exchange between East and West.”

November 24: The retired Bishop of Hong Kong, Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kai, published a guide for Chinese Catholics to further explain Pope Benedict XVI’s 2007 pastoral letter to them. In the Cardinal’s words, the guide is a “personal attempt to help my brothers and sisters to understand the Pope’s letter accurately, since there are still some questions, which the Compendium has not answered.”

November 25-26: In Beijing, at a joint meeting of the standing committee members of the Chinese Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the Patriotic Association, the approximately 100 members in attendance unanimously agreed to postpone the 8th National Assembly of Catholic Representatives until 2010.

December 2009

December 1: Jinde Charities, a nationwide Catholic charitable group, based in Shijiazhuang, Hebei, was one of the participants in an HIV/AIDS prevention campaign to mark World AIDS Day on December 1. The campaign, organized by the city government, attracted the participation of 29 medical institutions and civil groups, which set up booths and exhibits in a square, handed out

leaflets to provide correct information, and to raise awareness of discrimination against HIV/AIDS patients.

December 3: *China Daily*, English edition, reported an interview with Liu Peng, a leading Chinese researcher and scholar of religion. Liu considered China ready for “an institutional guarantee for the legality and quality of all religions.” He called for a “system [to] be developed in such a way as to let more religious affairs be governed by law, instead of through administrative means.”

December 5: The death of Bishop Matthew Luo Duxi (1919-2009), of Leshan (Kiating), Sichuan, recognized by both the Chinese authorities and the Holy See. Bishop Luo was born in 1919, and completed his seminary studies in Chengdu Diocese in 1956. He worked on a farm during the decades of political turmoil, and was ordained a priest only in 1983, at the age of 64. In 1993, he became the first bishop of Leshan to be elected and ordained by the government-approved Church community. Later, he received recognition from the Holy See.

December 8: Auxiliary Bishop Xing Zhiwen of Shanghai ordained 11 new priests from 5 dioceses in the Xujiahui Cathedral.

December 7-10: The second “Forum on Catholic Studies for Young Chinese Scholars” was held in Beijing, with the participation of 49 scholars, both Christians and non-Christians. According to the organizers, the “Bei Jing Institute for the Study of Christianity and Culture,” led by Director Father Peter Zhao Jianmin, the Forum was the occasion to promote and support the study of Catholicism in China.

December 10: The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples released a letter from “a group of Chinese bishops and priests” who praised Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone’s recent letter to the priests of China.

December 14: The Fides News Service reported that a recent three-day Fifth Plenary Session of the Union of Superior Generals of Female Congregations in Hebei Province (founded on April 20, 1999), attended by 12 Superior Generals and held in Shijiazhuang, highlighted their commitment to formation, evangelization, witness, spirituality, and service. It also stressed the importance and urgency of vocational training. The Superior Generals are preparing to organize a series of lectures on theology for religious Sisters.

December 15: The Macau chief executive Edmund Ho Hau-wah and Bishop Jose Lai Hung-seng laid the foundation stone for the University of Saint Joseph, re-named from the Macau Inter-University Institute (IIUM, set up in 1996). Its campus on Ila Verde, shares the site with the senior secondary section of Saint Joseph Diocesan College. In this way, Church authorities hope to create a “one-stop” Church educational service.

December 24: Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian of Shanghai issued his Christmas letter, entitled “Song of Matteo Ricci,” which exhorts his faithful to learn from Matteo Ricci’s (1522-1610) qualities as a way to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the death of this famous Jesuit missionary in China.

December 30: Death of Bishop Leo Yaoliang (1923-2009), unofficial Coadjutor Bishop of Xiwanzi, Hebei. He was born in a farming village in 1923, and was ordained a priest in 1948. In 1956, he was sent first to a labor camp and then sentenced to life imprisonment. He was released from jail in 1984. He was ordained bishop of the underground Church community in 2002, and again detained by the police from July 2006 to January 2009.

STATISTICS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA

A) According to the Holy Spirit Study Centre

<i>Number of Catholics:</i>	12,000,000 [5,600,000 as stated by the Open Church]
<i>Number of Dioceses:</i>	138 (116 active + 22 inactive)
<i>Number of Bishops:</i> Official bishops Unofficial bishops	54 38
<i>Number of Priests:</i> Open Church Underground Church	30 (old), 1,800 (young) 30 (old), 1,150 (young)
<i>Number of Sisters:</i> Open Church Underground Church	3,600 1,350
<i>Number of Seminaries:</i> Open Church: - Major seminaries - Minor seminaries Underground seminaries	10, with 606 seminarians 22, with 393 seminarians 10, with 550 seminarians
<i>Number of Sisters' Novitiates:</i> Open Church Underground Church	40, with 100 Sisters in formation 20, with 100 Sisters in formation

***B) According to Faith Institute for Cultural Studies,
December 8, 2009***

On December 8, the Faith Institute for Cultural Studies (FICS), a Church-run organization based in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, published the results of a study of the statistics of the Catholic Church. According to the survey, there are now about 5.71 million Catholics in Mainland China, served by 3,397 bishops, priests and deacons. A total of 3,268 priests are serving in more than 100 dioceses. The statistics do not distinguish between the government-approved and “unregistered” Church communities. The report states that figures for the latter may not be entirely accurate due to the difficulties involved in getting information. The FICS spent three months gathering the information through e-mails, phone calls, faxes and personal interviews. The report says that there are now 628 seminarians studying in 10 major seminaries plus, another 630 in 30 minor seminaries. There are a total of 5,451 nuns from 106 congregations, and 350 religious in male congregations. The Catholic community manages 381 charitable structures (excluding centers for lepers). These include 220 clinics, 11 hospitals, 81 homes for the elderly, 44 kindergartens, a higher education center (including schools, research institutes and a publishing house), 2 vocational training institutes, 22 orphanages and centers for disabled children, 3 rehabilitation centers, and 34 centers for social service. Some 80 religious sisters are working in 20 government institutes for lepers.