

Archbishop Fernando Filoni Appointed New Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

Ucanews

Archbishop Filoni visited the Holy Spirit Study Centre during his stay at the "study mission" in Hong Kong in 1992-2001. The Centre congratulates him on his new appointment. The following is the news of the appointment with courtesy of Ucanews.

Pope Benedict XVI yesterday (May 10, 2011) appointed Archbishop Fernando Filoni as the new prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. He succeeds Cardinal Ivan Dias, who is retiring having reached the age limit of 75, and who has been in ill health for several years.

Prior to his appointment, Archbishop Filoni was the Substitute for General Affairs of the Secretariat of State, the third ranking position in that department.

The Italian-born prelate is an expert in dealing with China Church affairs. He previously headed a "study mission" in Hong Kong (1992-2001), during which he acted as the pope's link with the "open" and "underground" Church communities in mainland China.

Several Church observers believe he is a very suitable choice to head the Vatican department which oversees and directs global missionary activities.

One observer, who wished to remain anonymous, said Archbishop Filoni "knows China and understands the Vatican well.

At this very important moment, we are expecting many things from him.”

He said Archbishop Filoni’s study mission experience has made him familiar with the difficulties in political and Church matters, and he knows many Chinese bishops and priests personally.

The new prefect will be prudent in making decisions regarding matters in China, the observer added.

Ren Yanli, a retired researcher in Beijing, said the diplomat has a deep understanding of East Asia, the Middle East and South America as well as the Islamic world in general, which are current focuses of the Holy See’s missionary work.

With his study mission experience and current role on the Vatican’s Commission for the Church in China, Ren believes the archbishop will help the Vatican deal with problems related to the China Church.

However, Ren thinks that Chinese people “need not over-react” as the appointment is not aimed at China since “his scope of work is far more extensive and comprehensive.”

Anthony Lam Sui-ki, senior researcher at Hong Kong diocese’s Holy Spirit Study Centre, welcomed the appointment. He described Archbishop Filoni as a “courageous figure who holds fast to principles” in the face of great danger, citing Archbishop Filoni’s decision as former nuncio to Iraq to stay in Baghdad during the war.

Archbishop Filoni, 65, was ordained a priest in 1970. He joined the Holy See’s diplomatic service in 1981 and has served mostly in Asia since then. After the study mission, he was appointed an archbishop to serve as nuncio in Iraq and Jordan (2001-2006) and the Philippines (2006-2007) before working in the Roman Curia.