

China Church and News Update 2015

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Death of Bishops

- January 30: Official information released (but later denied) about the death of Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang (師恩祥 1921-2015), bishop of Yixian (易縣) Diocese.

New Bishops

- August 4: Episcopal ordination of Rev. Joseph Zhang Yinlin (張銀林 1971-), as coadjutor bishop of Anyang, Henan, approved by the Holy See and the Chinese Authorities.

MAIN EVENTS

JANUARY

- January 1: The *South China Morning Post's* inaugural Leaders of the Year are President Xi Jinping (習近平) and Pope Francis. The selection was based on the major reforms they have pursued as the political and spiritual leaders of populations that make up more than a third of humanity: "Our Leaders of the Year selection is a way to capture transformations that are taking place on a more historic scale. It is hard to find two leaders in 2014, who have done more to make not just news but also history."

- January 5: The second part of the course on Theology and Social Harmony was held at Yinchuan Diocese (銀川) in Ningxia, led by Bp. Yang Xiaoting (楊曉亭) with about 60 participants, and also the active attendance of the local civil officials.

- January 8: The State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) announced new regulations for bank accounts of religious venues and religious schools: the accounts should be made under the name of the concerned, duly registered unit, and not under the name of an individual (from April 21, 2015).

- January 9: Issue of a declaration from the bishop's office of Jingxian (景縣) Diocese in Hebei to guard against the "Book of Truth" and "Peace to

the World New Era” websites, the contents of which include prophecies of the end of the world and doctrines contrary to the traditional Catholic faith.

- January 15: The SARA work report 2014 and the guidelines for the main commitments of 2015 were published on this date, after evaluation during the December 26-27 meeting. For the Catholic Church in 2015, SARA will aid the two supervisory Catholic organizations to continue with the democratic election of bishops, to prepare for the National Assembly of Catholic Representatives, to implement the rules for the registration of clergy who are in charge of parishes, and for the certification of seminary teachers, and for the dispensing of academic degrees.

At the meeting, the Director Wang Zuo'an (王作安) pointed out four priorities: improve religious work according to the law, continue solving the special issues arising in the different religious areas, foster the personal formation of religious professionals, and enhance their positive role. Vice-director Jiang Jianyong (蔣堅永) summed up the spirit of the meeting in these four requests: 1. faithfully report to local government and party offices at all levels the decisions of the Central Government authorities and the instructions of the SARA central office; 2. promptly transmit the new spirit and the decisions to all party members and concerned religious leaders in order to implement them at the local level; 3. seriously investigate and submit high standard reports to the central authorities for their consultation; and 4. strongly care for security, especially at the end and beginning of the year, assuring that all the religious celebrations and activities should be performed in an orderly manner.

- January 16: The leaders of the Catholic Patriotic Association and the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China held their 10th meeting, presided over by Bp. Fang Xingyao (房興耀). They discussed reports on the work done in 2014 and on the work planned for 2015. The 2014 report emphasized the good results achieved through the efforts and the cooperation of all, with the support and the guidance of the civil authorities. The work priorities for 2015 are to continue the democratic selection and ordination of bishops, to develop the democratic administration of the Church, to hold meetings for lay people and for the clergy, to strengthen the religious education of lay people and of formation in the seminaries, to celebrate the Year of Consecrated Life, to organize the fourth conference for the inculturation of theology, and to prepare well the 9th National Assembly of Catholic Representatives.

- January 19: On his way back to Italy from the Philippines, Pope Francis sent a message to all leaders of the countries he was flying over, including

President Xi Jinping of the P.R.C. In answer to a question, Pope Francis said that he is ready to visit China any time. He also said that Beijing and the Vatican are “taking the process (of enhancing their relationship) step by step.” On January 21, the spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry acknowledged the message, and underlined the hope for a constructive dialogue between the two parties. For the most part, the official Chinese press did not mention the Pope's Asian trip, except for the *Global Times* on January 18. The Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, upon the Pope's return, commented on the relationship with China: “There are signs that seem to indicate a mutual willingness and are therefore promising.”

- January 20: Fr Peter Ye Yaomin (葉耀民) of Foshan (佛山), Guangdong, the oldest priest in China, passed away at the age of 105.

- January 22: *Vatican Insider* published an interview with Bishop Joseph Wei Jingyi (魏景儀) of Qiqihar, who emphasized the urgent need for dialogue between the Holy See and the Chinese Government, and of establishing diplomatic channels, to solve serious problems within the Church in China.

- January 24: The unveiling of the statue of Xu Guangqi (徐光啟) in the garden in front of the Matteo Ricci Foundation in Macerata city, Italy. The statue was sent from Shanghai. A statute of Matteo Ricci is already located in Guangqi Park, near St. Ignatius Cathedral in Xujiahui, Shanghai.

- January 29-31: Chinese political leader Yu Zhengsheng (俞正聲), chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, made an inspection tour of Baoding City, Hebei Province. He urged those concerned to carry out the administration of religious activities according to the law, and to contribute to economic and cultural development and social harmony. Yu asked Catholic circles in a special meeting "to maintain the good tradition of loving the country and the Church, to keep the three autonomous principles, to oppose the infiltration of overseas-based forces, and to ensure that the leadership of religious organizations is firmly in the hands of people who love the country, as well as their religion." During Yu's visit, four relatives of Bishop Su Zhimin (蘇哲民) intended to ask him about the whereabouts of the Bishop, but they were detained at a Baoding guesthouse for three days.

- January 30: Baoding civil authorities reported the death of Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang (師恩祥) of Yixian (易縣), Hebei, according to a relative of the bishop. However, the Chinese authorities denied the event,

and withdrew the information. Bp. Shi was born in 1921 and ordained a priest in 1947. He was first arrested in 1954 and went on to suffer long periods of imprisonment between 1957 and 1980. Much of that time was spent doing hard labor, first in Heilongjiang province, then in coalmines in Shanxi province. After returning to Hebei, he was arrested and imprisoned briefly again in 1981 for practicing his ministry. He was secretly ordained Auxiliary Bishop of Yixian in 1982. In 1989, Bishop Shi was arrested again and later released in 1993 as a result of international pressure. He became the ordinary in 1995 after his predecessor Bishop Liu Guandong (劉冠東) retired. He was arrested for the final time on Good Friday, April 13, 2001, and had been in prison until the day of his alleged death.

FEBRUARY

- February 6: *Vatican Insider* published an interview in Chinese conducted by Gianni Valente with Bishop Han Zhihai (韓志海) of Lanzhou (蘭州), Gansu.

- February 11-14: According to Xinhua News Agency, the United Front Department's new director, Ms. Sun Chunlan (孫春蘭) paid a visit to the headquarters of the five official Religions to express good wishes for the Spring Festival. Her visit was followed on February 13-14, by that of the Chinese Vice Premier, Ms. Liu Yandong (劉延東). Both women urged all people concerned at all levels to manage religious affairs in accordance with the law and to protect the legal interests of religious people.

- February 14: Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kun (陳日君) led protests outside the Chinese government's liaison office in Hong Kong, demanding an official clarification of the death of detained Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang (師恩祥).

- February 20-24: The illegitimate Bishop Joseph Liu Xinhong (劉新紅) of Anhui province, who was ordained without Vatican approval in 2006, visited Taipei "to see an ailing priest friend, and met with local and foreign missionaries." He stayed at the Bellarmine Theologate of Fugen Catholic University in New Taipei City, where dozens of mainland Chinese priests, nuns and seminarians are studying. He did not celebrate Mass publicly.

- February 24: Gianni Valente of *Vatican Insider* published an interview with Bp. Paul Xie Tingzhe (謝廷哲), Bishop of Urumqi, who is not recognized by the government.

MARCH

- March 3-13: The third Session of the 12th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) was held with 2,153 delegates, among whom were 7 Catholic bishops, namely Bps. Fang Xingyao (房興耀), Li Shan (李山), Shen Bin (沈斌), and Meng Qinglu (孟清祿), Ma Yinglin (馬英林), Lei Shiyin (雷世銀), Zhan Silu (詹思祿), and one Catholic layman Liu Yuanlong (劉元龍). (The last three bishops do not have papal approval.) Chairman Yu Zhengsheng (俞正聲) gave the work reports for 2014 and 2015, calling for greater efforts to fight corruption.

In the report "religion" was mentioned ten times. The main changes in the report were: 1. The contribution of religions to the economic and social development of the country was not emphasized. 2. The control and adaptation of religions to socialism and the concern for national unity and harmony are set in the context of "governing the country according to the law." 3. The administration of religious affairs should be strengthened especially in rural areas so that religious professionals can get social security. 4. Contacts and exchanges with Taiwan should be extended to the sectors of religious culture and traditional ethical teachings. 5. The Chinese Conference for Religion and Peace should maintain a position of balance and equality, and prevent undue interference in dealing with Tibet and Xinjiang issues. 6. The Committee for National Minorities and Religions of the CPPCC should increase external contacts and exchanges.

- March 5-15: The third Session of the 12th National People's Congress (NPC) was held with 3,000 delegates, among whom were 3 Catholic bishops, namely Fang Jianping (方建平), Guo Jincai (郭金才) and Huang Bingzhang (黃炳章) (the latter two do not have papal approval). Premier Li Keqiang presented the annual work report. On the issue of religion, the Premier, after emphasizing the urgency of safeguarding national unity and harmony among the minority ethnic groups in full respect of all their proper rights and privileges, stated: "We have to thoroughly and completely follow the basic guidelines for religious work, favouring a harmonious relationship among religions, protecting the legal rights of the religious circles, promoting the positive role of the religious professionals and of the masses of believers in the process of social and economic development!" Regarding the improvement of people's life, he also admonished people to prevent and eliminate social evils, among which he listed "false religions."

- March 10: The Vatican spokesman, Fr. Federico Lombardi gave an interview to Hong Kong Phoenix TV, confirming the positive contacts

between the Vatican and China and suggested the possibility of taking into consideration different ways, among which the model of the relations between the Vatican and Vietnam were mentioned: that is, the names of candidates are first reported to the Vatican, which chooses, appoints and ordains bishops based on government confirmation. However, China's Foreign Ministry urged the Vatican to face "the historical tradition and reality of Catholics in China" regarding ordinations, the state-run *Global Times* reported on March 13.

- March 15: Death in Taipei of the Jesuit father John Baptist Chang Ch'un-shen (張春申), a theologian on the faculty of the theologate of Fugen University.

- March 22: Fathers Quan Xiaoyun (全小雲, aged 41), and Cao Jianyou (曹建友, aged 43), two underground Chinese priests of Mudanjiang parish, in the northeastern city of Harbin, were forcibly detained by government officials and police while giving a blessing during Sunday Mass at a prayer house. They were charged with "holding illegal religious activities at an unregistered worship venue."

- March 26: Gianni Valente of *Vatican Insider* published another interview with an unofficial Chinese bishop, this one with Bp. Paul Ma Cunguo (馬存國) of Shuozhou (朔州), Shanxi.

APRIL

- April 12: On the Feast of Divine Mercy, a priest of Baoding (保定) Diocese, Rev. Gao Huqing (高虎慶) proposed to his faithful the campaign "Jesus comes to my house for 24 hours," which started the following day. Each family welcomed to their home an image of Jesus, the Lord of Divine Mercy.

- April 4: The eighth meeting of the Laity Committee of the Chinese Bishops' Conference was held in Beijing, attended by Committee chair, Bp. Meng Qinglu (孟青祿) of Hohhot, and other top leaders both Catholic and civil. The participants numbered about 30 coming from 26 provinces and regions.

- April 15: The *Daily Telegraph* reported that China's churches and crosses demolition campaign continues in east China despite Beijing's claims that it had ordered an end to the "anti-Christian" campaign. In fact, on April 2, authorities removed the cross from a church in Cixi; two days

later the cross was removed from the Enquan church in Ningbo, and on April 13, a third church, was targeted in Lishui, another city in Zhejiang.

- April 19: The CICM Congregation, at their mother-house in Scheut, Belgium, celebrated the 150th anniversary of their Founder Fr. Theophile Verbist's (1823-1868) arrival in China (1865).

- April 20: Bp Wang Ruowang (王若望), the 53-year-old unofficial bishop of Tianshui (天水) diocese in Gansu Province, was hospitalized in critical condition after he accidentally came in contact with a high voltage power line.

- April 20: The Diocese of Hainan (海南) opened its charitable institution, the Star of the Sea Community Service Center (海星公益服務中心).

- April 22: *Ucanews* reported the 2014 annual report of US-based China Aid, which warns that the scale of the church demolition campaign in China's Zhejiang province may be much greater than previously reported. The ongoing campaign was already considered among the most destructive against Christianity in Asia in recent times with previous estimates of more than 400 crosses forcibly removed and about 35 churches destroyed since the end of 2013. But the real number of crosses taken down may have reached 1,000 with up to 50 churches destroyed, based on unverified reporting in Zhejiang's local media.

- April 24: Death of the 93-year old Fr. Andrew Wang Jinling (王進凌, 1922-2015) of Xiwanzi (西灣子) Diocese in Zhangjiakou, Hebei.

- April 25: Earthquake in central Nepal, felt also in India, Tibet, Bangladesh and Pakistan, with about 4,000 victims in Nepal and 25 dead with 17 injured in China. The Shijiazhuang-based, Catholic Jinde Charity (進德公益) is contributing help, alongside other Chinese and international agencies. They are soliciting donations and prayers.

- April 27: A parish priest presided over the memorial Mass for the second anniversary of the death of Bp. Jin Luxian. Bp. Ma Daqin (馬達欽) is still forbidden to meet people and to celebrate Mass in public. Preparations for the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, on 24 May, are underway, but there will be restrictions on pilgrimages throughout the month of May.

- April 28: The official website of the Chinese Catholic Church reported that, during the past Easter celebrations, 19,554 new baptisms were recorded. The figures come from the eighth survey carried out by Faith Press.

- April 28-29: The Dioceses of Zhumadian (駐馬店) and Anyang (安陽), both in Henan province, respectively held a “democratic election” for episcopal candidates. The ballot contained the name of only one candidate in each diocese, namely Rev. Ji Chengyi (吉成義) for Zhumadian and Zhang Yinlin (張銀林) for Anyang.
- April 29: *Vatican Insider* columnist, Gianni Valente, published another interview with a Chinese bishop, Bp. John Huo Cheng (霍成) of Fenyang (汾陽) Diocese, Shanxi.
- April 13-28: The Diocese of Nanchong (南充), in Sichuan organized its first course for new catechists. Thirty were in attendance.

MAY

- May 1: Since 1985 when Faith Press established the Charity Editorial Company, it has published 132 million Bibles, thus greatly contributing to the improvement of biblical knowledge both in China and abroad. In fact, of the total number of Bibles published, 60% have been distributed in China and 40% abroad, to about 60 countries or territories.
- May 4: According to Reuters, China has lodged a protest with the United States after the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom published the 2014 report. The report stated that Chinese violations of religious freedom were “severe and systematic, with unprecedented violations” against Christians, Buddhists and Muslims in China. The report urged the U.S. Department of State to re-designate China’s government as a top-tier violator, along with 16 other countries.
- May 5: The Chinese Government released for public comment the Foreign/Overseas Non-Governmental Organizations Management Law of the People’s Republic of China (Draft) (Second Review Draft) 《境外非政府組織管理法（草案二次審議稿）》. If enacted and implemented in its current form, both Chinese civil society and international engagements with it will be considerably downgraded.
- May 7: A draft of Regulations was issued by the Zhejiang provincial authorities on religious structures and on the location of crosses and religious symbols (they should be affixed to the façade and not on the top, be reduced in size and fit in with the surroundings). Both Catholic and Protestant representatives criticized the proposed rules as being contrary to the Church’s traditions, and therefore unacceptable. On May 18, the Wenzhou Catholic Church published a protest statement against the

above-mentioned rules, accusing them of neglecting history, going against artistic trends, severely interfering in Church affairs, being impractical, and creating further contradictions in society. Meanwhile, between May 7 and 9, civil authorities forcibly removed 12 crosses from Protestant churches in Lishui near Wenzhou.

- May 9: The 11th Panchen Lama with six other monks paid a visit to the headquarters of the Catholic Yihui Yituan (一會一團). Bp. Ma Yinglin (馬英林) and Mr. Liu Yuanlong (劉元龍) welcomed them.

- May 12-24: Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo (賈治國) of Zhengding (正定), Hebei, was taken away by officials on May 12 and then sent back to his cathedral to celebrate Mass on Pentecost Sunday on May 24, without any clear reason given for the 12-day detention. The unofficial community of the Church in Baoding (保定) also suffered the ill treatment of a priest, Liu Honggeng (劉紅更). He had been freed last August after eight years in detention, but since May 7 he has disappeared again. On May 22, the private prayer place in Anzhuang Village, Xushui District (安庄, 徐水), was destroyed. Two Catholic laywomen were wounded while trying to protect the altar from destruction by more than 40 police officers.

- May 14-17: A few days after President Xi Jinping (習近平) visited Moscow for the 70th anniversary of Soviet victory over the Nazis in World War II, during which he held talks with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, the Orthodox Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk (also serving as chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for Church External Relations) visited China. In Beijing, Metropolitan Hilarion met with Wang Zuo'an (王作安), director of China's State Administration for Religious Affairs. After the official visit, it was announced that for the first time in 60 years, the Chinese Government has authorized the ordination of Chinese Orthodox priests. Presently 13 Chinese candidates for the Orthodox priesthood are studying in Russia.

- May 20: According to Xinhua, Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平), at the closure of a national meeting on United Front Work, held May 18-20 in Beijing, stressed that as religions develop in China, they should undergo the process of "sinicization" and be independent from foreign influence. "Active efforts should be made to incorporate religions into socialist society," he said. The president called for the implementation of the Party's policy of religious freedom in accordance with the law and for a balanced attitude towards religions and their role, taking account of the pros and cons of their functions "in a dialectical way." The country acknowledges the contributions of religious people and will encourage

them to continue working for China's economic, social and cultural development as well as for unity among ethnic groups and for the unification of the motherland. On September 22, the Regulations for the United Front Work of the CPC were published.

- May 24: Day of prayer for the Church in China, as proposed by Benedict XVI in his 2007 letter to Chinese Catholics, and referenced by Pope Francis in recent public meetings. Several churches in China combined special prayers for this purpose with the celebration of Pentecost. The Hong Kong Diocese also held five prayer meetings in different parishes from May 20 to May 24.

- May 27-28: The Faith Institute for Cultural Studies organized a seminar in cooperation with the Institute of World Religions of the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, and the Ethnic Minority Groups Development Research Institute at the Development Research Centre of the State Council of China. The seminar was held in Beijing. The theme was "The development of the Catholic Church in Contemporary China." Its aim was to improve the collaboration between the Catholic Church and Chinese society, and to promote a vision and a comprehensive evaluation of the development of the Church in contemporary China. The seminar provided an opportunity to analyze, and reflect on the state of Catholicism in China in the past 30 years. Priests, religious and Catholic laity were able to hold public discussions face-to-face with academics and government officials.

- May 29-30: The Nanjing (南京) Diocese together with the Beijing Diocese organized a symposium in Nanjing on the topic of "Fr. Matteo Ricci and Theological Inculturation." 33 scholars took part.

- May 29-June 5: The head of the Anglican Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby visited China.

JUNE

- June 3: Pope Francis, during the public audience in St. Peter's Square, prayed for the victims and families of the recent ferry tragedy on Yangtze River, in which 442 out of 456 passengers drowned.

- June 15-16: The Jilin Theological and Philosophical Seminary, together with Taiwan's Fujen University, organized a seminar on the Transcultural Nature of Scholastic Philosophy, with about a hundred participants in attendance.

- June 9: The Diocese of Nanchang (南昌), in Jiangxi Province, opened a new diocesan formation center.
- June 11: The Xianxian (獻縣) Diocese, Hebei, ordained six new priests bringing the total number of local clergy to 139.
- June 16: SARA and the Catholic “One Association and One Conference”, together with the two Catholic committees of Hebei province organized a symposium and a speech competition on the theme “Strengthening love for the Country and of the Church, and implementing the core values of Socialism.” It was open to all seminarians of China’s eight major seminaries. It was held in the Hebei Major Seminary and was presided over by the SARA vice-director, Chen Zongrong (陳宗榮).
- June 20: Zhejiang police successfully removed the cross that towered over the Three-self Protestant Panshi (Rock) Church in Hangzhou, the provincial capital. The church was built with all the required permits and was inaugurated in September 2012.
- June 29: Closing ceremony of the school year at the National Catholic Theological Seminary, with the presentation, for the first time, of the academic title of baccalaureate to 28 graduating students, recognized by the Government. Five other major seminaries also ended the academic year with the conferral of the same title upon their graduating seminarians. Thus the baccalaureate degree was awarded to a total of 79 seminarians nationwide: 28 from the National Seminary, 16 from Hebei Seminary, 8 from Central China Seminary, 15 from Shenyang Seminary, 9 from Shaanxi Seminary, and 3 from Beijing Diocesan Seminary.

JULY

- July 1-2: A symposium organized by “One association and One Conference” on the democratic management of the Church was held in Jinan, Shandong. The 50 participants included 15 bishops, 7 priests, 1 sister and 13 lay people.
- July 7: People’s University released the “China Religion Survey 2015,” the first nationwide statistical survey of religious activities, which was done using methods that strictly comply with international standards and probability sampling principles. The China Religion Survey began in 2012, focusing first on places of worship. From the second half of 2013 to the first half of 2015 (a time frame of two years), the survey was conducted among 4,383 places of worship within the country’s 31 provinces,

municipalities, and autonomous regions, spanning 243 counties, cities and districts. Those surveyed included local religious affairs departments as well as the heads of individual places of worship. The report found that among the five major religions, Buddhism is still the most influential religion. It contributes the most to charity and ranks highest in internet propagation (14%). Daoism has a strong program of international exchange, with 11% of Daoist temples involved in some form of exchange. The survey also examined the rapid growth of Christianity following the Reform and Open Door Policy. The conclusion was that “of the five major religions, Christianity seems best suited to adapt to the contemporary Chinese social environment, which may be the fundamental reason for its considerable development over the past thirty years.”

- July 8: According to *Ucanews*, substantial and unusual transactions involving tens of millions of yuan have reportedly gone missing from the Shanghai diocese to irregular accounts over the last year, intensifying trouble for the local Church. The money has moved from one bank to another “under instructions from the party’s Religious Affairs Bureau officials,” according to a source. The Shanghai transactions are part of a larger countrywide invasion of Church accounts, estimated to be in the neighborhood of 90 million yuan (US\$14.3 million) over a number of years. The funds were transferred to government offices and private accounts, according to the same source.

- July 8: The *Global Times* published an article “Religious Chinese are younger”: “Islam has the largest number of young believers, with 22.4 percent of them aged below 30; Catholicism ranks second with 22 percent. Buddhism and Daoism have the highest number of followers older than 60, with 54.6 percent and 53.8 percent, respectively.”

- July 9: Official installation of Bp. Martin Wu Qinjing (吳欽敬), as bishop of Zhouzhi (周至), Shaanxi, with the attendance of Bp. Yang Xiaoting (楊曉亭) of Yulin and Bp. Dang Mingyan (黨明彥) of Xi’an.

- July 22-27: The retired archbishop of Guwahati, India, Msgr. Thomas Menampampil, was invited to give lectures on spirituality and to preach a retreat by the official leaders of the Catholic Church in Beijing.

- July 23: According to *Ucanews*, rebuilding of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Ningbo has started, a year after the 143-year-old former cathedral was destroyed by fire.

- July 24: the 89-year-old Bishop Zhu Weifang (朱維方) of Wenzhou, led a group of more than 20 priests to protest against the recent official

campaign of the demolition of crosses in Zhejiang province. Letters of protest were also issued from various institutions and individuals. Meanwhile, authorities in Zhejiang arrested 16 Protestant believers and clergymen who opposed the demolitions, and accused them of “running an illegal business,” “obstructing official duties,” and “using secret accounting procedures.” In Hong Kong the Justice and Peace Commission launched a campaign of initiatives to protest against the demolition of the crosses. On August 2, a group of about 50 people from both Protestant and Catholic Churches carried individual homemade crosses to a gathering in front of the Chinese Government Liaison Office in Hong Kong. And on August 13, Cardinal John Tong, bishop of Hong Kong, issued an urgent appeal entitled “The Sufferings of the Cross,” calling on China’s central government to investigate and stop all unlawful acts of dismantling crosses. The Cardinal also urged Hong Kong Catholics “to carry out some form of penance and prayer, in order to share the sufferings of the Zhejiang Christians.”

AUGUST

- August 4: Episcopal ordination of Rev. Joseph Zhang Yinlin (張銀林, 1971-), as coadjutor bishop of Anyang, Henan, approved by both the Holy See and the Chinese authorities, the first ordination since July 2012. He was ordained by the 90-year-old Bishop Thomas Zhang Huaixin (張懷信), together with Bishops Shen Bin (沈斌) of Haimen, Wang Renlei (王仁雷) of Xuzhou and Yang Yongqiang (楊永強) of Zhoucun, with the participation of 73 priests, 150 sisters and about 1,300 faithful. However, all ceremonies were under strict control, which made many people unhappy.
- August 6: The excommunicated bishop of Heilongjiang, Yue Fusheng (岳福生) ordained three new priests. Another excommunicated bishop, Lei Shiyin (雷世銀) of Leshan, Sichuan ordained a new priest on June 29.
- August 12: At least 150 people were killed and hundreds more injured when a series of explosions of some 700 tons of sodium cyanide in a warehouse rocked Tianjin. The morning after the blast, the Tianjin Catholic Diocesan Social Service Center lined up 60 volunteers to assist the government's rescue and relief work. They transported donated water, clothes and other supplies to hospitals and to temporary settlements for evacuees. After being briefed on chemical contamination, they were dispatched to various relief camps and hospitals. Other dioceses in China, especially the neighboring ones, showed solidarity with the victims in

various ways. On August 16, during the midday blessing, Pope Francis prayed for the victims and expressed sorrow for all those who suffered in that calamity.

- August 20: The SARA website reported that a team of 3 doctors, 2 nurses and 20 medical workers of the Catholic Hospital in the city of Benxi, Liaoning, provided free medical consultation and treatment to about a thousand patients, under the slogan “care for life, care for health.”

- August 24: The Wenzhou office of SARA issued rules about starting an investigation into the financial situation of churches; it started first in eight religious districts during September and October.

- August 25: Zhang Kai (張凱), a Protestant lawyer, and his assistant were detained by security officers, because they founded the association of “Lawyers for the protection of the Cross” and launched a legal fight against the demolition of crosses. Also on August 25, the police detained a dozen Protestant pastors, the night before they were supposed to meet with David Saperstein, an American envoy with responsibility for religious freedom. Soon the US government called on China to release the group of Christian activists and lawyers.

- August 26: Catholic leaders of the “One Association and One Conference” circulated a letter to Patriotic Catholic associations at all levels, requiring them to organize the faithful in the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the victory over Japan and the Fascist forces, on September 3. The invitation was to watch the military parade broadcast on television and to organize meetings for exchanging opinions as well as for saying prayers. They then had to send a report to central headquarters on the activities they had carried out.

SEPTEMBER

- September 1: *Ucanews* reported that Su Tianyou (蘇天佑), nephew of Bishop Su Zhimin (蘇哲民), Father Peter Cui Xingang (崔新崗), and Father Lu Genjun (鹿根君), vicar-general of Baoding's underground community (himself released from jail in August 2014), signed a petition for the release of the old underground Bishop James Su Zhimin (蘇哲民) of Baoding. He had been under arrest since 1996. The request was made on the occasion of the general amnesty that President Xi Jinping (習近平) granted to jailed war veterans, and bedridden or disabled prisoners to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II.

- September 5: The opening of the new school year at the National Seminary took place, with a new vice-rector, Bp. John B. Yang Xiaoting (楊曉亭). A total of 100 seminarians enrolled, of whom 4 were newcomers. Other major seminaries also started the school year. New recruits in the whole country number 54: 19 in Hebei Seminary among a total number of 124 seminarians, 9 in Shenyang Seminary (total number 26), 8 in Xi'an Seminary (a total of 54 seminarians, plus 45 sisters), 4 new recruits in Jilin Seminary (total number 42), 7 in Beijing Diocesan Seminary (total number 48, with 5 studying abroad), and 3 in Wuhan Seminary (total number 19). For the Sichuan Seminary, the situation is special: the newcomers, numbering 36, are studying the first year of a two year course in church management. Among another 10 students, who are attending the second year, it is hoped that some of them would become candidates for the priesthood. In Sheshan Seminary, still officially closed, there are only few local seminarians from the Shanghai Diocese. The Shanxi Seminary is still closed. The total number of major seminarians in the official seminaries is 425 (plus the 46 Sichuan Seminary students).

- September 11, 2015: China's ruling Communist Party invited more than 80 political and academic figures from around the world to Beijing to attend a meeting called "The Party and World Dialogue 2015." Wang Qishan (王岐山), head of China's Commission of Discipline Inspection, the top anti-graft watchdog, took the unusual step of proclaiming publicly that the party's rule over China is legitimate: "The legitimacy of the ruling Party lies in history, its popular base and the mandate of the people." Wang's talk seems important since it is the first time that the word "legitimacy" appears in the Party's official statements. The implication is that this topic is being widely and publicly discussed in China.

- September 21: Bp. Ma Daqin (馬達欽), of Shanghai, uploaded a blog essay about his dream that Pope Francis (September 19-22 in Cuba, 22-27 in the US and UN) and President Xi Jinping (24-25 in the US, 25-28 at the UN) would cross paths and shake hands at the United Nations headquarters next week. Unfortunately, it did not happen. Meanwhile, on September 15-25, a delegation of three Chinese Bishops, namely Ma Yinglin (馬英林), Yang Xiaoting (楊曉亭) and Zhan Silu (詹思祿), along with Fr. Yang Yu (楊宇), paid a visit to the US, invited by five universities and congregations. The aim of the visit, according to the press, was "to seek reconciliation."

- September 29: During the flight back from the US to Rome, Pope Francis answered a question on the relations between the Holy See and

China: “China is a great nation that offers the world a great culture and many good things. I said once, in the aircraft flying over China, that I would very much like to visit China. I love the Chinese people. ... I hope that there will be opportunities to establish good relations... We are in contact and we are talking.”

- September 30: The *Global Times* published an article entitled, “China hopes for ‘sincere’ dialogue with Pope.” “China is sincere about improving relations with the Vatican and has made consistent efforts,” the spokesperson of the Chinese foreign ministry told the newspaper. On the same day, the *South China Morning Post* also dedicated its editorial to Pope Francis in very positive terms.

OCTOBER

- October 9: A 9.4-meter-high and 120-ton statue of Jesus, the highest in Northeast China, has been solemnly blessed at the church on Gaoshan Street, Fushun city, Liaoning, by Bishop Pei Junmin (裴軍民), with about 40 diocesan priests and about 2,000 faithful in attendance.

- October 11-15: The second round of negotiations between Beijing and Vatican representatives was held in Beijing, after an icebreaker in June 2014. They were the first such discussions to take place since contact was suspended in 2010. The Vatican delegation also paid a visit to Bishop Li Shan of Beijing and to Bishop Ma Yinglin at the National Seminary.

- October 16: A symposium on the history of Christianity in China was held in Anyang, organized by the Research Institute of Christianity of the Teachers' University of Anyang, through the initiative of Prof. Liu Zhiqing (劉志慶).

- October 17: A meeting of the Zhejiang authorities was held in Yiwu, Zhejiang to summarize the experience of the two-year campaign “Three Transformations and One Demolition,” with an invitation to all other provinces to “learn from Zhejiang.”

- October 19-24: Shortly after the recent second round of negotiations between China and the Vatican in Beijing, a group of 25 Chinese bishops, priests, nuns and lay leaders were summoned by officials from the State Administration for Religious Affairs to Guizhou Province. They were told to emphasize the “Sinicization” of the Church and to “continue to walk the path of independence with a firm will.” As part of the six-day trip, bishops with dual approval from both the Vatican and the Chinese government

concelebrated Masses with illicit bishops, who are excommunicated by the Holy See.

- October 19: it was announced that the country allows all couples to have two children in order to address the problem of an aging population.
- October 21-23: A symposium on the life and times of Fr. Matteo Ricci was held in Macerata, Italy, to which Pope Francis sent a message of support.
- October 26-29: A key meeting of the CPC Central Committee on the 13th five-year development plan took place. The promulgation of two major intraparty codes, that is, the revision to the Code of Ethics for Party Cadres and to the Disciplinary Ordinances, were announced. Both revised codes set out requirements that are stricter than the law for all Party members. For those in official positions, they are not allowed to believe in any religion nor may they take part in any religious activities.

NOVEMBER

- November 11: Police informed the family of Father Pedro Yu Heping (蔚和平), also known as Wei Heping, that the priest's body had been found on November 8 in the Fen River, a tributary of the Yellow River, in Shanxi province. They considered it a case of suicide. Father Yu was supposed to be arriving in Xingcheng in northeastern Liaoning Province on the afternoon of November 7 to join a catechetical meeting, but he did not show up. He was reported missing on November 8. "No one believed Father Yu, as a dedicated priest, would commit suicide," the source stressed. "But now even a postmortem is not trustworthy." Father Yu, 40, was born in Shanxi Province. He studied at the Baoding Seminary of the Chinese Catholic underground community in Hebei Province from 1993 until 1997. He was ordained a priest of Ningxia diocese in 2004. He furthered his studies at the Pontifical Bolivarian University in Colombia and at the Pontifical University of Salamanca in Spain. After earning master's degrees in Church Social Teachings in 2006 and in Canon Law in 2007, he returned to China, and taught in various seminaries. Father Yu was one of the founders of Tianzhujiao Zaixian (天主教在線), a popular Catholic web portal established in early 2000. Because of the time difference between Europe and Asia, he and his team could translate news from the Vatican in a timely manner. For this reason the unregistered website became very popular among Chinese Catholics. However, that drew attention from Chinese authorities and the website was subsequently

shut down. Fr. Yu was not involved with the website when it was re-established in 2003. In recent years, Father Yu founded the Emanuel Institute of Philosophy and Theology. He was active in publishing a theological journal and conducting research and teaching at several cultural institutes in China. He also brought young Catholics to preach and serve in remote areas.

- November 19: The *China Daily* published an article on the National Catholic Seminary, entitled “Church puts faith in recruitment drive.” It quotes the data provided by official Catholic sources: “the country’s 6 million-plus Catholics are served by 3,316 priests, plus 5,622 nuns from 106 congregations.... There are 556 priesthood candidates at the nation’s 10 major seminaries,” the article said.

- November 19: It was announced that Bishop Lai Hong-Sheng (黎鴻昇) of the Macau Diocese would receive a medal in early December from the Macau SAR government in appreciation of his services to the community.

DECEMBER

- December 1-2: The “One Association and One Conference” of the Chinese Catholic Church, with the sponsorship of the United Front Department and SARA officials, organized a study meeting in Nanning, Guangxi, for 35 representatives of returned students and of central and local Catholic leaders. The topics of discussion were “The Strengthening of Church structures,” “The Formation of new talent,” and “The Localization of the Church.” The government officials expressed their support for the present Catholic leaders and institutions.

- December 8: Faith Press reported the inaugural ceremony for the Extraordinary Jubilee of the Year of Mercy with the opening of the Sacred Door in many dioceses in China. In Tianjin, at the Xikai (西開) Cathedral, the baptism of 641 new Christians took place on this occasion.

- December 14: According to *Ucanews*, Chinese authorities have released in the past few days four Christian pastors and two lawyers, detained for their opposition to the cross-removals and church-demolitions in Zhejiang Province. But the key lawyer Zhang Kai (張凱) and six others remain in jail.

- December 18: Two senior Communist Party officials formerly responsible for China's religious structures, namely Ye Xiaowen (葉小文), former director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs for over a

decade, until 2009, and Zhu Weiqun (朱維群), former head of the Tibet section of the United Front Work Department have been accused of overseeing a long-running corruption racket involving the naming of 'Living Buddhas.' The accusations were made by Jiangbian Jiacao (降邊嘉措), a respected Tibetan scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The accusations were made on Weibo, before being removed on the same day.

- December 21-26: The bimonthly session of the National People's Congress Standing Committee approved a basket of laws and law amendments, including one on fighting terrorism and another on allowing couples to have two children. The first Counter-Terrorism Law enters into force from January 2016. Its new definition of "terrorism" includes "any proposition or activity that, by means of violence, sabotage or threat, generates social panic, undermines public security, infringes personal and property rights, and menaces government organs and international organizations with the aim of realizing certain political and ideological objectives." The Law further states China "opposes all extremism that seeks to instigate hatred, incite discrimination and advocate violence by distorting religious doctrines and other means, and acts to establish an ideological basis for terrorism."

It also adopted the country's first bill against domestic violence in a landmark move to bring traditionally silent abuse victims under legal protection. "The country prohibits any form of domestic violence," reads the new law, which formally defines domestic violence, and streamlines the process for obtaining restraining orders - measures long advocated by anti-domestic abuse groups. Domestic violence is defined as physical, psychological and other harm inflicted by family members with beatings, restraint or forcible limits on physical liberty, and recurring invectives and verbal threats.

- December 24: *Ucanews* published the article "Religious rights deteriorated in 2015": "After claiming 2014 to be the worst year for religious persecution in China since the Cultural Revolution, observers in and outside the country say this year saw the situation deteriorate still further. Relations between China's faithful and the Communist Party have not been this strained since the days of Chairman Mao. The Chinese Communist Party is attempting to co-opt Christianity for its own political ends. But it remains unclear whether its policy comes from the very center of the party, since high-ranking party officials appear to disagree about how Christianity should adapt to China. A firm direction will not be

determined until a delayed religious meeting led by President Xi Jinping takes place some time in the near future.

- December 24: According to *Ucanews*, sources in southwestern Sichuan Province reported that the Holy See approved the appointment of Bishop-designate Tang Yuange (唐遠閣) of Chengdu in October, shortly after a six-member Vatican delegation visited Beijing to meet with Chinese officials.

- December 25: According to Radio Free Asia, China's Christians are told to keep a low profile and avoid large services in Christmas celebrations, since the Chinese Communist Party has continued to place restrictions on Christian worship over Christmas. However, Chinese churches, mainly in the urban areas of Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an and Hangzhou have made use of e-invitation cards to encourage people to celebrate Christmas.

- December 26: Maoists drafted a petition that asks the Communist Party's Central Committee and Chinese legislators to officially designate today, the birthday of Mao Zedong, a public holiday, to be called "People's Day." On December 26, tens of thousands of people gathered in Shaoshan, Hunan, Mao's hometown, to celebrate his birthday. Elsewhere several temples have been built in honor of Mao Zedong, and celebrations were also held at these venues.