

# A Brief Description of Nanchong Diocese

(Sichuan Province)

by Li I Te



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The Nanchong diocese, originally called Shunqing diocese, was divided from the Chengdu diocese in 1929. The first bishop, Mgr. Paul Wang Wencheng, was consecrated in April, 1930 in Chongqing by Archbishop Celso Costantini. In those days the diocese comprised 13 counties and had about 20,000 Catholics who were cared for by 29 priests. Bishop Wang died on January 28, 1961 at 81 years of age. During his 31-year administration, Bishop Wang founded Linjiang Seminary to train future priests and Sacred Heart Convent for the training of religious Sisters. He ordained altogether 18 priests. Bishop Wang also established two middle schools, Minde and Renai, and two elementary schools, Minde and Puyu. In 1958, Bishop Wang consecrated Father Li Xiting as bishop of Chengdu.

On April 7, 1963 in the Nanchong cathedral, Bishop Li Xiting consecrated Father John Baptist Fan Daojiang as bishop of Nanchong. Bishops Duan Yinming of Wanxian and Deng Jizhou of Leshan were co-consecrators. Now 72, Bishop Fan was born on June 21, 1913 in Tongnan County, Sichuan. He graduated from the Chengdu Seminary in 1942 and was assigned as a teacher in the Linjiang seminary. The future bishop was ordained a priest on October 3, 1945 and served as parish priest in the parishes of Guangan, Huayunchi and Nanchong. Father Fan was appointed vicar general of the Nanchong diocese in 1954 and in 1963 became bishop. When the Sichuan Catholic Seminary reopened in 1984, Bishop Fan became the vice-rector and professor of Church History.

While Bishop Fan is at the seminary, he has entrusted the affairs of the diocese to Father Yuan Zhizhong. During summer and winter vacations Bishop Fan returns to his diocese and re-assumes charge of diocesan affairs.

In order that they might harmonise with civil jurisdictions, diocesan boundaries were redrawn in June, 1984. This also facilitates visitation of the diocese by the bishop. The Nanchong diocese now contains two districts, Nanchong and Neijiang, and one provincial city, Suining. There are also a total of 22 counties in the diocese.

At present there are ten churches opened in the diocese and these are served by eight priests whose average age is 65. The ten open churches are located in Nanchong City, Yuechi, Guangan, Huaying, Langzhong, Nanbu, Yingshan, Suining, Tianlin (Anyue) and Neijiang. There are also three religious Sisters and 30,000 Catholics in the diocese, and five seminarians from the diocese are studying at the Sichuan Seminary. One older Catholic, who graduated from the Chengdu seminary before 1949, has maintained celibacy for over 30 years with a view to becoming a priest. The diocesan authorities have decided to ordain him in the near future.