

NEWS IN BRIEF

Since December, news releases from China have continued to report the arrest of 'underground' bishops, priests and lay people. The first was Bishop Liu Guandong of Yi County in Hebei Province who was arrested in Baoding on November 26. Bishop Li Side of Tianjin was taken into custody on December 8 or 9 while on his way to administer the Sacrament of the Sick to one of his parishioners. On December 11, Fr. Zhang Gangyi was taken from his rectory at Zhangerce Village in the Diocese of Sanyuan in Shaanxi Province and placed under arrest, while on the same evening in Baoding Diocese in Hebei Province Bishop Fan Xueyan was also led away by members of the Public Security Forces. Nothing has been heard of him since then.

Reports continued to arrive telling of the arrests of many more clergymen and lay Catholics throughout the country. Most of these took place during the latter part of November and the first weeks of December. A list of their names appears below.

NAME	PLACE	DIOCESE
Fr. Su Zhemin	Hebei Province	Baoding Diocese
Fr. Shih	Hebei Province	Baoding Diocese
Mr. Wang Tongshang	Hebei Province	Baoding Diocese
Bishop Guo Wenzhi	Heilongjiang Province	Qiqihar City
Bishop Zhang Liren	Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia	Hohhot
Bishop Lu Zhensheng	Gansu Province	Tianshui Diocese
Bishop Yu Chengti	Shaanxi Province	Hanzhong Diocese
Bishop Yang Libai	Gansu Province	Lanzhou Diocese
Bishop Li Zhenrong	Hebei Province	Xianxian Diocese

Besides the above, there was news of another 20 arrests which would bring the total to 32, but it is quite possible that the number is far greater. Fr. Zhang Gangyi was among those arrested. He was later released only to be rearrested soon after.

Some commentators are of the opinion that the current crackdown stems from a strict interpretation by the authorities of directives on implementing the government policy on religion which appeared in last year's decree, Document Three. While the policy has not changed, the interpretation of the law has always been subject to changes in the political climate. Observers outside China have been closely monitoring these events, which continue to have damaging effects on China's international reputation.