

China Church and News Update 1996

A Review

Estimated Statistics of Chinese Catholic Church, 1996

Number of Catholics	10,000,000
Number of dioceses	138
Number of Bishops	
in the Open Church	70
in the Underground Church	60
Number of Priests	
in the Open Church	1,000
in the Underground Church	1,000
Number of Sisters	
in the Open Church	2,000
in the Underground Church	2,000
Number of Seminaries	
in the Open Church	24
in the Underground Church	10
National (open church)	1
Regional (open church)	6
Provincial (open church)	7
Diocesan (open church)	10
Number of Seminarians	
in the Open Church	1,000
in the Underground Church	700
Number of Novitiates	
in the Open Church	40
in the Underground Church	20
Number of Sisters and Women in Formation	
in the Open Church	1,500
in the Underground Church	1,000

Consecration of Bishops

Bishop Alfonso Yang Guangyan, 67, of Zhouzhi succeeded the late Bishop Paul Fan Yufei to head the Zhouzhi diocese in Shaanxi Province. The episcopal ordination took place in Zhouzhi county on December 17, 1995. (Not reported in December 1995 issue)

Li Hongguang, 70, was ordained auxiliary bishop of Xinjiang Diocese, Shanxi Province on May 14.

Joseph Zen Zi-Kiun, 64, appointed coadjutor bishop of Hong Kong, October 20, 1996

John Tong Hon, 57, appointed auxiliary bishop of Hong Kong, October 20, 1996.

Death of Bishops

Bishop Paul Song Weili, 83, bishop of Langfang, southeast of Beijing, died on July 20, 1996.

Arrests and Releases

Bishop Francis An Shuxin, Auxiliary of Baoding;

Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang of Yixian;

Bishop Peter Liu Guandong, coadjutor of Yixian;

The following are under strict surveillance:

Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhending, isolated in his village;

Bishop Joseph Wei Jingyi, coadjutor of Qiqihar;

Bishop James Su Zhimin, bishop of Baoding, first under strict surveillance and then hidden by his priests.

Bishop John Han Dingxiang of Yongnian.

Bishop Zeng Jingmu, 75, of Nanchang, remains in prison, seriously ill.

The following priests have also been detained:

Father Charles Guo Baile, 58, from Shanghai, sentenced to 2 years of hard labor for "illegal religious activity, for having spoken well of the Pope, having damaged the Patriotic Association and spread confusion among the people."

Fr. Chen Yunpeng detained in Baoding, Hebei Province. No word of his release.

Fr. Cui Xingang, parish priest of Donglu

Fr. Hu Duo

Fr. Xiao Fengzun

Fr. Wei Laogen

Fr. Shi Xiaosan

Besides these priests, a number of the faithful of the Baoding diocese have also been arrested (AIF, Aug. 9, 1996).

Members of House Churches also experienced a number of crackdowns during the course of the year. Several persons were severely beaten by police.

Significant Happenings in China Church, 1996

Vigilance over religion stressed in 1996

Nineteen-ninety-six was marked by a considerable amount of religious vigilance:

- In January, religious authorities in Beijing warned of new “errors” that have crept into the practice of various faiths permitted in China. To eliminate the problem, the officials identified three main tasks for 1996:
 - registration of all places of worship
 - deal with difficult problems of public concern;
 - cultivate contingents of young patriotic religious preachers.
- The new warnings were aimed at all five officially recognized religions as well as those involved in so-called superstitious activities. These regulations came into force shortly after the lunar new year. Regulations also ban divination, prayer for healing and consulting *Yijing*.
- Fearful of a fast-growing Christian church, the Public Security Bureau singled out the Protestant House Churches as “enemy forces” and warned that Christianity had become a threat to the Communist Party. Police stepped up their pressure on believers and closed hundreds of house churches or meeting points in April. Three hundred house churches were closed in Shanghai in April alone and two important meeting points were close in Shenzhen. Other meeting points in Quanzhou, Fujian Province were shut down with warnings that more would be shut down before the end of the year.
- Monks in Tibet also came in for their share of vigilance. The monks of several monasteries were subjected to a campaign of “re-education” Also a nunnery and a monastery were closed down in Western Tibet.
- China is signalling a major religious crackdown on Tibetan Buddhism saying that “Buddhism must conform to socialism, not socialism to Buddhism”. Furthermore, temples, monks and nuns must “consciously accept” the leadership of the Party at all levels.
- Underground bishop, James Su Zhimin of Boading, Hebei Province in a June 15 letter appealed to the Standing Committee of the national

People's Congress against Church suppression in his diocese. (Cf. this issue of *Tripod* for letter).

- China also told South Korea to stop sending missionaries to China. China maintains that the missionaries are posing as business people or teachers and are violating China's religious policy. According to the Chinese government, these "missionaries" are operating mostly in Northeast China, especially in Liaoning Province where there is a large Korean minority.
- The director of the United Front Work Department, Wang Zhaoguo, met with leaders of China's approved religious bodies. He reiterated the government's policy on religion, warning them to be vigilant against efforts at infiltration by international groups.
- Ye Xiaowen, China's Religious Affairs head led an eleven member delegation from Beijing to Hong Kong, June 20-29. In his major address he stressed the need for all religions in Hong Kong to respect the motherland, not to undermine Hong Kong's stability and prosperity, to love the country, Hong Kong and religion. He also emphasized the three principles needed to maintain a healthy relationship: non-subordination, non-interference and mutual respect as laid down in the Basic Law.

Sino-Vatican relations

In 1996, China took a first step in re-establishing diplomatic ties with the Vatican, suspended since the 1950s. The initiative was conveyed to the Holy See through Archbishop Claudio Celli, a papal representative who met with officials in Beijing in January.

Chinese Hierarchy's 50th Anniversary

April 11, 1996, marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Chinese hierarchy by Pope Pius XII. Taiwan and some church members on the Mainland commemorated the anniversary with a variety of activities. The bishops' conference of the official church did not celebrate the anniversary openly.

New Publication

China's government approved church began the publication of an English bulletin, entitled "China Catholic News"

Programs in Hong Kong for Mainland Priests and Sisters

Nineteen Sisters from 15 different Chinese congregations and nine provinces attended a program of pastoral exchange from June 11-July 3, 1996. The program was sponsored by the Catholic Institute for Religion and Society.

The Catholic Institute for Religion and Society (CIRS) in conjunction with the Hong Kong Chinese Theology Association also offered a program for seventeen young priests from mainland China from July 18-August 26. The program, entitled "Doctrine and the New Catechism," was in response to the young priests' need to acquire pastoral skills and evangelization methods

Documentation Related to Religion, 1996

"One Point of Clarification: Papal Primacy and the CCPA in 1957." (*Tripod*, No. 94, July-August, 1996).

"A Letter to all the Bishops of the Country from a Diocesan Administrator" (*Tripod*, No. 94, July-August, 1996).

"An Outline of Religious Affairs for 1996" by Ye Xiaowen, the director of the Religious Affairs Bureau. (*Tripod* No 92, March-April, 1996).

"Regulations from the Shanghai Religious Affairs Bureau" (*Tripod* No. 92, March April, 1996)

"Religious Freedom Guaranteed," an explanation of China's freedom of religion policy delivered at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, in Geneva, March 18 April 28, 1996. (*Tripod* No 93, May-June, 1996).

Regulations concerning outside religious personnel who come to Jingxian (Hebei Province) for activities, or bearing donations or gifts. (Effective January 1, 1996) (*Tripod*, No 93, May-June, 1996)

"Talk Policy, Talk Supervision, Talk Adaptation: The Three Phrases must be thoroughly Implemented in order to Do Religious Work Well" (*Tripod*, No. 95, September-October, 1996).

"Be Not Afraid, I Have Risen," A pastoral letter by Bishop James Su urging his flock to remain faithful in the face of persecution.

"Pastoral Letter of the Mainland Catholic Bishops Conference in Commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the Consecration of the First Local Chinese Bishops, and the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Chinese Hierarchy," dated October 28, 1996, (*Tripod*, No. 96, November-December, 1996).