

China Church and News Digest

December 2001-November, 2002

Death of Bishops

Bishop Liu Hede, OFM, 90, (underground) of Hankou Diocese died on December 10, 2001. He joined the Friars Minor in 1929, and was ordained a priest in 1936. He was arrested and incarcerated in September 1954 and released only after the Cultural Revolution. He was secretly consecrated a bishop in 1984 and administered the Hankou Diocese. In the 1990s he reconciled with the bishop of the official church.

Bishop Pei Shangde, 83, (underground) of Beijing Diocese died on December 24, 2001. He was ordained a priest in 1948. In 1950 he was sent to work in a factory and during the Cultural Revolution he was sentenced to ten years of reform through labor. He was released in 1980 and secretly consecrated a bishop in 1989.

Bishop John Li Congzhe, 87, (underground) of Hohhot died on June 20, 2002. Bishop Li was born on December 25, 1915, ordained a priest in 1942. He was arrested in the 1950s and sent to a labor camp until 1978. Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding Diocese, Hebei Province, ordained him bishop in 1984.

Cardinal John Baptist Wu Cheng-chung, 77, of Hong Kong died on September 23, 2002 of multiple myeloma, a rare form of bone marrow cancer. Coadjutor Bishop Joseph Zen Ze-kiun automatically succeeds Cardinal Wu as the 6th bishop of Hong Kong since 1946. Cardinal Wu was born on March 26, 1925 in Kaying Diocese in Guangdong Province. He served in Hong Kong, the United States, and in Hsinchu Diocese, Taiwan. He was ordained bishop of

Hong Kong on July 25, 1975, and cardinal in 1988. He was the third Chinese to have received a red hat.

Detention of Bishops

Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo, 67, of Zhengding Diocese, Hebei Province, detained on March 20, four days before Holy Week, was released on March 23, 2002. Bishop Jia has refused to join the local Patriotic Association. He was ordained a bishop in 1980. Previous to this last arrest, Jia spent some twenty years in prison. He was again arrested on August 15, 1999, on the Feast of the Assumption, and released in March 2000.

Bishop Wei Jingyi, 44, (underground) of Qiqihar Diocese, Heilongjiang Province was arrested on September 9 by public security officials after leaving a chapel where he had celebrated Mass. Bishop Wei was born in May 1958, ordained a priest in 1985 and ordained bishop in June 1995. He was in a labor camp from 1987-1989 and again from 1990-1992.

The whereabouts of **Bp. Francis An Shuxin**, arrested on October 9, 1997, and **Bishop James Su Zhemin**, arrested in 1996, both of Baoding Diocese, Hebei Province, are still unknown.

Other Church Personnel Detained

January 6-13: **Fathers Wang Zeyi**, 31, and **Zhang Sulai**, 52, priests of the underground church in Inner Mongolia, were arrested.

June 20: Religious Affairs officials took **Father Leo Chen Nailiang**, 60, vicar general of Wenzhou Diocese (underground) was taken away. He refuses to join the Catholic Patriotic Association, and is accused of opposing

unity in the diocese, and meeting with people without permission. Chen was ordained a priest in 1980.

July 21: Five adults and 25 children were arrested in southeastern China for engaging in religious activities in Dongan village in Fujian Province. Sister Chen Mei, 28, was sentenced to 15 days in jail for teaching catechesis. Others were released with a warning.

July 28: Father Pang Yongxing, 30, was arrested at his home in December; Father Ma Shunboa, 50, was arrested on Easter Sunday, March 31, while celebrating Mass; and Father Wang Limao, 32, was arrested on Palm Sunday also while celebrating Mass. All were sentenced to three years of forced labor for ministering without the consent of the authorities.

August 22: Since July about 70 Christians from the house churches have disappeared. Calls to the Ministry of Public Security and the Bureau of Religious Affairs seeking their whereabouts and release were left unanswered.

October 8-11: Five Christians sentenced to death for illegal activities related to religion had their sentence overturned because "the court decision to impose the death penalty was not clear and was not based on enough evidence." After the retrial three were given a life sentences, and two were given 15-year sentences. Another eight received jail terms of from two to 15 years for assault and damage to property. Four members acquitted of all charges were re-arrested and sentenced to labor re-education for three years.

Other Church and China News

November 26, 2001 (not recorded in 2001) Premier Zhu Rongji told American Protestant, Pat Robertson that the Chinese government had drafted new regulations to allow,

“unofficial Christian churches to register with the Religious Affairs Bureau that would allow them to worship openly.” Most church leaders, especially in the Catholic Church are leery about the proposal fearing they are in for a trap.

December 11, 2001 China officially entered the WTO, becoming its 143rd member.

December 18, 2001: St. Anthony’s Church opened in Shenzhen. This is the first and only Catholic Church in Shenzhen. The new church has a “sister” church in Hong Kong, St. Anthony Church that contributed to the construction of the Shenzhen church. There are approximately 10,000 Catholics in Shenzhen’s five million population.

January 2: Police in Shanghai and Xi’an arrested 18 dissidents planning to hold a memorial for Wang Ruowang, who died at the age of 83 in New York. Wang was known as the “grandfather” of Chinese dissidents.

January 6: Li Guangqiang, 38, Hong Kong businessman was indicted for shipping two truckloads of Bibles to the underground church in Fuqing in April and May. The police arrested him and seized the shipment.

January 10: The Court of Final Appeal in Hong Kong ruled that only those children who came to Hong Kong before the January 1999 ruling, and who had submitted identity documents could enjoy the right of abode immediately. This ruling affects some 5,000 mainland-born children of Hong Kong residents. The Diocese of Hong Kong has been active in the Right of Abode issue and has pledged to continue its support.

January 21: US Ambassador Clark Randt urged China to release Bishop James Su Zhemin of Baoding, Hebei Province. Bishop Su and his Auxiliary Francis An Shuxin

were arrested in 1997. Their whereabouts are still unknown.

February 6: Bishop Philip Huang Jaw-ming, 47, was installed as the bishop of Hualien, Taiwan. Cardinal Paul Shan of Kaohsiung presided at the installation. Bishop Huang is one of four Taiwan-born bishops.

February 19-24: The Grand Ricci dictionary, the largest-ever Chinese-French encyclopedic dictionary, more than 52 years in the making, was on display and available for purchase at the Taipei International Book Exhibition. The dictionary contains some 300,000 multi-character expressions in seven volumes and 9,000 pages. The CD-ROM version will take at least three years to complete since over one million words must be romanized into pinyin.

April 11: The police demolished a Catholic Church in Xiaozhao village, Hebei Province. It belonged to the underground diocese of Zhending. About 200 public security officials entered the village with military tanks and pushed down the semi-finished walls. They then destroyed the rest of the building with explosives. The local Catholic community numbers about 700.

May 14: Sisters from the Sacred Heart of Jesus Convent in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, after attending a two-day training session on preventive measures and medical treatment for AIDS/HIV patients, have formed an AIDS Concern Group. Most of the Sisters are engaged in medical ministry.

May 1-7 During the first week of May some tens of thousands of Catholics made their way to Sheshan Shrine of Our Lady to pray.

May 5-12: During the year Hong Kong experienced a rash of suicides. Approximately 1000 people committed suicide in

Hong Kong during 2001, and from April 2001 to April 2002, 17 minors took their own lives. The Catholic Church in Hong Kong named May 5-12 as "Concern for Life Week" to persuade people to cherish their lives and those of their children.

May 19: Two churches (underground) were shut down in Fujian Province for violations of building regulations. The buildings were being used for worship instead of for secular purposes.

June 5: More than 3,000 Catholics walked on the streets of Fuzhou, Fujian Province, to "welcome the Blessed Sacrament and pray for peace." This was the first ever street procession in China to pray for peace. The three-hour walk ended at a Marian Shrine in Changle where Bishop Joseph Zheng Changcheng of Fuzhou offered a Mass for the union of all Christian communities.

June 23-
June 30 Falun Gong cult hijacked nine of China Central Television Station's channels and ten provincial TV channels

July 1: Hong Kong commemorated five years of return to China with a special flag raising ceremony and with Tung Chee-hwa taking the oath of office for another five years. Xinhua said that Hong Kong had successfully implemented the "one country, two systems" of government.

July 4: China suspended the satellite service of the British Broadcasting Corporation. A news item included materials on Falun Gong banned by the Chinese government in 1999. China allowed resumption of services by July 12.

- July 4: The Dalai Lama said that he is not seeking independence from China but genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people.
- July 8: The Vatican granted Outer Mongolia the status of an Apostolic Prefecture. At present there are five women CIHM missionaries, four Missionaries of Charity and four religious of the Congregation of St. Paul de Chartres working among the 100 Catholics in the territory. There are also four CICM priests and two Fidei Donum priests from South Korea and six Salesians, who will open a vocational school in the near future.
- July 12: Although some 800,000 to 1.5 million people in China suffer from AIDS, nearly one in five Chinese have never heard of the disease. Beijing has now increased funding for HIV control sevenfold.
- July 28: Six St. Joseph Sisters, aged 36-69 pronounced their final vows in Beijing's North Church on July 28. This was the first profession of final vows in Beijing since 1949. The media reported the occasion in detail. The St. Joseph Congregation in Beijing was founded in 1872. It was closed during the Cultural Revolution and revived in 1986. The first group of Sisters made their first vows in 1989. The Congregation now has more than 50 Sisters.
- August 1: Christian designs found on tomb stones of the Eastern Han Dynasty reveal that Christianity entered China some 550 years earlier than the presently accepted dates of 635 A.D.
- August 6-8: Mass was celebrated for the first time in the Church of St. Jude in Fengjie city and in the Church of St. John Bosco in Wanzhou Diocese, on August 6 and 8 respectively. The original churches are among six in the diocese to be submerged with the Three Gorges dam project along the Yangtze River.

- August 13: Human Rights Watch and the Geneva Initiative of Psychiatry has asked China to end the practice of using psychiatric incarceration for political ends. The two groups also urged the UN to address the issue of political psychiatry abuse in China.
- August 11: The Beijing municipal government claims to have allocated 120 million yuan in recent years to return its churches to full working order. Beijing has 923 religious properties in the city.
- August 14: The Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) reported recently that over 90 million people in China are over 60 years old. These account for more than 10 percent of the country's population.
- August 17 Beijing residents cast their votes for the first time ever democratic election in the community. They elected a new director of the Neighbourhood Committee and also deputies to the Community Congress.
- August 26: The Communist Party has set November 8 for the starting date for the 16th Party Congress. The Congress is expected to set up a new leadership line-up and political agenda for the next five years.
- August 30: The China government has set a goal to enable all the handicapped to enjoy rehabilitation services by the year 2015. By 2010, all the handicapped in cities and developed rural areas will have access to the services, while 70 percent in underdeveloped rural areas will get aid.
- September 2: The Catholic Church in Hong Kong is providing free tutorial lessons to children seeking abode who are presently barred from attending school. Classes are held in a Caritas social service center. Bishop Joseph Zen has appealed to Catholics to donate money for the project so that it does not become a burden on the diocese.

September 2: Since 1997, the Chinese Communist Party has grown by nearly six million making a total of 66 million members. The membership is composed of workers, farmers, intellectuals, soldiers and cadres.

September 6: China blocked China's most popular search engines Google and Alter Vista, both based in the USA, in its effort to control Web content.

September 30: In his first press conference since succeeding Cardinal John Baptist Wu-Cheng-chung as Hong Kong's ordinary, Bishop Zen, 70, pledged service to minorities and to dialogue with the government. He said that being now in a different position, he may have to adjust his style, but he will not alter his principles. He said he would try to emulate the late cardinal by "doing the truth in charity."

October 7: The US state Department issued its annual report on religious freedom around the world. It found little improvement in China. The US statement drew "strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition" from Beijing. The report based its findings on the fact that China still restricts religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations in registered places of worship. The report added that police closed mosques, temples, seminaries and Catholic and Protestant churches that were not officially registered with the government. It also mentioned that thousands of Falun Gong followers have been imprisoned and hundreds have died in detention since 1999.

October 14: UN Secretary General Kofi Annan met with Chinese official, Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, to appeal for international cooperation to "defeat the scourge of terrorism."

October 21-26: Cardinal Shirayanagi Seiichi of Japan is the first cardinal to visit Mainland China officially since the Sino-Vatican furor over the canonizations of the 120 China

martyrs in the year 2000. The cardinal was invited by a government-recognized interreligious body in China. He led a group of a dozen religious leaders on the trip. The group met with Anthony Liu Bainian, vice-president of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and Ye Xiaowen, director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs.

November 8 Debates rage daily in the press between the advocates of and the opponents to the legislation of Article 23 of the Basic Law on sedition, subversion, treason, secession and other anti-State activities. Many feel that Hong Kong is at its most vulnerable point since the handover of sovereignty in 1997. Church people, lawyers, academics and rights activists in Hong Kong maintain that the law may endanger religious freedom and other rights.

November 8: Eighty years ago this year, on November 9, 1922, the first apostolic delegate to China, Archbishop Celso Costantini (1876-1958) arrived in Hong Kong. He reached Beijing on December 29, 1922.

November 8: The 16th Party Congress opened in China. In his ninety minute opening talk, President Jiang Zemin outlined China's achievements and set goals for the future of the Party on reform, the economy, Taiwan, and corruption. In a controversial move, private entrepreneurs were approved for Party membership.

November 14: The mission statement of the 16th Congress, referred to as the *Three Represents*, requires that the CPC be representative of China's strongest productive forces, best culture, and the interests most widely shared by its people.

November 15: Jiang Zemin, core of the third-generation leadership of China's Communist Party, along with five of his colleagues were not elected to the Central

Committee on November 14. The only member of the 15th CPC Central Committee Political Bureau Standing Committee on the ballot was the 59 year-old Hu Jintao who was elected the new General Secretary of the Communist Party.

November 15: An amendment was made to the 1922 Constitution of the Communist Party. The amendment clearly defines that Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory and “the important thought of the Three Represents constitute the ideology that the Party must uphold for a long time to come. The Chinese Communist Party, according to the amendment must now be both the leaders of the working class and of all the Chinese people, and the Chinese nation as well as the leaders in the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Sources of information

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