

The System for the Joint Conference of Chairpersons of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and of the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China

Translated by Peter Barry, MM

Article 1: This system has been formulated in order to make more complete and to deepen the Chinese Catholic independent enterprise. It is based on the "Constitution of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association" and on the "Constitution of the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China." It has been formulated in accordance with the democratic principles of running the Church, namely collective leadership, democratic supervision, mutual consultation, and joint decision-making. It also takes into account Church tradition and the requirements of the times.

Article 2: The component members of the Joint Chairpersons Conference are the chairperson, vice-chairpersons and secretary-general of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and the chairman, vice-chairmen, standing committee members and secretary-general of the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC).

Based on its needs, the Joint Chairpersons Conference can invite honorary chairpersons, the responsible persons of every special committee, diocesan administrators, rectors and superiors of seminaries and convents, responsible persons from the patriotic associations and church affairs committees at the levels of the province, autonomous region or municipality, and priests, Sisters and lay representatives to attend the meeting.

Article 3: The function of the Joint Chairpersons Conference is to discuss, and decide the most important affairs of the Chinese Catholic Church. The most important matters the Joint Chairpersons Conference must deliberate and decide upon include:

1. To study and formulate the annual work plans of the CCPA and of the BCCCC (below briefly called "one association and one conference"), and to deliberate the annual work report of the "one association and one conference."
2. To study and formulate the rules and regulations for the Chinese Catholic Church throughout the whole country, and to put forward ideas and proposals regarding these rules and regulations. These proposals must be deliberated and passed by the standing committee of the CCPA, by the BCCCC and by the Chinese Catholics Representatives Assembly.
3. To study and deliberate matters concerned with the election and ordination of bishops in each diocese, and with the adjustment of dioceses.
4. To study and formulate methods and procedures for determining the qualifications of the clergy.
5. To organize discussions on important theological and liturgical questions.
6. To organize and arrange important sacramental activities.
7. To organize and arrange important activities concerned with foreign affairs, to unify the manner by which persons are selected and sent abroad for further study, and to give guidance regarding inviting foreign experts to teach in any major seminary throughout the country.
8. To be responsible for the preparatory work for holding the national representatives assembly, consult and determine the representatives, the quota of members and the distribution of work for the representatives assembly.
9. To study and decide important matters regarding the National Catholic Academy of Philosophy and Theology. These include the plan for enrolling students, and the arrangement of subordinate institutions and personnel. The Joint Conference should also give guidance to local Catholic seminaries, so that they follow the policy of the independent administration of the church, and implement accurate objectives in running the seminaries.
10. To study and decide upon the qualifications for entering the Sisterhood and on the method for supervising Sisters. To give guidance to each diocese which has established a Sisters congregation, so that the congregation follows the policy of the independent running of the Church, and that it can develop self-government.

11. To study and determine the internal structures of the “one association and one conference,” and the setting up of special committees. They should also assign the responsible person and other personnel to each special committee.
12. To study and decide on each major construction project.
13. To study and decide upon major financial outlays.
14. In the name of the “one association and one conference” to report the situation of the church to the concerned departments of the government, and to put forward opinions and suggestions to them.
15. Promote the participation of Catholic Church personnel in important national works of social service.
16. To study and decide any other important matters, which are necessary for the Joint Chairpersons Conference to study and decide.

Article 4: A meeting of the Joint Chairpersons Conference should be held once every half year. If the chairpersons and over half of the members agree that a Joint Chairpersons Conference is needed, then it can be held.

Article 5: The secretaries-general of the Patriotic Association and of the Bishops Conference are responsible for the preparations and other concerned matters for the Joint Chairpersons Conference. They will suggest to the Chairpersons dates for the Conference and items for the agenda. They are also responsible for drafting documents for the Conference.

Article 6: The chairperson of the CCPA and the chairman of the BCCCC are in charge of running the Joint Chairpersons Conference. If for some reason the chairpersons are not able to attend, they can appoint a vice-chairperson to be in charge.

Article 7: The matters discussed and passed by the Joint Chairpersons Conference must be reported for the record to the concerned departments of religious affairs of the State Council.

Article 8: The patriotic associations, church affairs committees and dioceses at the provincial, autonomous region and municipal levels have the duty to obey and to carry out the matters deliberated and passed by the Joint Chairpersons Conference.

Article 9: Every patriotic association and church affairs committee (diocese) at the provincial, autonomous region and municipal levels, based on this system, may in accordance with local practical circumstances, set up a corresponding joint chairpersons conference system.

Article 10: This system takes effect after deliberation and passage by the Joint Chairpersons Conference of the standing committees of the CCPA and of the BCCCC.

Comment of a participant at the March 21-22, 2003 meeting

“Nowadays people are always asking me: what is the relationship between the church and the CCPA? I think that the CCPA and the church should mutually respect one another. The CCPA is not an organization placed above the church....The CCPA and the church affairs organizations should mutually respect each other, and have the same object, namely to run the church well.

Bishop Li Du’an, Xian Diocese

Source: China Religion, 2003, #4