

## Year 2021: Major Events of the Catholic Church in China

### January

**Jan 5:** Joseph Zong Huaide, bishop emeritus of Sanyuan (Shaanxi), died on Jan 5, 2021. He was 100 years old. He was ordained a priest in 1949, he later became administrator of the diocese. In 1965 he was arrested and sentenced in 1966 to “reform through labour” in Sanyuan, Xi’an, Baoji, and Yan’an. In 1980 he was released and returned to work as a priest in Tongyuanfang. In 1985 he was secretly appointed bishop of Sanyuan, and secretly consecrated in 1987. He affirmed seminaries and formation were paramount. Perhaps this is why he sought to be recognized as the official bishop of Sanyuan in 1992. In 1997 he made a trip to Italy where he was received by Pope John Paul II. In 2003 the Holy See accepted his resignation. He ordained Bishop Han Yingjin as his successor. (*AsiaNews*, Jan 7, 2021)

**Jan 7:** A government-sanctioned Catholic Patriotic Association of Gaocheng district in Shijiazhuang, Hebei, reportedly issued a statement on Jan 7 refuting rumors that church gatherings were a source of the Covid-19 outbreak in some villages. “The spread of the rumors has seriously violated the legal rights and interests of the priests of the Catholic Church and undermined the harmony and stability

of society,” it said. (*UCANews*, Jan 10, 2021)

**Jan 8:** The government-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China (CCPA-BCCCC) issued a statement on preventive measures against the spread of Covid-19. It reminded churches of the restrictions on Masses at Lunar New Year and discouraged gatherings. (*Faith Press*, Jan 8, 2021)

## February

**Feb 8:** Pope Francis spoke about China in his address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See. Regarding the renewal of the *Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement* on October 22, 2020, he said, it “is essentially pastoral in nature, and the Holy See is confident that the process now begun can be pursued in a spirit of mutual respect and trust, and thus further contribute to the resolution of questions of common interest.” The Holy See and China agreed to extend for another two years the *Provisional Agreement* regarding the appointment of bishops in China, signed in Beijing in 2018. (*UCANews*, February 11, 2021)

**Feb 19:** The Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Yining, Xinjiang, was ordered to be demolished, but not taken down. Since February 19, 2021, the Catholics of Yining cleared out the furnishings and decorations of the church. Yining, in the Yili district, is located 700 km west of Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang. Until March 25, the church was not demolished.

But the building cannot be used because water, electricity and other services have been cut off by the government. (*AsiaNews*, Feb 19 and March 25, 2021)

### **March**

**Mar 16:** A Catholic in Wenzhou was asked to pay a fine of 200,000 yuan after Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou, not recognized by the Chinese government, celebrated a Mass in a private chapel of the layperson's house on March 16, 2021. The charge was hosting "illegal religious activities" for Bishop Shao. (*AsiaNews*, April 27, 2021)

### **April**

**Apr 5:** The Vatican's Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, interviewed by a Spanish broadcaster COPE on the situation of the Catholic Church in China, said that the Holy See views it with great respect, given its history of enormous suffering, but also with great hope. The move "is to protect this community which is still small but has great strength and vitality. Everything that is being done is to assure a normal life for the Church in China," to guarantee "space for religious freedom, and communion, because one cannot live in the Catholic Church without communion with the successor of Peter, with the Pope." (*Vatican News*, April 5, 2021)

**Apr 13:** A Catholic home for the disabled in Zhaoxian, Hebei Province, was closed by authorities. The Liming Zhijia

was closed by local authorities in mid-April 2021. The home was founded in 1988 by then unofficial Bishop Raimund Wang Chonglin and run by the Sisters. The children and youngsters were said to be placed in state homes. Another home was closed in Renqiu, and one each in Zhangjiakou and Zhengding. A Another one in Baoji was closed two years ago. (*AsiaNews*, April 13 and 14, 2021)

**Apr 23:** Official Catholic governing bodies prepare the Tenth Assembly of Representatives of the Catholic Church in China. The joint meeting of the leaders of CCPA-BCCCC decided to convene the national assembly. Bishop Shen Bin of Haimen made the key points of work in 2021. The meeting decided to convene the Assembly this year to deliberate on the list of delegates. An official of the United Front Work Department reminded them of holding a forum on the centenary of the CPC, and to strengthen personnel training including patriotism. (*Catholic Church in China*, 2021, Issue 3)

## May

**May 1:** *The Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel* took effect on May 1. This is a comprehensive administrative regulation for the supervision of religious clergy by the state. It was issued on Feb 9, 2021 by the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA). The measures identify the responsibilities of religious clergies, improve the cultivation of religious talents and protect their legal interests

in accordance with laws. It covers the interests enjoyed by religious clergy and their responsibilities, the qualification reorganizations and the administration of them. It also states that religious clergy should resist illegal religious activities or violate principles on independence. (*Global Times*, Feb 9, 2021)

**May 1:** *The Measures for the Administration of Institutes for Religious Education*, was issued by SARA on May 1, 2021 and took effect on Sept 1, 2021. It clarifies the nature and orientation of religious colleges, establishment conditions and standards, procedures and relevant requirements for application for establishment. The measures also state the operational principles and responsibilities of religious institutions and principals. Besides the rights and obligations of teachers and students, they also contain the management responsibilities of government management departments, religious groups, and religious institutions. (*China Christians Today*, May 5, 2021)

**May 21:** Unofficial Bishop Zhang Weizhu of Xinxiang, 10 priests and 10 seminarians have been arrested at a raid on the old factory building in Shaheqiao, Hebei Province, used as a seminary by the Apostolic Prefecture of Xinxiang, Henan Province. A layperson made it available for this purpose. Bishop Zhang, 63, was arrested a day after the priests and seminarians were detained, for allegedly violating the country's new regulations on religious affairs. Zhang, appointed by the Vatican, was ordained secretly in 1991.

(*AsiaNews*, May 20 and 21; *UCANews*, May 24, 2021)

**May 21:** China's State Council publishes White Paper titled *Tibet Since 1951: Liberation, Development and Prosperity*. On the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tibet's liberation in 1951, the State Council published an extensive paper of the government's narrative on the history of Tibet as part of China since ancient times. (*Xinhua*, May 21, 2021)

**May 24:** On May 23, the eve of the World Day of Prayer for the Church in China, Pope Francis said that the Catholics in China will celebrate the Feast of Mary, Help of Christians with particular devotion in the Sheshan Shrine in Shanghai, "invoked assiduously by Christian families, in the trials and hopes of daily life." "May the Holy Spirit, protagonist of the Church's mission in the world, guide them and help them to be bearers of the Good News, witnesses of goodness and charity, and builders of justice and peace in their country." (*Vatican News*, May 23, 2021) Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon (Myanmar), president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, called for a week of prayer for the Chinese Church from May 23 to 30. (*UCANews*, March 14, 2021)

**May 24-28:** A team of textbook compilation of the Catholic seminaries in China held a working meeting in Yan'an (Shaanxi). The meeting included a patriotic education session that studied the revolutionary history in Yan'an, visited revolutionary sites. On May 26, the leaders of the textbook team held the meeting at the Bishop's House of

Yulin Diocese, presided over by Bishop Yang Xiaoting. The meeting formulated a plan for the teaching materials for the seminaries. (*Catholic Church in China*, 2021, No.3)

## June

**Jun 19:** Bishop John Lee Juo-wang of Tainan, 54, resigned six months after his ordination on January 1, 2021. He explained in an open letter that he developed “psychological and physical problems” unexpectedly after he took office. On May 7, he reported the facts to the Holy Father and offered to resign. On June 19, the Holy See announced that Pope Francis had accepted his resignation, and appointed Bishop Emeritus of Tainan, Bosco Lin Chi-nan, as Tainan’s apostolic administrator. (*UCANews*, June 23, 2021)

## July

**Jul 1:** The Communist Party of China celebrated 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding. In the run-up to July 1, the religious affairs authorities carried out a patriotic education campaign in which official religious communities at all levels had to participate. People were called to “study the party history”; and to “love the party, love the country, love socialism” on an education campaign. (*China Religion*, 2021, No.10)

**Jul 9:** Mathew Cao Xiangde, bishop emeritus of Hangzhou (Zhejiang), died on July 9, 2021. He was 93 years old. Ordained bishop in 2000 after he was “democratically”

elected despite the Vatican's opposition. In September 2004, the prelate asked the Holy See that he be legitimated. In 2008 the Holy See granted him legitimacy but without jurisdiction over the diocese. He was one of the bishops ordained in 2000 without papal mandate during the crisis in relations between Beijing and the Vatican. Born in 1927 in Tongzhen, in Shanghai, he was ordained a priest only in November 1985 by Bishop Jin Luxian of Shanghai. During the Cultural Revolution, he was put through harsh experiences. As a priest, he performed his priestly ministry in Hangzhou cathedral and in the parishes of Xiaoshan and Jinhua. On June 25, 2000, he was “democratically” elected and ordained bishop by Matthew Yu Chengcai, the official bishop of Haimen, despite the Holy See's exhortation not to proceed. A limited number of participants attended his funeral due to the epidemic. (*AsiaNews*, July 10, 2021)

**Jul 28:** Father Anthony Li Hui of Pingliang (Gansu) was ordained coadjutor bishop at the cathedral of the diocese. His election by the local Church was held on July 24, 2020. Pope Francis made the nomination on Jan. 11, 2021. Bishop Li assists Bishop Han Jide of the diocese. Bishop Li was born in Mei County (Shaanxi) in 1972. He entered the preparatory seminary of Pingliang, and studied in the national seminary in 1992. He was ordained priest in 1996. After studying Chinese language at the Renmin University, he began to work at the Secretariat of the government-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (CCPA-BCCCC)



and until he was elected coadjutor bishop. Li's consecration was presided over by Bishop Joseph Ma Yinglin of Kunming (Yunnan), head of BCCCC and vice president of CCPA. Bishop Li's consecration is within the framework of the Sino-Vatican agreement on episcopal appointments in China. The ordination was the third after the renewal of the *Agreement* in October 2021. (*AsiaNews*, July 28, 2021)

### **July to September**

Torrential rains in Henan, Shanxi, Hubei, Shaanxi and other provinces caused severe flooding, hitting lowland, cities and coal mines. Catholics in various dioceses sent relief aids to Henan and other flood-hit areas. Prayer meetings were held to pray for the victims. Jinde Charities also sent relief materials and funds to help the needy in the flood-hit areas. (*Faith Press*, August 2021)

### **September**

**Sept 1:** Shijiazhuang-based Faith Press celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a short article, thanking Church groups and individuals of the support and prayers during its “most difficult time” in early 2021. (*Faith Press*, Sept 1, 2021)

**Sept 8:** Father Francis Cui Qingqi, a Franciscan, was ordained the bishop of Hankou/Wuhan, in Hubei diocese. Bishop Cui filled the episcopal see left vacant since Franciscan Bishop Bernardine Dong Guangqing died in 2007. Born in Xiangyuan (Shanxi) in 1964, Cui was

ordained a priest in 1991. He was the administrator of Wuhan diocese since December 2012. He worked as deputy secretary of the government-sanctioned bishops' conference. The new bishop, 57 years old, was elected “democratically” on Sept. 27, 2020 by the local Church. The Holy See spokesman confirmed that the ceremony took place within the framework of the *Sino-Vatican Agreement*. Pope Francis approved the appointment on June 23, 2021. (*UCANews*, Sept 8, 2021)

## October

**Oct 5:** On Sept. 24, Catholics from two churches in Zibo city in Shandong province attended an event called “Hundred Sermons” that sought to explain the instructions of President Xi on religious activities, promotion of Sinicization in the Church and how to adapt to the socialist society. (*Faith Press*, August 27; *UCANews*, Oct 5, 2021)

**Oct 13:** Stephen Yang Xiangtai Bishop Emeritus of Handan (Hebei) died. He was 98 years old. He was born in 1923 into a Catholic family in Gaocun, part of Weihui diocese (now Handan) and under the care of PIME missionaries. In July 1966, during the Cultural Revolution, he was arrested. He was not tried until October 1970 and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Yang was released on March 15, 1980, acquitted of all charges. In 1988 he became rector of the diocesan seminary and chaplain of the Congregation of the Consolation of the Holy Spirit. Bishop Chen Bailu then appointed him vicar

general. On November 30, 1996, Bishop Chen consecrated Yang his coadjutor bishop. On September 17, 1999, upon Bishop Chen's retirement, Yang became the ordinary bishop of Handan Diocese. On June 21, 2011, in Feixiang Church, he consecrated Joseph Sun Jigen as his coadjutor bishop. He did this in secret, a few days before the official date: it was to avoid that the consecration ceremony, already approved by both the Holy See and the Chinese authorities, was presided over by an illegitimate bishop. Bishop Yang was not an "underground" bishop, but he never easily submitted to the "patriotism" of religious authorities linked to the Chinese Communist Party. For example, in 2015 he supported the courageous protests of the clergy of Wenzhou against the demolition of crosses in Zhejiang Province. (*AsiaNews*, Oct 13, 2021)

**Oct 26:** Wenzhou authorities detained unofficial Bishop Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou again, the Chinese Catholics prayed that "the Lord will give him confidence and courage, that he will not be demoralized by what happened; pray also that he will remain healthy and whole, under the guidance of Christ, so that he may return to us as soon as possible to shepherd his flock; let us pray together." He was released shortly after. (*AsiaNews*, Oct 26, 2021)

## **November**

**Nov 11:** On the Communist Party's hundred years' achievement and historical resolution, the history was

adopted at the Party Central Committee meeting on Nov 11, 2021 in Beijing. It is the third such resolution, after the 1945 and 1981 resolutions. (*Xinhua*, Nov 11, 2021)

## December

**Dec 3-4:** President Xi Jinping attended a Communist Party’s two-day national religious work conference in Beijing on Dec 3-4, 2021, the first since 2016. He warned that religious activities must stay within the law. China would further promote “Sinicisation of religion”, with a focus on strengthening control of online religious affairs. He emphasized the importance of “upholding the principle of developing religions in the Chinese context and providing active guidance for the adaptation of religions to socialist society.” (*Xinhua*, Dec. 4, 2021)

**Dec 5:** Jesuit Bishop Stephen Chow Sau-yan, 62, was ordained at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The new prelate will take over from Cardinal John Tong, who served as the Apostolic Administrator of Hong Kong since Bishop Michael Yeung Ming-cheung died in 2019. On January 1, 2018, he was appointed Provincial of the Chinese Province of the Society of Jesus. (*Kung Kao Po/Sunday Examiner*)

**Dec 21:** *The Measures on the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services* is a new regulation published on Dec 21, 2021 and took effect on March 1, 2022. The regulation was issued by the State Administration of

Religious Affairs. The rules are applied to various kinds of religious activities, including masses, sermons, baptisms, formation and religious information services. (*Global Times*; *AsiaNews*, Dec 21, 2021)