

Year 2020: Statistics of the Catholic Church in China

Number of Catholics:

About 10 million

Number of Bishops: total 99

Official: 72, of whom 66 in office

Unofficial: 27, of whom 14 in office

Number of Dioceses:

According to the Catholic Church: 147 (116 dioceses + 31 ecclesiastical circumscriptions)

According to the Chinese Government: 95 dioceses + 7 under the care of other dioceses

Number of Priests: total about 4,000

(39 new official priests in 2020, but the number of new unofficial priests and of those who refuse to officially register were not available)

Number of Seminaries and Seminarians:

Official: 6 major seminaries, with about 350 seminarians

Unofficial: 5 formation communities with approximately 70 seminarians

Number of Sisters: total 4,600

Official: approximately 3,250 in 87 congregations

Unofficial: approximately 1,350 in 40 congregations

Year 2020: Major Events of the Catholic Church in China

JANUARY

- January 6: Letter of Bishop Zhan Silu (詹思祿) of Funing/Mindong Diocese, Fujian, inviting all the clergy to proceed to the official registration in order to favor the unity of the diocese. At least five parishes (including Fu'an, Saiqi and Shuangfeng) have been closed because of “fire safety measures”. The church in Luojiang, where Auxiliary Bishop Guo Xijin (郭希錦) and some other priests resided, had all electricity and water supplies cut, with an eviction order (January 15). The clerics were forced to move out of the premises. A home for the elderly kept by the nuns was also closed.
- January 18: After the retirement of Bishop Louis Yu Runshen (余潤深) of Hanzhong, Shaanxi, Coadjutor Bishop Stephen Xu Hongwei (胥紅偉), ordained on August 28, 2019, was installed as the ordinary bishop.
- January 23: The Catholic churches started to be closed after the Chinese authorities locked down Wuhan, the epicenter of the Covid-19 pandemic. Government-sanctioned Church bodies - Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and Bishops' Conference in the Catholic Church in China (CCPA-BCCCC) issued a circular on Jan. 24, Lunar New Year Eve, stating the need of preventing the epidemic and Sunday Masses were suspended. Church gatherings and activities at parishes were halted as well. Priests and

the faithful had to resort to online prayers and liturgical celebrations.

- January 26: After the *Angelus* prayer, Pope Francis called for prayers for coronavirus victims and their families in China.

FEBRUARY

- February 1: The *Measures for the Administration of Religious Groups*, published by the State Administration for Religious Affairs on 30 December 2019, became effective. It gives detailed provisions of a section of the revised *Regulations of Religious Affairs* which took effect since February 1, 2018.
- February 3: The Vatican, in a joint initiative of the Office of Papal Charities, the Holy See Pharmacy and the Missionary Centre of the Chinese Church in Italy, sent about 700,000 facemasks to China in an attempt to help stall the spread of the coronavirus.
- February 11: Following a virtual meeting of the mainland religious leaders about the epidemic spreading of the Covid-19, the Catholic leaders in China on February 12 issued a circular under the CCPA-BCCCC to adopt a measure of “Double suspensions and one postponement” to temporarily close all religious venues, suspend religious gatherings and postpone the resumption of classes in seminaries across the country.
- February 14: Meeting of two “foreign ministers”: Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See, and Wang Yi, State Councilor

and Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, met at the Munich Security Conference in Germany, as a sideline of the conference. The Holy See's statement stressed the importance of the promotion of dialogue and of the *Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement*. China also issued a statement. It has been the first time since 1950s for the foreign ministers of both sides to meet.

- February 26: Letter of Cardinal John Baptist Re, dean of the College of Cardinals, to all cardinals, as an answer to Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium (陳日君), Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, in the latter's open letter to all Cardinals dated 27 September 2019 about the danger of a schismatic Church in China.

MARCH

- March 19: Solidarity gestures from the Church in China to Italy were reported from several dioceses and Church organizations in China. From Hong Kong, the Caritas-Hong Kong also sent facemasks to Italy.
- March 25: Death of unofficial Bishop of Ningxia, Joseph Ma Zhongmu (馬仲牧, Tegusbeleg, 1919-2020), the first and the only Mongolian bishop. Bishop Ma was not recognized by the Chinese authorities that considered him a priest. For the Holy See he was the bishop of Ningxia. He was born in Chengchuan, Inner Mongolia, on November 1, 1919. He studied theology in Datong (Shanxi) and was ordained a priest on July 31, 1947. After a few years of study at the Fu Jen Catholic University in Beijing, he carried out his priestly ministry in Zhongwei and then teaching in

the major seminary in Hohhot. In 1958, after refusing to join the Patriotic Association, he was sentenced to forced labor as a “counter-revolutionary”. Released in 1969, he returned to his hometown, where he worked as a laborer at a water conservation facility. Rehabilitated in 1979, in 1980 he restarted to do priestly ministry. On November 8, 1983 he was consecrated clandestinely as the Bishop of Ningxia, retiring in 2005. After retirement, he lived as a pastor in his hometown parish of Chengchuan. Bishop Ma was very concerned about Mongolian culture, wrote and translated into Mongolian language several books, among which the *Roman Missal*.

APRIL

- April 1: Chinese Catholic *Faith Press* expressed well wishes to Pope Francis on its website. Its collections through *Jinde Charities* was sent to the Holy See with the logistical support of the Italian embassy in Beijing and the Italian Foreign Ministry.
- April 2: According to *AsiaNews*, Cardinal Charles Bo, Archbishop of Yangon (Myanmar) and President of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, made a strong intervention about the origin of the Covid-19 pandemic, laying the primary responsibility upon the Communist Party of China, and requiring it to bear the economic consequences.
- April 7: The State Administration for Religious Affairs published a letter of Easter Greetings to all Catholics and Protestants and reminded them to upkeep the

measure of “Double suspensions and one postponement” (suspension of the places of worship and religious activities as well as postponement of resumption of seminary classes) in order to prevent the spreading of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- April 11: *Global Times* reported that the Holy See has thanked recent donations from Red Cross Society of China to the Vatican Pharmacy amid the global pandemic.
- April 13: The Diocese of Shanghai has decided to cancel all pilgrimages in May, including the feast day of Mary Help of Christians (24 May) to the Marian shrines of Our Lady of Sheshan and of Tangzhen in Pudong. On April 19, Beijing Diocese also issued a circular cancelling all May pilgrimages.
- April 20: On the 170th anniversary of its foundation, *La Civiltà Cattolica* has fulfilled the long-time cherished dream to have the Chinese edition. Its Chinese name is 《公教文明》。
- April 26: A circular letter of the CCPA-BCCCC, following the April 6 Government’s directives, renewed the decision to continue the temporarily closure of all religious venues and activities.
- April 27: According to *UCA News*, the Communist authorities have started another wave of cross removals in China.

MAY

- May 7: Death of Bishop Joseph Zhu Baoyu (朱寶玉,

1921-2020), Bishop Emeritus of Nanyang, in Henan in the convent of the Sisters of the Diocesan Congregation of the Immaculate Conception. His funeral took place on May 9. Only dozens could attend because of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. He was born on July 2, 1921 in Pushan, Henan. In 1946 he studied philosophy and theology at the Henan Regional Seminary in Kaifeng. He became priest in 1957 and then he carried out his priestly ministry in several churches in the Diocese of Nanyang. From 1964 to 1967 he was sentenced to forced labor. Later he was allowed to return to his hometown, Pushan, where he carried out his ministry in secret. In 1981 he was again sentenced to ten years of forced labor as a “counter-revolutionary”. Released in 1988, he was able to resume his ministry in several parishes. On March 19, 1995, feast of St. Joseph, he was ordained clandestinely Coadjutor Bishop of Nanyang by the unofficial Bishop Jin Dechen (靳德臣). He succeeded Bishop Jin as the Bishop of the Diocese in 2002. Due to his advanced age, in 2010 he submitted his resignation to the Holy See. However, in June 2011 he agreed to be officially installed. Due to health reasons, for the last few years he retired and lived in a hospice for the elderly in Jingang and then at the Sisters’ convent. In February 2020, Bishop Zhu was hospitalized and tested positive for Covid-19. He was the oldest Chinese to recover from the disease, and later was discharged. His case was reported by state media.

- May 22-28: Third Session of 13th National People’s

Congress (NPC) was held in Beijing, with the parallel meeting of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) from May 21 to 27. The chairman of the latter, Wang Yang (汪洋), emphasized the need for keeping the official orientation of Sinicization of religion, the reinforcement of the theoretical education of the responsible officials of the religious work, and religions' adaptation to the conditions of the country, to Chinese culture and to socialism. Catholic delegates to the NPC were four bishops, while to the CPPCC were seven bishops, two priests and a layman. On May 29, the Catholic delegates held a meeting to report and share the experience of the delegates, and to study the spirit of the two assemblies.

- May 24: Day of the Prayer for the Catholic Church in China: Pope Francis sent a message to the Catholics in China at the midday blessing after praying the *Regina Caeli*.
- May 26: Closure of the church in Jinxi, in Yujiang Diocese (Jiangxi), since the authorities consider it illegal.

JUNE

- June 2: Churches were reopened to the faithful, but under strict conditions. In some provinces, like Zhejiang, the Patriotic Association and the Church Administrative Affairs Commission required that in the homilies priests should praise the government's efficiency in dealing with the coronavirus and emphasize the love for the country. Youths under 18 continued to be forbidden to attend church. Some places required Mass attendees to register

with the parishes beforehand.

- June 7: Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli said in a program *Stanze Vaticane* of an Italian television network about the renewal of the *Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement*, due to expire: “I think we should probably reconfirm it for one or two years.”
- June 9: Official installation of unofficial Bishop Lin Jiashan (林家善) 83, as official ordinary bishop of Fuzhou, Fujian. The ceremony, held at the Cathedral in Fanchuanpu, in Fuzhou city, was presided over by Bishop Joseph Cai Bingrui (蔡炳瑞) of Xiamen (Fujian), with the attendance of 80 people and 40 priests. Bishop Lin had always been a member of the unofficial Church, and had also been sentenced to 10 years of forced labor. He was ordained bishop in July 1997 as bishop of Jian’ou (Fujian), but he remained in Fuzhou.
- June 9: Death of Professor Audrey G. Donnithorne (董育德, 1922-2020) in Hong Kong: she was born in Sichuan in a British Anglican family, but joined the Catholic Church during her studies. She had been always concerned with the Catholic Church and people in Sichuan, China.
- June 10: *Guidelines of Pastoral Care for Parishes* issued by Bishop Joseph Li Shan (李山) of Beijing and the Church bodies concerning the reopening of the Churches, and resuming of the public liturgical celebrations and religious activities.
- June 10: The office for religious affairs of the Hanshan

district, Handan Diocese, Hebei, issued a circular to invite people to inform about illegal religious activities, listing them and providing ways for doing it.

- June 19: According to *AsiaNews*, the underground bishop of Xuanhua (Hebei), Bishop Augustine Cui Tai (崔泰), 70, has once again been taken away by police. He was released in January 2020 on the occasion of the Chinese New Year and - perhaps because of the pandemic - was able to remain with his family until June. This period from January to June was the longest period of freedom for the prelate who, since 2007, has been detained without any charge on several occasions for long intervals.
- June 22: Bishop Paul Li Huiyuan (李會元) of Fengxiang, Shaanxi, was officially installed as the ordinary bishop of the diocese, at St. Joseph's Cathedral. Ordained coadjutor bishop by Bp. Lucas Li Jingfeng (李鏡峰, 1921-2017) in 2014, he succeeded the elderly bishop at the latter's death in 2017. In 2019, the Patriotic Association was established in the diocese and Bishop Li Huiyuan was elected as its head. Almost all the bishops from Shaanxi attended the installation ceremony, along with several civil authorities, but only 200 people due to pandemic restrictions.
- June 27: Shanghai Diocese issued a circular on funeral regulation, requiring priests who officiate funerals to produce their identification in order to prove that they are officially recognized by the State.

JULY

- July 5: Pope Francis, in his Sunday *Angelus* midday

address, skipped a section on Hong Kong situation, while the full text was previously distributed by the Holy See Press Office: it created a great speculation about the interference of Chinese authorities on the Holy See.

- July 9: Bishop Paul Ma Cunguo (馬存國, 1971-) of Shuozhou, Shanxi, an unofficial bishop was installed as the official ordinary bishop. The ceremony was presided by Bishop Paul Meng Ningyou (孟寧友) of Taiyuan (Shanxi).
- July 11: According to *AsiaNews*, in the unofficial community of Yujiang, Jiangxi, both bishop and clergy were forbidden by the local authorities to exercise any pastoral ministry since they did not join the Patriotic Association.
- July 29: US cybersecurity firm *Recorded Future* said in its report, from early May 2020, the Vatican, the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong and several Catholic Church-related organizations, among which the Study Mission in Hong Kong, were targeted by *RedDelta*, a Chinese-state sponsored activity group, *Reuters* reported July 29.
- July 30: Bishop James Su Zhimin (蘇志民) of Baoding, who has been detained since 1996 and was discovered in a hospital in 2003, was the subject of hearing by the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of US Congress. It was rumored that Bishop Su, if alive 88 years old, was feared dead during his imprisonment.
- July 31: A symposium of the leaders of the CCPA and BCCCC on “Reasons for Sinicization of Religion” was held in Beijing.

AUGUST

- August 13: A commemoration was held by central and provincial Catholic leaders of the 75th anniversary of the victory against Japanese invasion.
- August 14: *Christian Post* reported that authorities of at least five provinces in China over the last few months urged Christian believers either to replace crosses and images of Jesus in their homes with posters of Xi Jinping, or to lose welfare benefits. In the southeastern province of Jiangxi, officials removed crosses and other Christian images in the homes of officially recognized believers, for implementing state-issued orders to “Sinicize” Christianity.
- August 18: Official installation of official Bishop Francis Jin Yangke (金仰科) of Ningbo (Zhejiang), who was ordained coadjutor bishop privately in 2012 by Bishop Matthew Hu Xiande (胡賢德), and succeeded as ordinary bishop in 2017. Bishop Jin, born in 1958, has always belonged to the official church and worked openly as a priest in the open Church.
- August 21: According to *UCA News*, Chinese Authorities took advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic for restraining the celebration of the Feast of the Assumption. Since August 12 unofficial Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo (賈治國) of Zhengding (Hebei) and the Superior General of the Sisters Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Mary were detained. The bishop was released on October 6.

SEPTEMBER

- September 4: CCPA and BCCCC published a circular,

joining in the campaign for thrift and green promotion against food waste.

- September 22: Second anniversary of the signing of the Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement. The renewal for two years took place on October 22.
- September 25: According to *UCA News*, the Electronic Sciences University, following the official promotion for rewriting the Bible according the local needs, published a text *Professional Ethics and Law* in which in the episode of the adulteress of the *Gospel of St. John*, Jesus, instead of forgiving, stoned her to death “according to the request of the law”. Objections to the content were made by the Catholics and Protestants on social media in China.
- September 27: The People’s Court of the city of Linhai (Zhejiang) sentenced the owner of the online bookshop, Xiaomai Book Chamber, to seven years’ imprisonment for having sold foreign religious books. Chen Yu, a Christian believer, has been found guilty of “illegal business operations” after trading religious titles from foreign publishers through his e-commerce shop based in China.

OCTOBER

- October 3: At the conference on “The Other China” marking the 150th anniversary of the presence of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions in mainland China, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican’s Secretary of State, highlighted the “ecclesial and pastoral” value of the Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement, and underlined

it as a “starting point” to face the “many other problems” experienced by the Church in China.

- October 4: Bishop Guo Xijin, recently demoted by the Holy See to Auxiliary Bishop of Funing/Mindong Diocese, Fujian, in order to appoint the newly legitimized Bishop Zhan Silu, resigned: “I resign because I am incompetent and not in step with the times.” However his resignation was not accepted by the Holy See.
- October 12: Following the recent instruction of China’s President Xi Jinping, all religious bodies, including Catholic leaders, joined in the initiative by proposing to the faithful “the nice tradition of being drifty, avoiding waste of food and adopt a simple but sound life style.”
- October 22: Official announcement of the renewal for another two years of the Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement between China and the Vatican, without any change. According to *Reuters*, it has received the consent of Pope Francis on September 1, while other media raised questions and speculations. It was renewed not according to the anniversary date of its signing, September 22, 2018, but according to the date of its coming into effect, agreed upon by both parties.
- October 26-29: The Fifth Plenary Session of the Nineteenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China was held in Beijing. President Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party, delivered a work report and explained a draft document on proposals for formulating the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for Economic and

Social Development and future targets for 2035. It was a deadline for China to “achieve socialist modernization” based on “dual circulation” (domestic and foreign trade) with stress on technological innovation. On 4 November, the CCPA and BCCCC issued a circular inviting all Catholics to study the final message and by the end of November submit a report to their secretariat.

- October 30: A meeting was held in Beijing on the work in the seminaries, with the participation of 18 persons coming from the headquarters and the nine major seminaries. The main topic was the qualifications of 48 teachers of five seminaries and the uniformity of the courses.

NOVEMBER

- November 2: Police arrested all seminarians and workers of the unofficial minor and major seminary of Baoding (Hebei), altogether 16 persons, among whom a dozen of seminarians and three priests. It was a coordinated plan since the raid was carried out at the same time in the three different locations of the seminaries, one in Beijing and the others in Baoding. Two of the seminarians were soon released and two others sent back home, while the others were sent home after some days. Most probably the arrest was occasioned by the official inspection visit to Hebei (including Baoding) of Wang Yang, the chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, on 3-4 November.
- November 4: Death in a road accident of Fr. Joseph Wu Jian (吴健, 1981-2020) of Nanning Diocese, Guangxi, at

the age of 39: he was returning to his Guigang parish by motorcycle but at a crossroad was hit by a lorry. He was one of the two youngest priests who died in 2020. The other priest Fr Ma Zhaxi (馬扎西) of Yunnan, a Tibetan native, died of liver cancer on Jan. 17, 2020, also aged 39.

- November 13: *AsiaNews* reported that a research published on November 10 by the Pew Research Centre on persecution of religions reveals that, out of 198 governments surveyed, China ranks first.
- November 18: The State Administration of the Religious Affairs issued the drafts of the *Measures for the Administration of the Religious Clergy* and the *Measures for the Administration of the Religious Activities of Foreigners in China*, for a solicitation of opinions for one month.
- November 23: Episcopal ordination of Fr. Chen Tianhao (陳天浩, 1962-) as bishop of Qingdao, Shandong, recognized by both the Holy See and Chinese Government. He was ordained within the framework of the Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement. He was born in December 1962 and became priest in December 1989 after the philosophical and theological studies in Sheshan, Shanghai. In 1998 he was appointed head of the Qingdao Patriotic Association and in 2010 became member of the permanent committee of the National Catholic Patriotic Association. Since 2012 he has been head of the two Shandong provincial Catholic Associations and on 19 November 2019 was elected episcopal candidate.

- November 24: *Reuters* reported that for the first time Pope Francis called China's Muslim Uighurs a "persecuted" people. In his coming book *Let us Dream: the Path to a Better Future*, Pope Francis writes: "I think often of persecuted peoples: the Rohingya, the poor Uighurs, the Yazidi" in a section where he also talks about persecuted Christians in Islamic countries.
- November 30 - December 1: CCPA and the BCCCC held the standing committee meeting at Guangyuan, Sichuan, in order to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the *Guangyuan Reform Manifesto* (30 November 1950) and to discuss the work report of 2020 and the work plan for 2021. They repeated the emphasis on the autonomy principles, the study the guidelines of Xi Jinping, and the commitment of implementing the already approved the 2018-2022 Sinicization Plan for the Church. But they did not discuss about the *Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement*.

DECEMBER

- December 4: Due to the recent sudden death of young priests and sisters, the Catholic leaders of CCPA and BCCCC issued a circular letter about concern for the good health of clergy and faithful, requesting the Dioceses the establishment of health-check system, and encouraging the clergy and laity concern their health by doing physical exercises.
- December 7: Catholic celebration of the 70th anniversary of the launching of the Patriotic Movement against

Imperialism, was held in Nanjing (Jiangsu) with the attendance of 180 participants.

- December 8-10: Symposium of “Catholic Theology in Contemporary Time”, organized by Shandong Catholic leaders in Qufu, with 30 participants, with an emphasis on Sinicization and learning from Confucian tradition.
- December 15: CCPA and BCCCC issued a circular on strengthening the religious information work on the internet according to the requests of the Government regulations.
- December 22: Episcopal ordination of Fr. Pietro Liu Genzhou (劉根柱) as bishop of Hongdong/Linfen, Shanxi, was held, recognized by both the Holy See and Chinese Government. He was ordained within the framework of the Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement. Bp. Liu had already been vicar general of Hongdong/Linfen since 2010 and episcopal candidate approved by the Holy See for some years. The ordination ceremony was presided by Bp. Paul Meng Ningyou of Taiyuan, assisted by several provincial bishops, with the participation of 63 priests and 200 among sisters and faithful. Bishop Liu Genzhu was born on 12 October 1966 in Hongdong County. In 1991 he completed his studies in the provincial seminary of Shaanxi and was ordained a priest in the same year. He was a member of the Ninth Committee of the Patriotic Association of the Chinese Catholic Church, and deputy director of the Seventh Patriotic Association of Shanxi.
- December 24: From the morning all the ceremonies,

including celebrations of Christmas and religious activities, were stopped in Beijing, due to the reappearance of Covid-19 cases.

- December 31: Death of unofficial Bishop Andrew Han Jingtao Bishop (韓景濤) of Siping (1921-2020), northeastern China. He was born on 27 July 1921, entered the seminary in 1932 and was ordained a priest in 1947. In 1953 he was arrested and put first in prison, and later in labor camp, until 1980. Once freed, the authorities hired him to teach English at Changchun University and then in the Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations at Northeast Normal University. In 1982 he was secretly ordained bishop. He gave special care to the evangelization and to the formation of priest and sisters, and founded the Congregation of the Mount Calvary. Starting in 1997, his home came under constant surveillance. Recently he got sick and died very early in the morning of December 31. Described by some faithful as “a giant of culture and faith” of the unofficial community, Bishop Han, among his literary works, has translated the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. Catholics of Bishop Han’s community in the unofficial Church were not allowed to attend the funeral taken place at a funeral parlour. His body was cremated on Jan. 1, 2021 and the ashes was brought to his native village in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, and buried there.