

Year 2022: Major Events of the Catholic Church in China

January

Jan 1: Tangshan diocese (Hebei) ended the celebration of the “Year of Charity” in 2021 and began with the “Year of the Church” in 2022. Bishop Fang Jianping of Tangshan encouraged the religious and the faithful to build the church together. Noting in his pastoral letter for the “Year of the Church”, he said that the Church is the sacrament of the presence of the Triune God in the world, and the “sacrament of salvation” through Jesus Christ. The photo exhibition section of their diocesan museum, located at a parish, was completed before Christmas 2021, displaying the history of the diocese. The construction of the museum began in 2016, and was opened in 2017. (*Faith Press*, Jan 5, 2022; *Kung Kao Po*, Jan 14, 2022)

Jan 9: For the first time, the Cathedral Parish of Hangzhou (Zhejiang) appointed female altar servers. The 12 laywomen have joined with the male altar servers to serve the liturgies. According to the report, it was a response to Pope Francis’ motu proprio *Spiritus Domini*, issued in 2021, which modifies canon 230 of the *Code of Canon Law* “regarding access of women to the ministries of lector and acolyte”. Parishioners of the 400-year history church were happy

about this move. The laywomen also served in Bible reading, catechism classes and home visits. (*Faith Press*, Jan 12, 2022) Meanwhile, children can no longer be altar servers in the Church in China, since the Chinese authority prohibited minors from entering churches in 2018. (*AsiaNews*, April 18, 2017; *UCAN*, July 7, 2020)

Jan 25: The Congregation of the Daughters of Purgatory, founded in Ningbo (Zhejiang), celebrated its 130th anniversary in China. Bishop Francis Xavier Jin Yangke of Ningbo presided over the Mass, and Vicar General Father Xu Wenzhou concelebrated. Sister Mao Aide, the new superior, told the sisters: “Our forerunners dedicated themselves and founded the congregation in China. We should value our consecrated life and pray for our communion”. (*Faith Press*, Jan 27, 2022)

Jan 31: Monsignor Arnaldo Catalan, charge d’affaires of the Holy See in Taiwan (September 2019 – February 2022), 57, has been appointed Apostolic Nuncio in Rwanda on Jan 31, 2022. Born in the Philippines, he was ordained a priest in 1994. Catalan was consecrated as archbishop at the Cathedral in Manila on Feb 11, 2022 by Cardinal Luis Antonio G. Tagle, Pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization of the Holy See. (*Daily Bulletin of Holy See Press Office*, Jan 31, 2022; Manila Archdiocese webpage, Feb 12, 2022)

February

February 4-20, March 4-13: China hosted the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games for the first time, which began on Feb 4 and March 4 respectively. Strict restrictions against COVID-19 pandemics were enforced. The 3,000 athletes and thousands of participants were required to take vaccination beforehand. The Games operated through a close-loop system, separating the athletes and participants with the local Chinese. China faced diplomatic boycott at the Games. Pope Francis sent greetings to the Games' participants: "Sport, with its universal language, can build bridges of friendship and solidarity between people and peoples of every culture and religion". Catholics leaders, including Bishop Nazzareno Marconi of Macerata (Italy) sent greetings. (*Vatican News*, Feb 11, 2022; *Fides*, Feb 4, 2022) The Games took place at Xiwanzi, an area for Catholics. Xiwanzi-Chongli, a venue for the main skiing events, has been a region with Catholics in Hebei province with the neighboring Chahar region suffered persecutions in anti-Christian insurrection, Chinese civil war and even recent times. (*UCAN*, Jan 23, 2022)

Feb 5: Monsignor Javier Herrera Corona, representative of the Holy See in Hong Kong, has been appointed apostolic nuncio in the Republic of the Congo and in Gabon, and was consecrated archbishop in Mexico by Vatican's secretary of state, Pietro Cardinal Parolin. Born in 1968, he was ordained a priest in 1993. He served at the Study Mission in Hong

Kong from July 2016, and became the head of the Mission in January 2020 and left Hong Kong on March 11, 2022. (*Daily Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office*, Feb 5, 2022; *Sunday Examiner*, April 24, 2022)

Feb 15: Tsou priest Father Norbert Pu Ying-hsiung has been appointed Bishop of Chiayi in Taiwan. He was ordained as a bishop on April 2, 2022 by Archbishop Chung An-ju of Taipei. Bishop Pu is a native of the Tsou ethnic group, born in Alishan, Chiayi. He is the first aboriginal to become ordinary of the Church of Taiwan. (*Daily Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office*, Feb 15, 2022; *Radio Veritas*, April 2, 2022)

Feb 21: Underground Bishop Joseph Zhang Weizhu of Xinxiang (Henan), 63, has disappeared for nine months, since police cracked down his seminary on May 21, 2021. Detained with him were 10 priests and 10 seminarians, who were eventually freed. By February 2022, Bishop Zhang has not been released, not even sent back to his family at the Lunar New Year. In 1991, Bishop Zhang was ordained clandestinely with papal approval, but his episcopal appointment was not recognized by Beijing. (*AsiaNews*, Feb 21, 2022)

March

March 1: The *Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services* took effect on March 1, 2022. The Administration for Religious Affairs, the Cyberspace Administration of China, the Ministry of

Industry and Information Technology, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of State Security announced the regulations on Dec 3, 2021. A license will be required by provincial religious affairs department to disseminate religious information online. The *Measures* formulate in accordance with existing laws and regulations, including the *Cybersecurity Law* and the *Regulations on Religious Affairs*. The *Measures* prohibits religious content that instigates subversion of state power, violates the principle of independent management of religious undertakings, broadcast of preaching, or induces minors to practice religion online. (gov.cn. Dec 3, 2021)

March 12: Bishop Stephen Chow of Hong Kong visited Pope Francis in the Vatican in early March, and suggested the Holy Father to give his blessings to the Church in China and the Church in Hong Kong in the midst of the COVID-19 spike. Pope Francis recorded impromptu video messages in Italian for both. His message for the Church in China is translated as: “Dear brothers and sisters, you Catholics, I greet you with gratitude and love. Thank you for your testimony of faith. Thanks for the love to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Mother of God, Our Lady. Thank you for your work; for bearing so much with this COVID pandemic makes us suffer a lot. We go forward with the Lord, sometimes the Lord is hidden from our sight, but He is always beside us. It takes patience to hope. I am close to you; I love you so much! I pray for you, and you, please pray for me! Now may Almighty God bless you all, the Father,

the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen”. (*Catholic Way*, March 22, 2022)

March 17: The Covid-19 pandemic has caused lockdowns in provinces and cities, and Catholic churches and religious venues continued to close. Many dioceses and Catholic groups participated in the prevention and control support. Since March, the cumulative cases in Jilin Province exceeded 10,000, mostly in Jilin and Changchun cities. Catholics in both cities were infected. Nearly 10 Catholics of Jilin parish were infected, and other Catholics volunteered to help the prevention and control services. As the churches were closed, parishes have used online WeChat groups to contact Catholics. Father Qian Li, rector of Jilin Seminary, said that an outbreak occurred in the seminary’s neighborhood. Due to lockdowns, nobody could go out without a pass. Catholics of Jilin diocese assisted in delivering emergency medical aids to local residences, villages and elderly homes, and distributed supplies of facemasks, face-shields, protective gears and gloves. (*Faith Press*, March 17, 2022)

March 22: Pope Francis sent a telegram to offer condolences to Chinese President Xi Jinping after a deadly plane crash of the China Eastern Airlines, carrying 123 passengers and nine crew members from Kunming to Guangzhou. The Pope expressed sorrows for those who lost their lives in the air crash, and prayed for them and their families. The telegram was signed on his behalf by Vatican’s Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and addressed to President

Xi. (*VaticanNews*, March 22, 2022; *Faith Press*, March 22, 2022)

April

April 11: Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican’s Secretary of State, expressed hope that the *Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement* could still be adapted successfully. With the accord on the appointment of Chinese bishops due to expire in October 2022, Cardinal Parolin hoped that the agreement could be tweaked. Interviewed by CNA, he discussed the accord, But he did not go into detail or explain precisely which aspects he hoped to change. The text has never been published. The provisional agreement was signed in September 2018, and was extended in October 2020 for two years, “with no adjustments or amendments”, the report said. There have been six ordinations of Catholic bishops in China with the approval of the Holy See and the Chinese government. (*CNA*, April 11, 2022)

April 13: Unofficial Bishop Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou (Zhejiang) was taken away, but his whereabouts were unknown. Some time ago the secretary of the diocese Father Jiang Sunian was brought away and returned. Local Catholics believed the bishop was brought away to attend sessions and forced him to join the official Church. Meanwhile in January, in Xuanhua diocese (Hebei), the authorities seized more than 10 religious personnel, including Bishop Augustine Cui Tai and his deputy Father Zhang Jianlin. Local sources said the

tension in Zhangjiakou area could be caused by the Winter Olympics in Beijing, in which some competitions were held. The diocese of Xuanhua was founded by the Holy See in 1946, but in 1980 the Chinese government established the official diocese of Zhangjiakou, joining Xuanhua and Xiwanzi. The diocese of Zhangjiakou is not recognized by the Holy See. Bishop Zhao Kexun reportedly died in 2018, and until then was the ordinary bishop of Xuanhua. After a raid in 2007, he lived in hiding. (*AsiaNews*, April 13, 2022)

April 15: In Shanghai, the COVID-19 epidemic was at a critical stage. The priests and Catholics of the Xuhui district have helped in distributing prevention resources to the neighborhood. Since March, Shanghai's epidemic situation was severe. The diocese has closed all the churches and suspended religious activities. Catholic volunteers provided support and aids to the communities. Those in Songjiang, Jiading, Jinshan, Minhang, Pudong, Fengxian, Yangpu volunteered to be “dabai” (epidemic control workers dressed in white protective workwear). In mid-April, Jinde Charities sent needed supplies to Shanghai. (*Faith Press*, April 10, 12 and 15, 2022) On March 20, the Diocese of Shanghai issued a notice to cancel Marian pilgrimages to Sheshan for May 2022. Since the COVID-19 pandemic in and outside China was not under control, the diocese has closed the Sheshan basilica, the Mid-hill church and related areas. The diocese would not organize pilgrimages and religious activities, nor receive pilgrims in groups or individual. Pilgrimages were not allowed in May 2020 and May 2021 as well. (Shanghai

diocese website, March 20, 2022)

April 30: Since January 2022, a total of 10 unofficial priests of Baoding diocese “were disappeared”. Four of them disappeared around Xushui in late April. Their family members asked their village police for information, but in vain. The Catholics of Baoding asked for prayers for them. They also called for prayers for their missing Bishop James Su Zhimin, missing for at least 25 years, and another priest Liu Honggeng, who has been kept for 7 years. It is believed that all these were related to the registration of the clergy to join the official Church. (*AsiaNews*, April 30, 2022) In a related incident, Father Li Lujia of Baoding in Qingyuan County, was “lost contact” at the end of June. That was the second time he has been taken away. The last time was on Nov 2, 2020, when he was taking care of the sick Father Chen Guozhen in Xushui County. Suddenly more than 20 unidentified people broke into their house and forcibly took them away. In August, Father Chen was harassed by local government officials, causing a heart problem and urgently admitted to the intensive care unit. The seriously ill Father Chen needs to go to the hospital for dialysis three times a week. The priests of the diocese take turns to take care of him. Recently, the priests were taken away without anyone to help him. (*ChinaAid*, Aug 24, 2022)

May

May 7: The Guangdong Provincial Patriotic Association and Church Affairs Commission, in accordance with the provisions on *License of Internet Religious Information Services* issued by the Provincial Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee on March 3, sent staff to attend a training course for religious information reviewers, passed proficiency tests, and set up information bases, equipment, and funds to engage in Internet religious information; and went through the procedures for licensing and got approval on April 28, and obtained the license on May 7. (*Faith Press*, May 8, 2022)

May 10: Bishop Peter Wu Junwei of Yuncheng (Shanxi) died on May 17, 2022. He was 59 years old. Bishop Wu suffered a heart attack induced by work-related stress. Ordained bishop in 2010, he had been approved by both the Holy See and Chinese authorities. He dedicated himself to evangelization and Church property issues. In recent years, many Catholic religious, even young ones, have died due to work-related stress. Born in a village near Taiyuan (Shanxi) in 1963, Bishop Wu entered the minor seminary in 1982. He was ordained a priest in 1990. Between 2001 and 2009 he was rector of the Shanxi major seminary. In September 2009 he was transferred to Yuncheng, and was appointed ordinary the next year. He was consecrated with the approval of the Holy See and Chinese authorities. Bishop Wu publicly thanked Pope Benedict XVI for his appointment and vowed

to “remain firm and faithful to the Holy Father”. He was the eldest of six siblings from a fervent Catholic family: one brother became a priest and a sister joined religious congregation. Their great-uncle, Saint Peter Wu Anbang, suffered martyrdom during the Boxer rebellion of 1899-1901, and was canonised in 2000 as one of 120 holy Chinese martyrs. (*AsiaNews*, May 10, 2022)

June

June 1: The *Measures for the Administration of Financial Affairs of Sites for Religious Activities* took effect. On March 18, 2022, the State Administration for Religious Affairs promulgated the *Measures*, jointly formulated by the State Administration for Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Finance. It consist of 55 articles in 10 chapters, and stipulates that religious activity sites shall establish and complete internal financial management systems and financial management bodies, and major matters shall be studied and decided by the venue management organization; implement the accounting system for non-profit organizations, set up accounting books in accordance with the law, and establish and properly keep accounting files; formulate revenue budgets and expenditure budgets, and all income shall be deposited into the settlement account of the unit’s bank, and shall not be deposited into an individual account; and it should be used for activities consistent with the purpose of this site, and should not be used for illegal activities. (*chinacatholic.cn*)

June 1: The Hong Kong Christian Council held a seminar on the *Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services*, and invited Professor Song Jianwu of Chinese Renmin University in Beijing, a drafter of the regulation, to explain and respond to questions via video. The *Measures* in Mainland on March 1 has attracted the attention of many Hong Kong church groups in response to the frequent exchanges between churches, institutions and seminaries of the two places. Professor Song pointed out that the main reason for the promulgation of the *Measures* is to address the chaos caused by the rapid development of the Internet. Applicants of the license to operate must be Mainland residents and possess relevant technical conditions and professional capabilities. Religious groups, schools, and activity venues need to obtain the license before they can preach with their real names on their self-built online platforms and conduct religious education and training, but those participating in the training still need to verify their identities. That is, other organizations or individuals must not carry out training, preaching, or retweeting content online, nor may they carry out religious activities online, including the establishment of religious organizations and the develop Internet. (*Christian Weekly*, June 2022)

June 27: As the school year ended in May and June, the news of graduations from various seminaries in China has been announced. The Chinese Catholic Institute of Theology and Philosophy held the 2022 graduation ceremony and degree conferring ceremony on June 18 in the Peter's Hall

of the college. Bishop Ma Yinglin of Kunming, the rector, presided over the ceremony for 23 graduates and awarded graduation certificates and degrees certificates. A total of 30 seminarians had graduated from Hebei, Shaanxi, Jilin, and Beijing Catholic Theological and Theological Institute. Also graduating at the same time were 35 sisters and 2 lay people. (*Faith Press*, June 27, 2022)

July

July 16: The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Beijing (South Church) reopened on July 16 after a six month closure due to government anti-COVID measures. Not only did the Diocese of Beijing celebrate the reopening, but also the sacraments of Christian initiation for 101 catechumens, mostly adults. Already, before dawn, both young and old alike were waiting outside the gate, rejoicing at being able to resume their spiritual, liturgical and pastoral activities. In late afternoon, the catechumens were baptised by Bishop Joseph Li Shan and received Confirmation and First Communion. Bishop Li encouraged those present to treasure the experience. The parish priest of the cathedral, Father Joseph Zhao, thanked all those who had followed the long journey of faith and asked everyone to continue to protect these “new seedlings” of the community so that they can grow together in the Church on the path of synodality. (*Sunday Examiner*, July 22, 2022; *UCANews*, Jul 26, 2022) Also, at the Mass held on the feast day of the St Peter and St Paul Parish June 29 of Wenzhou Diocese

(Zhejiang), 52 people received the sacrament of initiation, including 40 people who were baptized and 12 people who were confirmed. The catechism class started on Oct 16, 2021 and lasted for more than eight months. The newly baptized will continue to study to strengthen their faith. (*Faith Press*, July 4, 2022)

July 25: Chinese authorities in June 2022 demolished an underground church in Youtong, a village in the Diocese of Zhengding (Hebei). The structure, actually a large tent, was torn down when the local parish priest, Father Dong Baolu, was in the hospital for a check-up. The priest suffers from hemiplegia (paralysis of part of the body). He refused to join the official Church. Since February 2018, the *Regulations for Religious Affairs* requires that religious personnel can perform their duties only if they register. (*AsiaNews*, July 25, 2022)

August

Aug 18-20: The government-sanctioned Tenth National Assembly of Chinese Catholic Representatives was convened in Wuhan (Hubei) on Aug 18-20, 2022. It reinforced rhetoric of patriotism and Sinicisation and the need to “unite and lead the vast number of Catholics to accept Xi Jinping’s thinking as their guide”. Bishop Joseph Li Shan of Beijing, 57, has been elected president of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association; and Bishop Shen Bin of Haimen (Jiangsu), 52, headed the Bishops’ Conference of the Catholic Church in

China, the collegial body not recognised by the Holy See. Bishop Li was ordained bishop in Sept 2007 with the Holy See's consent. Bishop Shen Bin, 52, also vice-president in the bishops' council, presented the Assembly a report (2016-2022) about the Church activities in China, without making any reference to the *Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement*. A new "Supervision Committee" was created, to be led by Bishop Zhan Silu of Mindong (Fujian), legitimized in 2018. As for outgoing head of bishops' council Bishop Joseph Ma Yinglin of Kunming, 57, also legitimized in 2018, and head of Patriotic Association Bishop Fang Xingyao of Linyi (Shandong), have been assigned the position of "honorary president". (*chinacatholic.cn*; *AsiaNews*, Aug 22, 2022)

Aug 22: Taiwan Bishops' Conference issued a notice on Aug 23 that the Apostolic Nunciature in Taipei has announced the charge d'Affaires Monsignor Stefano Mazzotti has assumed responsibility on Aug 22. Monsignor Mazzotti began his diplomatic service in 2014, and has been stationed in Portugal, France, the Holy See's State Relations of the Secretariat of State, and Egypt. By Sept 2022, the Holy See was one of the 14 sovereign entities that maintain full diplomatic ties with Taiwan. (Taiwan Bishops' Conference website, Aug 24, 2022; *Central News Agency*, Sept 8, 2022)

Aug 26: The Beihan Church in Taiyuan (Shanxi) was demolished due to a city development. On Aug 25, Beihan, a big Gothic-style church, was removed, then its affiliated 40-meter-high tower exploded to the ground, according to

local Catholics in China. The Catholic mission in Beihan has been existed for about 200 years. (*ChinaAid*, August 26, 2022; *China Christian Daily*, Sept 7, 2022)

Aug 27: Bishop John Baptist Ye Ronghua of Ankang (Shaanxi) died at the age of 91. He was the first Chinese bishop in what was once the Apostolic Prefecture of Hinganfu, erected as the Diocese of Hanzhong in 1928, and managed by Italian Friars Minor Conventual until the expulsion of foreign missionaries. Bishop Ye was born on June 20, 1931 into a Catholic family in Shankou, a village near Hanzhong, one of the dioceses where PIME missionaries carried out their ministry in China. It was here in 1900 that the martyrdom of Saint Alberico Criscitelli took place. In Sept 1945, Ye entered the St Joseph minor seminary in Hanzhong, transferring later to the regional seminary in Kaifeng (Henan). Both schools were founded and run by PIME missionaries. In 1966 during the Cultural Revolution, Ye was labelled a “counter-revolutionary” and condemned to re-education through forced labour. Only after a long period of harsh persecution was he ordained in 1981. In 1987, Bishop Anthony Li Du’an of Xi’an (Shaanxi) sent him to Ankang, in the former Apostolic Prefecture of Hinganfu, tasked with rebuilding the small Catholic community in this very poor area of Shaanxi. On Dec 10, 2000, Bishop Li consecrated Ye as the “official” bishop of Ankang, soon also recognised by the Holy See. Struck by illness, he asked for and obtained a coadjutor bishop, Bishop John Baptist Wang Xiaoxun, originally from the Diocese of Xian, 56 years old.

The latter's ordination took place on Nov 30, 2016 with the participation of six bishops from Shaanxi dioceses, all in communion with the pope and recognised by the government. (*AsiaNews*, August 27, 2022)

September

September: According to the *Chronology of Leadings Events in the Diocese of Hong Kong* in 2020 and 2022, Monsignor José Luis Díaz-Mariblanca Sánchez arrived in Hong Kong and took office as Head of the Holy See Study Mission (Hong Kong), in place of Monsignor Javier Herrera-Corona, who left Hong Kong on March 11 to take up his new appointment as Apostolic Nuncio in the Republic of the Congo and in Gabon. In mid-Dec 2020, Monsignor Alvaro Izurieta y Sea was assigned to Hong Kong as Deputy Head. (Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Website)

Sept 3: A year after the latest episcopal ordination in China, Bishop Cui Qingqi of Wuhan-Hankou on Sept 8, 2021, a Vatican delegation led by Archbishop Claudio-Maria Celli met with Chinese authorities in Tianjin in late Aug to early Sept 2022, Vatican Secretary of State Card Pietro Parolin said in an interview with an Italian TV network. Speaking of the *Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement* signed in 2018, Cardinal Parolin said he was convinced that the agreement – aimed at ensuring that all bishops in the country are in communion with the Pope, and are fully Chinese and fully Catholic – will be renewed. He noted that the

delegation continued discussions, acknowledging that there have been many difficulties and that there is a long way to go. He added that the journey requires patience to continue going forward in order to see the “seeds” that have been planted sprout despite adverse weather. (*Vatican News*, Sept 3, 2022; *AsiaNews*, Sept 11, 2022)

Sept 9: After the earthquake in Luding (Sichuan), the cracks in Moxi Catholic Church were obvious. On Sept 5, 2022, a 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck Luding County, Sichuan. The church was damaged by the earthquake. Parish priest Father Wang Xusong of Moxi was outside the church and hurried back to the church. He found the church was much damaged and nobody was injured. The church is one of the only two remaining old churches in the Ganzi Tibetan area of Sichuan. It was built in 1918 by a priest of the Paris Foreign Mission. In 1935, the Red Army passed by Moxi Town during the Long March, stayed overnight in the Moxi Catholic Church. They held the Moxi Conference there. In 1999, Moxi Catholic Church was rated as a state-level cultural monument. In 2004, the site was listed as a key cultural protection building. (*Faith Press*, Sept 9, 2022)

October

Oct 16: The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China was held in Beijing from Oct 16-22. The congress had 2,296 delegates and 83 specially invited delegates, totaling 2,379 delegates, representing 96.71 million party

members nationwide. In this reshuffle, CPC General Secretary Xi Jinping was re-elected the third term of the party. Faith Press reported that Xi's report to the Congress included religion, with "adhering to the direction of sinicization of religion in our country" and "actively guiding religion to adapt to socialist society". Ten representatives of religious circles from national religious groups were invited to attend the opening ceremony of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. (*Faith Press*, Oct 16, 2022)

Oct 22: The *Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement* was renewed for the second time, extended for two years. A communique on the extension of the *Provisional Agreement* regarding the appointment of Bishops was released on Oct 22, 2022, saying: "After appropriate consultation and assessment, the Holy See and the People's Republic of China have agreed to extend for another two years the *Provisional Agreement* regarding the appointment of Bishops, which was signed on 22 September 2018 and previously extended on 22 October 2020. The Vatican Party is committed to continuing a respectful and constructive dialogue with the Chinese Party for a productive implementation of the Accord and further development of bilateral relations, with a view to fostering the mission of the Catholic Church and the good of the Chinese people". The Agreement was signed on Sept 22, 2018, and the first extension for two years took place on Oct 22, 2020. (*Daily Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office*, Oct 22, 2022; *Vatican News*, Oct 22, 2022)

Oct 24: Spokesperson of the foreign ministry of China Wang Wenbin, in a reply to AFP reporter on the *Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement*, said on Oct 24: “On October 22, after friendly consultations, China and the Vatican agreed to a two-year extension of the provisional agreement on the appointment of bishops. The two sides will continue to maintain close communication and consultation, work for the sound implementation of the provisional agreement and continuously advance the process of improving relations”. (Foreign Ministry of China website, Oct 24, 2022)

November

Nov 12: As the pandemic gradually receded in Zhejiang province, the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Couples’ groups of Wenzhou diocese was held on Nov 12. About 230 priests, nuns and Catholic couples attended. The theme of the event was “In Love We Are One”. (*Faith Press*, Nov 12, 2022) The Xiaolin Parish of the Ningbo Diocese of the same province gathered with about 200 elderly people on Oct 9, Chongyang Festival, and administered the sacrament of anointing the sick for 94 of them. Father Pan of the church reminded the elderly to learn to let go of their worries, rely on God, and live a peaceful life. The priest also encouraged the elderly to set a good example of faith and pray for their children. (*Faith Press*, Oct 9, 2022)

Nov 24: The “installation” of unofficial Bishop John Peng Weizhao of Yujiang, in Jiangxi Province, as auxiliary

bishop of Jiangxi diocese took place on Nov 24, 2022 in Nanchang. Peng was clandestinely ordained with a papal mandate in 2014. With the approval of the Jiangxi Provincial Catholic Affairs Committee and the approval of the Chinese bishops' council, the Jiangxi diocese held the installation of Peng Weizhao as an auxiliary bishop. Father Wu Jianlin, deputy secretary-general of the bishops' council, read the council's Approval Letter. Auxiliary Bishop Peng swore to "faithfully preach the gospel, lead the priests and Catholics of the Diocese of Jiangxi, abide by the national constitution, safeguard the unity of the motherland and social harmony, love the country and religion, adhere to the principle of independence and self-management of the Church, adhere to the direction of Sinicisation of Catholicism in our country, actively guide Catholicism to adapt to socialist society, and contribute to the realisation of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation". More than 200 priests, nuns and lay representatives in the Jiangxi diocese attended. After the ceremony, a Mass was celebrated. (chinacatholic.org, November 24, 2022; *AsiaNews*, Nov 24, 2022)

Nov 25: Retired Hong Kong Catholic leader Joseph Zen, among six, was fined HK\$4,000 (US\$ 509) each over failure to register legal defence fund set up for protesters. The magistrate ruled that "612 Humanitarian Relief Fund" was set up in swift and systematic manner, with clear political aims and intimate interaction with public. Cardinal Zen was arrested on May 11 in Hong Kong and appeared in court for the first time on May 24. He turned 90 on Jan. 13, 2022.

(SCMP, Nov 25, 2022)

Nov 26: The Holy See Press Office released a statement on Nov 26 noting the “surprise and regret” of the Holy See upon receiving news of the “installation ceremony” that took place on 24 November in Nanchang of Bishop John Peng Weizhao of Yujiang (Jiangxi Province) as Auxiliary Bishop of Jiangxi, a diocese not recognized by the Holy See. The statement notes that this event “has not taken place in conformity with the spirit of dialogue that exists between the Vatican parties and the Chinese parties and what has been stipulated” in the *Agreement* of 2018. “It was with surprise and regret that the Holy See learned of the news of the “installation ceremony” that took place on Nov 24 and Bishop Peng as “Auxiliary Bishop of Jiangxi”, a diocese not recognized by the Holy See. Such an event, in fact, has not taken place in conformity with the spirit of dialogue that exists between the Vatican parties and the Chinese parties and what has been stipulated in the *Agreement*. In addition, “the civil recognition of Bishop Peng was preceded, according to reports received, by prolonged and intense pressure by the local Authorities. The Holy See hopes that similar episodes will not be repeated, is awaiting the appropriate communication about the matter from the Authorities, and reaffirms its complete willingness to continue the respectful dialogue concerning all of the matters of common interest”. (*Vatican News*, Nov 26, 2022)

December

Dec 7: Members of the Politburo Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China held a meeting on Nov 10 to discuss measures to prevent and control the epidemic. On Dec 7, China further adjusted its virus prevention and control policies, announcing 10 new measures to shift the policy focus from infection prevention to severe case prevention. (*Xinhua*, Dec 31, 2022) In November and December, there were protests and clashes demanding the lifting of lockdowns, and by early December, institutions and transportation in many cities did not require nucleic acid test results. After the measures were announced on Dec 7, cities canceled nucleic acid tests and life gradually returned to normal. (*SCMP*, Dec 7, 2022)

Dec 17: Pope Francis, on his birthday, declared Jesuit Father Matteo Ricci Venerable. He recognized Ricci's heroic virtues, the first stage in a process of beatification that has had a troubled history. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) brought the Gospel to China through the path of friendship. Usually the causes of beatification begin in the diocese where the candidate dies. Matteo Ricci died on May 11, 1610 at the age of 57 in Beijing where he is buried, in the Jesuit cemetery that is now included in the large garden of the Beijing Administrative College. The cause of beatification has been assigned to the Diocese of Macerata, where the Venerable came from. The original process of beatification began in 1982, but never reached a clear conclusion. In 2010, on the

400th anniversary of Fr Ricci's death, the time was finally ripe. Bishop Claudio Giuliadori restarted the process. Pope Francis very often pointed to Ricci as the ideal missionary, one capable of inculturation, dialogue and openness to others. Catholics China regarded this is a day of joy, and one of hope for the future of the faith in the land of China. (*AsiaNews*, Dec 17, 2022)

Dec 18: Underground Bishop Joseph Gao Hongxiao of Kaifeng died on Dec 18 in Shaanxi. He was 77 years old. He was clandestinely ordained in 2005 as coadjutor of Bishop Liang Xisheng of Kaifeng, with a mandate from the Holy See. Bishop Liang passed away in 2007. The episcopal see of the “official” Church of the diocese of Kaifeng (Henan) has been vacant since the death of its illegitimate bishop in 2001. Kaifeng was a mission of Pontifical Institute of Foreign Missions (PIME) until the missionaries were driven out of China. Bishop Gao, a member of the Order of Friars Minor, passed away at his home in Meixian (Shaanxi) province. Since he was not recognised by Chinese authorities, it was hard for him to carry out his ministry in Kaifeng area. Father Franco Mella, a Hong Kong-based PIME missionary who stayed in Kaifeng for a few years, told *AsiaNews*: “I met Bishop Gao in Kaifeng; he was a very welcoming person. He told me that he had tried several times to get in touch with the leaders of the official Church, but the situation had not been resolved. He was very sick lately”. Catholics in Kaifeng are estimated to be around 30,000. In addition to Kaifeng, in Henan, the dioceses of Zhengzhou, Shangqiu,

Luoyang, Zhumadian, and Xinxiang are also vacant. One of the main issues not resolved by the *Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement* is in fact vacant episcopal sees. Although the agreement was extended for two years on Oct 22, 2022, more than one-third is still without a bishop. The last episcopal ordination took place in September 2021 in Wuhan. (*AsiaNews*, Dec 19, 2022)

Dec 23: The Administration of Religious Affairs sent a letter of greetings and Christmas wishes to the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in China. The letter stated the content and gist of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party. The letter reminds the two groups that “2023 is the first year to implement the spirit of the Party Congress”. (*Faith Press*, Dec 23, 2022)

Dec 24: Parishes prepared for Christmas. Under the management of epidemic prevention and control, the parishioners of Jiujiang Parish of Jiangxi Diocese wore masks, and attended the Mass at the church to welcome the birth of the Holy Child. Father Pang Rui shared the meaning of incarnation of Jesus, blessed the faithful and prayed for those parishioners who could not come to church for various reasons. After the Mass, the faithful prayed before the image of the Holy Child. (*Faith Press*, Dec 26, 2022)

Dec 31: The 95-year-old Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI passed away on Dec 31, 2022 in his residence at the Vatican’s Mater Ecclesiae Monastery where he had lived since his resignation in 2013. Chinese Catholics had prayed for him.

Pope Benedict issued the historic “Letter to the Chinese Catholics” in 2007, expounding the principles of the Church to the government and providing guidelines for the life of the Church and the mission of evangelization in China. He elevated two Chinese cardinals, Joseph Zen and John Tong, both bishop emeritus of the Diocese of Hong Kong. Pope Benedict instituted May 24 every year as the “Day of Prayer for the Church in China”. He had not been to mainland China, but visited Hong Kong as the prefect of Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in March 1993. He attended a theological conference of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences and delivered a speech on “inter-culturality”. In that trip, he also visited Macau, as well as the Holy Spirit Seminary and the Holy Spirit Study Centre in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, Father Gianni Criveller, an expert on China, pointed out in an article in *AsiaNews* that Pope Benedict’s *Letter* was written directly to Catholics. He decried the Pope’s *Letter* as a “small masterpiece of lucidity, balance and tactfulness” about the Church in China, but Chinese authorities have challenged it. (*Vatican News*, Dec 31, 2022; *AsiaNews*, Jan 3, 2023)