

Year 2024:
Statistics of the Catholic Church in China
(as of December 31, 2024)

Number of Catholics

About 10 million

(6 million, estimated by the Chinese Government)

Number Dioceses

Catholic Church: 147 dioceses

Official Church in China: 98 dioceses

Number of Bishops

Catholic Church: 97 bishops in China
(74 official; 23 unofficial)

Official Church (2022): 66 bishops

Number of Priests

About 4,000

At least 37 priests ordained in 2024

Number of Sisters

About 5,000

Major Events of the Cathiloc Church in China in 2024

Introduction

In 2024, one of the noteworthy events for the Catholic Church in China was the third renewal of the Provisional Agreement between China and the Vatican. On September 13, about a month before the renewal, during Pope Francis' flight back to Rome from Singapore, he once again expressed his "admiration and respect for China" and his desire to visit the country. Regarding the dialogue between the Vatican and China, the Pope expressed satisfaction, stating that he "believes China represents a commitment and hope for the Church."

With the Pope's expectations and the dialogue between both parties, the renewal of the Provisional Agreement between China and the Vatican was anticipated. On October 22, the Vatican and the People's Republic of China reached the third renewal of the Provisional Agreement on the appointment of bishops. This renewal is for a period of four years, effective until 2028. As before, the contents of the agreement remain undisclosed. However, the extension for four years, rather than the previous two-year renewals, is a new proposal. By the time the agreement expires in 2028, it will mark the tenth anniversary of its signing in Beijing on September 22, 2018. Neither China nor the Vatican has explained the reason for the "four-year extension."

On the day of the renewal, October 22, 2024, a spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated: “Since the signing of the ‘Provisional Agreement between China and the Vatican on the Appointment of Bishops’ in 2018, it has been renewed twice, in 2020 and 2022. Both China and the Vatican have positively evaluated the effectiveness of the agreement’s implementation. Through friendly consultations, both parties have decided to extend the agreement for another four years. Both sides will maintain contact in a constructive spirit and continue to promote the improvement of China-Vatican relations.”

A Vatican press release on the same day stated: “In view of the consensus reached on the effective implementation of the Provisional Agreement on the appointment of bishops, after appropriate consultation and evaluation, the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China agreed to extend the validity of the agreement for four years from now.” It pointed out: “The Vatican will continue to be committed to a respectful and constructive dialogue with the Chinese government aimed at promoting bilateral relations for the benefit of the Catholic Church in China and all Chinese people.” The Holy See’s announcement for 2024 is largely the same as that for 2022. However, this time the wording “reached consensus and confirmed its effective applicability” was added.

Under the framework of the Provisional Agreement, four new bishops were appointed in China in 2024. Among them,

three were appointed by Pope Francis in 2023. These three bishops were consecrated in their respective dioceses within the last week of January 2024.

- Bishop Thaddeus Wang Yuesheng of Zhengzhou Diocese (Henan): Bishop Wang was consecrated as bishop on January 25, 2024. He is 59 years old and was ordained as a priest in 1993. On December 16, 2023, he was appointed by Pope Francis as the bishop of Zhengzhou Diocese.
- Bishop Anthony Sun Wenjun of Weifang Diocese (Shandong): Bishop Sun was consecrated as the first bishop of Weifang Diocese on January 29, 2024. He is 55 years old and was ordained as a priest in 1995. He studied abroad in Ireland and was appointed by Pope Francis on April 20, 2023. On the same day, the Pope established the Weifang Diocese, aligning its jurisdiction with the administrative divisions of Weifang City, replacing the Yidu (Yiduxian) Apostolic Prefecture established in 1931. The Weifang Diocese serves approximately 6,000 Catholics, supported by ten priests and six sisters.
- Bishop Peter Wu Yishun of Minbei Diocese (Fujian): Bishop Wu was consecrated as bishop on January 31, 2024. He is 61 years old and was ordained as a priest in 1992. On December 16, 2023, he was appointed by Pope Francis as the bishop of Shaowu Apostolic Prefecture/Minbei Diocese.

Regarding the three bishop consecrations within a week and the progress in China-Vatican relations, a spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to the media on February 1, 2024, stating: "In recent years, China and the Vatican have maintained communication, and the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China on the Appointment of Bishops has been effectively implemented. China is willing to improve relations with the Vatican on the basis of mutual respect and equal dialogue."

Bishop Zhen Xuebin was appointed by Pope Francis as the Assistant Bishop of Beijing Diocese on August 28, 2024. He was consecrated on October 25, 2024, three days after the renewal of the agreement, by Bishop Li Shan of Beijing. He became the first new bishop appointed after the renewal of the agreement. Bishop Zhen is 54 years old, was ordained as a priest in 1988, and has studied abroad in the United States.

Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang's Transfer to Hangzhou Diocese (Zhejiang): Bishop's transfer to a different diocese was also conducted under the framework of the agreement. Bishop Yang of Zhoucun Diocese (Shandong) was transferred to Hangzhou Diocese (Zhejiang). Bishop Yang assumed his role as Bishop of Hangzhou Diocese on June 27, 2024.

Bishop Yang of Hangzhou Diocese, along with Bishop Zhan Silu of Mindong Diocese (Fujian), was invited by Pope Francis to attend the second session of the Synod of Bishops from October 2 to 30, 2024, which focused on the theme of a

synodal Church. This marked their first full participation in the Synod. Bishop Yang had also participated in the first session in 2023, alongside Bishop Yao Shun of Jining Diocese.

Among the 2024 bishop appointments, the recognition and installation of the 94-year-old unofficial Bishop Melchior Shi Hongzhen of Tianjin Diocese by Chinese authorities drew significant attention.

On October 28, 2024, the non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch released a report suggesting that the extension of the agreement between China and the Vatican should serve as a foundation for promoting religious freedom and other human rights in China. The organization cited a report by the Hudson Institute, calling for the release of ten Chinese clergy members, including Bishop Shi Hongzhen, who has been under house arrest for years due to his refusal to join the Patriotic Association. Others mentioned include Bishops Su Zhimin, Cui Tai, Jia Zhiguo, Zhang Weizhu, and Shao Zhumin.

Although Pope Francis and senior Vatican officials have expressed confidence in the dialogue, some faithful hope that China will provide more space and respect for religious freedom and the Church. So far, apart from responses from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the agreement, China has disclosed very little about the implementation of the agreement, showing a lack of transparency. However, there remains hope for continued dialogue and improvement in the current state of the Church in China.

January 2024

Tangshan Diocese Launches the “Year of the Gospel”

On January 1, 2024, Tangshan Diocese, Hebei province, inaugurated the “Year of the Gospel.” The opening mass took place at the Cathedral, where priests, sisters, and laypeople from various parishes gathered to witness this joyful moment. During his homily, Bishop Fang Jianping of Tangshan urged parishioners to embody the Gospel through their lives, and encouraged all parishes to develop concrete plans for preaching the Gospel. He noted that this process should be synodal—a collaborative effort involving priests, sisters, and parishioners walking together on the path of evangelization. Bishop Fang called on priests to set an example—both in evangelization and in their own spiritual practices—guiding parishioners toward a deeper and more spiritual life.

(Faith Press, January 1, 2024)

Couples’ Sharing at Hangzhou Church

On January 14, 2024, the Church in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, held a sharing activity for Catholic couples to promote harmonious family relationships and provide pastoral care for marriage and family life. More than 30 couples reaffirmed their marriage vows at Mass, and nearly 500 parishioners listened to their sharing and marriage commitments. Father Zheng Jiamao, parish priest, said that the Church pays attention to the needs of couples. The coordinator of the Hangzhou Couples’ Group talked on the development of

the couples' groups in China. There are 44 dioceses across the country with more than 7,900 couples, 395 priests and 750 sisters participating. (*Faith Press*, January 14, 2024)

Wang Yuesheng ordained as Bishop of Zhengzhou

On January 25, 2024, Father Thaddeus Wang Yuesheng, 58, was ordained Bishop of Zhengzhou, Henan Province, the first one after the episcopal ordination in Wuhan in September 2021. Pope Francis appointed Wang on December 16, 2023 "in the framework of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China," according to the *Daily Bulletin of The Holy See Press Office* on January 25, 2024.

Bishop Joseph Shen Bin of Shanghai, head of government-sanctioned Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC), presided over the ordination. Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang of Zhoucun (Shandong), Bishop Joseph Zhang Yinlin of Anyang (Henan) and Bishop Peter Jin Lugang of Nanyang (Henan) co-ordained. Father Joseph Yang Yu, BCCCC's secretary general, read the letter of approval. According to a report of China Catholics bodies' website, Wang was elected bishop of Zhengzhou diocese on March 22, 2022.

Bishop Wang, born on February 27, 1966 in Zhumadian, Henan, studied philosophy and theology at the South Central China Seminary from 1987 to 1993. He was ordained a priest in Hankou on October 17, 1993, and

served as a parish priest in Zhengzhou since December 2011, the Vatican's Bulletin noted.

(*Daily Bulletin of The Holy See Press Office* ("Holy See Bulletin" here after) , Catholic Church in China, *AsiaNews*, January 25, 2024)

Sun Wenjun ordained First Bishop of Weifang Diocese

On January 29, 2024, Anthony Sun Wenjun, 53, was ordained the first bishop of Weifang diocese, Shandong Province. Pope Francis appointed him on April 20, 2023 as bishop of Weifang, within the framework of the Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement, according to the *Holy See Bulletin*. Bishop Johan Fang Xingyao of Linyi (Shandong) presided over the ceremony. Co-ordinators were Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang of Zhoucun, Bishop Joseph Zhang Xianwang of Jinan, Bishop John Lu Peisen of Yanzhou and Bishop Thomas Chen Tianhao of Qingdao, all from Shandong Province. Father Ignatius Wu Jianlin, deputy secretary-general of China's bishops' council, read out the council's letter of approval. Wang was elected bishop for the Weifang Diocese on August 26, 2022.

According to the *Holy See Bulletin* on January 29, 2024, Pope Francis had established the new Chinese Diocese of Weifang in Shandong Province on April 20, 2023, after the suppression the apostolic prefecture of Yiduxian. The territory of the new diocese conforms to that of the city of Weifang. The diocese has about 6,000 Catholics, served by 10 priests and 6 religious sisters.

Bishop Sun was born on November 1, 1970 in Weifang. He studied at the Jinan Seminary from 1987 to 1989 and then at the Sheshan Seminary in Shanghai from 1989 to 1994. He was ordained a priest in December 1995 and provided pastoral service in Shandong from 2005 to 2007. Between 2007 and 2008 he was in Ireland for further training.

Since December 2017, he has been deputy head of the Catholic “two bodies” of Shandong Province. (*Holy See Bulletin*, Catholic Church in China, January 29, 2024).

Episcopal ordination of Wu Yishun the Bishop of Minbei

On January 31, 2024, Peter Wu Yishun, 59, was ordained Bishop of the Minbei, Fujian Province. He was appointed by Pope Francis on December 16, 2023 as bishop of the apostolic prefecture of Shaowu/ Minbei within the framework of the Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement. Bishop Joseph Li Shan of Beijing, chairman of the Patriotic Association, presided over the ordination. Co-ordinators were Bishop Vincent Zhan Silu of Mindong, Bishop Joseph Cai Bingrui of Xiamen and Bishop Francis Xavier Jin Yangke of Ningbo.

Father Joseph Yang Yu read the official letter of approval from the bishops’ council. Wu Yishun was elected bishop-designate for the Minbei Diocese on January 18, 2022.

The Vatican announced on Jan. 31, 2024 in the *Holy See*

Bulletin that Pope Francis appointed Wu Yishun “as bishop of the apostolic prefecture of Shaowu (Minbei), in the Chinese province of Fujian” on December 16, 2023, within the framework of the Provisional Agreement.

Bishop Peter Wu Yishun, born on December 7, 1964 in Ningde, Fujian Province, studied theology and philosophy at the Sheshan Seminary in Shanghai from 1985 to 1992. On August 15, 1992, he was ordained a priest for the diocese of Xiamen. He was subsequently sent to Minbei where he carried out his pastoral service, and was responsible for the apostolic prefectures of Shaowi and Jian’ou, the *Holy See Bulletin* said. In December 1999, according to the Chinese official website, he was elected administrator of the diocese of Minbei, and has been vice-chairman of the Fujian province’s official Catholic bodies from September 2001 to the present. (*Holy See Bulletin*, January 31, 2024; Cathoilc Church in China, January 31, 2024).

February 2024

PRC’s Response to the ordination of Chinese Bishops

On February 1, 2024, Wang Wenbin, spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, responded to media questions on China-Vatican relations. “In recent years, China and the Vatican have

maintained communication, and the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China on the appointment of bishops has been well implemented," Wang said. "China is willing to improve its relations with the Vatican on the basis of mutual respect and equal dialogue." (Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, February 1, 2024)

Inner Mongolia Catholics Pay Tribute to Ancestors During Lunar New Year

On February 9, 2024, Lunar New Year's Eve, Father Liu Jianlin, parish priest of Qianjinguo Town, Taifu Temple Banner, Inner Mongolia, held a memorial Mass to commemorate the departed and allowed the parishioners to express their remembrance of the deceased. The altar inside the church was adorned with portraits of deceased parishioners. Catholics entered the church to attend Mass with devotion and reverence, remembering their beloved ones. "Today, our memorial Mass connects us with all the saints and becomes a symbol of our boundless remembrance and gratitude to our ancestors," Father Liu said. This was the first time that the church commemorates the departed on Lunar New Year's Eve. (*Faith Press*, February 18, 2024)

Baoding: Diocesan Display Hall Attracts Catholics and Others

Baoding Diocese's Exhibition Hall was open for ten days from February 10 to 19, 2024, presenting a detailed account of the history of the Baoding diocese, the bishops of the diocese, and activities of the parishes in the construction and development of the diocese. The old photos of Baoding before and after 1949 had attracted many visitors. The display hall is located in the compound of the bishop's house.

During the exhibition days, long queues were seen outside the hall. Many said the display had enriched the Catholics' knowledge about the Church, and interested many to learn about the development of Catholic Church in Baoding diocese. (*Faith Press*, February 20, 2024)

March 2024

Xiamen Diocese Launches Year of the Catechism in 2024

On March 1, 2023, the Diocese of Xiamen launched a 12-month "Year of Catechesis," which aims to deepen the study and understanding of Catholic catechesis among the faithful. The diocese arranges the faithful to study catechism before Sunday Masses. Catechism for Youth on Saturdays. Courses are designed to provide more

opportunities for the faithful to learn more about Catholic doctrine. The parishes' catechism classes of Xiamen focuses on promoting communion and exchange among the faithful from all over the world, and encouraging the faithful to practice their faith in their daily lives. (*Faith Press*, March 1, 2024)

Catholics at National People's Congress and People's Political Consultative Conference

At the NPC and the CPPCC, 13 bishops and priests attended the meetings in Beijing. The CPPCC session was held on March 4, 11 members from the Catholic sector attended. Bishops Li Shan, Shen Bin, Fang Xingyao, Guo Jincai, Yang Yongqiang, Yue Fusheng, Meng Qinglu, Lei Shiyin, Cai Bingrui, Wang Yuesheng, and Father Wu Jianlin. The NPC was attended by Bishops Huang Bingzhang of Shantou and Fang Jianping of Tangshan. (*Faith Press*, March 2024)

Third Christian-Taoist Dialogue between Vatican and Hong Kong

According to the press release of the Vatican Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue on March 9, 2024, the Dicastery, in cooperation with the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong and the Taoist Association of Hong Kong, organized the Third Christian-Taoist Dialogue, which took place on March 11–13, 2024 at the Yuen Yuen Institute, Hong Kong. The theme of the colloquium was “Cultivating a harmonious

society through interreligious dialogue.” The participants were Christian and Taoist believers and scholars from Hong Kong, Mainland China, France, Italy, Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Singapore. The press release of the Dicastery said that such colloquium “will provide a platform for both Christians and Taoists to deepen their mutual understanding, to fathom how disharmony generates pain and suffering, and also to work together to heal today’s fragmented world.” The Secretary of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, Msgr. Indunil Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage, described the meeting as “a moment of profound openness and mutual listening.” Previous dialogues took place in Taiwan in 2016 and in Singapore in 2018. (*AsiaNews*, March 15, 2024; Press Release of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, March 9, 2024)

140 catechumens baptized at Beijing Cathedral at Easter vigil

On March 30, 2024, Bishop Li Shan of Beijing presided over the Easter Vigil at the Cathedral (North Church) of Xishiku, and administered the sacrament of initiation for more than 140 catechumens. Bishop Li said that the resurrection of Christ has brought light to people, expelled the darkness in our hearts, and with hope and peace. (*Faith Press*, April 3, 2024)

400 catechumens in Shanghai received the sacrament of initiation

According to preliminary statistics reported by the parishes of Shanghai diocese, a total of 470 people in the diocese of Shanghai have been baptized this year. Of these, 349 received the sacrament of initiation during Easter this year, 64 made up and 57 received baptism on weekdays. (*Faith Press*, April 9, 2024)

April 2024

Bishop of Macau visits Shanghai

Bishop Stephen Lee Bun-sheng of the Diocese of Macao led a delegation to visit Shanghai diocese from April 25 to 26. The Catholics from Macao visited Shanghai for exchange and dialogue. During their visit, they met with government officials from Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs, leaders of the Shanghai Catholic bodies, and some priests of the Diocese of Shanghai. (*Faith Press*, April 29, 2024)

Cardinal Chow and Church leaders of Hong Kong visit Guangdong dioceses

The Bishop of the Hong Kong Diocese, Cardinal Stephen Chow, led a delegation of ten members on an exchange visit to the dioceses of Guangzhou and Shantou. The

group included Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha, three Vicars General—Fathers Peter Choy, Paul Kam, and Joseph Chan—as well as a priest, a permanent deacon, and three laypeople. From April 22 to 26, the delegation visited key religious sites, including the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Guangzhou, St. Joseph's Cathedral and other churches in Shantou and Shenzhen. They engaged in Mass celebrations and exchange activities with local clergy and members of the dioceses. The delegation met with Bishops Gan Junqiu of Guangzhou, Huang Bingzhang of Shantou, and Su Yongda of Zhanjiang (formerly Beihai), as well as local Catholics. This marks Cardinal Chow's first official visit to Guangdong Province. He emphasized that the Hong Kong Diocese, as a “bridge church,” does not merely contribute to the mainland church but seeks equal mutual appreciation and learning. “My deepest experience is the feeling of being part of a family within the church, which fills me with joy,” he said. Cardinal Chow also extended an invitation to mainland church members to visit Hong Kong for further exchanges. (*Kung Kao Po*, May 3, 2024; *Faith Press*, April 30, 2024)

May 2024

Qingyang Marian Shrine of Nanjing opens for pilgrimage in May

Since mid-April, thousands of Catholics gathered at the Church of Our Lady of Qingyang, Diocese of Nanjing. On April 30, 2024, Bishop Lu Xiping of Nanjing led the faithful to hold a procession to welcome Our Lady and preside over the Mass. More than 6,000 Catholics from Nanjing and other dioceses participated in Mass. More than 20 priests of the Diocese concelebrated. In his homily, Bishop Lu reminded the faithful to follow the virtues of Our Lady at all times, and “constantly improve and enhance our faith.” (*Faith Press*, May 4, 2024)

Zhejiang: Catholic Church in Lishui consecrated and opens

On May 18, 2024, the Catholic Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Lishui, Zhejiang Province was opened. Nearly 2,000 sisters and laypeople attended. The sisters were from the Infant Teresa Church of Wenzhou Diocese, and representatives of the parish gathered together with the local parishioners to celebrate this day long-awaited. The Mass was officiated by Father Ma Xianshi, the priest in charge of (official side of) Diocese of Wenzhou, and more than 20 priests concelebrated. (*Faith Press*, May 21, 2024)

Symposium for Centenary for Shanghai Council draws scholars and church speakers from China and Vatican

At a symposium on the centenary of the Shanghai Synod, Pope Francis addressed participants via video, praising the clergy at the Shanghai Synod 100 years ago for experiencing the “spirit of synodality” and acknowledging the contributions of Chinese Catholics to fostering harmonious coexistence in society. On May 21, Pope Francis delivered a video message to the international conference held at the Pontifical Urban University. Speakers included Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, and the Bishop of Shanghai Joseph Shen Bin, alongside with scholars like Zheng Xiaoyun and Liu Guopeng from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The 1924 conference, held in Shanghai from May 15 to June 12, was a historic event. Under the guidance of Archbishop Celso Costantini, the first Apostolic Delegate to China, all Chinese bishops united. The conference aimed to implement Pope Benedict XV’s apostolic letter Maximum Illud, which encouraged localization, empowering Chinese bishops and priests to manage dioceses and parishes while eliminating colonial attitudes in Church practices. The event began with Pope Francis’s video address, emphasizing its significance. Cardinal Parolin reflected on the legacy of the 1924 gathering, describing it as a model for national episcopal conferences in missionary countries. He stressed

the continuing relevance of these historical events, particularly as the Church, under Pope Francis's guidance, embraces synodality and encourages active participation of God's people in church life. (*Vatican News*, May 21, 2024)

June 2024

Bishop Yang Yongqiang of Zhoucun transferred to the diocese of Hangzhou

On June 22, 2024, Pope Francis appointed Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang, 57, as Bishop of Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, and transferred him from the Diocese of Zhoucun in Shandong Province to Hangzhou. The appointment was made within the framework of the agreement between the Holy See and China.

The inauguration of Bishop Yang took place on June 27, 2024 at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province. It was presided over by Father Zheng Jiamao, diocesan chancellor. Father Yang Yu, Secretary General of the bishops' council, read a letter of recognition. Bishop Shen Bin of Shanghai and Bishop Jin Yangke of Ningbo (Zhejiang) attended the ceremony. In his inaugural address, Bishop Yang said that he would unite and lead the priests and the faithful to promote the healthy transmission of the Catholic faith and to proclaim the Gospel in Hangzhou. "We will contribute

to the development of Zhejiang Province, the sinicization of religious practices and the modernization of the management of religious affairs,” he said.

Bishop Yang was born on April 11, 1970 in Boxing, Shandong, to a Catholic family. In 1987, he entered the Holy Spirit Seminary in Jinan, and then Sheshan Seminary in Shanghai. He was ordained a priest on June 5, 1995. He was appointed coadjutor bishop of Zhoucun and was ordained on November 15, 2010. On February 8, 2013, he succeeded Bishop Ma Xuesheng at the head of the diocese. In October 2023, Bishop Yang participated in the 16th World Synod of Bishops, together with Bishop Yao Shun of Jining, on the theme of the communal Church: communion, participation and mission. Bishop Young told Fides that he was “honored” to be invited to the Synod in Rome, which he sees as an opportunity to “share his own faith journey and at the same time listen to the journey of others”.

There are 30,000 Catholics in the Hangzhou diocese. The diocesan episcopal see had been vacant for a long time. On June 25, 2000, Father Cao Xiangde was ordained as Bishop of Hangzhou without papal approval. Subsequently, on June 8, 2008, the Holy See recognized his episcopal status, but did not grant him jurisdiction. Bishop Cao passed away on July 9, 2021, at the age of 92 due to a chronic illness. (*Holy See Bulletin*, June 22, 2024; *Faith Press, AsiaNews*, 27 June 2024)

August 2024

Pope Expresses Desire to Meet Bishops and Faithful in China

Pope Francis praised the people of God in China as possessing “great faith” and being “teachers of hope,” during an interview with Father Pedro Chia, Director of the Press Office of the Chinese Province of the Society of Jesus. The interview, recorded on May 24, 2024, was made public on August 9, 2024. Pope Francis expressed his wish to visit the shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai. When asked what message he would send to young Chinese Catholics, Pope Francis responded with the word “Hope.” He further explained, “It seems tautological to me to give a message of hope to a people who are masters of hope and of patience in waiting.” (*America*, August 9, 2024)

Consecration of Apostles’ Cemetery in Inner Mongolia, Honoring CICM Missionaries

On August 17, 2024, a consecration Mass for the Apostles’ Cemetery (使徒陵園) was held at the Church in Ershiqingdi (二十四頃地天主堂), Baotou, Inner Mongolia. The liturgy was presided over by Bishop Meng Qinglu (孟青祿) of Hohhot, with concelebration by Bishop Yao Shun (姚順) of the Ulanqab Diocese, Bishop Du Jiang (杜江) of Bayan Nur Diocese, and 18 priests from various dioceses. Nearly 1,000 sisters and faithful attended the Mass.

The Ershiqingdi Church, built in 1902, has been a witness to the dedication of 84 CICM missionaries in evangelization, education, and charity over the years. Faith Press reported that 35 bishops, priests, and sisters were buried in Ershiqingdi. The parish priest and parishioners helped transfer their remains to the Apostles' Cemetery. In 1880, Ershiqingdi Village was founded after a CICM priest purchased the land and distributed it to farmers who were subsequently baptized. The number of faithful increased, leading to the construction of a cathedral and more churches in the neighboring villages. In his homily, Bishop Yao stated that the consecration was also a spiritual baptism and a gathering of faith. After the Mass, the faithful visited the Ershiqingdi Church, which displays artifacts, Church documents, and artworks related to the parish's history. (*Faith Press*, August 21, 2024; *Xinhua*, May 19, 2012)

11th European Catholic China Colloquium Focuses on Youth in China

Hosted by China-Zentrum, the 11th European Catholic China Colloquium took place in Santkt Augustin, Germany, with nearly 120 attendees from about 15 countries. Among the participants were approximately 50 laypeople, scholars, religious women, and priests from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and individuals residing in Europe. Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne attended the meeting. The theme of the colloquium centered on youth in China.

Cardinal Stephen Chow discussed youth ministry in Hong Kong, highlighting several initiatives led by the Diocesan Youth Commission to engage and support young people. Given the significant number of Catholic schools in Hong Kong, engaging in pastoral work with youth in schools is crucial for nurturing their faith. Father Bruno Lepeu of the Paris Foreign Missions Society shared insights on how the youth in China are revitalizing the life of the Church with their faith, providing a sense of hope. Despite facing challenges to their faith, the youth actively engage in Bible reading, trust in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and embrace their baptismal mission. This has led to the formation of a vibrant and participatory Catholic community.

Gao Shining and He Guanghu, two renowned scholars of Christianity from Beijing, spoke about recent theological developments in China. They noted that Christian theology in China now grapples with complex issues arising from the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, global conflicts, the emergence of extreme nationalism, and a tendency towards centralized thinking. (*Sunday Examiner*, August 30, 2024; *AsiaNews*, August 25, 2024)

Unofficial Bishop Stephen Shi Hongzhen Recognized as Bishop of Tianjin

The Chinese authorities have officially recognized the 94-year-old Bishop Stephen Shi Hongzhen as the bishop of the Northern Tianjin Diocese. Since 2005, the diocese had

been without an “official” bishop. This appointment was made within the framework of the provisional agreement between China and the Vatican on bishop appointments, as reported by the Chinese Catholic Church Network and confirmed by Vatican News. Bishop Shi, who had been detained for many years, was visited by Archbishop Celli, a Vatican diplomat, during the Vatican delegation’s trip to China in October 2022. During the visit, Archbishop Celli presented Bishop Shi with a bishop’s pectoral cross on behalf of Pope Francis. On August 27, 2024, the Vatican issued a statement: “The Holy See is pleased to learn that Bishop Stephen Shi Hongzhen has been officially recognized today as the Bishop of Tianjin. This is a positive result of years of dialogue between the Holy See and the Chinese government.”

Born on October 7, 1929, in Tianjin, Bishop Shi was ordained a priest in 1954. In 1982, he was consecrated as auxiliary bishop by Bishop Li Side, under authorization from the Holy See. Bishop Li had his freedom restricted until his death in 2019. Throughout his life, Bishop Shi refused to join the Patriotic Association and was never recognized by Beijing as a bishop.

According to Vatican announcements, the Tianjin Diocese consists of approximately 56,000 faithful spread across 21 parishes, served by 62 priests and numerous nuns. (*Holy See Bulletin*, Catholic Church in China, *AsiaNews*, August 27, 2024)

September 2024

Pope Francis: Satisfied with Agreement, China Brings Hope and Prospects to the Church

Onboard the papal plane returning from Singapore September 13, 2024, Pope Francis expressed his satisfaction with the renewal of the provisional agreement between China and the Vatican. He said: “I am pleased with the dialogue with China. The results are good. Even for the appointment of bishops, things are progressing with goodwill. I have spoken with the Secretariat of State, and I am happy with how things are going. As for China, I see China as an aspiration, meaning I would like to visit China. It’s a great country, and I admire and respect China.

“It’s a country with an ancient culture. China’s capacity for dialogue to understand each other goes beyond the different systems of government it has had. I believe China is a promise and a hope for the Church. Collaboration is possible, and certainly regarding conflicts. Cardinal Zuppi is working in this area, and he has contacts with China.”
(*Vatican News*, September 13, 2024)

October 2024

Two Bishops from Mainland China Participate Fully for the First Time in Second Session of Synod in Rome

Two bishops from Mainland China, Yang Yongqiang and Zhan Silu, greeted other delegates at the Synod on Synodality, reflecting on the faith and communion of Chinese Catholics. “The Church in China is the same as the Catholic Church in other countries of the world: we belong to the same faith, share the same baptism, and we are all faithful to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,” said Bishop Yang.

This marked the third instance of two bishops from China participating, following previous occasions in 2018 and 2023 (the Synod on Youth and the first session of the Synod on Synodality). Before the signing of the Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement in 2018, bishops from mainland China were unable to participate in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) or the subsequent Synods of Bishops. Bishop Yang recalled these gatherings in communion with the universal Church. “We follow the evangelical spirit of ‘becoming all things to all people,’” he said. “We effectively adapt to society, serve it, adhere to the direction of the sinicization of Catholicism, and preach the Good News.” The bishop extended “a welcome” to Catholic communities from all countries who wish to visit the Church in China. Bishop Zhan Silu focused his

remarks on the history of Christianity in China, recalling the figure of the Jesuit missionary, Fr. Matteo Ricci, and his “experiment” to “adapt the Christian Gospel to different human practices.” “Being a synodal Church engaged in the mission of evangelization,” continued Bishop Zhan, “means respecting and listening to the voices of different stories, cultures, and traditions in the journey of seeking humanity’s ultimate goal, which is God.” (*Vatican News*, October 17, 2024)

Study Sessions for Superiors of Sisters’ Congregations

The second national study session for superiors of Sisters’ congregations in 2024 took place from October 9 to 14 at the Catholic Training Centre in Hengyang, Hunan Province. Organized by the Sisters’ Section of the Chinese Catholic “Yi-hui-yi-tuan” (Patriotic Association and Bishops’ Council), the session was attended by forty-nine sisters from across the country. The sisters reflected on the responsibilities of today’s religious leaders by studying biblical figures, and discussed how to advance the work and undertakings of the congregations today. The sisters emphasized promoting Bible study to inspire enthusiasm among parishioners. They expressed the need to remain steadfast in their faith, with the “Word of God” as a guiding light in their lives. They also highlighted the importance of continuous improvement in virtue and skills, adhering to the sinicization of Catholicism in China, and better serving the Church and society to contribute to Chinese-style

modernization. The study session also included lectures on management for sisters, the role of sisters in a synodal Church, and contemporary religious vocations for sisters. Earlier, the first study session for superiors of Sisters' congregations took place from July 27 to August 2, 2024 in Chengde. Thirty-six sisters from different parts of the country participated. (Catholic Church in China, October 24, 2024; *Faith Press*, August 3, 2024)

15 Bishops Take Part in Retreat at National Seminary

A retreat themed “Walking Together, Encountering the Lord” was held at the Chinese Catholic Theological Seminary in Beijing. This retreat was organized by the Patriotic Association and Bishops’ Council, co-hosted by the National Seminary. Father Zhang Shijiang, Deputy Director of the Hebei Provincial Committee for Catholic Church Affairs, leading the retreat. Fifteen bishops from various dioceses across the country participated.

During the retreat, Father Zhang accompanied the bishops in delving into the mysteries of the Bible and experiencing God’s infinite mercy and salvation. Each day focused on a specific theme: “Letting Go of Everything,” “Mother of Heaven, Shepherd’s Model,” “Discern and Obey, Fulfill the Lord’s Will,” and “Healing and Reconciliation, the presence of the Kingdom.” They shared and reflected on how to emulate the resilience and compassion of the Virgin Mary in their pastoral careers, how to navigate both favorable and adverse conditions, seek God’s guidance

and companionship in solitude, and find inner peace and strength through Jesus' mercy and healing. (*Faith Press*, October 22, 2024)

Extension of Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement for Four Years Regarding the Appointment of Bishops

The Vatican's communiqué on October 22, 2024, states: "In light of the consensus reached for an effective application of the Provisional Agreement regarding the Appointment of Bishops, after appropriate consultation and assessment, the Holy See and the People's Republic of China have agreed to further extend its validity for four years from the present date. "The Vatican Party remains dedicated to furthering respectful and constructive dialogue with the Chinese Party, in view of the further development of bilateral relations for the benefit of the Catholic Church in China and the Chinese people as a whole."

The *Associated Press* reported that China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Lin Jian, confirmed the extension, saying, "The two sides will maintain contact and dialogue in a constructive spirit and continue to promote the improvement of China-Vatican relations."

This is the third renewal of the Agreement, which, with its signing on September 22, 2018, opened a historic chapter in relations between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China, and within the Church itself in China. The Agreement has allowed all bishops to be in full hierarchical

communion with the Pope. The new signatures affixed by both parties extend the Provisional Agreement's validity for another four years, following the first renewal for a two-year period on October 22, 2020.

The Agreement ended decades of episcopal ordinations without papal consent, leading to significant changes over the past six years. Since then, about ten bishops have been appointed and consecrated, and Beijing has officially recognized the public role of several previously unrecognized bishops. (*Vatican News, Holy See Bulletin, Associated Press*, October 22, 2024)

Episcopal Ordination of Coadjutor Bishop Zhen Xuebin of Beijing

On October 25, 2024, the episcopal ordination of Matthew Zhen Xuebin (甄雪斌), appointed by the Holy Father as coadjutor bishop of Beijing on August 28, 2024, took place. The candidature was approved within the framework of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China. Bishop Li Shan of Beijing presided over the episcopal ordination.

Bishop Matthew Zhen was born in Changzhi, Shanxi, on May 10, 1970. From 1988 to 1993, he studied at the Philosophical and Theological Seminary of Beijing; from 1993 to 1997, he continued his studies at Saint John's University in the United States, obtaining a licentiate in liturgy. On June 25, 1998, he was ordained a priest and was

incardinated in the diocese of Beijing. From 1998 to 2007, he served as vice-rector of the Seminary of Beijing. He then ministered in various parishes in the city. Since 2007, he has served as diocesan chancellor. (*Holy See Press Office*, Catholic Church in China, October 25, 2024)

Tangshan: Priests and Sisters Participate in Marathon Race

On October 27, 2024, twenty-six priests, sisters, and parishioners from Tangshan Diocese (Hebei) participated in the Tangshan Marathon. The international sports event attracted 20,000 participants from 13 countries and regions. The Catholic runners formed a small but enthusiastic group. For several years, the Catholics of Tangshan Diocese have taken part in this event to show their gratitude to God for the gift of life. They believe that Christians should live a healthy life and bear witness to their faith. The Catholic runners emphasized that life and faith require a marathon spirit of positivity, perseverance, and mutual encouragement. (*Faith Press*, October 27, 2024)

December 2024

Mainland Catholic communities begin the Jubilee of Hope

The dioceses in China celebrated the start of the Jubilee Year on December 28. In Beijing, priests, sisters, and laypeople gathered in front of the Cathedral of Saint Saviour. Bishop Joseph Li Shan and Coadjutor Bishop Matthew Zhen Xuebin presided over the opening ceremony, during which the *Spes non confundit*, the papal bull proclaiming the Jubilee, was read aloud. The diocese also dedicated the Jubilee Year to the Family.

In Hangzhou (Zhejiang), Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang, who attended the Synod of Bishops in Rome, encouraged the faithful to “treasure this Jubilee” and grow in faith, hope, and charity. The diocese has designed a “Jubilee map” that includes designated pilgrimage churches, highlighting St. Peter’s Basilica and the image of “Luce,” the little pilgrim doll symbol of the Jubilee.

In Shanxi, Bishop Paul Meng Ningyou of Taiyuan emphasized that the Jubilee is an opportunity to recognize that “our greatest hope is in God” and to spread this light to every corner of the world. Bishop Peter Ding Lingbin of Lu'an encouraged the faithful to embark on a “pilgrimage of hope, guided by the glorious Cross of Christ.”

The Jubilee message resonated strongly among Catholics from ethnic minority groups in Yunnan and Guizhou

provinces. These faithful participated in processions wearing their traditional costumes and playing native music. In Guiyang, Bishop Paul Xiao Zejiang invited priests, religious leaders, and the faithful to “actively participate in the Jubilee with faith, allowing hope to shine in their hearts and in the world.”

In Handan (Hebei), Bishop Joseph Sun Jigen presided over a solemn celebration where Father Xu Shuwen explained the spirit of the Jubilee and the special conditions for obtaining the plenary indulgence during this time of grace.
(*Agenzia Fides, Faith Press*, December 31, 2024)