
Catholic Church Update: October 2009

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ASIA/CHINA

Large attendance at perpetual vows of 5 religious from Franciscan Order of the Child Jesus, on the First Sunday of the Missionary Month

Yi Chang (Agenzia Fides) – Five religious sisters of the Franciscan Order of the Child Jesus in the Diocese of Yi Chang made their perpetual vows on the First Sunday of the Missionary Month of October. According to information sent to Agenzia Fides, the celebration was presided by the local Bishop Lv Shou Wang, and concelebrated by 25 priests. Another 24 sisters and over 400 faithful participated in this joyful moment for the religious, their congregation, and for the diocese.

The long history of the evangelization of the Diocese of Yi Chang, in the Province of Hu Bei, dates back to 1661, to French Jesuit Fr. Jacobus Motel, and later, Italian Jesuit Fr. Francesco Noel, from 1702-1719. In 1870, the Holy See entrusted the mission of E Nan, of which Yi Chang was a part, to Belgian Franciscans. The Apostolic Vicariate was established in 1924 and then the Diocese, in 1946 – the year in which the Chinese hierarchy was established. Today, the Diocese has over 25,000 faithful, 22 priests, 40 religious sisters of the Franciscan Order of the Child Jesus, 6 parishes, 13 churches, and 8 missionary stations.

The Franciscans of the Child Jesus has had three “founders” in its history: Bishop Alessio Maria Filippi, OFM, Bishop Benjamin Christiaens, OFM, and Bishop Theotime Verhaeghen OFM, who formed a group of consecrated virgins who lived in community. On this solid foundation, Bishop Modest Euerets, OFM, founded the order on November 18, 1906, with 7 novices, entrusting their spiritual care to Fr. Mancel Sterckensies, OFM. Five years later, they were already 45 religious. A branch of the congregation was founded in Tai Pei in 1957. After the cultural revolution, the Diocese of Yi Chang decided to restart the Congregation. The religious today are active in pastoral care and healthcare. They also work in printing/publishing, in collaboration with secular entities. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 12/10/2009)

VATICAN 'Significant similarities' between Churches in Asia and Africa

By Gerard O'Connell, Special Correspondent in Rome

October 8, 2009 | ZY08043.1570

VATICAN CITY (UCAN) -- Despite differences, the Churches in Asia and Africa bear striking similarities, the secretary general of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) told participants of the ongoing Synod of Bishops for Africa.

Filipino Archbishop Orlando Quevedo made this observation when he delivered one of five "continental" reports at the meeting which opened in the Vatican on Oct. 4 and which is set to conclude on Oct. 24. Other reports came from Latin America, North America, Europe and Oceania, presented by a bishop from each region.

The second Synod for Africa, which the African bishops requested, focuses on: "The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace."

The synod's theme "resonates deeply with Asian aspirations of the Church in Asia," Archbishop Quevedo told the assembly. It included some 200 bishops from Africa's 53 countries, representatives from other continental episcopal conferences and heads of 25 Roman Curia offices, including the only other Asian prelate — Indian Cardinal Ivan Dias, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

Archbishop Quevedo began by listing some of the "similarities." For the most part, the Church in both continents "is young," he said.

While Christianity reached India and North Africa in the Apostolic age, it was introduced to most countries in both continents mainly by foreign missionaries during the colonial period, and especially in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Among other "significant and striking similarities" between Africa and Asia, Archbishop Quevedo listed "the richness of cultures, the trove of cherished, truly human traditional family values, the thousands of languages spoken, the encounter between Christianity, Islam, and indigenous traditional religions."

Both Africa and Asia "are continents of the poor and of the young," he observed.

The Asian prelate pointed to "striking similarities" in the apostolic exhortations "Ecclesia in

Africa” (1995) and “Ecclesia in Asia” (1999), which Pope John Paul II issued after the 1994 African synod and the 1998 Asian synod.

He said both exhortations identified pastoral challenges facing the Church today. He cited inculturation and interreligious dialogue, an emerging relativistic and materialistic culture promoted by the instruments of social communication and the negative impact of economic globalization on the poor.

He said the exhortations also pointed to the decline of moral values in social, economic and political life and the continuing threats to the very nature of marriage and the family, and the various faces of injustice and violent conflict that ruin the harmony of African and Asian societies.

Archbishop Quevedo noted that both the Churches in Africa and Asia are raising similar questions: What are we as a community of disciples, as Church? How are we to be credible witnesses of the Lord Jesus and his Gospel? How should we respond to the many complex pastoral challenges that confront us in our mission to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior?

While the Church in Africa “is exploring the theological and pastoral implications of the Church as the Family of God,” he said, the Church in Asia has opted “to explore in the Asian context the theology of Church as communion and as humble servant of the Gospel and of Asian peoples.” This approach has opened the possibility for an “ongoing radical renewal of the Church in Asia, an option more of being than of doing,” he stated.

He informed synod participants that since its establishment 35 years ago, the FABC has sought to renew the Church in Asia through promotion of a deeper spiritual interiority, and of dialogue with Asia’s cultures, its ancient religious and philosophical traditions, and its peoples, especially with the poor.

Pointing to the frequency of typhoons, floods, droughts, earthquakes and tsunamis in Asia, Archbishop Quevedo said all these demand “our pastoral collective concern regarding global warming and climate change.”

He said both the Churches in Africa and in Asia “experience great joy and hope” in the movements of justice and peace — shown by the growing awareness of young people, women and civil society groups “pushing for integrity in public life and advocating the care and integrity of creation.”

Pope Benedict XVI was present in the synod hall when Archbishop Quevedo spoke. The FABC official concluded his talk by turning to him and saying, “May we invite you, beloved Holy Father, to visit our region in the near future.”

CHINA Catholics celebrate National Day with prayers, singing contest

October 7, 2009 | CH08042.1570

SHENZHEN, China (UCAN) -- Young Catholics have celebrated the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in their own way – by praying for the country and its future.

As other Chinese were celebrating the Oct. 1 National Day with fireworks and performances, one group of Catholic teenagers and young adults organized a candlelight prayer gathering at the seaside to mark the occasion.

Father Hu Qinghua, pastor of the Bao'an Church in Shenzhen city, southern China, led some 10 parishioners to Xichong beach, a scenic spot at the eastern edge of the special economic zone on the evening of Oct. 2, the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels.

There they prayed for Chinese fisher folk, the victims of natural disasters in Taiwan and elsewhere in Asia, and asked for God's providence for the Chinese people.

They placed 60 candles on the beach in the shape of a heart with a cross inside. They also prayed that they would be "salt and light," able to share the love of Christ with others.

The prayer meeting helped the busy youngsters refresh themselves spiritually as well as physically, a participant told UCA News.

Some curious passersby were attracted by the reflective atmosphere and even joined in the prayers.

It followed other celebrations round the country by Catholics combining their love of God with their love for their nation.

In southwestern China, Nanchong diocese in Sichuan organized a singing contest on Sept. 26 themed "Celebrating the National Day, promoting evangelization." The competition attracted eight choirs from seven parishes in seven cities as well as one formed by priests and nuns. In all there were about 200 participants.

Each choir performed two songs, one praising the country and the other praising the Blessed Mother. Their voices attracted many non-Catholics to the cathedral.

Sister Teresa Wang Yan of Nanchong told UCA News that after the contest some visitors asked if they could join the church choirs. “They told us they were touched by our singing and that they did not expect the Catholic Church to hold a ... celebration for National Day,” she said.

Catholic participants said they prayed for the country’s prosperity and for the Church to develop further so as to meet the challenges of the time.

Some dioceses in the mainland also organized celebrations for the Communist regime’s 60th anniversary, but UCA News learned that some dioceses chose to celebrate in a low key manner with just a Mass.

Meanwhile, Chinese authorities have tightened control over some mainland Catholic websites and some “underground” Catholic communities, apparently to ensure social stability before National Day.

In September in Yunnan province, neighboring Sichuan to the south, four policemen entered the apartment of Father Lawrence Zhang Wenchang, who was celebrating a Mass. Father Zhang, administrator of Kunming diocese, is not recognized by the government. Although the police allowed the Mass to proceed, they photographed each participant and recorded their identity card numbers, home addresses and contact numbers.

“Such a thing had not happened here before,” a Church source told UCA News.

Father Zhang has been living under police surveillance for years. He is unable to make calls from his phone to places outside the province, the source said.

He speculated that the reason for the latest intrusion was that local authorities may have been alarmed by the increasing number of laypeople turning to the underground community and refusing to receive sacraments administered by Bishop Joseph Ma Yinglin of Kunming. Many laypeople object to the leadership of Bishop Ma, who is not papally approved.

CHINA Underground Bishop of Wenzhou dies on episcopal anniversary

October 5, 2009 | CH08030.1570

WENZHOU, China (UCAN) -- Bishop James Lin Xili of Wenzhou died at the age of 91 on Oct. 4, the 17th anniversary of his episcopal ordination, which the Chinese government did not recognize.

The Vatican-approved bishop was transferred from a hospital in Wenzhou to Qiligang church in Yueqing, 45 kilometers away, shortly before he died that evening.

Church sources told UCA News the funeral is scheduled for Oct. 10 in Qiligang church.

The church, located away from the center of Yueqing and administered by the diocese's "open" Church community, was designated for the funeral "under an arrangement of the local government," the sources said.

The situation in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, has been tense since the ailing bishop's health took a critical turn for the worse in late September. A Wenzhou-based Catholic website was closed down after it published the bishop's obituary and photos of his last days. The site included tributes from Catholics in various provinces around the country.

Government officials had feared social instability if the bishop died on or before Oct. 1, the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, and crowds of Catholics gathered, especially from the underground community.

Some living outside Zhejiang had indicated they would return home for the funeral if he died.

Bishop Lin's relatives and followers hoped to hold a funeral befitting a bishop's status, in the biggest church in Yueqing, but government officials opposed that, they said.

About 120,000 Catholics come from Wenzhou. They live and do business in various parts of China.

Since Pope Benedict XVI issued his letter to Catholics in China in 2007, the 19 open clergy and 18 underground clergy of Wenzhou diocese have striven to reconcile and reach communion.

Father Vincent Zhu Weifang, vicar general for the open Church community, heads the funeral committee and Father Peter Shao Zhumin, vicar general for the underground

community, is deputy.

Father Shao, 46, told UCA News that Bishop Lin was gentle, kindhearted and “never made decisions in a rush.” When Bishop Lin disagreed with certain ideas, “he usually remained silent but smiled,” the priest recalled. “Then we understood and sought his opinion.”

Born on Oct. 19, 1918 in Yueqing, the future bishop entered Ningbo (Ningpo) diocese's St. Vincent Seminary in 1931. He was ordained a priest on June 3, 1944, and entered Fu Jen Catholic University in Beijing three months later.

After he graduated in 1948, he returned to Ningbo diocese for pastoral work and also served as the principal of a Church-run secondary school until 1955. He was named by Bishop Andre-Jean-Francois Defebvre of Ningbo as one of the diocesan administrators during the political turmoil in the 1950s.

However, he was arrested in 1955 for “counter-revolutionary crimes” and was sentenced to 16 years’ imprisonment and hard labor. He worked as a cobbler and resumed his pastoral ministry in 1971 after his release. From 1978 he administered pastoral work in Yueqing and helped restore old churches and build new ones in the diocese.

He was clandestinely ordained on Oct. 4, 1992, as the first bishop of Wenzhou, which the Vatican had formally created from Ningbo in 1949, and the local Church developed rapidly under his leadership. He was forced into hiding to escape arrest in 1998 but was discovered the following year and detained.

Bishop Lin had been under house arrest in Church premises in Wenzhou while in and out of hospital for treatment of Alzheimer’s disease since 2000. He had been hospitalized as his condition worsened from 2005 onwards.

Public security officers had imposed strict surveillance then “and even after he died,” Church sources said.

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ASIA/CHINA**

Catholic workers of the Catholic Social Services Center of Shanghai on pilgrimage to Shrine of “Rosary Village” in the Diocese of Fu Zhou

Shanghai (Agenzia Fides) - "The pilgrimage has given us a spiritual boost that helps us to live our faith as all Christians, but also to better carry out our mission in social services and Catholic ministry." This is what the Catholics of the "Paul Xu" Catholic Social Services Center of Shanghai said, as they returned from their pilgrimage to the famous Marian Shrine of "Rosary Village" in the Diocese of Fu Zhou. Rosary, Way of the Cross, Eucharist, and meditation were the main highlights of the pilgrimage, which was held September 19-21.

According to the pilgrims' testimony, sent to Agenzia Fides, "no one felt tired after the plane ride of nearly 3 hours and the car ride of almost an hour. As soon as we stepped off the plane, we began to admire the beauty of creation and praise the Lord: the sea, the mountains...When we reached the Village, we were amazed at this miracle of the Lord: the transformation of the terrain amidst the wonders of nature, where we could perceive the 'aroma' of Marian spirituality." The 21 employees of the Center also visited the elementary school that had been constructed by the 280,000 Yuan (nearly 30,000 Euros) they had raised. They met with the students there and those responsible for their education, all of whom thanked the Catholic association. In addition, the leader of the pilgrimage, Sr. Pan, spoke to the children and told them the story of Paul Xu, patron of the Center, who was the first Catholic intellectual and Mandarin Chinese to be baptized by Fr. Matteo Ricci. He then encouraged the children to imitate Paul Xu's example, becoming good citizens and good Christians. They then taught them how to pray together, with the public functionaries present, asking that Love may abound more and more and invoking the protection and assistance of the Blessed Virgin Mary. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 02/10/2009)
