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## 15 Articles

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AsiaNews - www.asianews.it

09/17/2009 13:44

CHINA

Ye Xiaowen, party hound on Vatican and religions, is promoted

by Bernardo Cervellera

He is now Party secretary of the Central Institute for socialism with the rank of minister. Under his direction, the Religious Affairs Bureau has persecuted underground Christian communities, Tibetans, Falun Gong. He did not want Benedict XVI to publish the letter to Chinese Catholics and blocked its circulation in China. Wang Zuoan, of the same ideological approach, takes his place.

Rome (AsiaNews) - Ye Xiaowen, the man who for 15 years led the ministry for religious affairs, has been promoted to party secretary of the Central Institute for socialism with the rank of minister. Ye was one of the greatest obstacles to China's dialogue with the Vatican and his promotion brings no hope for a relaxation of relations between Beijing and the Holy See. The outlook looks no better, considering that he is to be replaced by Wang Zuoan who has a similar ideological approach.

Ye, 59, was born in Guizhou. Since the early 90s he has worked in the United Front and the Ethnic and Religious Affairs. In 1995 he became director of the Office for Religious Affairs (with the rank of deputy minister), which at the time went by the name of "the State Administration for Religious Affairs."

Under his direction the first Regulations of religious activity were launched, which defined as "legal" only those whose activities, personnel and places of worship were registered, branding all meetings and activities of underground communities "illegal." Thanks to these rules one of the most violent and widespread attempts to wipe out the underground Catholic Church began, which led to the arrests of bishops and priests, to the use of physical violence against the faithful and the destruction of places of worship.

In '95, under the Ye's direction the election of the 11th Panchen Lama also took place, as opposed to the one recognized by the Dalai Lama, increasing control over Tibetan Buddhism, to the point of demanding that all Buddhist reincarnation (even that of the Dalai Lama ) must have Party approval to be "true".

From '99 onwards, Ye has also led a campaign against the Falun Gong spiritual movement, resulting in the arrest of thousands of members accused of following an "evil cult", with a strange aftermath - denounced by that same movement - of "suicide" among prisoners members of the group.

A perfect representative of the idea that religions should be subservient to the power and supremacy of the Party, Ye has always hampered dialogue with the Vatican, sometimes using weak words to publicise Beijing's "openness".

His interviews with American media in February 2008 remain infamous, where Ye went to great lengths to proclaim the good prospects in diplomatic relations with the Holy See. Days later, in

March 2008, at home, he released a harsh interview against the "colonial" aims of the Vatican and Benedict XVI (cf. AsiaNews.it, 21/03/2008 The Vatican's "double face", according to Beijing; see also AsiaNews.it, 22/02/2008 China-Vatican relations, smoke and mirrors over the Olympics).

What happened in the drafting of the Letter of Benedict XVI to Chinese Catholics gives an idea of the type of dialogue Ye had in mind. As is known, the secretary of state, to show its goodwill, sent the draft of the letter to the Chinese government. It was Ye Xiaowen himself who wrote to the Vatican, demanding the publication and circulation of the papal document be blocked.

According to AsiaNews sources in China, the very publication of the Letter of Benedict XVI to Chinese Catholics, delayed the promotion of Ye to the rank of minister. For the party, in fact, only he could effectively hinder its circulation in China. Hours after publication, the Chinese web sites that had posted it were forced to withdraw it, other sites were obscured, priests were warned against its spread.

The latest feat of Ye Xiaowen was promoting a series of lectures to the bishops and priests on the kindness of the official religious policy of the Chinese government, 50 years since the founding of the Patriotic Association.

His departure from the Office for Religious Affairs is a promotion for his work, rather than a sign of policy change by China. His deputy, Wang Zuonan, 51, is known for his apparent affability, but his ideological position is the same as Ye: religious freedom is an innate right, only the party has the right to bestow or determine it.

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UCA News - [www.ucanews.com](http://www.ucanews.com)

CHINA 'Underground' Bishop Yu of Hanzhong dies at 90

September 17, 2009 | CH07938.1567

HANZHONG, China (UCAN) -- A low-key funeral has been held for Bishop Bartholomew Yu Chengti of Hanzhong, Shaanxi province, who died of stomach cancer on Sept. 14 at the age of 90.

Only around 1,000 Catholics were allowed to attend the Sept. 17 funeral at the rural church in Yuwang village, the bishop's hometown.

The elderly Vatican-approved bishop had ministered in the "underground" Church community since he was clandestinely ordained a bishop in 1981. He retired in 2003.

The Chinese government recognized him only as a priest, and local officials expressed "grave concern" over the funeral, but the diocese insisted on honoring him as a bishop. In the end, officials ordered that each parish send only a few representatives, and did not allow the diocese to publicize the obituary nor invite guests from outside Hanzhong.

Despite this official disapproval, a dozen priests from neighboring dioceses in Shaanxi, Gansu and Sichuan provinces joined Hanzhong diocese's 27 priests to concelebrate the funeral Mass and pay tribute to the highly respected prelate.

Bishop Louis Yu Runchen of Hanzhong, who is recognized by the government and in communion with the pope, presided at a requiem Mass in the morning. A memorial service and burial in the church compound followed.

However, authorities did not allow a planned funeral procession around the village, a common practice to honor a deceased person in northern China.

Bishop Bartholomew Yu had been hospitalized since April 13, Easter Monday. His condition steadily worsened until he could barely eat or drink and was kept alive by injections of nutrients. The hospital discharged him on Aug. 20 to spend his last days at the Yuwang church.

Bishop Louis Yu described the late prelate as "enthusiastic" in all aspects. "He performed pastoral work honestly and modestly, and won respect and support from his priests and laypeople," the 78-year-old prelate told UCA News.

The two bishops had worked together since the 1980s on the formation of priests, the restoration of a convent and Church properties, and the opening of new churches.

Catholics from the diocese's "open" and underground communities gradually put aside disputes and achieved reconciliation four years ago, according to Bishop Louis Yu.

A requiem Mass for the late Pope John Paul II in 2005 marked the first occasion that the two bishops and their priests celebrated together.

From then, all seven priests ordained by Bishop Bartholomew Yu and 20 priests ordained by Bishop Louis Yu concelebrated Chrism Masses together with both bishops on various occasions including Holy Thursday each year.

On Holy Thursday, diocesan priests traditionally join their bishop in blessing the oil used for baptism and other sacraments.

A Hanzhong priest ordained by the late Bishop Yu told UCA News the prelate had preserved his faith until the last moment of his life despite enduring much hardship.

"He taught us to fulfill priestly ministry and spread the Good News diligently. If we did our best to develop the Church's evangelization work, it would be a great consolation for his soul in heaven," he added.

Born in 1919, Bishop Yu entered the seminary when he was 17. He was ordained a priest in October 1949, the same year the Communists founded the People's Republic of China. He was imprisoned when the Church faced political turmoil in the 1950s but was released on parole after a few years due to illness.

He returned to the diocese and served in Chenggu county as religious activities gradually revived after the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

The bishop lived under government surveillance and faced official pressure even after his retirement.

Hanzhong diocese is home to an estimated 20,000 Catholics.

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"CathNews Asia" <dailynews@cathnewsasia.com>

Matteo Ricci

Published Date: September 15, 2009

Jesuit Father Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), whose death anniversary China is preparing to celebrate next year, arrived in the country in 1583. Wherever he went in the country, he discoursed with intellectuals and bureaucrats who appreciated his wide knowledge of geography, mathematics and science.

With the help of Jesuits and Chinese Catholic scholar Paul Xu Guangqi, he also published world maps and books in Chinese, as well as translating Confucian classics into Latin to introduce the dominant Chinese philosophy to Europe.

This video was produced by the Catholic News Agency TV.

VIDEO

Matteo Ricci (YouTube)

[http://www.cathnewsasia.com/2009/09/15/matteo-ricci/?awt\\_l=JhxJl&awt\\_m=leHmppiguwYDL0](http://www.cathnewsasia.com/2009/09/15/matteo-ricci/?awt_l=JhxJl&awt_m=leHmppiguwYDL0)

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CHINA Catholics in Hebei remember 'martyr' Bishop Han

September 15, 2009 | CH07922.1567

HANDAN, China (UCAN) -- More than 100 Catholics visited the grave of Bishop John Han Dingxiang of Yongnian on the second anniversary of his death. They prayed for his intercession to unite and protect Catholics in the diocese.

The late bishop, who had no affiliation with the government-approved "open" Church, was arrested in 1999 and died in detention on Sept. 9, 2007.

Government officials reportedly cremated him and buried his ashes in a public cemetery in Handan, a city in the southern part of Hebei province, within six hours of his death. Hebei mostly surrounds Beijing.

On the anniversary this year, Catholics began arriving at the grave, where Bishop Han's nephews greeted them, starting at 6 a.m. Some reported that laypeople had erected a crucifix on the tombstone and decorated it with flowers and red ribbons.

Priests from the "underground" and open Church communities presided at several requiem services held one after the other. About 100 laypeople attended the morning prayers and were reluctant to leave, witnesses said.

A seminarian told UCA News he felt touched by Bishop Han's witness of living a difficult and arduous life. He hoped the prelate would "pray for our diocese to achieve unity soon" and for his priestly vocation.

The territory of Handan diocese, set up by the open Church, includes that of Yongnian, set up by the Vatican decades ago and now an underground diocese.

In his elegiac prayer during one of the anniversary services at the graveyard, Father Peter Peng Jiandao praised Bishop Han's virtuousness, perseverance through hardship and loyalty to the Catholic faith.

The priest of Handan diocese told UCA News that many Catholics look upon Bishop Han as a martyr-saint. He pointed out that some sick people even brought home a pinch of earth from the prelate's gravesite to mix with water and drink, hoping the bishop's intercession could cure their sickness.

The first anniversary of the bishop's death coincided with the Paralympic Games held last year in Beijing. Catholic sources said local government officials warned Catholics not to visit Bishop Han's and plainclothes police were stationed in the cemetery to monitor those who paid tribute.

This year no police presence was visible and the requiem prayers proceeded smoothly.

Elsewhere, underground priests said memorial Masses for the bishop in their own parishes but some open parishes also held Masses to pray for the repose

of his soul, UCA News has learned.

An underground priest of Yongnian said he and dozens of Catholics celebrated a Mass at Bishop Han's grave on the previous weekend to avoid pressure or possible interferences from local government officials.

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UCA News - [www.ucanews.com](http://www.ucanews.com)

CHINA Bishop welcomes Catholic-Orthodox interaction

September 11, 2009 | CH07896.1566

QIQIHAR, China (UCAN) -- A Catholic bishop in northeastern China says he is looking forward to more dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox Christians following the consecration of a Russian Orthodox church in a remote city.

Bishop Joseph Wei Jingyi of Qiqihar in Heilongjiang province noted there has been little contact between the two Churches in E'erguna, near the Russian border.

He said he hopes this will change following the consecration of St. Innocent of Irkutsk Church in the city, located in the Hulunbuir region, on Aug. 30.

The current number of Russian Orthodox Christians in E'erguna is not known but their ancestors arrived here more than a century ago, the bishop said.

There are about 20 Han Chinese Catholics living in E'erguna without a church or resident priest, while about 7,000 Catholics live scattered in the 264,000-kilometer-square Hulunbuir region.

The Orthodox church, which comes under the Diocese of Chita and Transbaikalia in Russia, is believed to be the first such church to be consecrated in mainland China in over 50 years. The St. Innocent of Irkutsk Church is one of four Orthodox churches that enjoy official status in China.

Father Mikhail Wang Quansheng, an elderly Chinese Orthodox priest from Shanghai, performed the consecration rites as the new church does not have a priest yet.

Orthodox Christians from the Hailar district of Hulunbuir, Harbin in Heilongjiang, Shanghai, Beijing and the ethnic Russian villages of Tryokhrechye, located near E'erguna, attended the consecration.

Orthodox Archpriest Dionisy Pozdnyaev, who is in charge of the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Hong Kong, and Wang Yanming of China's State Administration for Religious Affairs attended the ceremony and had a meeting afterward.

E'erguna was formerly called Labdarin or Labudalin. The original St. Innocent Church was built in 1967. In 1999, a new church was constructed

with funds from the Chinese government. However, it was not until 2008 that it received the long awaited iconostasis --- the screen partitioning the sanctuary from the rest of the church -- held by China's customs department since 2000.

According to the Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church arrived in China in 1685 but failed to attract many followers until the second half of the 19th century.

The anti-Western and anti-missionary Boxer Rebellion (1898-1900) in China saw violent attacks on converts to Christianity, including Orthodox believers who numbered about 6,000 by 1902.

By 1949, the year the People's Republic of China was founded, there were 106 Orthodox churches in China. Most parishioners were Russian refugees while their Chinese counterparts numbered about 10,000. However, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) almost destroyed the fledging Orthodox Church in China.

The Orthodox revival in China started in the middle of the 1980s. The church in Harbin was opened first and a few Russian refugees and Orthodox Chinese were allowed to pray there since 1986.

For years, the Chinese government and the Russian Orthodox Church have been discussing matters relating to the Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church. These include the sending of mainland seminarians to Russia for religious education, the lack of Orthodox clergy to serve in China and the return of Church properties by the government.

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China's top political advisor hopes for further religious exchange overseas

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BEIJING, Sept. 10 (Xinhua) -- China's top political advisor Jia Qinglin urged the country's religious circles to organize high-level teams for overseas exchanges as the first session of the Third China Committee on Religion and Peace (CCRP) kicked off Thursday.

Jia, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, congratulated the newly-elected CCRP leaders and extended his best wishes to all religious people across the country.

"With the support of the (Communist) Party and the government, the CCRP has been strengthening the cooperation and exchange with other countries' religious circles and making China's religious policies known to the world," said Jia.

He called upon CCRP members to enhance communication with overseas friends and contributed their abilities and wisdom to ensuring the country's ethnic unity, religious harmony and social stability.

The CCRP was founded in July 1994 and consists of representatives from the country's five religious groups: Buddhists, Taoists, Islamites, Catholics and Protestants.

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UCA News - [www.ucanews.com](http://www.ucanews.com)

CHINA Seminary to launch master's program in pastoral, catechetical work

September 10, 2009 | CH07890.1566

BEIJING (UCAN) -- The National Seminary in Beijing will start a master's degree course in October to train mainland Chinese pastoral workers and catechists.

The seminary in the state capital's rural Daxing district is now receiving applications to its first three-year pastoral and catechetical master's program that will start on Oct. 5.

Father John Chen Shujie, the seminary's executive deputy rector, said six priests, nuns and laypersons have submitted applications, mostly from dioceses in northern China.

"The fact is many Catholics feel interested but think the entrance prerequisites are a bit high," he said.

Applicants should have a bachelor's degree and a standard of English comparable to that required by local universities for postgraduate students. Applicants also require approval from a bishop, and a letter of recommendation from their parish priest or Religious superior.

The National Seminary intends to have a class of 10-15 students and the application period will close on Sept. 30.

The Verbiest Institute of the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium is co-organizing the program.

Since the Catholic Church has been in China for a long time, it should develop its own research work in theology, said Father Chen, who has a doctorate in education. After running a bachelor's program in theology for six years, he said, "God has given us the opportunity to train highly qualified personnel by launching the master's course."

He said the program aims to help Church workers keep pace with theological developments in the universal Church, develop evangelistic work in mainland China and contribute to the inculturation of the local Church.

Along with local Chinese priests and lecturers, there will also be foreign teachers arranged by Leuven university and the Lumen Vitae Institute in Brussels. Lectures will also be simultaneously translated into Mandarin-

Chinese but some course materials will be in English. Father Chen observed that so far, applicants appear relatively competent in English.

According to the July newsletter of the Verbiest Institute, the Chinese civil authorities have approved the program. "This is considered to be a breakthrough," it reported.

The newsletter hopes that after their studies, graduates will start pastoral centers in their own dioceses.

The National Seminary, run by the government-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China, was established in 1983.

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Agencia Fides - [www.fides.org](http://www.fides.org)  
ASIA/CHINA

Religious from various diocesan congregations in China making vows around the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Gui Zhou (Agencia Fides) - In honor of the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, September 8, various feminine Congregations of the Chinese dioceses have celebrated profession of vows. According to information sent to Agencia Fides, five religious of the Congregation of the Holy Family of the Diocese of Gui Zhou made their perpetual vows on August 30. Over a thousand faithful participated in the liturgy, along with 40 religious of the same congregation, in a ceremony presided by Bishop Andrew Wang Chong Yi and concelebrated by 20 priests. As it is an ethnic area, there were also faithful present of Tibetan origin and at the end of the celebration the faithful gave the religious a HaDa, a white sash that symbolizes honor in the Tibetan culture.

Bishop Joseph Li Lian Gui recently presided the profession of perpetual vows of 7 religious sisters of the Congregation of the Holy Hope of the Diocese of Xian Xian. In the same ceremony, 5 postulants entered as novices, 20 religious renewed temporal vows, and another few celebrated the 3 year anniversary of their perpetual vows. The Congregation also invited many priests to come celebrate, in light of the Year for Priests. According to the Congregation's Constitutions, the vocational "process" lasts nearly 10 years, to guarantee the authenticity of the vocation. In spite of a seemingly-long period of formation, there have never lacked vocations. In fact, there is an ever-growing number of them. The Congregation always conserves the tradition of making vows in the days surrounding this Marian feast. (NZ) (Agencia Fides 08/09/2009)

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Agencia Fides - [www.fides.org](http://www.fides.org)  
ASIA/CHINA

Faithful of Shang Hai travel to the Shrine of Our Lady of She Shan to celebrate the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, praying to her for "new and holy priests," as requested by the Bishop in Year for Priests message

Shang Hai (Agenzia Fides) - Over 300 faithful from the Diocese of Shang Hai gathered in the Shrine of Our Lady of She Shan on Saturday, September 5, to celebrate a few days ahead of time, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in this Year for Priests. They are especially invoking the intercession of Our Lady, asking that the Lord may grant the Church "more priests, more holy priests," as the Bishop requested in his pastoral message for the Year for Priests.

According to information sent to Fides, following the recitation of the Rosary and the Mass, the faithful placed flowers and sweets before the image of Our Lady, in her honor.

The Diocese of Shang Hai has a great tradition of Marian devotion, which is seen at the Marian Shrine of Our Lady of She Shan, which is the most famous Marian shrine in Asia, and which is particularly close to the heart of the Holy Father Benedict XVI. On May 24, 2008, prior to the World Day of Prayer for the Church in China and feast of Our Lady, Help of Christians, the Pope personally composed the "Prayer to Our Lady of She Shan."

In every important circumstance in the life of the Church, the local community always turns to Our Lady for her intercession. During this Year for Priests, they have entrusted the Virgin with the vocations and holiness of priests. In his Pastoral Letter for the Year for Priests, Bishop Aloysius Jin Lu Xian, SJ of Shang Hai asked the Lord: "grant us more priests, more holy priests." In his message, Bishop Jin called for prayer, and the formation and conservation of vocations to the priesthood. In addition, he explained the meaning behind the word "sacer-dos" and the expression "alter Christus," to highlight the priest's belonging to Christ, to whom he should always cling and whom he should imitate in order to be worthy of the title "other Christ." (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 7/9/2009)

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Agenzia Fides - [www.fides.org](http://www.fides.org)  
ASIA/CHINA

On the feast of Saint Augustine, in this Year for Priests, Catholics in Fu Feng celebrate the ordination anniversary of 9 priests

Fu Feng (Agenzia Fides) - "As we are living this Year for Priests, we pray for Pope Benedict XVI and for all the priests of the world, that they may imitate Saint Paul: not only looking after the Christians but also after the non-Christians of God's flock. We also pray for all Bishops, priests, and faithful with the name Augustine." This was part of the homily given by the celebrant of the solemn Mass for the feast of St. Augustine, in honor of the Year for Priests, in the parish of Ying Xi, in the district of Fu Feng, Diocese of Zhou Zhi, in the Province of Shaan Xi.

According to information gathered by Agenzia Fides, nearly 500 faithful took part in the liturgy, which was also dedicated to 9 local priests who are celebrating the anniversary of their priestly ordination. The celebrant

explained: "Today we celebrate the anniversary of our ordination on the feast of Saint Augustine. This is no coincidence. It reminds us that the Lord does not detest sinners but worries when the sinner does not repent. Saint Augustine is our example of excellence: thanks also to the prayers of his mother, Monica, and his moving encounter with Saint Ambrose, Augustine was able to convert, become a priest, and later even a Bishop." He then addressed those present at the Mass: "Thus, your prayers and accompaniment are fundamental." (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 01/09/2009)

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China Reports Pope's Sorrow at Death of Kim Dae-jung

Peace Prize Winner Still Bringing North and South Together

ROME, AUG. 23, 2009 (Zenit.org).- News of Benedict XVI's message of condolence at the death of former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung was reported not only in the leader's home nation, but also by the official news agency of China.

Kim was a Nobel Peace Prize winner for his attempts to warm relations with communist North Korea. He died last Tuesday at age 85.

He served as president of South Korea from 1998 to 2003. It was in 2000 that Kim had a historical meeting in Pyongyang with North Korea's Kim Jong Il. That same year he won the Nobel Peace Prize.

China's Xinhua News Agency, the government's official press agency, as well as other Chinese papers, reported how the Holy Father sent a condolence message. The message, directed to the people of South Korea and its current president, was made public Friday by Kim's family.

"Having learned with sadness of the death of former President Kim Dae-jung, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI sends condolences to you and to the nation," said the message, sent through Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Pope's secretary of state. "He commends the late president's soul to the mercy and love of almighty God, and upon all the Korean people who mourn his passing, he cordially invokes the divine blessing of peace and strength."

Kim's funeral, celebrated today, was marked by the first high-level negotiations between North and South Korea in almost two years. Kim Jong Il sent a delegation to the South to meet with President Lee Myung-Bak and deliver an oral message. The delegation did not attend the funeral itself.

Pope John Paul II played a decisive role in Kim Dae-jung's life, interceding on his behalf in 1980, when the South Korean regime had condemned the leader to death.

In an article marking the death of the Korean leader, L'Osservatore Romano noted how Kim affirmed that it was his Catholic faith that "helped him and supported him."

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CHINA Prominent bishops urge strengthening of priestly vocations

August 11, 2009 | CH07729.1562

SHANGHAI, China (UCAN) -- Two prominent, elderly bishops have, in separate pastoral letters, called on priests and seminarians to strengthen their vocations through prayer during this special Year for Priests.

Jesuit Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian of Shanghai, 93, called for greater efforts to promote priestly vocations while Bishop Luke Li Jingfeng of Fengxiang, 87, urged his priests to enhance their spiritual life.

In his letter dated Aug. 4, feast day of Saint John Mary Vianney, patron of parish priests, Bishop Jin urged his 78 priests and 150,000 lay Catholics to strengthen their prayer lives and pray for more priestly vocations.

Bishop Jin pointed out that the greatest difficulty Sheshan Regional Seminary in Shanghai faces is the decreasing number of seminarians. The seminary, which opened in 1982, now has 60 seminarians who come from the municipality and six dioceses in eastern China. Enrolment is merely one-third of its peak in the early 1990s and "the downward trend seems irreversible," the prelate wrote.

He said parish priests should try their best to nurture vocations, as parents today only care about their children's grades, rather than educating them to be good citizens and good Catholics.

Bishop Jin admitted that persevering in the priestly vocation is difficult in today's society and so "we must rely on our spiritual life and strong will." Living a consecrated life "is like rowing upstream, not to advance is to fall back," he said.

Eleven priests in Shanghai diocese were laicized in the past two decades, Bishop Jin noted.

He noted that these priests performed well during their seminary days, but after being exposed to society and its values, they succumbed to power, money and got involved in inappropriate relationships with women. They also compared their living conditions with others and regretted their decision to become priests, eventually giving up their vocations, he said.

"I haven't forgotten to pray for them," Bishop Jin said, noting that priestly vocations should be treasured and more importance attached to ongoing formation for priests.

He also reminded laypeople that their love for priests should be manifested in helping them to become more Christ-like. "God will repay you if you ask about their health or give them some food and clothes. But if you buy them expensive gifts such as a car, it would be better if you give the money to the poor in your neighborhood," he said.

Meanwhile, Bishop Li in Shaanxi province, in his June pastoral letter, encouraged his 36 priests to enhance their spiritual life through daily reflection, Mass and praying the breviary and rosary. He suggested they use the Psalms for private prayers and also pray for the Pope's monthly intentions.

The prelate also urged his priests to spend half an hour reading the Bible, other spiritual books, and studying Church documents, theology and Latin. Bishop Li will test them on these topics at the end of the Year for Priests.

Concluding his letter, the prelate asked his priests to remember that "the Church is not a secular organization and clerics are not officials from secular society."

Both Bishop Jin and Bishop Li are approved by the Vatican and recognized by the Chinese government. They were invited by the Vatican to attend the world synod on the Eucharist in 2005 in Rome but Chinese authorities did not allow them to attend

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Hong Kong Sunday Examiner

<http://sundayex.catholic.org.hk/>

Sunday 9 August 2009

Church service in the Middle Kingdom

by Chan Sui-jeung

I first visited Beijing in 1981 when China had only just begun opening up to the world. There was no such thing as tourism and, as a non-business visitor, I had to travel as part of a group sponsored by a government organisation in China. Throughout our trip we were escorted by a couple of cadres.

Out of curiosity, I went to the Cathedral of the Immaculate of Conception, known in Chinese as Nan Tang, or the Xuan Wu Men Catholic Church. It was a dilapidated building and hardly anyone was praying inside. The cadre with me was in his mid-20s, so it was also an education for him.

When we arrived, I was met by a religious sister who was a senior official of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the government organisation responsible for the so-called official Church. With the the cadre around, our conversation was brief and hesitant.

After many long years, my wife and I travelled to Beijing. It was the last Sunday in June and we arrived at the cathedral at around 10.30am on a stifling hot day with the sun beating down on our heads.

Every Sunday, the church celebrates two Masses in English and one in Latin. By the time we entered, the building was packed with people of all nationalities. It was so full that the service was broadcast by loudspeaker to those who could not get in and were standing in the courtyard outside.

The altar servers, of different colours and nationalities, also reflected the cosmopolitan feature of the parish.

Before the priest entered, one of the altar servers asked all those who were in the church for the first time to stand up so that the congregation could greet them with a round of applause.

Among the congregation, was a fair number of young Chinese people who appeared to be university students, judging by the T-shirts they wore.

While the Mass was in English, other nationalities and languages were taken into account. So after the first and second readings, two parishioners proclaimed them in French. Parish newsletters, in English, were also distributed before the the service began.

When Mass was over, the priest, Father Li, announced the impending departure of two families, one from Kenya and the other from Slovenia, who had been coming to the cathedral for over 10 years. He presented both with souvenirs.

At the end of the Mass, Father Li stood at the door and chatted with everyone. One elderly Chinese parishioner talked to some of the non-Chinese and directed them to a stele displayed in the courtyard.

Apparently, the Qing dynasty emperor, Shun Zhi, visited the church 24 times between the years 1656 and 1657. He and the German Jesuit, Father Johann Adam Schall von Bell, had many long and friendly conversations.

The priest tried to convert the him, but the emperor would not give up his harem. The stone, now badly defaced, records some of their conversations. On another side of the courtyard stand bronze statues of St. Francis Xavier and Matteo Ricci along with a history of their involvement with China.

Though the temperature had climbed to 37 degrees Celsius, it was a worthwhile and unique experience.

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UCA News - [www.ucanews.com](http://www.ucanews.com)

CHINA Beijing Church conducts 1st lay-catechist course

August 6, 2009 | CH07712.1561

BEIJING (UCAN) -- Beijing diocese has run its first training course for lay catechists to meet increasing pastoral needs.

The 10-day intensive course from July 22-31 attracted 120 laypeople from 20 parishes. Many of them have experience in teaching catechumens and evangelizing to non-Catholics. Participants were mostly middle-aged laywomen. Some laypeople from other parishes also sat in during the classes.

German laywoman Helene Reichl conducted the course that took place at Savior Church (North Church) in Beijing. Reichl, a member of Taiwan

bishops' Commission for Doctrine of the Faith and Catechetical Instruction, has nearly 50 years of experience in evangelization work and can speak fluent Mandarin Chinese.

She spoke on the Sacraments of Initiation -- Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion -- and the various stages of the catechumenate, the process whereby people who want to be Catholics are initiated into the faith. "Participating catechists had no idea about the 'stage of inquiry'" which is prior to the catechumenate process, she said. "They used to admit someone as a catechumen merely by asking a question -- if he or she is interested in knowing Jesus and the Catholic faith," Reichl told UCA News.

Catechism classes in Beijing parishes usually last for three months and catechumens need not undergo a series of preparatory rites before receiving Baptism, she learnt.

Baptisms are often administered once the three-month cycle of catechism classes ends and the catechists had no idea of the significance of matching the catechumenate process with the seasons in the Church's liturgical year, she noted.

During the course, she also introduced them to the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" and other reference books to help them prepare lessons for catechism classes.

Participants were enthusiastic to learn and eager to ask questions, Reichl said. However, she pointed out that the outcome of her course depends on whether parish priests are cooperative in standardizing catechism classes.

A priest who serves at a parish in downtown Beijing said that parishes generally do not set any requirements for parishioners willing to teach catechism, although they will provide some formation. This training course was a new undertaking at the diocesan level, he said.

Participants appreciated Reichl's rich experience. "She didn't tell us profound theories but gave us many practical methods," said one of them.

Bishop Joseph Li Shan of Beijing told participants at the start of the course that the diocese normally baptizes about 2,000 people annually, and has plans to build six churches in 2010 to meet increasing pastoral needs. "The duty of evangelization is upon each of us, especially parish priests and catechists," he stressed.

The diocese budgeted about 100,000 yuan (US\$14,640) for this course. Nuns of the diocesan St. Joseph's Convent and some parishioners of North Church volunteered as receptionists, assisted at the classes and delivered meals for participants.

One participant from other parish appreciated their service. "I can feel like at home in the North Church as well as the love and harmony of the diocese as a family," she said.

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CHINA 'Lonely' hi-tech generation reflects on faith and community

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SHANGHAI, China (UCAN) -- A recent weeklong summer camp received a big thumbs up from Catholic university students in Shanghai after they were able to get closer to God and reflect on their spiritual side away from high-tech gadgetry.

Many of the 120 participants in the Aug. 2-8 program were attending the event for the first time. The students were given the chance to pray and adore the Blessed Sacrament during a one-day retreat, to test their knowledge of the Bible and catechism through contests, and to learn about themselves. Priests and nuns also shared with them about religious vocations.

A young man surnamed Xu, 20, said the Aug. 6 retreat was most impressive. After surrendering his mobile phone, the student learnt how to pray to Jesus and meditate with the Bible, adore the Blessed Sacrament and talk individually with a spiritual director. "It made me truly calm and nearer to God," he said.

Zhang Xiaolai, 21, was also moved by the peaceful atmosphere of the Taize-style prayers during the retreat. "In the simple melodies and silent prayers, we were inspired and some cried aloud. I guess such touching feelings can only be experienced through God's love," she reflected.

The young woman said she is determined to spend at least 20 minutes each day praying to Jesus, sharing with him all her feelings.

Shanghai is one of many mainland dioceses that held summer activities for Catholic students during the vacation months of July and August.

Sister Maria, an organizer of the Shanghai camp, said some students expressed their joy at the sense of community they experienced and felt sad thinking of the loneliness that would set in once they returned to their houses, university dormitories or flats. Most students are their parents' only child and came alone to Shanghai to study.

"I asked them if this high-tech era had brought them a richer life or had led them into a lonely existence," the nun told UCA News. She added that they showed her they had a desire for God, for spiritual nourishment and to be loved.

Father John Zhao Shijie of Shanghai, another organizer, told UCA News on Aug. 17 that the diocese began summer camps six years ago. He said most Catholics learn catechism in childhood, but later get busy with high school life and preparations for entering university that leave them with no time to deepen their faith or join Church activities.

Thus, he sees the summer program for Catholic university students as

crucial in giving them the opportunity to experience God and rediscover their faith.

The program also encourages students to form small communities that can meet regularly for prayer, Bible-sharing and pilgrimages, enhancing their spiritual growth, he said.

This year's theme was "Where are you?" Father Zhao said this theme awakened the students to the fact that God is with them even if they are not aware of it, that God is calling to them even when they are preoccupied with material pleasures such as mobile phones, computers, games and money.

Campers are encouraged to experience God's existence in a calm atmosphere and to let God enter their lives, he said.

In his observation, more than 60 percent of the almost 500 Catholic students who have taken part in the Shanghai summer camps have subsequently attached greater importance to their faith and attend Sunday Masses regularly.

"Youths are the future of our Church," the priest said. "At this stage in their lives, they need the Church to invest its time, human and financial resources in them and to care for them."

Father John Baptist Luo of Mindong diocese in Fujian province, also in eastern China, ran two summer camps for university students. Education in China has taught Catholic students to be ignorant about God, he said, so the Church "needs to affirm God's existence and enhance their affection for God and Church communities."