

Table of Contents

- 1 [*Delicate balance: Church assists Chinese without appearing powerful*](#)
- 2 [*Vatican diplomat expresses hope for normalizing relations with China*](#)
- 3 [*China's Catholics, the Holy See and religious freedom*](#)
- 4 [*Catholics hopeful Papal letter will help them achieve reconciliation*](#)
- 5 [*Hong Kong eyes tougher Vatican for China*](#)
- 6 [*China welcomes Vatican olive branch*](#)
- 7 [*Vatican to set up China affairs body*](#)
- 8 [*Pope to convene special meeting on China*](#)
- 9 [*China welcomes Vatican's approval of bishop picked by Beijing*](#)
- 10 [*Released two of the nine underground priests arrested in Hebei*](#)
- 11 [*Bible study raided*](#)
- 12 [*China detains three church leaders after raid on private home*](#)

Delicate balance: Church assists Chinese without appearing powerful

By Cindy Wooden

Catholic News Service (09.03.2007)/ HRWF (14.04.2007) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net -While local government officials in some parts of China arrest Catholics, authorities in other areas of the country are tolerating, or even encouraging, Catholic charitable activity.

A growing number of Catholic dioceses on the mainland have established a Caritas organization and are expanding their social service work.

Representatives of four Chinese diocesan Caritas organizations were at the Vatican March 6-7 for a discussion about how official church-sponsored charities around the world could support their efforts and assist the Chinese poor in general.

Duncan MacLaren, secretary-general of Caritas Internationalis, the Catholic charities' umbrella organization, said that even though church-state tensions remain, "we cannot ignore the needs of one-fifth of humanity."

And while China's communist government continues to use its rejection of "foreign interference" as the reason it refuses to allow the Vatican to choose the country's bishops, the government does not reject aid money and projects from foreign Catholic charities, he said.

Caritas Macau, Caritas Hong Kong and Caritas Taiwan are all active in the country, as are the Maryknoll China Service Project, the French Catholic

Committee Against Hunger and for Development and Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops' overseas development and relief agency.

Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium of Hong Kong, who participated in the meeting, told [Catholic News Service](#) that the Caritas agencies are found in dioceses "where the bishop is really in charge, which gives a guarantee that it functions like a Caritas should."

Unlike on the national level where the government-controlled Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association directs church activity, "at the diocesan level, the patriotic association does not always impose itself on the bishop. If a bishop is strong and capable enough, he can control the Caritas in his diocese," Cardinal Zen said.

While describing the Caritas work as "modest and limited," Cardinal Zen said, "Caritas is helping with real needs and there are local authorities who are good and care for their people, so there is cooperation."

And, he said, government authorities have invited Chinese and foreign Catholic agencies to help the elderly, people with mental illnesses, people living with HIV/AIDS and those suffering from Hansen's disease, formerly called leprosy.

In China's rural areas, where there is widespread poverty, local governments have benefited from Catholic agencies' willingness to dig wells, distribute seeds and train a new generation of farmers in sustainable agriculture.

In one instance, MacLaren said, a local government even asked the staff of a Catholic home for the elderly to train the staff of a government-run home.

Cardinal Zen said relations usually are smooth as long as the Caritas organization is "discreet."

"If you become too big, then they may not allow you to work because they are afraid you are becoming too powerful," he said.

Proselytism, not power, is the usual reason given for closing a program, he said, citing the example of a now-closed technical training program established by the Salesians.

Cardinal Zen said the Salesians explained that they prepare young people for a trade and do not try to convert them.

But the government found it suspicious that the students were not charged a fee.

The Salesians explained that benefactors fully funded the program, but the government officials were convinced that sooner or later the students would be pressured into becoming Catholic, the cardinal said.

"Incredible," Cardinal Zen said. "Such a good work for the local people, so welcomed by the local people. Now it is closed down."

The Catholic Church in China prays and yearns for the day when it will enjoy full religious freedom, he said, but "at this moment, the important thing is to help establish a Caritas in each diocese."

Chinese Catholics may not have a totally normal faith life, but charity is an essential part of Christian faith, and when Catholics have an opportunity to help others they must do so, he said.

And the needs are great, Cardinal Zen said.

"Economic progress is a reality, but everything is not rosy," he said. "Along with this economic progress you have so many new problems, including corruption on a big scale, and the gap between the rich and the poor is widening."

"The elderly, young people, HIV patients, migrants ... there are many problems and so many needs. Caritas has much to do," he said.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Vatican diplomat expresses hope for normalizing relations with China

By Tim Puet

Catholic News Service (13.04.2007)/ HRWF (14.04.2007) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Pope Benedict XVI's top diplomat at the United Nations said the Vatican wants to normalize relations with China, which it sees as a major way of advancing religious freedom and fostering unity among Chinese Catholics.

Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Vatican's U.N. nuncio, expressed hope that a papal letter to Chinese Catholics to be released around Easter will be seen as proof of the Vatican's good will and pave the way for Vatican talks with Chinese officials that could lead to diplomatic relations and resolution of differences over the church's status in the Asian nation.

Other church officials have said that the letter will be translated into Chinese and sent to the Chinese government several days before its publication.

"We have never severed our ties with the Chinese people," said Archbishop Migliore, at a March 2 news conference before giving a speech at St. Charles Preparatory School in Columbus.

At the same time, he said, the Vatican is hoping that a formula can be found to maintain ties with Taiwan while opening diplomatic relations with China.

The Chinese government has required severing diplomatic ties with Taiwan as a prerequisite for establishing diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

"We are ready to go back to Beijing without abandoning Taiwan," the archbishop said, without specifying whether future contacts with Taiwan would include diplomatic relations.

Archbishop Migliore said the Vatican's main differences with China involve continued recognition of Taiwan, freedom to worship and appointment of bishops.

In a March 12 e-mail reply to questions from Catholic News Service, the archbishop said he could not anticipate any specific formulas for balancing relations between China and Taiwan, but that precedents already have been set by other countries.

"We need only think of those countries that have embassies in Beijing while at

the same time maintaining official commercial, scientific and cultural relations with Taipei," he said.

Taipei is the Taiwanese capital.

Ties between the Vatican and China were cut in 1951, two years after communists took control of the Chinese government. The ousted Chinese Nationalist government moved to the island of Taiwan, claiming to still be the legitimate Chinese government. China claims Taiwan as its territory and does not recognize the Taiwanese government.

The Vatican is the only European government that has diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

In China there is the government-controlled Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, formed in 1957, and what has been called the "underground church," which maintains ties to the pope.

At the March 2 news conference, Archbishop Migliore said the term "underground church" does not apply any more. "There is nothing underground because everybody knows everything."

He also said Chinese officials should not fear that full religious freedom would mean Catholics would be more loyal to the Vatican than to their own nation.

"Our policy is to recommend that Catholics be good citizens, pay their taxes and cooperate with the government for the common good," the archbishop said.

Regarding the Chinese government's desire to appoint bishops, he compared it to the situation in Vietnam where, several years ago, a similar disagreement was resolved, with the Vatican agreeing to consult with the government over the appointment of bishops but still having the final say.

He said the same thing could be done with the Chinese.

"Our real problem is strengthening the unity among members of the church in China," he said.

"The government realizes that getting the Catholic Church under its umbrella didn't work," he said.

On Iraq, the archbishop said that although the Vatican did not favor the U.S. invasion, it also is opposed to a massive troop withdrawal.

"Once you undertake to free a country from dictatorship and bring democracy and human rights, you have to find a way to do that and respect human life," he said. "You can't just leave and say 'Now it's up to you.'"

Archbishop Migliore described Vatican-Muslim relations as improving.

In September, the pope gave a speech in Germany quoting a medieval emperor as saying Islam spread its faith "by the sword." This angered many Muslims and the pope later distanced himself from the comment.

The archbishop said that the pope recognizes that problems exist between Christians and Muslims and that they need to be examined.

"If we don't want to resort to the use of force, there is one way to solve the problem, and that is to put all our cards on the table and recognize what in our cultures is not working," he said. "We're not going to change the Quran, and they're not going to change the Bible, but we respect each other's sacred books."

On nuclear disarmament he said the most important step now would be the start of serious negotiations among the five nuclear superpowers: the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France. He said those nations needed to set an example to justify their demands that nations such as Iran and North Korea halt their nuclear programs.

In the 1970s, the Vatican supported the concept of nuclear deterrence, the policy that the world's superpowers had nuclear stockpiles as a way of preserving peace by maintaining a balance of power, he said.

"I don't think we'd subscribe to the possibility of deterrence today," he said. "Thirty years later, nuclear weapons are not a deterrent. The potential of destruction is too great."

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

China's Catholics, the Holy See and religious freedom

By Magda Hornemann

Forum 18 News Service (12.04.2007)/ HRWF (13.04.2007) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Many experts have noted that the relationship between the Chinese government and the Vatican has greatly improved over the last few years. They are quite optimistic that the relationship will be normalised relatively soon. What was once perceived as the major obstacle in the normalisation of bilateral relations, the Vatican's diplomatic relations with Taiwan, has for all practical purposes been removed. The main issue of contention remains government control over the selection of Chinese clergy, especially bishops. However, even on this point, most, if not all, Chinese bishops appointed by the government-sanctioned Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) unofficially seek the Vatican's approval even as they accept the government appointments.

Although some Chinese Catholics both inside and outside mainland China have condemned the CPA and have demanded that the Vatican declare the government-approved Chinese Catholic church to be schismatic, the Vatican has not taken this step. This may ultimately bear fruit for the Vatican, because a divided Catholic Church in China is very much in the interest of the Chinese government. A united Church that acknowledges the Vatican's authority, whether publicly or privately, may impede the government's efforts to control it and so may ultimately facilitate the growth of a church that is independent of the government, if not in law then at least in practice.

Among all the religions in China, Catholicism is notable for having a clear external political dimension. It is the one religious community in China that has a clear internationally recognised source of diplomatic power outside the country. The Holy See, after all, is a recognised state as well as a spiritual centre.

Tibetan Buddhism also has a source of power outside Chinese-controlled territory ever since the Dalai Lama escaped to India. However, it is clearly different from the Holy See as it is not an internationally recognised state.

Having a clear source of power outside China has always made the Catholic community in China dangerous in the eyes of the communist rulers. The establishment of the "patriotic" religious organisations at the founding of the People's Republic was, arguably, directed primarily at concerns about the Vatican's continued influence in China. The communist leaders were arguably less worried about the influence of the disparate foreign Protestant groups. This concern about foreign influence in general and the Catholic Church's foreign connection in particular continues to be seen in recent official documents.

For example, in the October 1997 White Paper on "Freedom of Religious Belief in China," the Chinese government focused completely on the Vatican and foreign Protestant organisations and individuals when justifying the need for Chinese religious communities to remain independent of foreign influence. The Catholic Church and the Protestant communities were portrayed in the White Paper as "tools" of hostile Western countries, which were seeking to colonise China. The White Paper portrayed these communities as unwilling to permit Chinese clerics to assume leadership positions in the churches in China. The White Paper, in particular, noted that immediately prior to the Communist Party taking power, "among the 20 archbishops in China were 17 foreigners and only three Chinese; in the 143 parishes there were some 110 foreign bishops but only about 20 Chinese bishops."

This non-Chinese dimension to Catholicism in China is not new, nor - in keeping with Catholicism's self-understanding of itself as a universal and not a national church - has it been unusual in other countries. As long ago as the 16th Century, foreign Catholic intellectuals were influential within China. But today, if the Church were able to freely exercise its religious freedom, the overwhelming majority of its leaders would be - as they are amongst both "underground" and "patriotic" Catholics - Chinese citizens.

An important part of this foreign dimension for Chinese Catholicism has been the fact that the Vatican and the Taiwan government have had formal diplomatic relations since 1951, two years after the defeated Chinese nationalist government headed by Chiang Kai-shek retreated to Taiwan. Undoubtedly, this decision was the reaction of a strongly anti-communist pope, Pius XII, and the Vatican's understandable outrage at the Chinese communists' purposeful and wanton destruction of Catholic churches in China and the persecution of Chinese Catholics.

To this day, Chinese officials continue to cite Vatican's diplomatic relations with Taiwan as one of the two obstacles toward the normalisation of Sino-Vatican relations - the other being the Chinese demand that the Vatican give up all rights and efforts to control the Catholic community in China, most notably the appointment of Chinese bishops. However, the Taiwan-Vatican relationship, for over 25 years, has been all form and no substance. Since 1980, the Vatican's delegation in Taipei has been led by a charge d'affaires rather than a full-fledged ambassador, or a papal nuncio. Second, the Vatican has already indicated publicly through various high-ranking Catholic clerics, including Hong Kong Archbishop Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun - who is known for his public statements against Chinese government controls on the Catholic Church - that the Vatican is ready to end its diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

Although the Chinese government was publicly outraged by the fact that Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian was present at Pope John Paul II's funeral, it would

seem that the issue of Taiwan is a public relations point more than a substantive one. The substantive point may be the Chinese government wanting to secure political control of China's Catholic Church. If this is so, even if the Vatican were to end all diplomatic relations with Taiwan this break would make little difference to the issue of normalising relations between China and the Vatican.

On the other hand, some experts argue that the philosophical differences between Catholicism - and all other religions - and Communism remain the core obstacle to the normalisation of Sino-Vatican relations. Professor Beatrice Leung, a respected expert on state-religion relations and the Catholic Church in China, argued in a recent essay in the "Journal of Contemporary China" that the difficulty in the relations between the Vatican and the Chinese governments "rests in the ideological incompatibility between the dialectic materialism embedded in Marxism Leninism and religious idealism".

Undoubtedly, the contradictions between the doctrines of the Chinese Communist Party and the beliefs of most religious communities are too great and too numerous for some to overcome. Some Chinese Communist Party officials have been visibly alarmed that an increasing number of Communist Party members are also religious believers. In a book published in July 2005 on "United Front Work" [Tongzhan gongzuo], the authors wrote in the section on "religious work" that "[Communist] Party members must be firm in their belief in Communism; they must not believe in religions. For party members who have lost their qualification as party members due to their belief in religions, and even those who use their authority to facilitate religious fanaticism, they must be strictly dealt with according to the regulations and requirements contained in the party constitution."

Yet, the differences between Communist theory and Catholicism are clearly not permanent barriers to improving the relationship between China and the Holy See. It is commonplace for observers to note that very few people in China today believe in Communism. As Forum 18 has found within China, many, if not most, people in the country see Communist Party membership as an instrument for career advancement, not an ideology they believe in. And as the state has publicly declared that religions will be in China for a long time and that religious communities are important for the construction of a "harmonious society", the communist state has officially given its approval to holding religious beliefs.

Certainly, Communist ideology has not prevented the Chinese government from allowing the Catholic Church in China to pay spiritual homage to the Vatican. A parishioner in the church that houses the headquarters of the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) in Beijing, for example, told Forum 18 that all Chinese Catholic adherents recognise and accept the Vatican's spiritual authority. The parishioner insisted that the Chinese Catholic Church actively seeks communion with the Vatican. Supporting the parishioner's testimony were news items posted outside the Wangfujin Catholic church in Beijing, which clearly stated that Chinese Catholics were encouraged to boycott the 2006 film "The Da Vinci Code" in accordance with the Vatican's instructions.

As suggested earlier, it seems that the main obstacle in the normalisation of Sino-Vatican relations remains political control, which is shown in the events of the past year. The Chinese government does not want the Vatican to have any say in the selection of senior Chinese clerics. This desire for exclusive political control is not necessarily connected with conflicts between Communism and Catholicism. To China, it just makes good political sense to make sure that it does not share domestic political authority with another government, especially when - as Communist party members admit in private - the Chinese Communist

Party is insecure in its legitimacy and both the Communist Party and the Holy See are deeply suspicious of each others' motives.

For this reason, the Chinese government refuses to consider the "Vietnam model", which involves the Vatican submitting a list of candidates for bishops to the Vietnamese government, with the pope making a final decision based in part on the government's opinions. The Chinese government is unlikely to compromise significantly on this issue. But it may be possible that the Catholic Patriotic Association might agree to provide a list of candidates to the Vatican, and then to take a decision based in part on the Vatican's opinions. If so, then the question is whether the Vatican would be willing to accept this approach.

But assuming for a moment that the relationship between the Holy See and the Chinese government is able to overcome this major obstacle and become a normal diplomatic relationship, what effects would that have on the situation facing Catholics in China?

The most egregious problems that confront the Catholic community in China today involve local officials cracking down on the clerics and lay members of the so-called "underground" Catholic Church. According to the Cardinal Kung Foundation, whose founder, Joseph Kung, is a nephew of former Cardinal Ignatius Pei-Min Kung (who had served 30 years in prison between 1955 and 1985), as of March 2007, five bishops and 14 priests in the underground church were in prison, eight bishops were under house arrest or surveillance, and two others were in hiding. The problem of local officials attacking religious freedom is a long-standing problem, and affects all China's religious communities.

If the relationship between the Vatican and China were normalised today, it is unlikely that these crackdowns would completely disappear. During the short to medium-term future, the best that Catholics could hope for is a reduction in the frequency of these incidents. A normalised relationship would mean that the Vatican may be more able to get the central Chinese government to reduce or halt these attacks. However, as these crackdowns are often generated at the local level and in policy areas that are controlled by the Ministry of Public Security and the state security organs, the Foreign Ministry - which would be the primary ministry the Vatican would be relating to - would be unlikely to have much influence unless it was also supported by political leaders like Premier Wen Jiabao, or the Vice-premiers in charge of those policy areas.

Also, some of these egregious violations of religious freedom reflect "internal" conflicts between senior leaders of the "underground" Catholic Church and their government-sanctioned counterparts. One source of this is that - as Cardinal Zen has noted - without continuing state support the Catholic Patriotic Association has the potential to disintegrate, as its members may publicly join the "underground" Catholic Church. A normalised state-to-state relationship may allow the Vatican to become more directly involved in the affairs of the Chinese Catholic Church and thus able to intervene in such internal conflicts. However, this may not be permitted by the Chinese government, which is likely to be extremely wary of any public effort on the Vatican's part to "intervene" in the affairs of the Chinese Catholic community. Like the other state-recognised religious associations, a monolithic "patriotic" facade conceals great diversity and potential for disputes.

However, the Vatican has so far not formally declared that there is a schism between any part of the Catholic Church in China and the Vatican. This may indirectly help to remove the internal conflicts among Chinese Catholics, by providing the basis for a unified Chinese church. Here, the contents of Pope Benedict XVI's forthcoming "personal letter to Catholics in China" - announced in

January 2007 - will have implications for both the church in China and for the Vatican's future influence on the Catholic community there.

Much of the internal conflict is between personalities, between those people who resisted the communist regime and suffered for their defiance, and those people who agreed to work within the government-sanctioned framework. These personalities will over time become less influential, which may cause these conflicts to diminish.

In addition to these internal conflicts at the upper echelon of the Chinese church, it seems clear that the current diplomatic situation is a reflection of the absence of consensus within the Chinese government about the desirability of a normalised relationship with the Vatican. This is probably due to the tendency among Chinese political leaders to think of the relationship primarily in political terms. As Sister Betty Ann Maheu, a former editor of "Tripod," a publication of the Holy Spirit Centre in Hong Kong, wrote in November 2005, the current pope "must somehow convince the government in China that the mission of the church is religious, not political." This is a very large task, which one might even say is almost but not completely impossible.

It would be a mistake to overlook the positive effects that regular interactions between the Vatican and China can have on changing the perceptions of Chinese political leaders. Also, significant progress has already been made towards uniting the Catholic Church in China. This progress may eventually cause the Chinese government to change its position on diplomatic relations with the Holy See. However, whether full diplomatic relations will be restored still depends on whether the government thinks it is in its interest to strengthen the ties of China's Catholics to the Vatican, by allowing the Holy See to have a normal diplomatic presence in China.

But even if there is a normalisation of relations between the Holy See and the Chinese government in the near future, this may not bring any significant short to medium term practical improvements in the religious freedom of Chinese Catholics or of other religious communities. This is because, for China's Catholics as for other religious believers, the major challenge to their religious freedom is the state's wish to control Chinese religious communities.

Source: <http://www.forum18.org>

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Catholics hopeful Papal letter will help them achieve reconciliation

HRWF Int. (02.02.2007) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net
- Catholics in China say they hope a letter Pope Benedict XVI plans to send them will not only strengthen their faith but also clearly explain how their fractured community in the mainland can be healed.

A statement the Vatican released on Jan. 20 announced that Pope Benedict has "benevolently decided to write a personal letter to Catholics in China," but it does not say when the letter will be issued. The press release provides some information about a special meeting held Jan. 19-20 at the Vatican to discuss the Church in China, and the letter was discussed during that summit.

In China's Catholic Church, which has been split into "open" and "underground" communities for decades, underground Catholics are voicing hopes that the papal letter will include clear instructions on reconciliation.

Bishop Joseph Wei Jingyi of Qiqihar, unaffiliated with the government-sanctioned "open" community, told UCA News on Jan. 23 that Catholics in China have long waited for such a letter. Qiqihar in north eastern China's Heilongjiang province is about 1,050 kilometers north as to f Beijing.

"The Holy See wants us to reconcile but does not tell us how to proceed or give us any clear instructions," Bishop Wei said.

The underground prelate noted that Vatican directives in the past instructed Catholics to avoid sacramental communion with the "open Church" community, "but now we need clarification on where those directives stand, so as to eliminate mistrust and misunderstanding" among Catholics in both groups.

The "Eight-Point Directive on Dealings with China" that was issued in 1988 by Cardinal Josef Tomko, then-prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, declares that all communication in sacris (sacramental communion) with bishops and Church personnel belonging to the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) should be avoided.

That document also points out that the CPA in 1957 issued a proclamation saying the Church "had broken all relationships with the Pope" and announced the Church was to be "under the direct control of the government."

Bishop Wei, who was invited to attend the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in 2005 but barred from going by the Chinese government, said he needs to know if "a Catholic can receive sacraments from Vatican-recognized 'open' bishops who hold positions in the CPA."

Since the 1988 document remains valid, some underground Catholics hold firm and refuse to reconcile with the open Church community. To sustain their faith life, many of them conduct religious services outside government-sanctioned worship venues, but government officials say such behaviour disrupts social order. This dilemma, and the confrontations of some clergy with the government over joining the CPA, has sometimes resulted in priests being detained.

In northern China, an underground Church leader who requested anonymity has told UCA News that the Vatican urgently needs to clarify its position because government officials are pushing clergy to register themselves for a so-called "priest license."

Possessing such a license allows priests to work openly without interference and to register their worship places. Without it, priests are detained or sent back to their hometowns, and prevented from doing pastoral work.

The underground Church leader in northern China said this also puts clergy at risk of being charged with "illegally conducting religious activities."

Registration conditions vary from place to place. It usually requires underground priests to concelebrate Mass with a government-designated "open" Church bishop, and sometimes compels them to profess support for the "independent, autonomous and self-management" principle of the China Church.

Bishop Wei, 48, agrees that the problem of priests being coerced to get a "priest license" urgently needs clear-cut directives from the Holy See. The Vatican allows an underground community to get such a license after all of its priests achieve consensus, but the bishop maintains that "it is illogical to decide such serious matters simply by casting votes."

Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, an "underground" prelate who says he is always closely watched, once told UCA News it is impossible to assemble all priests to discuss the matter because they are scattered in so many places.

An underground priest in northern China told UCA News he looks forward to receiving specific instructions, especially concerning "self-elect and self-ordain" bishops. He said he agrees with a comment recently made by Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kun of Hong Kong in the Hong Kong diocesan weekly *Sunday Examiner*. In the Jan. 7 issue, Cardinal Zen said being in communion with the Holy Father yet remaining in an independent Church is a contradiction.

In south eastern China, an underground priest has echoed a similar longing for concrete instructions from the Vatican. "If the measures of the Holy See remain unclear, we will continue to be confused and 'speculators' may continue to fish in our troubled waters," he told UCA News. "We have suffered a lot," he said, "but it would be ridiculous if our suffering becomes a stumbling block for reconciliation. What should we do?"

Bishop Paul Xie Tingzhe of Urumqi Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, north western China, says the papal letter should avoid confronting the Chinese government. "Our insistence is for our faith and for God, not for immediate reward," he told UCA News on Jan. 22, and "we should adjust ourselves for the sake of the whole Church." The bishop, whom the government recognizes only as a priest, added that he hopes the pope will elucidate the troublesome issues because that could quicken Vatican negotiations with the government.

Anthony Liu Bainian, vice chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, told UCA News on Jan. 22 he believes the papal letter will express "the love of Christ's delegate on earth." The letter will be "significant," he said, "because it could dispel the misunderstandings of non-believers about the Catholic Church" and that in turn could enhance efforts to develop Sino-Vatican relations.

Father Peter Zhao Jianmin of Beijingdiocese, director of the Institute for the Study of Christianity and Culture Study, told UCA News on Jan. 22 he hopes the pope will encourage Chinese Catholics to evangelize passionately and actively. "In light of the economic and cultural transformations now taking place in China, this is the best time to preach the Good News," he observed.

Father John Baptist Zhang Shijiang, director of *Faith Press* newspaper and Jinde Charities, told UCA News on Jan. 23 he hopes the pope's letter will "bring blessings to our motherland and fellow countrymen, as well as hope to the clergy and laypeople of the Church in China."

Father Zhang also said the normalization of Sino-Vatican ties will improve the image and situation of the Church in society, thereby enhancing Catholic NGOs in their service to society, especially the poor and underprivileged.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Hong Kong eyes tougher Vatican for China

By Maria Sanminiatielli

AP (26.01.2007) / HRWF Int. (26.01.2007) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Hong Kong's outspoken cardinal said it was time for the Vatican to take a more uncompromising line toward the Chinese government, which broke with the church more than a half-century ago and has sought to maintain control of Catholic institutions.

The Vatican has long indicated that it wants to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing, even at the cost of moving its embassy from Taiwan. Currently, worship is only allowed in government-controlled churches, but as many as 10 million Catholics are estimated to belong to unofficial congregations loyal to Rome.

The church, however, will not compromise on the tradition dictating that only the pope - and not a local church - can appoint bishops.

In recent years, China's state-sanctioned Catholic Church, the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, and the Vatican have tacitly agreed on the appointment of a number of bishops. The agreement broke down when the state-sanctioned Church appointed three bishops, angering the Vatican.

Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen, an outspoken champion of religious liberty, told The Associated Press on Thursday that he believes it is now time for Holy See to take a harsher stance on other matters as well.

"I think in this moment the most important thing we have to do is to assess the situation, to assess what we have done in many years and realize that we must change strategy," he said. "Because in so many years we have accepted compromises which in the beginning were good and necessary, but after so many years we can see there is a bad side effect."

For instance, the Vatican has over the years allowed the government-controlled church to impose conditions or limitations for running programs or teaching courses in seminaries or courses for clergy in China. For example, several of the seminaries there are not allowed to invite teachers from abroad.

"Maybe people don't like to take a hard line, but I would say clearer lines" are needed, Zen said.

Liu Bainian, the often hard-line vice chairman of the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, told Hong Kong Cable TV that he wants China and the Vatican to quickly establish formal relations.

"This has been my hope for the past 10 years. We've done a lot of things. We hope to adjust our strategy so that it is in the interests of improving Sino-Vatican relations."

Zen was in Rome to debate the Chinese problem in discussions last week with officials at the Holy See. Pope Benedict XVI did not attend the talks, but was briefed on them, and Zen said he also has been writing letters to the pontiff.

The Hong Kong cardinal could not discuss what was said during the talks and declined to reveal most of what he wrote to Benedict.

However, "one thing I can say is that I'm telling him that the people in China

expect from him clear direction," Zen said.

The last months have seen a series of arrests of priests in China, according to Asia News, a Vatican-affiliated news agency. At least 17 underground bishops have disappeared, been arrested or detained in isolation. Twenty priests have been arrested and at least five, detained on Dec. 27 in Hebei, are still in prison, the agency reported last week.

However, Zen said he believes the upper echelons of China's government may be readier for change than the state-sanctioned church.

"The foreign office is more interested in establishing diplomatic relations and the higher authority has a more international perspective," Zen said. "So they must understand that a normalization of relations between Beijing and the Holy See may be conducive to more prestige for the nation."

Zen, 75, said he has asked the pope to let him step down as Hong Kong's bishop so he can focus on helping the Vatican establish ties with China.

"It's impossible to do the two jobs together. So I asked the Holy Father to consider my retirement," Zen said.

He said he met with Benedict to make the request, but so far has not received an answer.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

China welcomes Vatican olive branch

AFP (22.01.2007) / HRWF Int. (23.01.2007) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - China's state-backed Catholic church Monday welcomed a newly announced Vatican initiative to repair ruptured relations with Beijing and said a promised letter from the pope to Chinese Catholics could be helpful.

Liu Bainian, the often hard-line vice chairman of the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, struck a conciliatory tone in the wake of the Vatican's announced diplomatic foray.

"I hope and I also believe that the Pope's letter will show his love of China's churches," Liu said in a telephone interview. "I am hopeful that it can improve Chinese-Vatican ties."

The Vatican announcement, made Saturday after two days of high-level debate on China, said the Holy See sought a dialogue with the aim of restoring diplomatic relations with Beijing and said Pope Benedict XVI was preparing a message for Chinese Catholics.

The diplomatic initiative comes as China is experiencing a religious boom while the Vatican remains hobbled by a half-century-long dispute with Beijing. A communist government-backed Catholic church refuses to recognize the Vatican's authority while many clergy and ordinary Catholics remain loyal to the pope and have been persecuted for it.

Participants in the Vatican's debate on China policy paid tribute to this "price of great suffering."

Liu glossed over the criticism, saying that the report also mentioned how fast the Chinese church has grown in recent years -- proof, he said, that the Vatican recognized that China enjoyed religious freedom of belief.

The Vatican debate and the pope's promised letter caught the attention of Catholics at a church in Shijiazhuang, said the Rev. Zhang Shijiang.

Zhang, the director of the Hebei Faith Press Newspaper, an officially approved weekly with a circulation of 50,000, said the two gestures would "certainly enhance dialogue and mutual trust and eliminate misunderstandings on both sides."

At the core of the Vatican's dispute with China are Taiwan and the appointment of bishops. The Vatican has indicated it is willing to downgrade relations with Taiwan. But Catholic Church tradition invests the pope with the authority to name bishops.

Beijing and its state-backed church, however, have appropriated the right, ordaining three bishops in 2006 without Vatican approval in recent months. Last month, Benedict expressed "great sorrow" over the latest such ordination.

"I personally hope that in the future they can agree on joint bishop approval," said the Rev. Zhang -- an indication that China is open to the idea.

"If it weren't for our lack of regular ties, it would not be so problematic for our two governments to reach agreements on issues," Liu said in apparent reference to the practice of jointly approving bishops.

Opinions within the Vatican hierarchy over China also appear divided. One participant in the Vatican debate was Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen, an outspoken advocate for freedom of worship and a critic of Beijing.

Zen, 75, was quoted in Hong Kong media as saying that the pope was probably going to let him step down as the city's bishop to help the Vatican restore diplomatic ties with China.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Vatican to set up China affairs body

AFP (16.01.2007) / HRWF Int. (23.01.2007) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A Hong Kong cardinal announced the Vatican will set up a permanent commission to handle China affairs, a day after the Holy See said it hoped to restore diplomatic ties with Beijing, according to a report.

"It will be set up because we had a good experience of working together in handling problems related to China," Cardinal Joseph Zen was quoted as saying by the South China Morning Post.

"It will definitely continue in similar fashion," he said after a two-day, high-level meeting with the Vatican to review its China policy.

Details of the new inter-departmental commission have yet to be announced.

In an editorial, the Post hailed the move as a "step forward" in efforts to bring about better relations between both sides, although the Vatican faced a tough

task ahead.

"At the heart of the problem is Beijing's assertion of a right to determine what goes on within its national borders," the Post said. "China, like every other nation, jealously guards that right.

"But the grip must be loosened if Catholics are to be able to properly follow their religion," the paper said, adding China could enhance its role on the world stage by doing so, with the 2008 Beijing Olympics approaching.

The Vatican meeting last week brought together key officials and China experts from the Vatican Secretariat of State, as well as Taiwanese Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-hsi and Macau Bishop Jose Lai Hung-seng.

The Holy See issued a statement afterwards, saying it wished to "overcome misunderstandings of the past" with Beijing, which does not allow Chinese Catholics to recognise papal authority.

It also called for "respectful and constructive dialogue" after months of tensions centring on the right to appoint bishops.

Although Pope Benedict XVI did not attend the meeting, he was broadly informed of the discussions and "has decided to send a letter to Catholics in China", the statement said.

Liu Bainian, vice chairman of the state-run Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, said he hoped formal ties between the Vatican and Beijing could be established "as soon as possible".

Despite the difficulties the Holy See faces, Sino-Vatican expert Beatrice Leung believed the new committee meant both sides could be in the final rounds of negotiations on normalising relations.

"This is a positive move. I think it is the last step in their negotiation. You can see all the key officials and experts went there for the meeting, which shows the importance of it," she said.

"Now the pope is writing a letter to the Catholics in China, which means the letter would be accepted by the mainland. They wouldn't do so if they knew it would be rejected," she said.

While the Holy See is ready to restore ties, Leung said China, emerging as a major world power, would be forced to face the issue sooner or later.

Tensions have been simmering since Chinese authorities last year went ahead with the ordination of four bishops who did not have the pope's approval.

Zen, who was still in the Vatican, said the Holy See's policy towards Beijing remained the same.

"We are not surrendering and our stance has not changed," he said. "We have stated our basic principles on religious freedom.

"There have already been statements in the past on the illicit ordinations and now is the time to review our policy and plan ahead on what to do," he said.

While Catholicism is allowed in China, a state-sanctioned "patriotic church" with

an estimated five million members does not answer to the pope and ordains its own bishops.

A clandestine Church, with some 10 million adherents, tenaciously maintains links with the Vatican.

Diplomatic ties between China and the Vatican have been severed since 1951, two years after Beijing's officially atheist Communist government took power.

Normalisation of ties would require the Vatican to break off ties with Taiwan, which Beijing considers a renegade province.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Pope to convene special meeting on China

AFP (16.01.2007) / HRWF Int. (22.01.2007) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Pope Benedict XVI is reportedly expected to convene a Vatican meeting soon to discuss the Roman Catholic church's strategy in China.

The meeting is to focus on China's strained relations with the Holy See after Beijing consecrated several bishops last year without papal approval, a move seen as "unlawful" by Pope Benedict, said the I-Media news agency, which reports in French on Vatican affairs.

A spokesman for Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen last week said that the Catholic leader planned to attend the meeting.

China's state-sanctioned church, which does not answer to the pope, has about four million worshippers, official figures show. The Vatican estimates the country's underground Catholic church has around 10 million followers.

Beijing in 1951 cut diplomatic ties with the Vatican, which has since recognised Taiwan, regarded by China as part of its territory awaiting reunification.

China had insisted that to re-establish ties, the Vatican must sever ties with Taiwan and not interfere in its internal affairs.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

China welcomes Vatican's approval of bishop picked by Beijing

Kyodo (18.01.2007) / HRWF Int. (22.01.2007) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - China's government-backed Catholic Patriotic Association on Thursday welcomed reports that the Vatican has approved a priest that the association has endorsed to become bishop of the Guangzhou diocese in southern China's Guangdong Province.

The South China Morning Post reported that Pope Benedict has approved Father Gan Junqiu of Guangzhou's Sacred Heart Cathedral to be ordained as the diocese's bishop.

The decision came ahead of a high-level meeting to be held in the Vatican this month to discuss the diplomatic relationship between the Vatican, China and

Taiwan, the English-language daily said.

Quoting an unnamed Vatican official, the report said Gan's candidacy "had been in the pipeline for months." The official added that after a thorough investigation, the pope gave his approval.

"Since China does not have official diplomatic ties with the Vatican, we have not received any official notification (about Gan's ordination approval)," Association Vice Chairman Liu Bainian told Kyodo News.

"But if it was true, it would be good news and beneficial to improving relationships between the two states," he said.

China's ordinations of mainland bishops without seeking prior approval from the Vatican since April last year has further damaged the relationship. Liu said China needs bishops and it cannot wait for the diplomatic relationship to improve.

"Father Gan was elected to be bishop-designate in November and once the Catholic Bishops' College has finished vetting process, a date for ordination will be set. It is hard to estimate when but will definitely happen this year," Liu said.

Beijing has ordained five bishops since April without papal approval, including Xu Honggen of Jiangsu Province, Ma Yinglin of Yunnan Province, Liu Xinhong of Anhui Province, Pei Junmin of Liaoning Province and Wang Renlei of Jiangsu Province. The Holy See endorsed only Xu and Pei.

Diplomatic ties between China and the Vatican were severed shortly after the Communist Party took power in 1949.

Roman Catholics in China are divided into two groups, one worshipping at churches controlled by the Patriotic Association --an organization set up by the authorities to keep a grip on the religion -- while those who are loyal to the Pope go to underground churches.

Talks have been held between China and the Vatican on restoring ties. However, two major hurdles are in the way, namely China's demand that the Vatican cut ties with Taiwan and that it stay out of China's internal affairs, including the ordaining of bishops.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Released two of the nine underground priests arrested in Hebei

AsiaNews (13.01.2007) / HRWF Int. (18.01.2007) - Website:

<http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Two priests of the underground Church of Hebei have been released by police due to ill health; 7 others arrested with them remain in prison. Local sources told AsiaNews that the priests were arrested because they had taken part in "illegal" gatherings. According to the same sources --who are forced to remain anonymous- the police are seeking to coerce them into joining the Patriotic Association.

The two men, who were released, Fr. Wen Daoxiu and Fr. Li Yongshun, have serious health problems, particularly 50 year old Fr Wen, the oldest of the group who suffers with heart problems.

The arrest of the 9 priests took place on December 27th last. The group had gathered together to study in a location 30 kilometers to the south of Baoding. AsiaNews sources confirm that the motive for the arrest is that they, priests not recognized by the government met in a place that was not registered with the government. According to the states religious legislation, such actions are considered illegal, and those who carry them out "a delinquent".

Hebei has the largest number of Catholics (1, 5 million), most of whom belong to the unofficial "underground" Church. They refuse the authority of the Patriotic Association of Chinese Catholics (AP), an organisation of control created by the communist party in the attempt to build a separate Church to Rome.

For the last ten years the AP has been carrying out a campaign of arrests and suppression against the bishops, priests, and faithful of Hebei.

December 30th last, Liu Bainian, the lay vice president of AP, told journalists that he had heard nothing of the new arrests. He also denied that AP is carrying out a campaign against the underground Church.

According to AsiaNews data at least 6 underground bishops from Hebei are in detention or missing. Among them the ordinary bishop of Baoding, msgr. Giacomo Su Zhimin, 73 years old, arrested in '96.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Bible study raided

China Aid Association (08.01.2007) / HRWF Int. (26.02.2007) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net -China Aid Association learns that on January 1st, 2007 the local police in Baoding city, Hebei province, attacked a Christian Bible Study held in a Communist Party School. There are 130 million Christians in China (including both Protestants and Catholics) according to Mr. Yie Xiaowen, the director of the Chinese State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA).

On January 1st, 2007 a group of Christians gathered in an office in the Party School (where the cadres of the Communist Party in this area are trained) of Baoding City, Hebei province to celebrate New Year by studying the Bible. But they were besieged and raided by the local PSB officers at 10am. Over 40 Christians were taken away for interrogation. Most of the Christians were not released until 6pm the same day, including Dr. Li Baiguang who is one of the most famous Christian legal activists from Beijing.

The host of the Bible study, Professor Geng Sude, who is the vice president of the Party School, was reportedly released after several days of investigation. Professor Su (about 50 years old) is a secret Christian intellectual among the Chinese House Church. She is under tight surveillances now.

Moreover, CAA also learns that on January 4, 2007 the local police attacked a Christian gathering in Xizhuang group, Anlou village, Erlangmiao Township, Fangcheng County, Henan province. Three Christians were brought to the police station. The police released two of them the same day, while the other one, brother An Wenqing, a house church seminary lecturer, was released on January 5 after being interrogated for 14 hours by the police.

CAA learns from a reliable source, that recently Mr. Yie Xiaowen, the director of the Chinese State Administration for Religious Affairs, said in two internal meetings held in Beijing University and Chinese Academy of Social Science respectively, that the number of Christians in China has reached 130 million now, including 20 million Catholics. The Chinese government often underestimates the number of religious believers in its officially released figure.

"The unprecedented growth of the Chinese church has happened under ceaseless persecution," said Bob Fu, the President of CAA. "We pray that China will realize true religious freedom soon."

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

China detains three church leaders after raid on private home

AP (03.01.2007) / HRWF Int. (05.01.2007) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Police arrested three Christian church leaders in a raid on a gathering at a private home in northeastern China, a U.S.-based monitoring group reported Wednesday.

About 30 policemen and officials from the local government's Religious Affairs Bureau took part in the Dec. 29 raid on the home in Duolun, in Inner Mongolia 250 kilometers (155 miles) north of Beijing, the China Aid Association reported.

The officials declared the service an "illegal gathering," the association said, a reflection of China's policy of permitting worship only in official churches whose clergy and activities are tightly controlled by the officially atheistic communist government.

Detained were Liu Guanghua, 42, Zhi Huiping, 41, and Zhi Ruiping, 35, the association said. It said the three women were being held at the Duolun County Detention Center.

Wednesday was an official holiday in China and calls to Duolun county government offices rang unanswered.

The association said the three women were sentenced to 15 days of administrative detention, a measure used against people deemed to have committed offenses but who are not legally recognized as criminals.

Activists in the unofficial church are frequently sentenced to up to three years in prison camps, part of a system called reeducation through labor that sidesteps the need for a criminal trial.

The association said the service had been part of post-Christmas celebrations, but didn't say how many people were attending.

While repression against unofficial church groups varies by region, the central government has enacted measures demanding such groups either register and accept government supervision, or face harsh punishment.

Yet with numbers of Christians growing across the country, millions still risk harassment and arrest by worshipping independently, often in private homes.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

