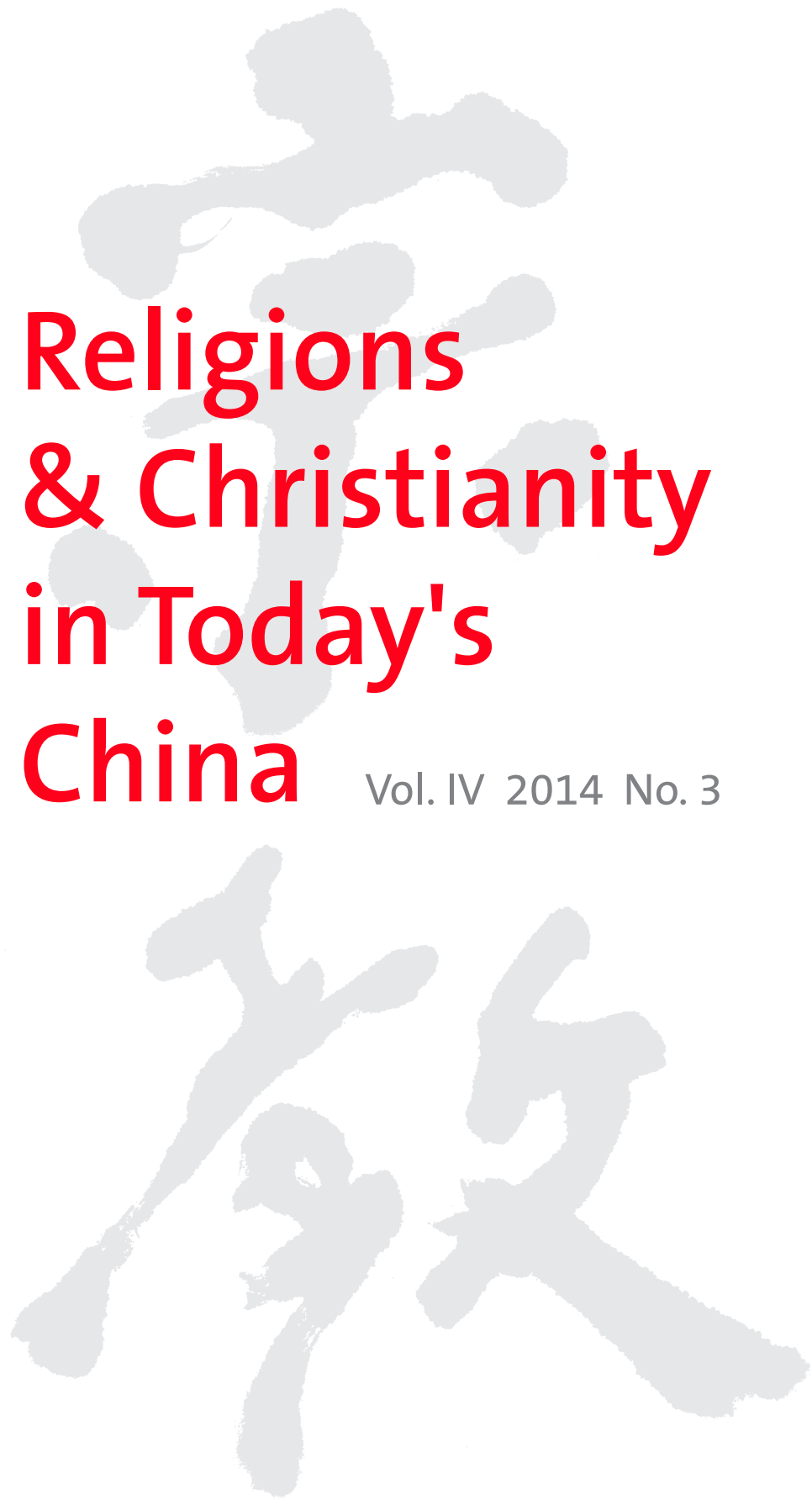


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Editorial

Today we can present to our readers the third 2014 issue of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* (中國宗教評論). As in previous issues, it includes the regular series of News Updates with an insight into recent events and general trends with regard to religions and especially Christianity in today's China.

The article by Sr. Clare Zhang Jiaqin of the Congregation of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus in Hebei Province – currently studying at the Catholic Theological Union of Chicago – gives an overall critical view of the “Present Situation and Future Development of Sisters’ Congregations in China.” Sr. Clare describes the many contributions of Chinese sisters to Church and society, but also stresses the manifold difficulties the sisters are confronted with.

Religions & Christianity in Today's China is freely available on the website of the China-Zentrum, www.china-zentrum.de. Additionally, readers who subscribe to *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* will regularly receive e-mail updates providing web links to the contents of each newly published issue.

The China-Zentrum is a non-profit organization. For the publication of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* we are dependent on the generosity of our friends and readers. In order to help us cover inevitable costs, we would be very grateful if you could consider sending in a voluntary contribution.

Sankt Augustin, September 2014

The Editors

News Update on Religion and Church in China April 3 – June 29, 2014

Compiled by Katharina Wenzel-Teuber
Translated by David Streit

The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2014, No. 2, pp. 3-16) covered the period December 1, 2013 – March 19, 2014.

April 3, 2014:

Xinhua: Buddhist temple in Hangzhou forms “anti-terror” unit

The new “anti-terror” squad consists of 20 Lingyin-Temple monks and about 20 security guards, all equipped with shields, batons and pepper spray. Members of the unit are being trained by the local police. More than 10,000 tourists and believers visit the temple each day. According to an April 3 *Xinhua* report, this is the first such unit to be formed in a Buddhist temple.

April 24 and 25, 2014:

Authorities in Wenzhou (Zhejiang) demolish the “Stations of the Cross” and the house of an underground Catholic

On April 25, the statues and images of the outdoor Stations of the Cross on Longgangshan Hill in Liushi, Yueqing County (Wenzhou) were either hauled away or bricked up so they could not be seen. All of the remaining religious symbols on the shrine property were destroyed. On April 24, authorities demolished the house of a lay Catholic man, which they claimed served the underground Church as an illegal religious meeting place (*UCAN* April 30). See also the entry below for April 28, 2014; for background information see *China heute* 2014, No. 2, pp. 72-75 (in German).

April 28, 2014:

Authorities pull down the Protestant Sanjiang Church in Zhejiang

A month of negotiations with the authorities preceded the demolition of Sanjiang Church in Yongjia County (Wenzhou). At times as many as 3,000 of the faithful took turns guarding the church building. The church had been registered with the authorities.



Excavators tear down the side walls of the Sanjiang Church.
Foto: CERF.

the roofs and towers of Christian churches. According to a list provided by the US-based ChinaAid organization, between January 1, 2014 and the end of June 2014, 132 churches (13 of them Catholic) either had annexes or their church buildings demolished, or had their crosses removed, or had received a demolition notice for either buildings or crosses. In 90 of the 132 cases listed, crosses were removed (or, in some cases, covered). Many of the churches concerned were registered with the government.



On May 30, 2014, authorities remove cross from Dongyang Church in Wenzhou.
Foto: ChinaAid (June 6, 2014).

consisting of Bishop Zhu Weifang, 18 priests and 400 lay representatives from all parishes of the diocese, applauded – a report on the website of the Catholic newspaper *Xinde* said.

Religious sites of other religions, especially small temples for Chinese popular religion, were also affected by the “Three remodelings, one demolition” (http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_c260784101011fjf.html; www.ccctspm.org May 12; www.chinaaid.org/2014/05/china-aid-receives-compilation-of-64.html; www.chinacatholic.org July 1).

For details see information article and documentation in *China heute* 2014, No. 2, pp. 72-75 and 91-93 (in German).

The demolition of Sanjiang Church took place in the context of the operation “Three remodelings, one demolition” launched by the government of Zhejiang Province. Lasting from 2013 to 2015, this operation aims at remodeling old residential areas, old factory areas and villages within cities, and at demolishing illegal buildings in the entire province. Since April 2014 (and even in a few cases during the months before) authorities ordered numerous “illegal” religious buildings and parts of buildings in Zhejiang to be pulled down. They also ordered the removal of many crosses from

Even bodies and representatives of the official churches felt compelled to take a stand against these actions. On April 26, Pastor Chen Yilu, head of the official Protestant National Union Theological Seminary in Nanjing, published a blog commentary on the demolition of the cross of Sanjiang Church. On May 12, the official governing bodies of the Protestant church, Chinese Christian Council and Three-Self Patriotic Movement, published “Answers to questions of part of the believers regarding churches, crosses etc. within the operation “Three remodelings, one demolition.”” While asking the local Christian communities to cooperate with the authorities, the statement of the two bodies also called for an immediate stop to the removal of crosses which do not exceed the size given in the approved construction plan and do not jeopardize safety. During a solemn Mass in the Cathedral of Wenzhou on May 30, Father Zhong Jinxing called the recent demolitions of crosses in the province the most serious attack on religion by the State since the beginning of reform and opening. He asked the government to respect Christian belief and to stop the demolitions. The congregation, consisting of

April 30, 2014:

Notice of the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the State Administration of Religious Affairs regulating the intake of orphans and foundlings by religious organizations

The measure regulates the taking in by religious organizations of orphans and foundlings. Among other things, the new rules concern the physical accommodations, which must meet the national standards on fire-protection and hygiene regulations. In addition, supervision, care, education and training should be ensured and the rights and interests of children are to be safeguarded. Collaboration between agencies and orphanages is to be improved and intensified, and orphans and foundlings are to be provided with a basic livelihood from the state in accordance with local standards. However, the new rules only apply to homes that are run by nationally recognized and registered religious organizations. While social activities for orphans and foundlings in such organizations are being legalized and promoted, the situation of those homes run by the unofficial Church has seriously deteriorated. Since the unofficial Church does not belong to the legally registered religious communities, neither the unofficial Church nor its affiliated organizations may run homes for orphans or foundlings. Those homes of this nature which do already exist are to be closed. Another regulation states that the children taken in by religious organizations should not be forced to accept their religious beliefs. This provision, too, and its formulation, which is very much in need of interpretation, are problematic (www.mca.gov.cn/article/zwgk/fvfg/shflhshsw/201405/20140500631165.shtml; *China Daily* online May 6; *Xinhua* May 5). – A German translation of this new document can be found in *China heute* 2014, No. 2, pp. 81-83. *Jan Kwee*

May 6, 2014:

First Blue Book on National Security warns of infiltration by religion

Religious infiltration is threatening the identity of socialist belief, notes the Blue Book with the English title *Annual Report on China's National Security Studies (2014)*. It was compiled by the Center for International Strategy and Security Studies of the University of International Relations and was published under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Religious infiltration of China by hostile western forces is now assuming ever more diverse forms and a larger scale, it is both provocative and deceptive, the Blue Book states (here presented according to a report in the Beijing newspaper *Xinjingbao*). According to the Blue Book, the forces of foreign religious infiltration have already stretched their tentacles into all areas of Chinese society. As an example, the report points out that all of the terrorist attacks in China during the year 2013 had been carried out by religious extremists. "Religious infiltration represents an extremely serious threat to ideological security in today's China and is a serious threat to Chinese national security," claims the Blue Book (epaper.bjnews.com.cn/html/2014-05/07/content_510389.htm?div=-1&news; see also: *People's Daily Online* May 8; *UCAN* May 7).

May 8, 2014:

Official Church election of a bishop in the Diocese of Chengdu (Sichuan Province)

In the second round of voting, Fr. Tang Yuange, born in 1963, was elected bishop-candidate by a vote of 39 to 8. The electoral college was composed of 21 priests, 3 deacons and 23 sisters, seminarians

and lay people. Present at the election were Bishop Luo Xuebin of Yibin and Bishop Chen Gong'ao of Nanchong, the two Vatican-approved bishops in Sichuan. Government representatives were also present. The approval of the official state-sanctioned Bishops' Conference (the next step in the official procedure) has not yet been given. According to *UCAN*, it was unclear whether the Vatican would agree to Fr. Tang's ordination as a bishop. The news agency pointed out that this first election of a bishop in the official Church since Pope Francis took office will be a key test of relations between Beijing and the Vatican. The episcopal see of Chengdu has been vacant since 1998. Fr. Li Zhigang had already been elected bishop-candidate in 2011, but he died shortly afterwards (*UCAN* May 9; www.sctzj.com May 9).

May 15, 2014:

***Xinhua*: Symposium in Urumqi calls on Muslims to resist religious extremism and terrorism**

The symposium in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Autonomous Region, was organized by the Chinese Islamic Association. Wang Zuo'an, Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, said in his speech to the symposium that religious extremism has nothing to do with Islam, but "maliciously distorts and kidnaps the religion." According to him, terrorism is neither an ethnic problem nor the problem of a particular religion, but an enemy of human civilization.

In recent months there have been a series of attacks, which according to the Chinese authorities were carried out by Uygur separatists. In the most serious attack on a marketplace in Urumqi on May 22, forty-three people, including four of the attackers, lost their lives and more than 90 were wounded (*New York Times* May 23; *Xinhua* May 5).

May 18–19, 2014:

In Shenyang (China), Catholics from South Korea invite their North Korean counterparts to the Mass with Pope Francis in Seoul

A representative of the Korean Bishops' Conference has announced that South Korea is inviting Catholic faithful from North Korea to take part in the Mass to be celebrated in Seoul by Pope Francis on August 18. According to the Vatican news agency *Fides*, the invitation was extended during the course of an encounter between Catholics from North and South Korea in Shenyang, China. Pope Francis is to visit South Korea from August 14–18.

According to *Vatican Insider*, "informed observers" were speculating that the Pope might possibly make a stopover in Beijing while on the way to Seoul (*Fides* May 26; *Vatican Insider* June 6).

May 21 / 24, 2014

Pope Francis calls for prayers for Catholics in China

At the end of the general audience in St. Peter's Square on May 21, quoting his predecessor, the Pope said: "On 24 May we celebrate the liturgical memory of the Blessed Virgin Mary Help of Christians, venerated with great devotion at the Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai. I ask all the faithful to pray that, under the protection of the Mater Auxiliatrice, Catholics in China may continue to believe, to hope and

to love and that they may be, in every circumstance, a leaven of harmonious coexistence among their fellow citizens” (www.vatican.va May 21). The day of prayer for the Church in China was observed in China itself and throughout the world.

May 26, 2014:

National Protestant governing bodies publish seven regulations for theological seminaries

The seven regulations, published for “trial implementation,” concern faculty and academic degrees in theological seminaries. By publishing these documents, the China Christian Council and the National Three-Self Patriotic Movement fulfilled requirements fixed in two guidelines of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, which took effect on 1 January 2013, namely the “Measures for the Recognition of the Status, Titles and Appointment of Teaching Personnel at Institutes for Religious Education” and the “Measures for the Awarding of Academic Degrees by Institutes for Religious Education” (www.ccctspm.org/news/ccctspm/2014/526/14526770.html; see: *RCTC* 2013, No. 1, p. 10).

May 28, 2014:

Woman slain in McDonald’s franchise in Shandong by persons identified as members of the “Church of the Almighty God”

As reported in the Chinese state media, six people in the restaurant in the city of Zhaoyuan brutally beat to death a 37 year old woman by the name of Wu Shuoyan when she refused to give them her phone number. The attack began after a female member of the group called out that the 37 year old woman was an evil spirit, the reports said. Excerpts of the incident – apparently captured on video with a cell-phone – were shown on Chinese television. Local police said on May 31 that the six people, including a father and his three children (two of them adults), are followers of the “heretical sect” of the “Church of the Almighty God.” The Hong Kong newspaper *South China Morning Post*, which had spoken with a relative of the victim and with witnesses to the incident, reported that on June 3 the victim’s family held a commemoration service in front of the restaurant on the seventh day after her death (a traditional day of mourning in Chinese culture) and burnt traditional paper offerings. In an open letter dated June 6, the governing bodies of the official Protestant church condemned the “insane crime” and called on Christians to be vigilant against the “heretical organization.” The party newspaper *People’s Daily* spoke of the incident as a “typical case of cult killing.” According to the newspaper, there are approximately 14 different cult organizations operating in China at this time. The *New York Times* reported that, following the murder, all of the media, local authorities and schools began to warn people of the dangers posed by evil cults (*Nanfang zhoumo* June 5; *New York Times* June 17; *People’s Daily Online* June 5; *South China Morning Post* June 4; *Xinhua* May 31; www.ccctspm.org/news/ccctspm/2014/66/1466769.html).

Founded in the 1990s, the “Church of the Almighty God” (also known as the “Doctrine of the Eastern Lightning”) proclaims Almighty God or Second Christ, a reincarnation of Christ in the form of a Chinese woman, whose antithesis is the “great red dragon” which the group identifies with the Chinese Communist Party. For years the sect has been trying to win over members from among the faithful of the various Christian communities.

May 30, 2014:

Administrator of the Diocese of Yujiang abducted by government officials

UCAN reported that on May 30, Fr. John Peng Weizhao was “taken away” to an undisclosed location from the home of another priest in Linchuan District of Fuzhou City in Jiangxi Province. Two weeks later his whereabouts were still unknown. Officials of the local Bureau of Religious Affairs in Linchuan claimed that the detention had been an action of the provincial government of Jiangxi. The actual reason for the arrest was not made public. Fr. Peng, who belongs to the non-registered Catholic community in the underground, was appointed by the Holy See in 2012 as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Yujiang, following the resignation of its aged Bishop Zeng Jingmu. In 1985, the official Church merged all five dioceses of Jiangxi Province (including Yujiang) into the Diocese of Jiangxi, whereas the underground Church continues to follow the Vatican’s division of dioceses. *AsiaNews* has reported one Church source in China as saying: “They are trying to eliminate all the candidates for the episcopate in the underground Church” (*AsiaNews* June 11; *UCAN* Sept. 9).

June 4, 2014:

Hong Kong: Record numbers take part in candlelight vigil for victims of Tian’anmen Square in 1989



Cardinal Joseph Zen during the candlelight vigil before the rally. Foto: Kathrin Harms.

The event’s organizer, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, estimated that about 180,000 people took part in Hong Kong’s commemoration of the victims of the massacre of Tian’anmen Square, which occurred 25 years ago. The police estimated the crowd at about 99,500. Before the rally, Christians gathered for a prayer vigil organized by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese. For details see information article in *China heute* 2014, No. 2, pp. 75-76 (in German). *Katharina Feith*

June 8, 2014:

South China Morning Post: Beijing and Vatican prepare to resume talks

According to the newspaper, which cited “a person close to the Holy See,” the Vatican is now waiting for confirmation by Beijing as to the time and place of the talks. If formal talks are indeed held, these would be the first between Beijing and the Vatican since 2010, the newspaper said. It quoted Bishop Fang Xinyao, Chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, as saying that now is an ideal time to resume a relationship with the Vatican (*South China Morning Post* June 8).

June 10, 2014:

Inspector for party discipline accuses the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences of being infiltrated by foreign powers

As reported by the *South China Morning Post*, Zhang Yingwei made his charges on June 10 when he oversaw a visit by representatives of the Communist Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). A report of his charges appeared on the website of the CASS, but was soon removed. Zhang is reported to have said during the visit that the Academy has ideological problems. These include using academic research as a cover for other purposes, using the Internet to promote theories that play into the hands of foreign powers and allowing inappropriate foreign influence in sensitive issues. He also spoke of "illegal collusion" between experts from the CASS and foreign interests in sensitive times and urged greater political awareness among the scientists of the Academy. Zhang said that no exceptions will be made for anyone (*South China Morning Post* June 15).

June 10, 2014:

Council of State's "White Paper" emphasizes Beijing's control over Hong Kong

The Information Office of the Council of State has issued a "White Paper" reminding Hong Kong that it is under the control of Beijing. "China's central government has comprehensive jurisdiction over all local administrative regions, including the HKSAR [Hong Kong Special Administrative Region]. The high degree of autonomy of HKSAR is not an inherent power, but one that comes solely from the authorization by the central leadership. The high degree of autonomy of the HKSAR is not full autonomy, nor a decentralized power. It is the power to run local affairs as authorized by the central leadership. The high degree of autonomy of HKSAR is subject to the level of the central leadership's authorization," says the document. The "White Paper" met with considerable criticism in Hong Kong and has, according to commentators, spurred popular participation in the unofficial referendum on the election of Hong Kong's Chief Executive, which was held between June 20 and June 29 (see below) (*South China Morning Post* June 11, 18.; *UCAN* June 13.). The English text of the document "The Practice of the 'One Country, Two Systems' Policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" can be found at: www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-06/10/content_17576281.htm.

June 11, 2014:

Memorandum of Understanding signed on the establishment of a Center for Orthodox Culture at the Shanghai Foreign Studies University

The memorandum of understanding was signed in Shanghai by Prof. Cao Deming, Rector of the University, and Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov) of the Moscow Patriarchate's Council for Culture. The future tasks of the Center will include, among other things, the publication of a Sino-Russian Bible dictionary as well as a dictionary of Orthodox terms (pravoslavie.ru June 16).

Mid-June 2014:

National Security Council said to have ordered a review of all NGOs with foreign background

According to a notice of the city government of Yuncheng (Shanxi Province), which sources say appeared in mid-June on a local news portal, the National Security Council has ordered a review of the foreign-based non-governmental organizations operating in the country and their relations with Chinese partners. The review was to last from May to the end of July 2014 and was intended to “further strengthen the administration of standards.” *Agence France-Presse* reported that links to the original posting appeared to have been quickly taken down but several other Chinese news sites posted screenshots of the notice. There has been no confirmation of such an action from official sources. The newly created National Security Council, which is headed by President Xi Jinping, met for the first time on April 16, 2014 (*AFP* June 20; *UCAN* May 7).

June 18, 2014:

UCAN: After two years, Bishop Ma Daqin of Shanghai still under house arrest

Government officials told priests and sisters of the Diocese of Shanghai, who were taking part in a “learning” class during the month of June, that Bishop Ma needs to continue his “repentance and reflection.” One course member told *UCAN* that this meant that Bishop Ma would not be allowed out to take over the leadership of the diocese. Bishop Ma is under de facto house arrest since he announced his resignation from the Patriotic Association immediately following his episcopal consecration on July 7, 2012.

Citing a “source close to the Holy See,” Reuters reported in March that the Chinese government had privately signaled that it might possibly appoint Bishop Ma Ordinary (Local Bishop) of Shanghai and release two long-imprisoned bishops. However, Liu Bainian, influential Honorary Chairman of the Patriotic Association, told Reuters that [with his resignation] Ma had “deceived the bishops and cheated the government as well as the public. How can you then take on the responsibility for such a large diocese as Shanghai?” According to Liu, Ma had obviously been under the influence of foreigners (*Reuters* March 31; *UCAN* June 18).

June 20 to 29, 2014:

780,000 take part in unofficial referendum on the election of Hong Kong’s Chief Executive

Almost 10% of Hong Kong’s people – significantly more than expected – took part in the survey organized by the pro-democracy group “Occupy Central.” Participants could choose between three different options for the process of nomination by the people of candidates for the post of Chief Executive. The first direct election of the Chief Executive is scheduled to take place in 2017, but many residents of Hong Kong fear that the nomination of candidates is going to be determined by Beijing. Beijing has characterized the Hong Kong referendum, which is not legally binding, as an “illegal farce.”

Hong Kong permanent residents were able to cast their vote online or at any one of 15 polling stations, three of which were set up in Catholic parishes. One polling station was set up under the auspices of the Protestant Hong Kong Christian Council. The retired Hong Kong bishop, 82 year old Cardinal Joseph

Zen, encouraged participation in the referendum on June 7 by setting out on a seven-day walk around the Hong Kong territory, accompanied by 200 people. On July 2, Hong Kong's current Bishop, Cardinal John Tong, told *KNA*: "According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, democracy is a high value, which we as Church must defend" (*AsiaNews* June 9; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* June 28; *Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur KNA* July 3; *South China Morning Post* June 22, 24; *UCAN* June 13, 30; *Xinhua* June 20, 24).

June 25, 2014:

Interfax: China's oldest Orthodox church at Wuhan could become Sino-Russian cultural center



The St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. Foto: OCP.

At the first session of a joint working group for trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation between Russia's Volga Federal District and the Chinese upper and middle Yangzi River region in the city of Chongqing in February 2014 the decision was taken to cooperate in restoring the historic St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Wuhan, built in 1893. The Cathedral had been expropriated following the 1950s and was used as a warehouse. On May 27, 1998, the church was registered as historical monument protected at the city level. At a second meeting in the Volga-Yangzi format, Volga's representative Mikhail

Babich said: "Once the church is restored, it could be used as a base for opening a Russian-Chinese cultural center hosting both the church-museum part introducing Russia's spiritual culture, and a permanent place dedicated to the history of Russian-Chinese regional ties" (*Interfax* June 25).

June 26, 2014:

25 adherents of the "Church of the Almighty God" sentenced to prison in Ningxia

The members of the sect were tried on charges of distributing materials of the "Church of the Almighty God" in public, of disrupting the social order and of undermining China's laws and regulations. They were sentenced by the Xiji County People's Court to prison terms ranging from three and a half to eight years (*Xinhua* June 27). See also the entry for May 28, 2014 (above).

This "News Update" was first published in *China heute* 2014, No. 2, pp. 77-80 (in German). Unless otherwise indicated, all source references in the "News Update" refer to the year 2014.

Present Situation and Future Development of Sisters' Congregations in China

Sr. Clare Zhang Jiaqin

Introduction

The Catholic Church in China has been developing a lot since China's economic and social reforms began in 1978. The Catholic Church makes many contributions to society and has a good reputation. These positive results are inseparable from the contributions of the Sisters, the religious women dedicated to service everywhere in China. Women religious participate in a wide variety of service activities, including giving comfort and support after earthquakes, helping to spread information to prevent HIV/AIDS, offering inexpensive medical treatment, visiting the sick, poor and elderly. Religious women live and proclaim the Gospel to society especially in the social service area. It is largely the Sisters' loving service which makes the Church relevant to society, embodying the image of Christ for a generation of young non-believers, counteracting atheistic propaganda. Through their loving service, they make God's love visible.

There are an estimated 5.350 religious women in about 160 congregations in China today (Holy Spirit Study Centre 2010).¹ Statistics show that there are about 100 dioceses in mainland China. This means that, on average, in every diocese there are one or more Sisters' congregations. These figures indicate the importance that religious Sisters have for the Church in China. Thus the development of the Sisters and of their commitment to their vocation will definitely have an effect on the overall development of the Church in China.²

Sister Clare Zhang Jiaqin is a member of the Congregation of Saint Therese of The Child Jesus in her home province of Hebei, northern China. In 1988, at her Bishop's instruction, Sister Clare helped to organize the re-establishment of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus Congregation in Hebei. She served as the superior of her congregation for twenty years. Sister Clare has helped to serve and care for the orphans of Liming Family Center since its inception in 1989. She drafted the regulations of the Association of Superiors General of Women Religious of Hebei Province and was its first chairperson from 1999 to 2001. As a spiritual director she has trained other Sisters and led retreats for different groups. She is currently studying at the Catholic Theological Union (CTU) of Chicago. The following text is based on a lecture she gave on July 2, 2014, at the China-Zentrum in Sankt Augustin, Germany.

- 1 See the "Statistics of the Catholic Church in China" for the year 2010 in: Sergio Ticozzi PIME, "China Church and News Update," www.hsstudyc.org.hk/en/tripod_en/en_tripod_160_10.html.
- 2 Cf. Victoria Lau FFM, "Reflections on the Formation of Religious Sisters in Today's China," www.hsstudyc.org.hk/en/tripod_en/en_tripod_159_05.html.

The degree to which Sisters can continue their positive contributions to the Church and to society in general depends on how much energy and what abilities the religious women have. In order to support the development of the Church, it is imperative to promote, educate and empower the religious women, so that they may have the ability and resources to continue their service and input for Church and society.

I. The Historical Background

A. Historical Background of Chinese Women

In Chinese history, over thousands of years, a woman had no self-image apart from her relationship to the males in her life and family. The “three obediences,” “four virtues” and “lotus feet” or “foot binding” are well known. In Confucianism there was a set of basic moral principles specifically for women. A woman was bound to “three obediences”: that is to be subject to her father prior to marriage, to her husband after marriage and finally to her son if she became a widow. The four feminine virtues were morality, proper speech, modest appearance and diligent work. The foot binding was the custom of applying painfully tight binding to the feet of young girls to prevent further growth. The physical and mental abuse through the three obediences, four virtues and foot binding, which characterized traditional Chinese gender relations for centuries, have left distinct scars on the history of China.

In 1989, the All-China Women's Federation, the largest women's organization in China, advocated the women's “four-selfs.” Those being self-respect, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-strengthening – values which all Christian women well appreciate. Women have to better themselves in order to make greater contributions to humankind.

However, the Catholic Church as a whole has not been influenced by this movement. The feudal belief in men's superiority over women, particularly in China, is so deeply rooted in the minds of people in the Church that it is very hard to overcome. The major cause of this is the way in which the Chinese Church has developed. After the Chinese Rites controversy of the 17th / 18th century, the Catholic Church in China was to some extent cut off from Chinese culture and society, so that the Chinese Catholic Church has not been much influenced by progressive social changes.

B. Historical Background of Chinese Religious Women and Sisters' Congregations

For more than 200 years, religious Sisters were key factors in the revitalization and growth of the Catholic Church in China. After the Chinese Rites Controversy, almost all foreign missionaries were expelled from China. At that time, China did not have a local clergy; so women, especially the so-called consecrated virgins, took on significant functions to build up the faith of believers and to continue the Christian mission. For more than 200 years, they played an innovative role in adapting Catholicism to Chinese culture.

In 1926, for the first time in history, Pope Pius XI ordained six native Chinese as bishops. By 1929 the majority of indigenous Chinese women's religious congregations had been es-

tablished for the Christian mission. The effects of World War II coupled with revolutionary movements destroyed all religious institutions. After more than 30 years of persecution, the pre-War foundations of the Sisters' congregations were completely obliterated.

The Chinese Sisters and consecrated virgins prior to 1948 provided valuable service to the Church that assured their financial self-sufficiency. They were esteemed – or at least tolerated – by the hierarchy and the laity, and enjoyed a lifestyle and social status that many young Chinese women found attractive.

After Mao Zedong came to power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party began a sustained attempt to control and ultimately eradicate religion. All the Sisters' convents were closed, their educational, medical and social institutions were nationalized, and their property and income confiscated. The Chinese nuns were ordered back to their villages. A remnant of these women stayed celibate and continued to live secretly as Sisters. Others married and worked as factory workers, nurses, doctors, teachers, clerks and farmers.

After the reforms of 1978, religious orders were not allowed to work autonomously in China. Administratively, the Religious Affairs Bureau held each bishop responsible for the religious staff in his diocese. This put the Sisters in a rather passive position since they were legally unable to initiate any new forms of Church service by themselves. Between 1980 and 2010 many congregations were started or reestablished. Most congregations were started by bishops for pastoral work, with only a few congregations started by the Sisters themselves. The Sisters had to perform the tasks desired by the bishops.

II. The Present Situation of the Chinese Sisters

A. Number of Sisters, Congregations, Apostolates and Current Trends

According to surveys by the Holy Spirit Study Centre in Hong Kong, in 2010, there were about 160 congregations with 5,350 Sisters in China. 70% of the Sisters are members of about half of the congregations. They are members of the public Church, but are not necessarily members of the Chinese Patriotic Association. Another 30% of Chinese Sisters who are members of the other half of the congregations are members of the underground Church.³ My personal research suggests that additionally there are also some 1,300 women working as consecrated virgins in parishes and serving the elderly in south-eastern China.

Most congregations have small clinics. The majority of the Sisters work in parishes. Some Sisters work in kindergartens and nursing homes sponsored by their congregations. Some Sisters work with NGOs and charitable institutes, such as orphanages and special education centers for children with special needs. A few Sisters work with lepers and HIV/AIDS patients. While leprosy is decreasing, the number of people affected by HIV/AIDS is increasing in many regions.

Parishes and clinics: Over half of the Sisters work in parishes or training centers. Sisters teach Sunday school, lead prayers, Bible study groups, yearly retreats and workshops, and

³ See the “Statistics of the Catholic Church in China” for the year 2010 in: Sergio Ticozzi PIME, “China Church and News Update,” www.hsstudyc.org/hk/en/tripod_en/en_tripod_160_10.html.

manage the affairs of the parish. The majority of the Sisters receive no or extremely low salaries for their work in the parishes. Due to urbanization and migration, parish work has become more and more difficult. Some Sisters try to set up small groups of migrant workers whom they visit regularly, but it is not easy to help them. Migrant workers have many family problems and are facing new challenges due to the changes in society. Clinics are established as both a small source of income for the Sisters, as well as a method to connect with the local people. Through work in health clinics, Sisters easily build up good relationships with the local people and help them grow spiritually.

Nursing homes: There are over 100 Catholic nursing homes or homes for the elderly in China. Sisters run or manage around 60 of them. The Sisters' work in nursing homes and kindergartens is also a way to spread the Good News among the people.

Charitable work: There are more than 20 orphanages run by Sisters, consecrated virgins and Catholic laity; 15 centers meet the special needs of disabled children. Among these orphanages, only two have a legal status in their provinces. These two are the Liming Family in Hebei and another orphanage in Xinjiang in Shanxi Province. During the last two years, the government has begun to recognize the charitable work done by NGO orphanages. We believe that the Liming Family might be the first Catholic orphanage that the government has cooperated with – a cooperation in which the government is to provide financial support and the Sisters would provide the services.

There are also a few retreat centers run by Sisters, but some retreat centers do not have their own spiritual directors. Therefore, the houses are used for other activities and meetings.

B. Networking Helps the Sisters in Their Apostolates

There are no resources on which the Sisters can rely on a long-term basis. Small projects usually find support from foundations, such as Caritas Hong Kong, Verbiest Foundation in Taiwan or other social foundations inside China. Sometimes, through friends, it is possible to find some resources from outside of China. Usually the support is for a period of two or three years and the Sisters are encouraged to take steps to find additional funding.

An example of this process is the Liming Family, an orphanage for disabled children run by my congregation, which was founded in 1988. In 1997 we got a grant from Caritas Hong Kong for family foster care for 10 children for one year, renewable for a second year. In that way we found support for a couple of years. This project encouraged us to find resources inside China, so I wrote letters to friends asking them to help by supporting one child in family foster care. Gradually we found families which could help a child for perhaps six months or one year. Though this was only a short-term solution, it helped us a lot. For the leader of a congregation, one of the big responsibilities is to find financial support for the professional development of the Sisters and to cover the costs of services for the clients, because they are too poor to pay their fees.

The Sisters' service institutions for disabled children with cerebral palsy have set up a network that has contact with 50 organizations inside of China. From 2011 to 2013 they

gained the support of Yi Jijin, One Foundation. This is a domestic public welfare foundation in China. This project came to a conclusion this year (2014), so the Sisters are looking for other domestic resources now. Just this year the Chinese government has begun to pay attention to the need for funding social work and I hope the future will be better.

To summarize, for domestic education and also spiritual help, congregations get help from inside the Church but also maybe outside of China. In order to support their charitable work, the Sisters have recently been trying to get help from resources inside of China, but outside of the Church, because society has become aware of the work that needs to be done. Usually there is no guarantee from a support network for long-term funding, since the conditions are constantly changing.

C. The Relationship with the Church Leaders and the Government

Relationship with the Church leaders: Since the bishops' primary concerns are the needs of diocesan evangelization, many simply consider the Sisters as female extensions of the diocesan working team and show little interest in whether the women have been adequately trained in spirituality and values of religious life. The authorities of the dioceses have taught the Sisters that they are part of the structure of the diocese and that they are accountable to the bishops and priests rather than to their own religious superiors. Therefore, some of the Sisters have the misconception that they belong to their diocese, as do the priests. Thus the leaders of congregations are confronted with multiple external and internal difficulties.

Circumstances differ widely in different places. Sisters in independent congregations – that is, congregations which to some degree are administratively independent from the diocese – have been struggling for their rights to autonomy. Their Sisters are aware of the need to struggle to maintain their rights, but the bishop or priests sometimes are hostile to these groups. In contrast, many congregations are completely under the control of the dioceses, relying on the diocese for all the needs of daily life, including meals and clothing; these Sisters do not even have a convent or a house as their home for gathering. Most of these dependent congregations have friendly relations with the priests and bishops. However, for a few dependent congregations the situation is horrific. The leaders of these congregations very often receive threats. For example, the dioceses threaten to cut off the Sisters' money for food if they do not agree with the new job or new order from the priests.

Most priests show respect to Sisters who work as partners with them. However, some priests do not see Sisters as “their sister,” but as low-status laborers. When these priests need the Sisters, they ask for help; after the Sisters have done the job, the priests feel that the Sisters have merely done what they ought to do. Instead of seeing Sisters as helpers, they look down on the Sisters and see them as a burden.

The reason for this kind of treatment is a misunderstanding regarding the Sisters' identity and dignity. The Sisters were taught that they belong to their diocese, so they should listen and be obedient to it. Sisters have also no power with respect to the sacraments and sometimes priests threaten to withhold them if the Sisters do not comply with their orders. The long tradition of Chinese women staying “behind the screen” contributes to current mind-sets. Therefore, many Sisters do not have a sense of self-identity, and clergy

treat them without dignity. The consequence of this misunderstanding is mistreatment. In some dioceses, the bishops and priests see the Sisters as cheap laborers, cleaners or maidservants inside their church. Those bishops and priests think that Sisters do not need education and that it is enough if the Sisters listen to them. These ideas still exist in some dioceses even now, especially in the underground ones. Those Sisters see the bishops and priests as almost equal to GOD and they really believe that they need no education. Based on this situation, many congregations do not have their own formator or spiritual director, because these Sisters do not believe they have a Sister who is capable to be a formator or spiritual director.

Sister Clara Liu has been the director of a training center for ten years. During these 10 years, her training center has accepted some 300 Sisters. In June 2014, she told me that even now some diocesan clergy continue to believe that Sisters do not need education. She said that she has been trying hard to help the Sisters to understand their dignity and identity in the eyes of God. Many Sisters do not have the opportunity to study or discern about their vocation, nor do they have an example to follow. Good virtue for them is to gain the appreciation of the Church authorities since they were taught that their obedience to the clergy is the highest virtue. Those Sisters do not have a sense of self-esteem. Some Sisters come into the congregation with a holy longing, then they become traumatized and leave. When they have left their congregation, they sometimes even leave the Catholic faith.

Sisters have no opportunities to hold positions of leadership in their diocese and no opportunities to speak at diocesan meetings although the Sisters are the main force in the missionary work and the clergy is happy to say that the Sisters are members of the diocese. Can you imagine an association in which more than half of the members are voiceless? Our Church is like that. Many Sisters are asked to do everything that is required by the clergy in their dioceses. The Sisters are like repair technicians; they go to any place where workers are needed.

Sisters also often work without income, leading lives without any financial security. Many congregations' Sisters still have no income for their services in parishes. It is not only that they have no income but also that the diocese takes from the Sisters' congregations what little they have, if the diocese needs it. For instance, in one diocese the old bishop had consideration like a father for the Sisters' problem of receiving no income for their service. The bishop decided to take precautions for his Sisters and deposited some money in each Sister's account after her profession. Thus the Sisters could have a little money to face emergencies. A new bishop appeared after the old bishop had died. The new bishop decided to take away all the deposits from the Sisters because the diocese needed money. The Sisters' superior general did not agree with the new bishop's decision and refused him. A couple of months later, the new bishop declared that he himself was the Sisters' Father Superior now, and he replaced that Sister superior general. Since the new bishop took office, many Sisters have left that congregation because they felt threatened. Their numbers decreased and no new members have joined that congregation since that event.

Relationship with the government: Most congregations are not registered with the government's Religious Affairs Bureaus and there do not seem to be any benefits from regis-

tering. In the eyes of the government, they have no independent legal status, because all congregations are considered to be part of their diocese. As they are not registered with the government, most congregations are technically underground. Their Sisters, however, feel that they function as a legal congregation since they are legal citizens. When I was the first leader of the Association of Superiors General of Women Religious in Hebei in 1999, I sought to gain legal status for all the congregations in Hebei Province, but the government refused.

It is very important that Sisters know how to deal with the government and with other extra-Church relationships. Sisters should take advantage of the fact that they provide valued social services. The government treats Sisters very differently, depending on the region and the circumstances of the congregations and the dioceses. Sisters receive better treatment in the North and in regions with a higher percentage of Catholics. If the relationship is bad between the clergy and the government, then the government takes more control over the Sisters. Under normal circumstances the government does not pay much attention to the Sisters.

D. The Vocational Education and Ongoing Formation

Women are more than half of the Church; when we lift up the women, we lift up the whole Church. The whole issue of vocation and education of Sisters revolves around the question of how to empower Sisters and restore their human dignity through theological and spiritual education.

Each congregation is dependent on its ability and resources to form new members and young Sisters. Some congregations have formation systems for younger Sisters, but some congregations, especially those which are totally dependent on the diocese, often in the underground, and especially those with less than 25 members usually do not have a complete formation or no formation program at all. Some formal congregations work very hard to gain opportunities to meet the spiritual needs, working not only for their own members' growth, but also to help other congregations. Some on-going training programs are taking place in some congregations. However, many needs cannot be met since the resources are very limited. Additionally, many Sisters lack finances to support their training.

Recently some combined training classes for novices under the auspices of the Association of Superiors General of Women Religious in Hebei have begun. The reason for this is that vocations are decreasing and many congregations have no new members or only a few.

Currently there are four seminaries and one training center accepting Sisters for theological studies. These are the seminaries of Xi'an, Shenyang, Shijiazhuang and the National Seminary in Beijing, plus the Taiyuan Sisters' Training Center. One out of six Catholic Sisters have had one to two years of basic level education in the above organizations. One Sister in ten has had the one month of preparation for the final vows in Beijing through 2009–2014 (see below). The above are some publicly organized training courses.

The Sisters of many congregations are working in the field of the education and spiritual development of Sisters. Bishop Li Du'an, Sr. Clara Liu Qiaomei and Mr. Liu Bainian

have greatly contributed to this project. Under Bishop Li Du'an, the seminary in Xi'an started training classes for Sisters in 1995. Approximately 800 Sisters have received basic education in Xi'an in the past 19 years. The course was first designed as a one-year program from 1995 to 2002; in 2003 it grew into a two-year program, and this year, 2014, it will become a three-year project. Sr. Clara Liu Qiaomei has set up a training program in Taiyuan since 2004. Some 300 Sisters have received an education of two years there. There are 60 Sisters studying at the training center now. In the two institutes Xi'an seminary and Taiyuan, the programs are designed according to a basic curriculum, since most members come from regions with few Catholics or congregations with a low number of sisters. In 2005, Shenyang Seminary began to accept Sisters as students. It usually only accepts around 10 Sisters at a time. This year the program has 13 Sisters in Shenyang. The National Seminary in Beijing has accepted Sisters to study for a Master's degree since 2011. In the same year 2011, the seminary of the province with the highest percentage of Catholics, the Shijiazhuang Seminary, began to accept Sisters to study there. The Sisters are in a one- to two-year program. Every year from 1992 to 2010, Mr. Liu Bainian organized groups of 20 Sisters (from different congregations around the country) to go to Hong Kong for a one-month training at the Catholic Institute for Religion and Society. From 1995 he began organizing one-month training programs each year for groups of around 20 leaders of congregations at the National Seminary in Beijing. In the fall of 2004, he organized a spiritual direction training group and invited three supervisors from outside of the country as teachers. The spiritual direction training course consisted of two months of classes per year over a period of 6 years. Now there are 14 Sisters who have become spiritual directors and they have been giving retreats to many congregations. I am a member of that group. Since 2009, there has been a training program twice a month for Sisters throughout the entire country preparing to take perpetual vows, regardless of whether they are joining communities that are underground or public. All Sisters preparing to take final vows are welcomed. The spiritual direction group is offering participants an eight-day one-to-one retreat. Each year, around 100 Sisters receive that training.

In many places, the Sisters' educational qualifications are insufficient, because they never received an education along with their vocation and mission. In addition, many Sisters did not have a good educational foundation when they entered their communities. It is well-known that Chinese society has undergone very rapid changes during the past 30 years. As a result of these changes, even at the parish level, every job requires some professional knowledge and training. However, most Sisters do not have the education and training to support their missions, because in the early years too many demands were placed on the Sisters, who were kept constantly busy responding to the needs around them. Another reason for many Sisters lacking professional training is that in many congregations the bishop interferes too much and the leaders change very often, so no one has defined a sustained, prophetic vision, or if there is such a vision, communities lack resources to pursue that vision. Among all the reasons for Sisters lacking the needed educational background, the greatest one, as mentioned above, is the attitude of some bishops and priests. Some clergy worry that if the Sisters get a good education, they might leave their congregations, but in China that is not true. For example, in the fall of 1994, when I sent three Sisters to

the medical college, one priest who helped us spiritually was very angry with me. He said that if the Sisters whom I sent did not come back or lost their vocations, I would have to take the responsibility for their (lost) vocations. He said it was too dangerous to send Sisters out into society. Maybe he was right since the identity of Chinese women outside the Church has been improving very much and they now have equal opportunities with men in education and economics. However, I have never heard that the Sisters left the congregation because of education.

Vocations decreasing: The vocations in China peaked between 1985 and 2000. Now vocations are decreasing. In the last five years, one in three congregations had no new members. In addition, some Sisters who have taken their final vows have left their congregations. Some congregations have suddenly disbanded in recent years; sometimes several Sisters left their congregations in a group.

Reasons for the decrease in Sisters' vocations include the one-child family policy and the fast development of society which gives young people many lifestyle choices. Other reasons are connected with 1) the Sisters' sense of powerlessness and frustration in their mission; 2) Sisters have not clearly articulated their testimonies; and 3) difficult interpersonal relationships within some congregations fueled by personal and emotional problems. However, the situation inside the Church may be more important than external reasons. Many feel that the power gap between nun and priest is the main reason for fewer women wanting to become Sisters.

It is impossible to measure the power gap between Sisters and priests, but it is large. 20 years ago, many parents wanted their daughters to become a Sister, and a Sister wanted her siblings or nieces to become a Sister, but this is no longer the case.

Most Sisters have high spiritual and social awareness and are eager to give better testimonies and attract young women to join their life. However, many lay people see the difficult situation of the Sisters and they do not want their daughters to be a Sister, although Sisters have a better reputation than priests among Catholics, with the government and throughout society.

E. Congregations' Major Worries, the Signs of a Midlife Crisis and the Provisions for Old Age

The major concern of Sisters' congregations are their members' continuing education, the opportunity for members to explore their charisms, concerns over members' midlife crises and securing members' health care and retirement support. However, most Sisters are concerned about how to be a good witness for their vocation, not about their living conditions. The majority of the Sisters have a health insurance that is connected with the New Rural Cooperation Medical System (NRCMS), but many Sisters' parents or siblings help to pay for the NRCMS. The Sisters aged over 40 just have the average health examination once every two or three years. There are only a few Sisters who obtain the Minimum Living Standard Assistance in big cities from the government.

The signs of midlife crisis: Because of the lack of foundational education, continuing education and formation are extremely significant now. The signs of Sisters developing midlife crises are not very obvious at present, but I believe we will see them soon. The average age of most Chinese Sisters is between 38 and 45, since many congregations are still young. Many elderly Sisters, the first to enter their communities, have a deep faith and are devoted to their vocation. But the high expectations regarding women, on the part of traditional Chinese culture as well as on the part of the Church, have put a kind of pressure on the Sisters which has proved to be destructive. Sisters sought to cultivate the virtues of self-sacrifice, selfless devotion and dedication, but under the guidance of these great values, many Sisters worked tirelessly only to exhaust themselves. The midlife crisis of the Sisters of some congregations comes from the lack of a sense of security on account of the situation around them. Each congregation may have a few Sisters at the stage of midlife crisis, but such crises are very hard to deal with, since the congregations are without the space and resources that would allow the Sisters to restore their vitality.

The majority of the congregations do not have old-age insurances for their Sisters. In some congregations, only a minority of elderly Sisters have it. The majority of the Sisters living in cities (or those who are registered in cities) usually have old-age insurances. Many data show that the majority of the congregations do not have the financial ability to support their Sisters in old age. Resources for this simply do not exist.

The financial situation of Catholic Sisters does not look bright. In many congregations it is not merely discouraging, but actually terrible, because the Sisters work in parishes or diocesan institutions without salary or for extremely low salaries. In addition, the majority of the congregations do not have property although their diocese might have much. This situation puts the Sisters' congregations permanently in a passive position – they need to be helped. In many congregations, since all their needs for daily life (except for salaries) are provided for by the diocese and donations of the laity, the Sisters' very livelihood is very often threatened.

Spiritual Needs: Some congregations realized at an early stage that their members need on-going spiritual formation. The relatively formal congregations have people in charge of spiritual formation and spiritual directors. They may also try to help other congregations. Some international congregations have helped with the spiritual needs of Sisters in recent years, but some congregations have no way to meet their Sisters' spiritual needs. If the congregations do not have a convent and rely on the diocese for housing, the sense of community among the Sisters is very low, and it is not easy for their spiritual needs to be met. In some congregations, as in our congregation, we began to give retreats more than 10 years ago in our convent. Our retreat center, which is open to Sisters from other congregations, has been running for over 3 years, and the schedule is always full. We try as hard as we can to provide good food and help. Since Sisters do not have any income or their income is very low, our charge is only for the basic operational expenses, so there is almost no surplus.

F. The Connections between Congregations

The connections between congregations in the open Church and those in the underground depends on the attitude of the underground part. If the underground congregations are willing to connect with other congregations, they would get help and support. However, very often the underground congregations do not accept such a connection and do not want to connect with or have any relationship with others. An example is one underground congregation in northern China. When other congregations have some training workshops, they invite this congregation's Sisters to participate but the bishop and their Sister superior always refuse the invitations. Some congregations willingly accept other congregations' help, then it is easier for them to get their spiritual needs met.

G. Where the Sisters Need Help

Sisters need help with continuing education and formation and with programs to restore wholeness and vitality. First, continuing education and formation can empower Sisters in the spiritual structures, to build up the spiritual life of their congregation and be independent administratively. For example, the sisters urgently need spiritual renewal programs. As another example, if support is given to congregations who have greater abilities and resources to act, those sisters' congregations will be put in a position to help other congregations, since we have similar experiences and know where the real problems lie. Secondly, it is important to support some projects which help the sisters to integrate life and restore life vitality. For instance, through formation and education some inspiration is given that helps the sisters to explore their charisms. Hence, sisters from diverse congregations can support one another and build up spiritual networks to spread the gospel throughout China and beyond.

III. The Perspectives for Future Development

Chinese Sisters are in search of the Lord, searching for the way of salvation. We say Chinese Sisters lack nurturing, knowledge, experience, good organization and skills. I feel these so-called lacks are not so important in the end. What is important is that the Holy Spirit has called us and is still calling us to continue in our vocation. If we lacked reliance on the Holy Spirit and our Lord, there would be a deficiency, a true lack. The so-called lacks in the religious Sisters of China are relative compared to other big international congregations. Chinese Sisters truly do lack something to some extent; Chinese Sisters have lacked many things. However, until we find the causes of these lacks, we cannot correct them.

Many diocesan leaders and priests do not think that Sisters have to be formed before being sent out to do ministry work. Bishops and priests need to let go and empower their Sisters. The Sisters need to be encouraged to find spiritual resources to explore their charisms. Men and women in the Church are like the two legs of one person; when one leg is longer than the other, the person cannot walk in balance. Sisters need education and formation before they go on mission. Therefore, building the Sisters' capacity is essential

and education is a key issue in enhancing women's participation in the Church. Many Sisters have the prophetic vision and spiritual discernment for the people of God and are very sensitive to the call of God. They have the gift and the ability to read the signs of the time. They need a place to have a voice in order to share what they see, feel and hope for. "The main point is: as women, we should aim at being recognized by the Church as having equal dignity and equal opportunities," as Maria Voce, the leader of the Focolare, said recently.

Within congregations, Sisters need to be built up and re-educated with respect to personality integration, spiritual growth and professional development. So the first steps of reconstruction or development are inner spiritual growth and integration of religious vocations. The second step is to explore the charism of both individuals and the community and, according to the charism, to reshape the vocations of the Sisters. We must admit our limitations and then focus on the charism of service, to respond to God's call. The third step in rebuilding communities is to be attentive in dialogue with the world. Let me explain it.

First, let's consider inner spiritual growth and incorporation of religious vocations that are the foundation of religious life. Inner spiritual growth requires being deeply rooted in Christ, in whom we believe. It is significant that it is through Jesus Christ and in Him that we are able to integrate our religious life to do God's will. If one's life is in Jesus Christ, one can have the ability to read the clouds, the signs of the time. "But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Romans 10:14)

Second, we consider exploring the community's charism and, according to the charism, to reshape the vocations of the Sisters. In faith, communities follow their charism and then select the pastoral service area and, according to the charism, cultivate professional abilities. The diocese where the Sisters live needs to respect the Sisters' charism if the diocese expects its Sisters to render better services. The diocese should let the Sisters grow; and Sisters should strive for their charism and improve their professional service, thus gradually becoming independent. The Holy Spirit is in the world and calls us through signs. Let us look for and find out what the call is. I believe that the Sisters have the grace to discover God's call for their mission in the world.

The third step in building and rebuilding communities is to be attentive in dialogue with the world and, through what we do, to let people know what we believe. Let the world know us and our faith through our dialogue and communication with the world. Chinese society is not only a big market for material goods, it is also a big market for Jesus' Gospel. We cannot stay only inside the Church; as Pope Francis says, we should go out to declare the Good News. In order to show what we believe and what we are doing, we must dialogue with society and government. Sometimes it is important and necessary to take the risk of entering into the secular community.

The progress in China, time for dialogue: Chinese society is in an era of transformation and needs spiritual values. Religious people can help, although the government does not want us to. Many people's hearts are fallow land waiting for the good seeds of the Gospel

and Sisters should sow these seeds. Sisters should not simply serve and try to maintain the current Catholic community. Now is the time to spread the Gospel.

Many factors show that providing social services to help the little ones is a good method to spread the Gospel. Now this is happening in China. Sometimes keeping silent with the mouth but talking with the hands is necessary. Looking at the situation in China from the perspective of the Catholic religious, we need wisdom and courage to be in touch with society, to demonstrate our attitude, values and longing. We need dialogue with society and the officials.

In China, as a result of the World War, domestic wars and movements, especially the Cultural Revolution, Christians were seen as outside the mainstream and alienated from society. Christians were made out to be foes of society. This has had a deep impact on the thoughts and feelings of Christians, especially on middle-aged and elderly people. For this reason, dialogue is a big challenge for Christians, especially for Catholic leaders. We need to release the mind and free it from the impact of the past and focus on the present and the changed society, to dialogue with our culture, society, other religions and neighbors. Particularly in our relations with government officials, we need to remove the prejudices and obstacles and create a harmonious and friendly environment.

Today's world is a dialogical world. We see dialogue between cultures, religions, nations and countries everywhere. Pope Francis said: "If we go in search of other people, cultures, ways of thinking, other religions, we come out of ourselves and begin that beautiful adventure that is called 'dialogue.'" The Pope continued: "Dialogue is very important for one's maturity, because in relation with other people, other cultures, also in healthy relations with other religions, one grows, matures." The Holy Father emphasized as well that peace cannot be achieved without dialogue.

From the traditional concept, the Christian does not boast when doing good deeds, as Jesus says, "When you give alms, do not let the left hand know what your right is doing" (Mt 6:3). However, based on some Chinese conditions, I think that the Church needs to explain what we do for the people and to petition the government for cooperation in the service for the poor. "Through our deeds to show our faith," St. James says. Let the officials have a chance to rediscover the Catholic Church today. Let them see that Catholic leaders are thinking about how to help the people to obtain a better way of living. Because this commitment to social justice is at the heart of who I am and what I believe, it must be shared more effectively with people in society. "If you want peace, work for justice" (Pope Paul VI).

The central government has emphasized: "Seize the opportunity, free the mind." I think this slogan is not only useful for developing the economy, but also for spreading the Good News. It is not only the officials who need to seize the opportunity, but also the Church leaders, the Sisters need to do the same.

The Chinese philosopher Lao Zi once said, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," and Christ said "Come follow me." I think Chinese Sisters are ready to take steps to follow the Lord wherever He leads us and I believe that the Lord will provide the resources we need to make this journey.

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