Questions
1. How are Catholics treated in Guangxi? Please provide information on Catholic house churches.
2. I understand progress has been made in terms of relations between the Chinese government and the Vatican. Could you please provide an overview and update on that?

RESPONSE
1. How are Catholics treated in Guangxi? Please provide information on Catholic house churches.

Limited information was found regarding the treatment of Catholics in the Guangxi province. In October 2007 China Aid reported that Catholics priests who publicly distributed a letter from the Pope in Nanning, the capital of Guangxi, were forced to attend political propaganda sessions. A 2003 article by Agence-France Presse reports on a police crackdown on “illegal religious organisations” in Xilin, a south eastern town in Guangxi and the detention of three individuals with Bibles without trial. However, no further recent information was found in the sources consulted regarding the situation for Catholics in Guangxi. Limited information was also available regarding house or underground Catholic churches in Guangxi. A 2002 paper on the Catholic Church in China reports on the historical existence of underground Catholic groups in Guangxi. However, the 1994 Temporary Regulations for the Administration and Supervision of Religious Affairs in the Guangxi Autonomous state that all religious organisations and places of religious activity must be approved by the government’s religious bureau and that no person may perform religious activities outside of government approved places. No information was found regarding more recent regulations for religious affairs in Guangxi. No regulations regarding religion were found on the English version of the Guangxi government website (‘Guangxi: stop the Pope’s Letter, even by brain washing’ 2007, China Aid website, 9 October http://chinaaid.org/2007/10/09/guangxi-stop-the-pope%e2%80%99s-letter-even-by-brain-washing/ – Accessed 20 November 2007 –.


On 9 October 2007 China Aid reported on a “campaign to counter the Vatican penetration in the life of the Church” in Nanning. This campaign reportedly included the “obligatory political sessions” for the Catholic priests who had distributed a letter from the Pope to the Chinese Catholic community:

Brain washing Catholic priests to convince them of the “error of their ways”; in short of having published and distributed the Pope’s Letter to China’s Catholics: it is taking place in Nanning, a major city of the autonomous Guangxi region, (south west China), where the government has launched a campaign to counter the Vatican “penetration” in the life of the Church. Meantime in Qingxiu district, close to Nanning, police sequestered and destroyed copies of a parish letter which carried parts of the papal document.

June 30th Benedict XVI published a Letter to the Catholics of China with which he exhorted them to live the Christian mission and witness for the good of their country and to draw close[r] the underground and official Church, asking all of those involved to witness with greater courage their unity with the Holy See. In turn, with cordial and respectful terms, the pontiff requested that Chinese authorities respect the religious freedom of the faithful and the appointment of bishops (‘Guangxi: stop the Pope’s Letter, even by brain washing’ 2007, China Aid website, 9 October [http://chinaaid.org/2007/10/09/guangxi-stop-the-pope%e2%80%99s-letter-even-by-brain-washing/] – Accessed 20 November 2007 – Attachment 1).

A 2003 article by Agence France-Presse reports on a crackdown by police on “illegal religious organisations” in Xilin, a town in southern Guangxi. According to the report the police searched homes for religious materials and three people found to be in possession of bibles were detained without trial:

Villagers in southern China’s Guangxi area accused local police Tuesday of arresting Bible owners and sentencing them to labor camps as part of a campaign to weed out “illegal religious organizations.”

Written testimony supplied to AFP by villagers in Xilin county said up to 40 policemen descended on Christian villages in the middle of the night and ransacked homes in search of Bibles and other Christian religious materials.
Official arrest documents also show that three people found with Bibles from Weishan and Tianbao villages were sentenced without trial to 18 months in a labor camp run by the Nanning Glass Factory in the provincial capital.

The three were taken away on the night of April 27, but it was only on September 26 that Xilin county police told villagers the men, identified as Li Hualiang, Wu Zhengxin and Wu Xinhua, had been sent to the labor camp, one villager said.

Police began suspecting illegal religious activities at the villages in the late 1990s and despite levying fines of up to 500 yuan (60 dollars) per villager, renewed efforts to wipe out “illegal religious organizations” were made again this year.

Local police and government officials refused to confirm the arrests or the crackdown on religious groups.

“We cannot tell you about this incident, this is a secret,” a police officer from the Xinlin county public security bureau told AFP, while denying that any arrests were made.


Underground Churches

A 2002 paper on the Catholic Church in China reports on the historical existence of underground Catholic groups in Guangxi.

Members of the underground church were scattered across the western provinces of Gansu, Xianjiang, Shaanxi, Guangxi, and the northern province of Heibei, and were largely found in rural villages. For the majority, their loyal Catholic faith was handed down for several generations from as early as the 13th century (Liu, W.T & Leung, B. 2002, ‘Organisational Revivalism: Explaining Metamorphosis of China’s Catholic Church’, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, vol.41, no.1, pp.124 – 125 Attachment 3).

The 1994 Temporary Regulations For The Administration And Supervision Of Religious Affairs In The Guangxi Autonomous Region state that religious organisations, places of religious activity, religious training and religious professionals must all be approved by the religious affairs bureau of the government. According to the regulations no person may perform religious activities outside of approved places for religious activity and penalties apply for violations of the regulations. No more recent regulations were located in the sources consulted for the Guangxi province. The following is an outline of relevant sections of the regulations on religious affairs:

Article 7: To establish a place for religious activity, the responsible person of the management Committee must bring the application form, the concerned materials and documents for the place and the opinions of the local people’s government and concerned religious organization, to the county (including county and below) government’s religious affairs bureau to apply for registration.

Within two months of receiving the application the religious affairs bureau of the people’s government, will give a written answer approving the application, disapproving it or temporarily postponing registration. A registration which is approved and for which a certificate of registration is issued will have its legal rights protected by the law.
Article 17: Religious professionals indicate persons designated as such by legitimately established religious organizations, such as, Catholic bishops, priests, and sisters, Protestant pastors, elders and preachers, Islamic imams, Buddhist monks and nuns and Taoist priests and priestesses.

Article 18: When a religious organization appoints and ordains a religious professional, it must report it to the religious affairs department of the people’s government at or above the county level. All appointed and approved religious professionals must perform their religious offices under the supervision of the religious organization and in accordance with its regulations. Then their legitimate rights will receive the protection of the law. Unqualified persons who have not been appointed and approved as religious professionals may not function as religious professionals.

Article 26: To establish a religious association it is necessary to obtain the agreement of the corresponding religious affairs department of the people’s government and to register with the local civil administration organs. The local religious affairs bureau must also report to the religious affairs departments at the next level of the people’s government.

Without the agreement of the religious affairs department and the civil administration organs of the people’s government no person can presume to establish a religious association.

Within the same government jurisdiction it is not – permitted to establish the same religious association again, nor a similar one.

Article 27: Each religious association is subject to the leadership of the local religious affairs department of the peoples government and to the supervision of the local civil administration organs.

Article 30: No person may presumptuously perform religious activities outside the place for religious activities. No person may carry out anti-religious activities in a place for religious activity.

Article 34: Religious education may be carried out in accordance with the concerned regulations of the religion. To hold a religious training course, one must report to the religious affairs departments, at the county level or above. To open a religious academy, one must report to the religious affairs departments of the autonomous region. To select and send a believer to a religious training course or to a religious academy, the candidate must have the recommendation of the religious association and the opinion of the local religious affairs department at or above the county level must be sought.

No person may privately open a religious academy or hold a training course.

Article 40: If a place of religious activity violates these regulations, the religious affairs departments at the county level or above will observe the severity of the violation, issue a warning, give a time limit for halting the activity, abolish registration or ask the government to deal with it in another way.

The religious affairs bureau at the county level or above will initiate curbs in accordance with the law against anyone who uses religion to carry out illegal activities; any violations against “The Regulations Regarding Punishments in the Management of Public Security in the PRC” will be dealt with in accordance with the law by the public security organs; for violations which are criminal, the judicial organs have the responsibility according to the law to investigate the crime (Guangxi Autonomous Region People’s Government 1994, Temporary
Research Response CHN32301 dated 19 September 2007 provides recent information on the treatment of underground Catholics in China. The Research Response provides several reports of recent arrests of underground Catholic Priests (Research & Information 2007 Research Response CHN32301, 19 September Attachment 6).

2. I understand progress has been made in terms of relations between the Chinese government and the Vatican. Could you please provide an overview and update on that?


Sources report recent co-operative events between the Vatican and the Chinese government. On 27 November 2007 the Financial Times reported that Pope Benedict XVI decided not to meet with the Dalai Lama due to pressure from the Chinese Government:

Pope Benedict XVI has apparently bowed to pressure from China by deciding not to meet the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader, when he visits Rome next month.

The Vatican, which is engaged in delicate diplomacy over a possible renewal of relations between the two states, yesterday said there would be no audience. The two religious leaders met a year ago (Dinmore, G 2007 ‘Vatican rethink’, Financial Times, 27 November – Attachment 8).

On 21 September 2007 the Guardian Unlimited reported on the appointment by the Chinese government of a Vatican approved Bishop for Beijing. According to the Guardian Unlimited this appointment was “a significant step towards improving its traditionally turbulent links with the Vatican”. Guardian Unlimited made the following comments on the appointment and its importance in relation to the relationship between the Chinese government and the Vatican:
China took a significant step towards improving its traditionally turbulent links with the Vatican today with the consecration of a new bishop of Beijing who is widely believed to have the formal support of the Pope.

Joseph Li Shan was installed to the influential role within China’s state-controlled Catholic church in a ceremony before hundreds of priests and nuns at the city’s 400-year-old Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, close to Tiananmen Square.

For more than half a century, officially atheist China has had no diplomatic links with the Vatican and has organised its own Catholic church, with bishops who swear loyalty to the state, not the papacy.

…However, unlike his predecessor – the fiercely anti-Vatican Fu Tieshan, who died in April – Bishop Li is known to have the approval of papal officials, who praised his appointment when it was announced.

…A senior Vatican official said this week that Bishop Li’s appointment should be a “favourable step forward, a good occasion to build”.

The consecration is seen as a boost for Pope Benedict’s policy of rapprochement with the Chinese government. While he still insists on the Vatican’s right to appoint all bishops, the Pope has spoken of perhaps doing this with some Chinese government consultation (Walker, P 2007 ‘China appoints pro-Vatican bishop’, Guardian Unlimited, 21 September http://www.guardian.co.uk/china/story/0,2174346,00.html#article_continue – Accessed 28 November 2007 – Attachment 9).

In July 2007 The Economist reported on progress in relations between the Vatican and the Chinese government. The report states that Pope Benedict’s recent letter to China’s Catholics was written “in conciliatory terms about China’s state-controlled Catholic church and bishops in it who have been appointed without the Vatican’s approval”. The article provides the following description of the Pope’s letter and increased compromise between the Vatican and the Chinese government on the appointment of bishops:

Pope Benedict, whose church has long upbraided China for its suppression of religious freedom, is now trying to make friends. In a rare and lengthy letter to Catholics in China last week the pope wrote in conciliatory terms about China’s state-controlled Catholic church and bishops in it who have been appointed without the Vatican’s approval. He also stressed that the church in China had no mission to change the country politically.

…China’s response to the pope’s letter has been muted, which Cardinal Zen [pro Vatican bishop] sees as a good sign. In fact, China may well be quietly pleased. One of the letter’s aims was to discourage Catholics in China from shunning the state-sponsored church.

…The pope’s letter said Catholics could worship in state churches, even if their priests had no links with the pope, if finding Vatican-approved clergy caused “grave inconvenience”.

One of the main obstacles to improved relations between China and the Vatican has been the Vatican’s insistence that it appoint bishops. China objects, fearful of losing control of the church. But there are signs of a possible compromise. In recent years it has often allowed names to be submitted to the pope in advance for his secret approval before its “official” ordination takes place. Last year, however, China made three appointments without Vatican clearance. Many believed this was partly prompted by Pope Benedict’s decision to make
Joseph Zen a cardinal in February 2006. Cardinal Zen, who dismisses any link with his appointment, described the ordinations as “acts of war”.

The pope’s letter was more tactful. It said some bishops who had been ordained under pressure without the Vatican’s approval had subsequently asked for the pope’s acknowledgement. He said he had granted this, taking into account “the sincerity of their sentiments and the complexity of the situation”. The letter said the “very small number” of bishops who had not asked for or received the pope’s blessing were “illegitimate”. But they were still considered “validly ordained” as long as it was by validly ordained bishops.


For detailed information regarding the Pope’s letter to the Chinese Catholic community please see Research Response CHN32301 (Research & Information 2007 Research Response CHN32301, 19 September - Attachment 6).

A 30 June 2007 report by Asia News, a Catholic news agency, describes improving relations between the Vatican and the Chinese government. According to the report the death of Pope John Paul II “has led to a new phase in the relations between China and the Holy See”. However, Asia News has also reported that while “there is greater good will and openness in Beijing”, the Patriotic Association still wants independence from the Vatican particularly on issues regarding the appointment of bishops and the management of church property (‘Vatican to the conquest of a changing China’ 2007, AsiaNews, 30 June  http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=9691# – Accessed 29 November 2007 – Attachment 7).

An April 2007 report by Forum 18, a Christian news service states that while the relationship between the Chinese government and the Vatican has improved, “contentious issues – such as government control of the selection of “patriotic” Chinese bishops and local officials cracking down on the “underground” church – remain”. The report also describes a current “absence of consensus” within the Chinese Government regarding the Vatican. According to the article any improvements in relations with the Vatican may not lead to significant improvements for Catholics in China due to the continuing desire of the government to control religious activity (Hornemann, Magda 2007, ‘China: China’s Catholics, the Holy See and religious freedom’, Forum 18 News Service, 12 April  http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=942 – Accessed 18 September 2007 – Attachment 11).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports
Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada http://www.irb.gc.ca/
UK Home Office http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk
US Department of State http://www.state.gov/
US Department of State website http://www.state.gov
United Nations (UN) UNHCR http://www.unhchr.ch/
Non-Government Organisations
Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) http://www.aidtochurch.org/
Amnesty International website http://www.amnesty.org/
Cardinal Kung Foundation http://www.cardinalkungfoundation.org/
Freedom House http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=1
Holy Spirit Study Centre, Hong Kong http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk/
Human Rights Watch http://www.hr.org/
International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights http://www.ihf-hr.org/welcome.php
Human Rights Internet (HRI) website http://www.hri.ca

International News & Politics
AsiaNews.It http://www.asianews.it/
BBC News website http://news.bbc.co.uk/
Zenit News Agency http://www.zenit.org/english/
Region Specific Links
Search Engines

Databases:
FACTIVA (news database)
BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)
REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)
ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)
RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments


