

Pope Leo XIV Appoints First Bishop to Chinese Diocese in 20 Years Amid CCP Agreement

The Vatican has appointed a new Catholic bishop for the Diocese of Chifeng in Inner Mongolia, ending a 20-year vacancy while continuing its controversial agreement with the Chinese Communist Party over the selection of bishops.

According to Breitbart, Pope Leo XIV approved the appointment of Joseph Chang Yanfeng “under the terms of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China,” the confidential accord first reached in 2018 during the pontificate of Pope Francis.

The agreement has drawn criticism because it reportedly gives the officially atheist Chinese Communist Party influence over the appointment of Catholic bishops, even as the regime continues to persecute Christians and restrict religious freedom.

Communist influence over Church leadership

Breitbart reported that the agreement’s full provisions have never been made public, but “reports indicate that it requires the pope to check with the Communist Party, which actively persecutes China’s massive Christian population, before appointing any leaders in the country.”



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Before his appointment, Chang served as head of the state-approved Chifeng Catholic Patriotic Association. The Vatican

announced that he was ordained in 2010 and has now been formally appointed to lead the diocese.

The Vatican-affiliated outlet AsiaNews, cited by Breitbart, reported that Chifeng had gone two decades without a bishop. The diocese now has its first bishop in 20 years under the Vatican's agreement with Beijing.

Christians remain under pressure

Breitbart reported that China is believed to be home to as many as 160 million Christians, while the Chinese Communist Party has continued campaigns to remove crosses from churches, restrict Bible distribution and expand state control over religious life.

AsiaNews reported that "In Chifeng the Church re-emerged in the 1980s after the suffering of the Cultural Revolution." Today, the diocese includes "around 50,000 members, with some 30 priests and 20 nuns dedicated to their pastoral care."

The report also said Chang expressed support before his appointment for China's "Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress." Local officials also stated "that it is essential to always prioritise strengthening the sense of community of the Chinese nation," language critics say reflects Beijing's campaign to subordinate religious and ethnic identity to communist ideology.

The appointment is the first bishop-selection process completed entirely under Pope Leo XIV and indicates that his pontificate will continue operating under the Vatican's 2018 agreement with Beijing.

Meanwhile, millions of Christians across China continue to worship under government restrictions, and many believers around the world continue praying for the persecuted church and for greater religious freedom throughout the country.

James Lasher, a seasoned writer and editor at Charisma Media, combines faith and storytelling with a journalism background from Otterbein University and ministry experience in Guatemala and at the LA Dream Center. A Marine Corps and Air Force veteran, he is the author of *The Revelation of Jesus: A Common Man's Commentary* and a contributor to Charisma magazine. For interviews and media inquiries, please contact media@.