



Pope Francis walks past a Vatican Swiss Guard as he arrives for his weekly general audience in the Paul VI hall, at the Vatican, Wednesday, Sept. 8, 2021. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

by The Associated Press

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The Catholic diocese of Wuhan, China — where the coronavirus was first detected — has a new bishop who was nominated by the pope according to the Vatican's controversial accord with China, the Holy See said Wednesday.

Bishop Francis Cui Qingqi, a Franciscan, is the sixth bishop nominated and consecrated according to the 2018 deal on bishop nominations.

Francis had named Cui bishop on June 23 and his consecration occurred Wednesday in Wuhan, in Hubei province, according to a statement from the Vatican spokesman, Matteo Bruni.

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Details of the 2018 accord have never been released, though officials have said it envisages a process of dialogue in selecting bishops. Pope Francis has said he has the final word.

The Vatican signed it in hopes it would help unite China's Catholics, who for seven decades have been split between those belonging to an official, state-sanctioned church and an underground church loyal to Rome.

The deal was renewed in October, despite objections from some Catholic commentators and members of the hierarchy who have termed it a betrayal of the underground faithful and a sellout to Beijing as it cracks down on religious minorities.