



Pope Leo XIV meets bishops during his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at The Vatican, Wednesday, June 11, 2025. (AP/Andrew Medichini)

by Associated Press

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[Pope Leo XIV](#) made his first appointment of a Chinese bishop under the Vatican's 2018 agreement with Beijing, signalling he is continuing one of Pope Francis' most controversial foreign policy decisions.

The Vatican expressed satisfaction that Leo's June 5 nomination of Bishop Joseph Lin Yuntuan as auxiliary bishop of Fuzhou was recognized Wednesday by Chinese authorities.

The Vatican said in a statement that Lin taking possession of the diocese and the civic recognition of his appointment "constitutes a further fruit of the dialogue between the Holy See and the Chinese authorities and is a significant step in the diocese's communal journey."

Francis had riled conservatives when he approved a [deal in 2018](#) over bishop nominations, which had been the most divisive issue in Vatican-China relations since diplomatic ties were severed when the Communists came to power. China had insisted on an exclusive right to name bishops as a matter of national sovereignty, while the Vatican asserted the pope's exclusive right to name the successors of the original Apostles.

China's estimated 12 million Catholics have been divided between an official, state-controlled church that didn't recognize papal authority and an underground church that remained loyal to Rome through decades of persecution. The Vatican tried for decades to unify the flock and the 2018 deal was aimed at healing that division, regularizing the status of seven bishops who weren't recognized by Rome and thawing decades of estrangement between China and the Vatican.

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The details of the 2018 deal were never released, but it affords the state-controlled church a say in its church leaders, though Francis insisted he retained veto power over the ultimate choice.

The deal has been criticized by some, especially on the Catholic right, for having [caved to Beijing's demands](#) and sold out the underground faithful in China. The Vatican has said it was the [best deal it could get](#) and has been renewed periodically since then.

One of the big foreign policy questions facing Leo, history's first American pope, was whether he would continue renewing the accord or heed conservative demands and make some changes.

There have been apparent violations on the Beijing side with some [unilateral appointments](#) that occurred without papal consent. The issue came to a head just before the conclave that elected Leo pope, when the Chinese church proceeded with the preliminary election of two bishops, a step that comes before official consecration.