

## Underground bishop of Shanghai who spent decades in prison dies at 96

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Hong Kong

Bishop Joseph Fan Zhongliang of Shanghai, a prominent leader of China's underground Catholic Community, died after a brief illness Sunday at his home. He was 96.

Fan, like many other Catholic leaders, served in prison after he and other priests were arrested in 1955 during a government crackdown. From 1958 to 1978, Fan was imprisoned in Qinghai province, where his job was to carry corpses in a cemetery, reported the Asian church news portal [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com).

China's estimated 11 million Catholics are divided between two communities: one that, for decades, remained underground because it did not accept compromises and political control after the Chinese communist takeover in the 1950s, and one that the Vatican has acknowledged accepted some compromises and political control in order to continue its existence. Both are faithful to the pope, and both have faced persecution from Chinese authorities.

Anthony Lam Sui-ki, senior researcher at the Holy Spirit Study Center in Hong Kong, said young priests, even those from the so-called open church community, often met with Fan before they were ordained. Shanghai has lost a "steadfast and persevering" leader in Fan, he said.

A Jesuit, Fan was ordained a priest in 1951. He refused to recognize the Chinese government-controlled Catholic Patriotic Association when it was established.

The Connecticut-based Kung Foundation said Fan was secretly ordained as coadjutor bishop of Shanghai in 1985 when Bishop Ignatius Kung Pin-mei remained incarcerated in a government jail. Kung died in 2000, and the foundation said Blessed John Paul named Fan his successor.

However, the late Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian of Shanghai, another Jesuit who spent 18 years in prison during the communist repression, was recognized by the government as bishop of Shanghai in 1989. He did not reconcile his status with the Vatican until early in the 21st century, according to information on the diocesan website.

Born Jan. 13, 1918, Fan was baptized a Catholic in 1932. He joined the Society of Jesus in 1938.

After his release from prison, Fan became a teacher. Later, he was allowed to return to Shanghai.

Funeral arrangements were not finalized as of Sunday but will be limited to two days as outlined under Chinese law.

Lam told ucanews.com that bishops of the underground church likely will meet to suggest a successor to Pope Francis.

Meanwhile, the future of Shanghai Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin, who was ordained in 2012 with the approval of both Pope Benedict XVI and the Chinese government, remains uncertain. Ma said during his ordination Mass that he would no longer hold any position in the Catholic Patriot Association so that he could focus on pastoral work and evangelization. He was immediately placed under house arrest at Sheshan Seminary. The government also rescinded his appointment.

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