

Chinese priest ordained coadjutor with approval of Vatican, government

YIBIN, China - With police officers and dogs monitoring the crowd at St. Mary's Church, Father Peter Luo Xuegang was ordained coadjutor bishop of Yibin Diocese in southwestern China's Sichuan province.

No phones, cameras or liquids were allowed in the venue, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News. Participants had to arrive three hours before the ordination began to go through security.

Bishop Luo had the approval of the Holy See, but an excommunicated bishop attended his ordination, despite a Vatican spokesman conveying the wish that "no illegitimate bishop will participate."

In recent years, many ordinations have followed the pattern of bishop candidates being elected by diocesan representatives, then being approved separately by the government-approved Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China and the Holy See.

Bishop Luo, 47, is the third bishop ordained with both papal approval and government recognition this year.

Bishop John Chen Shizhong of Yibin, 95, presided over the Nov. 30 ceremony, attended by 61 priests, 35 nuns, 800 faithful, government officials and representatives of other religions.

Excommunicated Father Paul Lei Shiyin of Leshan, wearing bishop's garb despite his excommunication earlier this year when he was ordained without papal approval, was among the four other Vatican-approved consecrating bishops.

Bishop Luo and Father Lei were ordained priests together in Leshan 20 years ago. Bishop Luo was loaned to the Yibin Diocese in 2009 and was elected the bishop

candidate and received the papal mandate last year.

At the Vatican, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, papal spokesman, called the ordination “positive.” He said Father Lei’s presence at the ceremony and the “repeated nature of his disobedience to the norms of the church unfortunately aggravates his canonical position.”

“In ordinary situations, the presence of the Bishop Lei Shiyin should have been absolutely excluded and would bring canonical consequences for the other participating bishops,” Father Lombardi said. “In the current circumstances, it is probable that the latter (the participating bishops) were not able to prevent him without serious difficulties. In any case, the Holy See will be able to better evaluate the question when it receives more ample and complete information.”

An official of the government-approved church authority in China said in April that 11 dioceses have elected their bishop candidates and await the approval of the bishops’ conference.

However, only five episcopal ordinations have taken place so far, including Father Lei’s and one other held without papal mandate earlier in the year.