

Cardinal Emeritus Visits Chinese American Catholics

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Joseph Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun SDB, Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong next to the Holy Family statue, Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

In August 2017, 85-year-old Joseph Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun SDB, Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, launched a 50-day visit to the United States and Canada. Before arriving in Washington, DC, he met with Chinese communities in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Vancouver, Toronto and Boston to talk about Sino-Vatican relations and explain his views on social issues.

Speaking at a dinner gathering, Cardinal Zen first clarified that the Church in China was not a schism, unlike the rift between the East and the West in 1054 and the Reformation in 1517. Rather, both the so-called “underground or unregistered” Church and the “open” Church in China suffer.

For sixty some odd years China has had no diplomatic relationship with the Vatican. The core issue remains with the authority to name bishops.

Currently the government-controlled Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA) nominates, elects and ordains their own bishops, resulting in seven illicit bishops that are appointed by the government without the Pope's consent. There are about 30 bishops affiliated with the unregistered Church who are not recognized by the CPCA. However, some bishops have been appointed with the consent of both the Vatican and the PRC government. While most Chinese Catholics have heard of and even experienced the confusion of the "underground" and "open" Church in China, many are not aware of the scope and consequences of a diplomatic relationship with the Holy See.

Besides holding talks, Cardinal Zen also celebrated Mass in every city he visited. Catholics in the metropolitan Washington area were pleased to attend Mass celebrated by Cardinal Zen at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, where he first visited in the early 2000's. After his multi-city tour, and a real vacation to Alaska with family members, he departed for New York and eventually to Hong Kong.