

Funeral of China's Bishop Fan draws congregation of 5,000



About 5,000 people attended the funeral Mass of Bishop Joseph Fan Zhongliang, president of China's 'underground' Bishops' Conference, on Saturday in Shanghai.

The four-hour ceremony, held in Latin and Chinese, was celebrated by Father Zhu Yude, head of the underground community of Shanghai. Among the concelebrants were 61 priests from the 'open' and underground Catholic communities from various parts of China.

A number of priests from Shanghai's open community were banned from attending the funeral, sources told ucanews.com.

In the past week, authorities warned them not to participate in any memorial services, though some defied the warning.

Government officials also warned Mass organizers to refer to Bishop Fan as "shepherd" rather than "bishop" during the Mass and on a booklet that was distributed at the ceremony.

"The warning was ignored ... and the officials did not intervene," said a layperson who was responsible for the liturgy.

The funeral Mass took place at a Shanghai funeral home. The Chinese government, which does not recognize Bishop Fan's episcopacy, would not allow the ceremony to take place in a church.

Surveillance on Auxiliary Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin of Shanghai, who has been under house arrest for more than a year, stepped up in the days following Bishop Fan's March 16 death. A few hours after the funeral concluded Bishop Ma posted a message to the Chinese micro-blogging site, Sina Weibo.

“Bishop Ma had tears in his eyes when we went to inform him of the death of Bishop Fan last week. He thought for a while and then wrote a couplet to mourn the late bishop,” a Church source told ucanews.com.

“A wreath with the same couplet but without any name was seen in the funeral parlor,” the source said.

Bishop Ma has been under house arrest since he declared he would leave the government-sanctioned Catholic Patriotic Association during his ordination Mass on July 7, 2012.

The diocese, under government pressure, suspended his ministry for two years, during which he cannot make public appearances. The suspension is set to end this July.

Bishop Fan was born in 1918 and baptized at the age of 14. He entered the Jesuit Society in 1938 and was ordained a priest in 1951.

In 1955, he and the then Bishop Ignatius Kung (Gong Pin-mei, who later became a cardinal) and a number of priests were imprisoned and accused of revolutionary crimes.

The future Bishop Fan was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment in Qinghai province. During that time it became his job to carry corpses to a cemetery.

After his release, he became a high school teacher before being allowed to return to Shanghai.

He was secretly ordained as coadjutor bishop of Shanghai in 1985 and succeeded Cardinal Kung when he died in 2000.

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