

Religious Freedom

That Christian communities, especially those who are persecuted, feel that they are close to Christ and have their rights respected.

Country Focus: China

Paper, the compass and the umbrella are just some of the modern day tools that were created in China hundreds of years ago. Today, China has the biggest population of any country in the world, at almost 1.4 billion people, and the world's fastest growing economy.

But for all of its progress, China also has its challenges. China has many laws about what information its citizens can access, and how they can practice religion. These laws have caused Catholicism in China to struggle. China does not recognize bishops appointed by the Vatican, because the Vatican is seen as a foreign, rather than a spiritual, authority. For many years, China has appointed its own bishops. This has caused a division within the Catholic Church in China, with Catholics having to choose between government

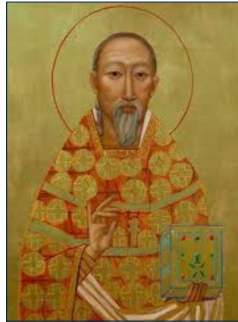
churches, with bishops appointed by Beijing, or underground churches loyal to the Vatican.

In 2018, Pope Francis made a temporary deal with China to try and unify the Chinese Catholic Church with the Pope as head. All Catholics are encouraged to pray for the Church in China, that it may be allowed to celebrate Christ in truth and fullness.



Education for Community Life

A Saint for Mission: Saint Augustine Zhao Rong & Companions



Saint Augustine Zhao Rong probably never thought much about Christianity until one of his last work assignments as a soldier. At a time when it was very unsafe to be a Christian in China, Augustine Zhao Rong was a captain in the imperial Chinese army. Part of his job duties included escorting people arrested for being Christians to Beijing, where they would be tried. One prisoner Augustine Zhao Rong escorted was then Bishop Jean Gabriel Taurin Dufresse of Chengdu, China. Bishop Dufresse showed such patience and courage during his trial that he convinced Augustine Zhao Rong to learn more about the Catholic faith. Augustine Zhao Rong was so inspired by the teaching of Bishop Dufresse that he was quickly baptized.

Not long after his baptism, Augustine Zhao Rong left his military career and entered theological study so he could become a priest. After his ordination as a diocesan priest, Father Augustine Zhao Rong ministered to the aboriginal people of Yunnan until he, too, was arrested for being a Christian.

Saint Augustine Zhao Rong was martyred in 1815. Many other Chinese Christians were also martyred around the same time. We call these people the companions of Saint Augustine Zhao Rong. We honor Saint Augustine Zhao Rong by name because he was the first Chinese diocesan priest to be martyred. We remember Saint Augustine Zhao Rong and his Companions each year on their feast day, July 9.



CENTER for MISSION

Society for the Propagation of the Faith / St. Paul and Minneapolis

Promoting Knowledge of Faith

God's Word for Mission

"He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ...In him we have redemption through his blood...With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will..." (Ephesians 1:5, 7-9)

"The right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person, a dignity known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself." (Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 2)

Life and Dignity of the Human Person



You've read about two different aspects of the Catholic Social Teaching theme of Life and Dignity of the Human Person already in this year's newsletters; in November, we focused on the prevention of war, and in February we focused on the elimination of modern-day slavery. This month, we will focus on a third aspect of the Catholic Social Teaching theme of Life and Dignity of the Human Person: religious freedom.

The Church teaches that religious freedom is necessary in any society that promotes human dignity. Religious freedom is a basic human right because it allows people the ability to seek the truth about God. It is natural for every person to wonder about what is truly important in life: who

created the world? How should I respond to this Creator? How do I live a good life? The Church offers answers to these questions, and it is important that people have the religious freedom to encounter the fullness of truth offered by Jesus through his Church.

The Church has been praying for Catholics in China for a long time because religious freedom is not permitted there. In fact, this month's video was created about 10 years ago, by the same people who help us pray the Pope's monthly prayer intentions today. It teaches us more about Saint Augustine Zhao Rong and Companions, and describes then Pope Benedict XVI's efforts to reach out to Chinese Catholics. As you watch, think about why religious freedom is so important to human dignity.

Religious Freedom in China: [Click Here](#)>>

1. Why is religious freedom important to the Catholic Social Teaching theme of "Life and Dignity of the Human Person?"
2. How can you support people who live in societies that do not guarantee religious freedom?
3. How would you feel if you had to worship God in secret?
4. Are there ever times in your life when you feel like you have to hide your faith? Why?



Mission Petitions

- ✚ Let us pray that God will transform the hearts of government leaders so that freedom of religion for all people is upheld.
- ✚ Let us pray for those who have to practice their Christian faith in secret, that they may be strengthened by the love of Christ Jesus.
- ✚ Let us pray for the unity of the Church in China and the right for Chinese Catholics to practice their faith freely.
- ✚ Let us pray for those who are negatively judged for their Christian faith, that they may be free from fear and that God may grant them peace.

Dear God,
 You called us as your people and gave us the right and duty to worship you. Please help us protect religious freedom for all people, so that all may come to know and love you. We ask this through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.