NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Cardinal Zen resigns as bishop of Hong Kong.

Catholic News Service | Apr. 15, 2009

Cardinal Zen in 2008 (CNS photo)

HONG KONG
Pope Benedict XVI has accepted the resignation of Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, 77, as bishop of Hong Kong.

Coadjutor Bishop John Tong Hon, 69, succeeds the cardinal as head of the diocese, which will celebrate with a Mass April 30.

Cardinal Zen said he will continue to be concerned with the church in China and with key issues concerning the country.

In a recent interview with the Asian church news agency UCA News, Bishop Tong said he would use four words to describe Cardinal Zen's handling of Hong Kong and mainland church affairs and his fight for human rights and religious freedom: "wisdom, benevolence, courage and determination."

As a person of foresight, Cardinal Zen's prophetic voice has alerted and inspired the people, Bishop Tong added. In contrast, he described himself as a person who needs more time to observe and think over how to express his views in a wise way.

Bishop Tong said he has invited Cardinal Zen to stay in the diocese during retirement and reside at Holy Spirit Seminary, where the cardinal will continue to teach philosophy and focus his concern more directly on the church in China. Bishop Tong, who has served as rector of the seminary since 1999, will step down from his post there.

At a farewell press conference after the Holy Thursday chrism Mass April 9, Cardinal Zen said he hoped Hong Kong chief executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen would have the wisdom to make the special administrative region of China a just society and correct "an ugly trend of allying (with) the powerful while despising the weak."

Asked about his wishes for China, he said he hoped Catholic communities not registered with the government would not give up and that the communities registered with the government would be brave. He added that he

wished the Chinese government understood that the church was no threat to the country.

Regarding his life in retirement, he said he would like to exercise more and maybe enjoy an occasional cup of ice cream.

Born in Shanghai in 1932, Cardinal Zen was ordained a priest in 1961 and a bishop in 1996. He became the bishop of Hong Kong in 2002 and was named a cardinal in 2006.

Bishop Tong told UCA News that one of his top priorities is to ensure that all priests help promote priestly vocations, which have lagged during the past decade.

"Today's priestly vocations are affected by materialism, especially in affluent places, and Hong Kong is no exception," he said.

Born in Hong Kong in 1939, Bishop Tong lived with his family in Guangzhou and elsewhere in Guangdong province during and after the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, 1941-45. He pursued his seminary studies in Macau and Hong Kong and at the Pontifical Urbanian University in Rome. Pope Paul VI ordained him a priest in 1966.

He obtained a doctoral degree in sacred theology in Rome in 1969, then studied at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, from which he received a master's degree in philosophy.

He has taught dogmatic theology and Chinese philosophy at Holy Spirit Seminary College and served as dean of theology there, 1973-1979.

He also has served as vicar general of the Hong Kong Diocese since 1992. He was ordained auxiliary bishop of Hong Kong in December 1996, about six months before Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule, at the same time that Cardinal Zen was ordained coadjutor bishop of Hong Kong.

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