

## Catholics pray for pardon, rain in drought-hit China

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Villagers fetch water at a nearly dry spring in Bayi village in the Baise area of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China, March 28.

GUIYANG, CHINA -- The church is leading Catholics in prayers for rain as five provinces in southwestern China experience the worsening effects of a drought that has gripped the region for months.

Fr. Shen Chengkai of Guiyang, who serves in eight counties in the Bijie area of Guizhou province, told UCA News the drought is a reminder from God.

"Have we been promoting environmental protection and the use of low-carbon [emission] energy?" the priest asked. "We need to treasure nature that God has given us, or otherwise these abnormal conditions will happen often."

His diocese has gathered the faithful for novenas, especially praying for rain. The priest asked his parishioners to first seek God's pardon for not having looked after the environment enough and then to pray for rainfall.

As of late March, about 6.7 million hectares of farmland had been affected, with more than 18 million people and 11 million animals facing severe water shortages. Guangxi, Guizhou, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces and Chongqing Municipality are the worst-hit areas.

Shen said people were using plastic pipes to collect water from mountains, but "there is no more water now."

Parishioners from Weining and Hezhang counties are suffering most and their wells have dried up, he noted. "They have to walk four to five kilometers, sometimes farther, to get water," he added. Bijie has a Catholic population of about 1,000.

Farmland in Guizhou is infertile, which makes it impossible to grow paddy rice. "Now it's becoming difficult to grow drought-resistant crops like maize, peanuts and tartary buckwheat," he said.

Bishop John Baptist Tan Yanchuan of Nanning in Guangxi told UCA News the 400 Catholic families in Baise, Longlin and other mountainous areas face the same problem. "There's been a shortage of drinking water since

the end of last year,? he said.

The diocese wants to reach out and help by collecting donations and delivering drinking water, added the prelate.

Kunming diocese reported that Yunnan province is enduring its worst drought in 60 years.

The Immaculate Conception Parish in Wenshan County organized a drought-fighting activity on March 12. Fr. Francis Tao Zhihai of Kunming led parishioners in delivering 100 tons of drinking water to a primary school and a Catholic village, which helped some 90 students and nine families there.

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