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## News Items

### Top Stories

### News Briefs

### Vatican

### Origins

### Africa

### Headlines

### Also Featuring

### Movie Reviews

### Sunday Scripture

### CNS Blog

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### 2008 papal visit

### World Youth Day

### John Paul II

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### Vatican

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## CNS Story:

POPE-CHINA May-26-2009 (770 words) xxxi

## New Vatican document again encourages Chinese Catholics to reconcile

By Cindy Wooden  
 Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Pope Benedict XVI knows the full structural unity of Catholic communities in China will take time, but the spiritual reconciliation of Chinese Catholics "can and must take place now," said a new Vatican document.

Marking the second anniversary of Pope Benedict's 2007 letter to Chinese Catholics, the Vatican published a reading guide and summary of the letter to clarify certain points and help people understand it better.

The 2007 letter established new guidelines to favor cooperation between clandestine Catholic communities and those officially registered with the government.

The papal letter strongly criticized the limits placed by the Chinese government on the church's activities. But on several key issues, including the appointment of bishops, it invited civil authorities to a new and serious dialogue.

The new compendium of the papal letter, released at the Vatican May 24, used a question-and-answer format quoting the original letter, but it also included several new footnotes and appendixes to clarify questions raised in the past two years.

The original letter contained directives aimed at bridging the gap between Catholic communities that have registered with the Chinese authorities -- and therefore operate under certain official limits -- and Catholic communities that have practiced the faith in a more clandestine fashion, professing full loyalty to the pope.

The compendium said Pope Benedict was urging Chinese Catholics to begin a process of spiritual reconciliation even before "a structural merger of official and unofficial Catholic communities can take place."

Reconciliation is a journey that will not be concluded overnight, the compendium said, but the necessary steps cannot "be postponed because -- or on the pretext that -- they are difficult since they require

the overcoming of personal positions or views."

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In addition to praying for one another, Catholics in China must take concrete steps, including sharing pastoral projects and undertaking common initiatives, it said.

"It is by means of practical steps that spiritual reconciliation, including visible reconciliation, will gradually occur, which will culminate one day in the complete structural unity," the compendium said.

The compendium also reaffirmed Pope Benedict's insistence that some aspects of the official Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association "cannot be reconciled with Catholic doctrine," particularly its claim to be above the individual bishops in guiding the Catholic community and its professed independence from the Vatican.

At the same time the compendium, like the 2007 letter, opened the door to registration with the government by bishops and Catholic communities, saying this was acceptable as long as it does not compromise principles of the faith and church communion and as long as it does not force church leaders to perform actions contrary to their consciences as Catholics.

When dealing with government agencies, "the pope recommends bishops and priests to do all possible to avoid giving rise to situations of scandal," it said.

The compendium emphasized once again Pope Benedict's position that determining whether or not to cooperate with the government is a decision that must be made by the local bishop in consultation with his priests, since government officials in different parts of China place different conditions on cooperating bishops.

"The pope neither excludes the possibility of accepting or seeking government recognition nor encourages doing so; the ideal would be to abandon the clandestine condition, but everything depends on the constraints imposed," the compendium said.

It also reaffirmed the pope's plea to Chinese Catholics to avoid making "judgments and mutual condemnations" of those who do not make the same choices regarding cooperation with the government and official registration with the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association.

The compendium gave individual Catholics wide latitude in deciding whether or not to receive the sacraments from bishops and priests who are recognized by the government but have not requested recognition from the pope.

"If the bishop or the priest celebrant is in communion with the pope, the faithful 'should not hesitate' to receive the sacraments from him," it said.

If Catholics cannot find pastors in communion with the pope and if they feel they need the sacraments at that moment for their spiritual good, the final decision on whether or not to receive them is up to the individual, it said.

In addition to affirming or explaining points contained in the 2007 letter,

the compendium also clarified that priests are authorized to celebrate Mass in the homes of the faithful if a church or chapel is not available, and it called on priests to follow canon law regarding accepting monetary stipends for the celebration of Masses for special intentions.

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Editor's Note: The text of the new compendium in English is posted online at: [http://www.vatican.va/chinese/pdf/7Compendium\\_en.pdf](http://www.vatican.va/chinese/pdf/7Compendium_en.pdf).

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