



## **ASIA/CHINA - Death of a Bishop loved for his understanding of young people**

Zhoucun (Agenzia Fides) – Bishop Joseph Ma Xuesheng, bishop of the diocese of Zhoucun (Chowtsun), in Shandong (mainland China) died on February 8 at the age of almost 90. He was born on 16 September 1923, in the district of Zouping (Shandong). The late bishop started his vocational path at the local minor seminary. After completing his studies in philosophy and theology at seminaries in Hankou, Macao and Beijing, he was ordained a priest on 3 April 1957. Until 1966, due to government political pressure on the Church, he was forced to alternate his pastoral ministry with manual work as a cook. In 1966, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, he was sent to work in the fields until 1980. In 1988 he was ordained Coadjutor of the diocese of Zhoucun, becoming diocesan Bishop in 1997.

Bishop Ma demonstrated great understanding towards young people and sought advice before reaching any decision. The diocese of Zhoucun, situated in central Shandong, today has a community of about 18.000 Catholics, 65 church buildings, twenty priests and a small community of sisters. The Diocese's present situation is due to the commitment, faith and support, of the late Bishop.

In 2009, the procedure for the appointment of a new coadjutor Bishop completed, cerebral paralysis prevented Bishop Ma from taking part in the ordination of his successor, Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang, ordained on 15 November 2010.

The funeral of Mgr Ma was held on 18 February in the church at Zibo. The late Bishop returned to the House of the Father a few days after the death of one hundred year old Bishop Liu Jingshan di Yinchuan (Ningxia). The sacrifice and faithfulness of this generation of Bishops remain a mark of love for Christ and love for the people of China. (Agenzia Fides 22/2/2013).