



NEWS REPORT

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Harassment during Easter season - More than 20 seminarians harassed in Southeastern China

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HONG KONG (UCAN) - Public security officers in eastern China have used the mother of an "underground" priest to draw him out and arrest him.

Two bishops, a priest and more than 20 seminarians of the "underground" Catholic Church in three southeastern provinces of China have been harassed and closely watched during the Easter season.

In the first instance, a Catholic priest of the "underground" Church in Fujian province and some seminarians were detained by public security officials while the Church people were on a picnic just before Holy Week.

A Church source in Hong Kong told UCA News on April 24 that 10 days earlier, 18 seminarians were "sentenced" to a month's imprisonment, while Father Zheng Ruipin of Fuzhou diocese was still waiting to hear what the authorities would do with him. The source, who asked not to be named, added that details about the charges and the whereabouts of those affected were not clear.

The source said a public security official on April 12 discovered Father Zheng and 10 seminarians praying the breviary, a book of the Psalms, readings and prayers, as they picnicked

on a small hill in Jiangtian town of Changle city. The city is near Fuzhou, Fujian's provincial capital, 1,630 kilometers southeast of Beijing. The source said the picnic was meant to offer some relaxation to the seminarians, who often had to stay indoors to avoid public exposure.

He said that the official called in other officials to surround and question the group. The Church people at first insisted they were just Catholics on a picnic, but some seminarians, some as young as 18 and coming from elsewhere in China, revealed their background and their "underground" seminary's location.

The public security officials then "purged" the seminary, breaking windows and damaging facilities in the house, and took away other seminarians, the source said. Later, the officials returned to the house and removed computers, a copying machine and other equipment.

The source described the underground Church situation in Changle, which is under Fuzhou diocese, as "always tense," and added that police crackdowns also disrupted Easter liturgical services in two nearby Church locations.

According to another Church source, Bishop Thomas Zeng Jingmu of Yujiang, who is unaffiliated with the government-sanctioned open Church, was harassed in a separate incident on April 2 in neighboring Jiangxi province.

The source told UCA News in mid-April that public security officials in Yujiang, about 1,300 kilometers south of Beijing, searched the bishop's residence, removed religious articles and beat up some Catholics at the scene. The same source also said that a Catholic woman, Wu Yinghua, was taken away.

Bishop Zeng told the source that his harassment by officials is "common" before major Church festivals. According to the source, officials maintain close surveillance over the 83-year-old bishop.

A third instance concerns "underground" Bishop James Lin Xili of Wenzhou in Zhejiang province, whom authorities recently confined to the cathedral of the "open Church" after he was discharged from hospital.

The bishop's relatives may visit him twice a week and laypeople once a week, but they must pass three checkpoints and undergo questioning about the purpose of their visit, the source told UCA News at Easter. The 84-year-old bishop, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, is reportedly greatly worried about his diocese, 1,440 kilometers southeast of Beijing, because is absent from it.