



NEWS REPORT

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Two underground priests arrested

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*The two were taken into custody after they concelebrated the mass that brought to a close the Year of the Eucharist.
Both had been detained in 1999 as well.*

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Yongqiang (AsiaNews/UCAN) - Two "underground" priests in Wenzhou diocese (eastern China) were detained by public security officers after holding a mass to mark the end of the Year of the Eucharist.

Fr Shao Zhumin and Fr Paul Jiang Sunian, respectively Vicar General and Chancellor of the underground Church community of Wenzhou diocese, as well as five other priests concelebrated the mass on October 27 in Yongqiang parish for about 600 Catholics.

After the Mass, Father Shao together with some priests, nuns and lay Catholics went to a restaurant for dinner. Public security officers seized him at the front desk when he approached the counter to order food while the other Catholics waited inside a room.

Alerted to the arrest, the lay Catholics quietly escorted the other priests out of the restaurant through a back door in the kitchen to prevent them from being arrested too.

Father Jiang did not join the group for dinner, but headed back to his parish. Public security officers took him into custody when he stopped at a toll booth in Bailou, Shuangyu Township.

A local Catholic source said that Fathers Shao and Jiang might have been targeted because they are the leaders of the community.

He said no problems occurred during or after a similar mass held by another parish on October 22 for the closing of the Eucharistic Year, even though more priests and Catholics attended that function.

Other sources said they could not understand why the two priests were taken away, as the situation concerning the Wenzhou underground community "has been calm" for some time, and a number of priests who had been detained were released gradually in recent years.

The October 27 event closing the Eucharistic Year was divided into five parts, with the participants first holding a simple ceremony to signify the closing of the special year proclaimed by the late Pope John Paul II. Then, several priests summarized their activities during the year, reiterating the significance of the Eucharist to the Church and the life of Catholics. After the Mass, the priests and Catholics held a procession with the Eucharist and then adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. A Benediction ended the activities.

Father Shao, who is in his early 40s, was arrested previously in 1999, but was hospitalized due to illness during his detention and later released.

In November 1999, Father Jiang was detained for illegally publishing 120,000 hymnbooks. He was officially arrested the following month, on December 23. He was given a six-year jail term and fined 270,000 yuan (US\$ 32,610) in April 2000, but was released on Christmas Day in 2003.

Bishop James Lin Xili of Wenzhou was arrested in September 1999 and is still confined to the cathedral of the government-recognized Church community without freedom of movement. Reportedly he is not in good health.