



THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS
DIE STEM VAN DIE MARTELARE

“REJOICE WITH ME,” HE SAID, “BE
COUNT THIS AS A KIND OF PRIVILEGE
SUFFER WITH MY LORD.”

殉道者之声

October 2022



China

**THE PRIVILEGE OF
PERSECUTION**

A FAMILY
IN EXILE

NO RELIGION
FOR CHILDREN

CHURCH LEADERS
IN PRISON



“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” Heb 13:3



The “At Any Cost” Mindset Prepared for Persecution

Our Lord has taught us the first step in preparing for persecution, and our Chinese Christian family members have walked it out in exemplary fashion under a brutal Communist regime for more than 70 years. Christ instructed us to count the cost of discipleship and take up our cross daily. Following Him is costly, but since He is infinitely worthy, we must continue paying without a thought when persecutors raise the price by opposing us.

VOM’s founder, Richard Wurmbbrand, said, “A man really believes not what he recites in his creed, but only the things he is ready to die for.” The first step in preparing for persecution is identifying the things we will do at any cost. We will read God’s Word, pray, worship, gather with other Believers and witness for Christ, and nothing will stop us from doing these things with willing and glad hearts. Because we do these things in obedience to the commands of our Lord, their worth is beyond evaluation. The value of everything else in this world pales in

comparison, including our very lives.

When you talk with Christians here in South Africa and in other free countries, the word that constantly comes to mind is unprepared. Persecuted Christians in restricted countries have counted the cost and considered Christ worthy, so they prayerfully approach each day with an obey-at-any-cost mindset. Anchored by an understanding of God’s greatness and with their desires fixed on His eternal kingdom, they approach life differently from most Christians in free countries. Too many Christians in free countries live in fear of those who oppose us while worrying about losing the things of this world.

For decades, our Chinese Christian family members have boldly, lovingly and humbly obeyed Christ, no matter how their government opposed them. When their gatherings were made illegal, they held church services anywhere necessary to avoid the secret police. And they also prepared for

the inevitable arrests so that when pastors were imprisoned, others in the congregation were ready to take their place. Meanwhile, the imprisoned pastors embraced their time in jail as a new ministry assignment from the Lord: They simply continued their work.

Today, the Chinese Communist Party has introduced video camera technology which is used against Christians. Hundreds of millions of facial recognition cameras help track Believers’ whereabouts and create a digital record used to punish them for their so-called disloyal and illegal activities. Their response to this surveillance has been the same as their response to previous threats and attacks. They simply continue in obedience with joyful hearts, having counted the cost and considered Christ worthy of any price they must pay.

Are we, our families and our churches ready to respond to opposition in a likewise manner? If not, then we are not prepared for persecution.

About the cover: Christians in China, oppressed and closely watched by the Chinese Communist Party, are forced to make difficult decisions as biblical disciples. These decisions have resulted in imprisonment for Christians like the church leaders in the story on p. 10 as well as exile for Christian families and even entire churches.

A Family **IN Exile**



▲ After being accused of membership in a “religious cult,” Ran, Ruiting, Dejun and Qiang (left to right) left China fearing that the government would take away Ruiting’s adopted brother.

In the several years that her family worshiped with Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, China, Ruiting got used to seeing her pastor arrested by government authorities. One of her earliest memories of Pastor Wang Yi is his arrest on 3 June, 2012. That time, authorities held the influential pastor for two days to make sure he remained quiet on June 4, the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

“At the time, I just felt a little afraid because I had never heard of pastors being arrested,” Ruiting said. “After a couple years, I found it is just a normal thing for the church.”

But when police arrested Pastor Wang Yi on 9 December, 2018, Ruiting and other members of the congregation were shocked. This time, it was more than just an attempt to intimidate or temporarily silence the pastor. Authorities also arrested his wife, Jiang Rong, several church leaders and more than 150 church members.

Under Surveillance

Ruiting’s father, Qiang, came to faith in Christ after reading several articles written by Pastor Wang Yi. And after Ruiting and the rest of the family came to faith, they decided to move

to Chengdu; Ruiting’s parents wanted to raise their young sons, Jianen and Jiawen, as biblical disciples within the Early Rain church family.

In 2017, Ruiting enrolled in Early Rain’s seminary, where her studies included working as Pastor Wang Yi’s administrative assistant. “He was also my teacher at seminary,” she said. “He was a very good teacher. He has a gift. His preaching really encouraged me to be a servant of God.”

On 9 December, 2018, Ruiting, her husband, Ran, and others from the church spent the afternoon rehearsing their upcoming Christmas play and shopping for coats. “Everything was normal that day until I got back home, maybe around 6pm or 7pm,” Ruiting recalled. “We read that a brother was arrested.”

Through a group message on WeChat, a popular Chinese messaging app, church members were informed that the church secretary had been arrested and that authorities had confiscated his laptop, which included church members’ personal information.

A short time later, they learned that Pastor Wang Yi and his wife had also been detained, and news of other arrests continued to show up in their messaging app. “Many people disappeared at that time,” Ruiting said. “We would be messaging

“Nobody gave up their faith. I saw church members who were braver, and they kept worshipping every week. Even without Pastor Wang Yi we are always worshipping God.”

someone on our phones and then they would just stop responding. They just disappeared.”

Ruiting soon learned that nearly everyone she worked with at the seminary had been arrested, and she feared that she might be next. Realising she couldn't return to her parents' house, where she and Ran lived, Ruiting decided to stay with a friend that night. Early the next morning, about 20 police officers and government officials visited her parents' house looking for her.

The officers attempted to force Qiang and Dejun, Ruiting's mother, to sign a document stating that they would leave their church. When the couple refused to sign, authorities took Qiang in for questioning. Ruiting later learned that authorities had threatened to harm her father and 10-year-old brother, Jianen, if she didn't come in for questioning, so she decided to turn herself in after praying with a group of other Believers.

A week after the raid, Ruiting met with five plainclothes police officers at a local cafe. After they ridiculed and questioned her for two hours, they asked Ruiting to sign a document stating that she would cut all ties with Early Rain. Like her parents, she refused to sign it.

Police closely monitored Ruiting and her family for the next month. Two officers followed each family member when they left the house, and they were not allowed to have visitors from the church. One officer even made Ruiting add him to her WeChat contacts so he could track her location.

Starting Over

Some members feared that the church would struggle as a result of the raid, but instead the church grew stronger. “Nobody gave up their faith,” Ruiting said. “I saw church members who were braver, and they kept worshipping every week. Even without Pastor Wang Yi we are always worshipping God.”

Ruiting and her family were determined to endure whatever persecution came their way, but a new tactic by the authorities soon forced them to create a plan for leaving China. In 2019, Communist authorities arrested a Christian couple and took custody of their four adopted children under the pretense of saving the children from a “religious cult.”

Sometime later, Ruiting learned through a neighbour that a police officer had also referred to her family as members of a religious cult. And sensing that authorities might use the same tactic to take her adopted brother, Jiawen, from her parents, Ruiting realised the family had to leave the country.

Ruiting and her family were able to get medical visas to Taiwan because of Jiawen's history of cancer; he had a tumour on his right

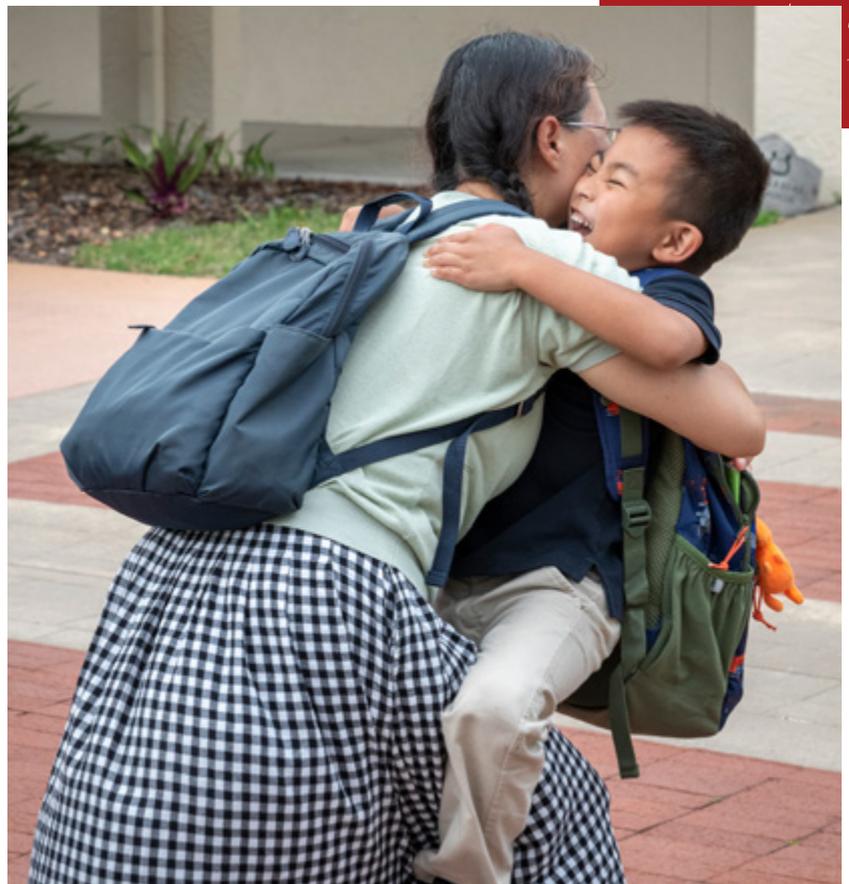
arm as a baby. The family travelled to Taiwan in July 2019, where they remained for two years, and on 29 June, 2021, they immigrated to the United States.

The Blessing of Persecution

Reflecting on their lives as Christians in China, Ruiting and her family said they are grateful for the persecution they endured. “I think persecution is quite a blessing from God,” Ran said. “It changed our life. God has us here to share what is happening in China, to share the evil side of President Xi Jinping. I think it is a blessing to the Chinese church. I think the Gospel in China will flourish more.”

And Qiang said facing persecution has helped him mature in faith. “Before persecution, I sometimes felt a little lazy about my faith,” he said. “The persecution made me feel that the future kingdom will come. Persecution made me feel like I'm flourishing in my faith.”

Ruiting requested prayer for Pastor Wang Yi and his family, for her own family and for members of Early Rain Church who continue to follow Christ under the government's watchful eye. “I think God wants me here to share the story with you,” she said, “to share my experience with the English-speaking world.” ●



▲ Jiawen is flourishing in his new school.



Further Crackdown on Educating Children

Teaching religion to children under 18 years old has been illegal since the adoption of China's constitution in 1982, and Communist officials have increasingly tightened those restrictions in the past few years.

Chinese lawmakers have passed additional policies to bolster governmental control over homeschooling and private education. A law passed in June 2021 empowers the government to revoke the parental rights of those who do not send their children to public schools. And more recently, China enacted a family education law in January 2022 that gives the government authority over what is taught inside the home.

In some cities, school officials have lined children up and asked them one by one if they attend church or if their parents teach them religious beliefs. Officials then called the parents of children who answered in the affirmative, threatening to expel their children from school. In many cases, officials have also required parents to sign documents stating that they would not teach religious ideology to their children.

Dozens of church-run schools around the country have been raided and closed. In a typical example, national security officers raided the Jordan River Learning Center, a Christian school affiliated with Mount Carmel Church in Anhui province, in March 2021. Authorities detained 10 staff members on charges of "illegal business operations," seized school equipment and confiscated teachers' cellphones and computers. Eight of the teachers were released on bail, while two remain in prison. ●

A Barrier for Online Church

On 1 March, Communist authorities within China's State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) implemented new measures prohibiting religious groups from posting information online without government approval. Under the new restrictions, anyone providing information related to "religious doctrine, religious knowledge, religious culture, or religious activities, which is transmitted as text, images, audio or video through means of internet websites, applications, forums, blogs, microblogs, public accounts, instant messaging, or online live-streaming" must obtain an Internet Religious Information Services permit.

While the new measures are strict, they merely put into plan the practices of the Communist government that have been in place for years. The laws do, however, pose a new challenge to unregistered churches that have moved their services online because of tightened restrictions on public worship. While some larger churches have built proprietary platforms that help them circumvent government restrictions, many other online churches will likely be shut down.

Some Chinese Christians now living outside the country continue to use various China-based online platforms and are not bound by the Communist government's restrictive laws. This allows them to continue to share Bible-based messaging from outside the country. ●



CHINESE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO TARGET CHURCH LEADERS

THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY (CCP) IS ACTIVELY SEEKING TO SILENCE PASTORS AND OTHER INFLUENTIAL BELIEVERS

through false accusations, unfounded charges and imprisonment. In addition to Pastor Wang Yi, countless other Christian leaders in China are imprisoned or have recently been released from prison. These three cases are representative of the persecution endured by those who proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Communist China.

ZHAO HUAIGUO

Zhao Huaiguo, pastor of an unregistered church called Bethel House in Hunan province, has been in prison since 2020. Authorities arrested him in April of that year, charging him with “inciting subversion of state power” for illegally preaching and distributing Christian pamphlets.

Zhao’s two government-appointed attorneys were able to mitigate the charges but chose not to plead “not guilty” on his behalf. The prosecutor suggested that the judge sentence him to 18 months in prison.

The pastor’s indictment alleged that he had used internet censorship circumvention software to view overseas websites, had recommended the software to church members, had published poetry that criticized the government, and had shared social media posts about Wuhan pneumonia. The CCP considered these actions a threat to China’s national security.

On 14 March, 2021, the Zhangjiajie National Security Bureau detained Zhao again for subverting the state. About a month later, when security bureau officials raided his home, they confiscated 500 religious books. Authorities have repeatedly rejected the attorney that Zhao’s family appointed for him, and the pastor remains in government detention.

Police had raided Bethel House two times previously, destroying church property, removing crosses and confiscating Bibles.





XU YONGHAI

After his 60th birthday, in 2021, Pastor Xu Yonghai should have been eligible for a pension. But because he has spent time in prison, Communist officials denied him his retirement benefits, and he essentially lives under house arrest.

Xu Yonghai was arrested in 2003 for speaking out on behalf of persecuted Christians. He served two years in prison on false charges of spying and illegally providing national intelligence to other countries. Since his release in 2006, he has led an unregistered church in Beijing that is frequently harassed by Communist authorities, and he remains unemployed, under surveillance and under house arrest.

Police have regularly harassed and intimidated Xu Yonghai and members of his church. In January 2014, authorities entered his home and detained more than 10 Christians for gathering illegally. In October 2016, police again came to Xu Yonghai's home, accusing the Christians gathered there of participating in illegal religious activities.

In June 2017, police interrupted a Bible study at Xu Yonghai's home and demanded to see every participant's ID. After asking the police officers why they needed to see everyone's identification in a private residence, the pastor called the national security office as police continued to intimidate the Christians. "I said that all our gatherings are open to the public and that the members are regulars," Xu Yonghai said. "Even the police are quite familiar with us. I said that since we only had a few people, there was no need to check our documents. It was unnecessary to generate trouble."

On 27 August, 2018, the pastor wrote an open letter, stating, "I became a 'sensitive' person because I am a Christian, because I proclaim the Gospel and because I safeguard Christians' freedom of religion. I am always placed under house arrest and not allowed to get out of my place on every sensitive date. Police even follow me if I go out to buy food."

During the 2021 Olympics in Beijing, police took Xu Yonghai and other members of his church to a hotel, where they were held until the Olympic Games had ended. ●



FU XUANJUAN

Four employees of a company that produced digital Bible players were arrested for their production and distribution roles within the company. Fu Xuanjuan, Deng Tianyong, Han Li and Feng Qunchao, employees of Shenzhen Tree of Life Technology Development, were arrested on 2 July, 2020, and convicted of "illegal business operation." In January 2022, a court dismissed the Christians' appeal and sustained the original verdict.

The company produced portable digital players that contained a narrated recording of the Bible as well as sermons and hymns. The players were especially useful to elderly Christians, but Chinese authorities viewed the players with suspicion.

The company's owner, Fu Xuanjuan, was sentenced to six years in prison. Her evangelist husband, Deng Tianyong, who managed content for the digital Bible players, received a three-year sentence. Feng Qunchao, a technician, was sentenced to two and a half years in prison. And the company's receptionist and accountant, Han Li, received an 18-month sentence and has since been released. Deng Tianyong and Feng Qunchao are nearing the end of their sentences.

Fu Xuanjuan and Deng Tianyong's adopted 14-year-old daughter as well as Deng Tianyong's widowed mother have been cared for by church members since the arrests.



**Extremists burned
her village and
murdered her
family.**

**But they could not
kill her faith.**



Watch the new short feature created for the International Day of Prayer,
Rebecca: Nigeria, at PERSECUTIONSA.ORG/IDOP

Prayer Diary[®]

October/November 2022

OCTOBER

- S 16 COMOROS** Pray for the encouragement of Christian workers.
- M 17 KUWAIT Pray that many young people seeking God will find Jesus Christ.
- T 18 KAZAKHSTAN Pray for the growth of house-churches in smaller cities and villages.
- W 19 YEMEN Pray for Sarah, who was recently released from prison.
- T 20 JORDAN Pray that God will equip Jordanian churches as they continue to reach out to Muslim refugees.
- F 21 CHINA Pray for imprisoned Christians, such as Wang Yi, Zhang Shaojie, Alimujiang Yimiti and John Cao.
- S 22 BANGLADESH** Pray for the encouragement of Christians, who are often the only Believers in their village.
- S 23 MALDIVES** Pray for an increase in Christians willing to work in the country.
- M 24 EGYPT Pray for Kadisha, whose family tortured her for her faith. She escaped and is now in hiding.
- T 25 IRAN Pray for protection for the people smuggling printed and digital Bibles to Believers.
- W 26 NORTH KOREA Pray for a pastor who ministers to North Korean victims of sex-trafficking in north-eastern China.
- T 27 LEBANON Pray for difficult areas outside Beirut where there is little Christian witness (Tyre, Sidon, Tripoli and more).
- F 28 TAJIKISTAN Pray for those who might be imprisoned for teaching Bible stories to children.
- S 29 LAOS** Pray for young Christian leaders who are studying to serve in churches.
- S 30 AFGHANISTAN** Pray for greater access to God's Word in every language and for every tribal group.
- M 31 UZBEKISTAN Pray for Uzbek women who are severely beaten by their relatives for turning to Christ.

NOVEMBER

- T 1 LAOS Pray for Khmu Christians who oversee outreach to the Hmong, Mien, Bru, and Prai people groups.
- W 2 TAJIKISTAN Pray for outreach efforts to unreached people in the Pamir Mountains.
- T 3 MALAYSIA Pray for church leaders who are forming strategies to engage unreached people.
- F 4 CHINA Pray that Chinese churches will unite as a brilliant Gospel witness.
- S 5 KENYA** Pray for Pastor Galgalo and pray that God will raise up more full-time ministry workers.
- S 6 IDOP*** Help your family, group, class or church join a global prayer movement for our persecuted brothers and sisters. persecutionsa.org/IDOP
- M 7 SYRIA Pray for unity among churches and Christians.
- T 8 LIBYA Pray that isolated Believers will enjoy fellowship with the Lord and with other Christians.
- W 9 PHILIPPINES Pray that a new Believer will be able to tell her family about her new life in Christ.
- T 10 IRAN Pray for Christian prisoners who feel discouraged and need emotional support.
- F 11 UZBEKISTAN Pray that young Uzbek leaders will be encouraged and equipped to lead new churches.
- S 12 CUBA** Pray for church leaders, pastors and Christians facing government harassment.

*INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

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