

## Catholic leaders detained in China

Bishop detained, priest disappeared amid crackdown on underground church in Hebei province



Authorities have stepped up persecution of underground Catholics in Hebei province with the detention of a bishop and a priest as well as the demolition of an altar that left two laywomen injured, all in separate incidents this month.

Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding was taken away by officials on May 12 and then sent back to his cathedral to celebrate Mass on Pentecost Sunday on May 24, according to his priests.

It remained unclear why the bishop had been detained for 12 days.

“He ordained a few priests in April and was then warned not to go on a pilgrimage during the Month of Mary in May,” said a Catholic source in Zhengding who declined to be named for security reasons.

Authorities have recently ordered all religious personnel — without specifying which faiths — to report their whereabouts, the source added.

Authorities also appear to have detained Father Liu Honggeng in nearby Baoding who has not been seen or heard from since talking to relatives on his mobile phone on May 7.

“His mobile is off. We Catholics have inquired from relevant government departments but in vain,”

said another Church source who also declined to be named for security reasons.

The Justice and Peace Commission of Hong Kong diocese has similarly demanded authorities explain Father Liu's whereabouts but also without reply.

“Many times in the past have shown that such disappearances were acts done by the authorities,” said commission spokesman Or Yan-yan.

The underground priest was only released in August following eight years of detention without trial after he refused to join the government-sanctioned Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) in 2006.

Meanwhile, in the same Baoding diocese, two Catholic laywomen were wounded while trying to protect an altar from more than 40 police officers sent to demolish it at an underground prayer house in Anzhuang on Friday.

The eight-by-six-meter altar was built before the Chinese New Year in February.



The altar before it was demolished on May 22 in Anzhuang (Photo supplied)

“Government officials came and asked about the prayer house early this month,” said a Church source in Anzhuang who declined to be named for security reasons.

Bishop An, the coadjutor bishop of Baoding who formerly belonged to the underground community and who is from Anzhuang, said he could not mediate for the prayer house.

“They are all underground Catholics who do not accept me. I don't think I could help,” he told

ucanews.com.

Bishop An spent 10 years in prison as a member of the underground church until 2006, and in 2009 agreed to become a member of the CPA. He was then installed by the government as bishop the following year.

Many Catholics in Baoding do not accept his appointment by the state after he effectively replaced Bishop James Su Zhimin who has remained in detention in an unknown location since 1997.

ucanews.com reporter, Hong Kong