

Chinese Government punishes Heilongjiang priests



Reprisals against clergy who resisted illicit ordination. The Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Harbin where the illicit ordination took place on July 6

The government is exacting revenge against seven priests in Heilongjiang province who resisted the illicit episcopal ordination of Father Joseph Yue Fusheng in Harbin earlier this month, local Church sources say.

They said the priests were forced to leave their parishes to “repent for their wrongdoing.”

They are now either staying with parishioners, have returned to their hometowns or have fled to other provinces.

Before the July 6 ordination, some religious officials warned that disobedient priests would face dire consequences. In recent weeks, they ordered priests with “dissatisfactory performances” to take three months leave for self-examination, sources said.

The seven priests were either absent from the ordination or openly expressed their opposition against Fr Yue, who did not have a papal mandate and is seen as too close to the government.

The Holy See declared that Fr Yue incurred automatic excommunication laid down by the Code of Canon Law on July 10 but he continues to celebrate Mass in bishop’s garb.

Heilongjiang province’s “official” Church community has 37 priests.

Since the ordination, according to the sources, some priests are avoiding concelebrating Mass with him while the number of Mass-goers at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Harbin city (the so-called “cathedral”) has dropped remarkably.

Some of them have turned to churches managed by the “unregistered” Church community.

The seven disobedient priests have to submit a repentance letter to Fr Yue and concelebrate Mass with him within three months, or the government may expel them from the diocese, the sources said.

One of them has already concelebrated Mass with Fr Yue at the consecration of a new church in Bei'an city on July 16.

Meanwhile, Bishop Joseph Wei Jingyi of Qiqihar, who is not recognized by the government, says he expects political pressure on the unregistered Church community in Heilongjiang to increase.

“In past decades, the unregistered community in Hebei province has been a major target of suppression. After Bishop Paul Meng Qinglu of Hohhot was ordained in 2010, the unregistered community in Inner Mongolia suffered a strong blow last year. We can anticipate Heilongjiang would be the next after Fr Yue's ordination,” he told ucanews.com.

Although local Catholics clearly know Church principles, the sources said, they are worried religious life would be greatly affected.

They are also disappointed that Fr Yue seems to be taking no action to protect his priests.

Fr Yue could not be reached for comment.

UCAnews - Harbin