

Chinese police disrupt weekend worship

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CHINA (BP)—Members of Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, China, tried to meet together for Sunday worship on Dec. 16, only to have police reportedly detain about 60 people and shut down outdoor services. Several small groups found spaces to meet and worship without incident.

One week after [Chinese authorities cracked down](#) on the prominent unregistered church and arrested more than 100 of its leaders and members, congregants arrived at their building to find the metal gate locked and plainclothes officers and riot police blocking all the entrances, according to a church prayer update. Police arrested some of the congregants who showed up for Sunday worship.

A group of about 50 or 60 Early Rain—also called Autumn Rain—members held a service in a nearby riverside park, singing hymns, praying and reciting the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism: “What is your only comfort in life and death? That I am not my own but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Police reportedly halted the outdoor worship service and arrested three church workers who were leading it. Another group of congregants—including several women whose husbands had been detained—met together in the field of a nearby university to pray and sing hymns when police came by and also arrested them.

In total, police arrested about 60 people Sunday for attempting to worship.

Pattern of persecution



Members of Autumn Rain Baptist Church in Sichuan, China, at worship in October. About 100 of them were jailed beginning Dec. 9 for their faith. (Photo from Facebook via BP)

This is not the first time government persecution has forced Early Rain to meet outdoors: In 2009, authorities kicked the church out of its rented location, and for three months the church worshipped in a park. At the time, church leaders secretly purchased a new office space for a meeting place and openly appealed the government's eviction charges. Government pressure eased after that.

Now, even Early Rain's church plants are under persecution. Members of Deyang Field Church arrived at their building on Sunday to find that the landlord had changed the locks on the doors. Members held their service outside, and police did not disturb them.

Authorities placed Jiang Tian, the preacher of church plant Gospel Church, under house arrest last week, so on Sunday about 30 church members came to his house for a worship service. About 30 police officers showed up to break up the meeting, taking Jiang's phone, beating him, and trying to coerce him to sign a pledge to stop meeting, which he refused to sign.

Police also detained Linxishu Church's preacher, Cao Qingen, outside his church's building on Sunday afternoon.

Crackdown on unregistered churches

In Guangzhou, police cracked down on another large unregistered church, Rongguili Church. Founded by the late pastor Samuel Lamb, the church attracts up to 5,000 worshippers each week, according to Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*. More than 60 police barged into a Rongguili children's Bible class on Saturday morning. They declared the service an illegal gathering, took down the names of church members and confiscated 4,000 books.

Currently, police are holding 11 Early Rain leaders and members in criminal detention and another in administrative detention, and they have detained six people for more than 120 hours. Elder Matthew Bingsen Su was summoned on Saturday night for "stirring up trouble."

On Sunday, police officers detained Su's wife and five children as they worshipped at the university field, according to a message sent by Su's wife. Police took the family to the local station, where they were reunited with Su. Authorities then asked Su to take the children home while leaving his wife at the station. He refused, even as they threatened to take his children away and charge the couple with child abandonment.

At 1 a.m., they finally let his wife take the children home, while forcing Su to remain in custody. The police then searched the family's home and confiscated two books before leaving.

In a prayer update Sunday, Early Rain summed up the church's current situation: "Lord, today we worship you in police cars. We worship you in police stations. We worship you in detention centers. We worship you in prisons. And we worship you in homes. We have no other goal except to

worship you alone.”