

# Mayflower Church members face deportation to China

March 30, 2023

Chinese Christians who have been living in Thailand after fleeing persecution in their native country have been arrested, and they face a March 31 hearing that could result in their deportation and near-certain imprisonment in China.

The [21Wilberforce](#) human rights and religious liberty organization is calling for the U.S. Department of State and other federal officials to intervene.

At about 11 a.m. on March 30, more than 20 Thai Immigration Police raided the hotel where members of the Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church—better known as the “Mayflower Church” for their commitment to seeking religious freedom—were staying.



Randel Everett

All 63 members of the church were arrested, taken to an immigration detention center in Thailand and told they face immediate detention proceedings, Randel Everett, founding president of the 21Wilberforce human rights organization wrote in a March 30 email.

“At this point in these brave folks’ journey, should they be returned to China, it is an almost certain prison sentence for most, if not all, of these fellow believers,” Everett wrote.

“The U.S. Embassy in Bangkok communicated to the church’s pastor that tonight the Thai government will transport all the church members to Bangkok Immigration Court for a deportation hearing tomorrow.”

Nary Turkel, chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, confirmed members of the Mayflower Church “are at imminent risk of deportation to China, where they will suffer severe consequences, including imprisonment and torture.”

## **Urgent action needed**

Everett, former executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, urged Texas Baptists to pray and to contact Sen. John Cornyn.

21Wilberforce is asking Cornyn to appeal immediately to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration on behalf of the Mayflower Church.

The email addresses for Cornyn’s key staff are [stephen\\_tausend@cornyn.senate.gov](mailto:stephen_tausend@cornyn.senate.gov) and [drew\\_brandewie@cornyn.senate.gov](mailto:drew_brandewie@cornyn.senate.gov). The phone number for his Washington, D.C., office is (202) 224-2934. Contact information for his seven regional Texas offices can be found [here](#).

21Wilberforce is asking that the Chinese Christians either be granted resettlement in the United States through humanitarian parole, or that the U.S. government provide them a means of temporary resettlement in another country.



Father and son Jonathan and Samuel—members of the Mayflower Church—enjoy gifts sent by Texas-based Freedom Seekers International to persecuted Chinese Christians currently living in Thailand. (Photo courtesy of FSI)

Abraham Cooper, vice chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, joined in the call for “the U.S. government to use all feasible tools at its disposal to ensure Mayflower Church members’ safety.”

[Freedom Seekers International](#), based in Tyler, has been enlisting East Texas congregations to sponsor the resettlement of Mayflower Church members. Midland-based [ChinaAid](#) has provided assistance to the Chinese Christians while they have been living in Thailand.

Members of the Shezhen Holy Reformed Church originally sought refuge in South Korea. After being denied asylum there, they relocated to Thailand on tourist visas, but the Thai government refused to renew their visas.

Mayflower Church members have been seeking refugee status from the United Nations, and each has been issued “refugee-seeker” identification. As of last month, only two of the 16 families in the church had been granted

a second refugee determination interview with the U.N.