

Week 1: Pray for Zhang Shaojie (China)

Arrest and Sentence Zhang Shaojie (49) is pastor of Nanle County Christian Church in Henan province, central China, and is local president of the government-approved Three-Self Church. He was arrested in November 2013 after a dispute with local Communist Party officials who, according to church members, were trying to seize church land. In December 2013, a Sky News crew reporting on the church's plight and lawyers representing the Christians were attacked and expelled from the area by government officials. On 4 July 2014, he was sentenced to twelve years in prison for "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order" and fraud.



Church members believe the government's persecution of Pastor Zhang stems from his defence of marginalised people who have had their rights violated, and that it is part of a plan to replace him as local Three-Self Church president. Rights lawyer Liu Weiguo said, "I strongly believe Zhang Shaojie is innocent. This is a total set-up by the local government." Meanwhile, Nanle County government officials have petitioned Nanle County People's Court to lengthen Pastor Zhang's sentence.



Family Pastor Zhang's eldest daughter Yunyun and her husband and baby daughter had to go into hiding, and in July 2014 they used China Aid's "underground railroad" to flee from China to the USA (pictured). On 5 November 2014, more than 20 officials violently abducted another daughter, Shanshan, and locked her in a soundproofed room. On the day of her release, 14 November, the authorities went to the Zhang family home to attempt to force the family to leave so the house and car could be auctioned, as Pastor Zhang had not paid 700,000 Yuan (€98,000) in restitution for his fraud charge. His elderly mother, Mei Xian, threatened to torch herself, and the officials left.

Latest news from prison In October 2014, Pastor Zhang was transferred from Baitiaohe Prison in Neihuang County, Puyang, to Henan Prison No. 2 in Xinxiang. Soon after, he was allowed to meet his lawyers for the first time since his appeal was rejected in August 2013. Local authorities continue to target Pastor Zhang's church: in December 2014, the authorities withdrew 4 million Yuan (€562,000 – savings for a new building) from the church bank account, removed the cross topping the building and blocked the entrance.

Prayer Points

1. Pray for wisdom for Pastor Zhang and his lawyers as they continue to seek justice.
2. Pray for God's protection for Pastor Zhang's family and that the authorities will stop harassing them.
3. Pray for God's blessing on the leaders and members of Nanle County Christian Church.