

Week 5: Pray for Hao Zhiwei (China)



Pastor Hao Zhiwei (52) of Egangqiao Church in Ezhou city, Hubei province, has been in detention since July 2019. She was charged with fraud for collecting offerings and tithes from house church members and waited two and a half years for her trial, which was postponed several times due to Covid-19. In February 2022 she was sentenced to eight years in prison and in December 2022 she lost her appeal.

Pastor Hao was appointed as a minister in the government-approved Three-Self Church in 2003 due to her excellent preaching but her pastor's licence was revoked in 2007 because she disagreed with the Religion Bureau's governance of churches and her congregation became an unregistered house church. In 2016 the local government banned it for "organising religious activities without permission" and local officials began to harass church members, detaining some for brief periods.

In July 2019 the local District Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau issued a notice stating that the church building must be demolished because it was in a "very dangerous location", being too close to a power plant. Pastor Hao was detained and the following month the church building was demolished.

The pastor was charged with fraud for collecting 2.24 million Yuan (€310,000) in tithes and offerings from her house church members – the government claimed that collecting the money amounted to fraud because of her illegal status as a preacher in an unregistered church. Two church workers detained with the pastor on fraud charges were released because they "confessed" but Pastor Hao refused to plead guilty. While her case is believed to be the first of its kind in China, several other pastors of unregistered churches have since been charged with fraud.

Pastor Hao has suffered from poor health in prison, including several bouts of acute pancreatitis, but her lawyer has said that her faith remains strong.

Family

Pastor Hao's husband Zhang Youwu died of liver cancer in 2018. Their sons Paul (19) and Moses (15) are struggling without parents – their one remaining grandparent has been ill – and Moses is suffering from severe depression.

Latest News

Pastor Hao's health is poor and she is under "special treatment" in prison: some prisoners in the same room reportedly have been tasked with watching her and reporting what she does and says to guards. Her sons continue to struggle and care from church members is limited because they all face pressure and threats.

Prayer Diary

Sunday	Pray for better treatment for Pastor Hao in prison.
Monday	Ask that God would heal and encourage her.
Tuesday	Pray that Pastor Hao would be released early.
Wednesday	Pray for peace and hope for Paul and Moses.
Thursday	Pray that Moses would recover from depression.
Friday	Ask God to sustain the church in Pastor Hao's absence.
Saturday	Pray for freedom for all China's house churches.

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