

China House Church Alliance Leader Sentenced to Labor Camp

Even as blind activist Chen Guangcheng suffers malnutrition under house arrest for blowing the whistle on China's forced abortion practices, the Communist nation continues its persecution against Christianity.

According to a report from ChinaAid, the deputy chairman of the Chinese House Church Alliance has been given a two-year labor camp sentence. Pastor Shi Enhao was condemned to two years of what the Communist State calls "re-education through labor."

Police handed down this extra-judicial punishment, which requires no trial or conviction of a crime. Re-education through labor is often used to punish people who have committed minor criminal offenses or for dissidents and adherents of religious groups, such as house church Christians and Falun Gong practitioners.

Enhao's large house church is home to several thousand members who meet in various sites around the city. He was charged with "illegal meetings and illegal organizing of venues for religious meetings." ChinaAid also reports that the police's Domestic Security Protection Department has ordered his church to stop meeting and confiscated the congregation's car, musical instruments and choir robes, as well as 140,000 yuan (\$21,) in donations.

Enhao's May 31 arrest by police in Suqian city comes against the backdrop of the Shouwang Church controversy in Beijing. In April, the Shouwang Church decided to meet outdoors despite being evicted from its leased meeting site. Critics of Shouwang's decision noted that when other house churches have

grown too large to meet in one place without making local officials nervous, most have avoided clashes with the authorities by breaking into smaller groups meeting in different locations. As ChinaAid sees it, Shi's charge and sentence demonstrate that this strategy does not guarantee that the authorities will be appeased.

Enhao and his wife, Zhu Guangyun, are both 55 years old. His 86-year-old mother, Liu Guanglan, requires round-the-clock care, which his wife provides. Enhao's son, Shi Yongyang, and his wife are both in full-time ministry. Four generations of his family have been serving the church. According to ChinaAid, police have threatened all three of his daughters and their husbands.