

Chinese Authorities Again Deny Facility to Shouwang Church

Authorities in China again thwarted efforts by Shouwang Church to lease a worship facility at the year's end, and the Beijing congregation again met outdoors on Sunday—resulting in the arrest of 48 members, sources said.

“The church tried three times to rent three different venues, but it was all to no avail because of the authorities’ intervention,” a source close to the church told Compass. “On Dec. 17, Shouwang signed a rental contract with a landlord for its new indoor worship venue. Two days later, the church’s books and some other belongings were moved into the new rented space.”

In the days that followed, however, the landlord terminated the contract due to pressure from “the local police station, the housing management office and leaders of various government agencies,” church leaders announced to members on Dec. 23.

Church leaders had initially arranged to have an indoor meeting on Sunday in a room they had leased from the Beijing Parkview Wuzhou Hotel on Dec. 17, according to a post on Shouwang’s Facebook page. But due to police interference and the cancellation of the lease, they moved to Plan B—a continuation of the outdoor worship services held every Sunday since April 10.

Shouwang began meeting outdoors last year after authorities blocked their attempts to rent worship venues or use a building they had purchased. Church leaders had hoped the situation would change early in the new year.

“The outdoor worship service has come to an end,” Shouwang had

announced on its Facebook page. "We first want to offer our thanksgiving to God ... We also pray that God will continue to open a way for us."

The post also described how the church had recently signed three leases with landlords in Zhongguancun, the area where the church has worshipped since it was founded, but that all three were revoked.

New Year Arrests

Police detained at least 48 church members who gathered for outdoor worship on Sunday (Jan. 1), releasing 40 of them by midnight, Shouwang's governing committee stated on its Facebook page.

Early on the morning of Dec. 25, church members had arrived at Zhongguancun square only to find it heavily guarded with industrial-strength rails blocking access, the committee reported. Police arrested 41 Christians who attempted to worship at the square, releasing all but one by midnight. The final detainee was released at 3 p.m. on Dec. 26.

During the 38 weeks of outdoor worship in 2011, police detained almost 1,000 church members and held many more under house arrest, according to the committee.

One church member who shared his testimony on the Facebook page on Dec. 26 said that the Christians detained indoors usually felt sorry for those waiting outside in the cold as they were able to "read books and have fellowship in a warm room." But on Christmas Day an officer interrogated him, taunting him for being afraid to give his home address and threatening to "hold you for more than 10 days so that you will lose your job. I will find out where you live and force you to move."

"As for my job, no one can fire me if God does not allow it," the church member wrote. He also advised other church members, "How long they detain you has nothing to do with whether you

cooperate with them or not, just as God's love for you has nothing to do with what you do. So do not be afraid, and be brave in speaking out as the Holy Spirit guides you."

His advice was timely as Shouwang Church plans to continue meeting outdoors until a more permanent solution is found, and officials seem just as determined to stop them.

"By arbitrarily detaining peaceful religious believers in the capital city on the first day of 2012, Beijing authorities show that they are determined to continue their crackdown on independent religious groups in the coming year," China Aid Association President Bob Fu stated on Sunday.