

# Holy Spirit Strengthens Underground Church in China Amid Persecution

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A prominent house church pastor in China, Pastor Yang Xibo, is being targeted by the Chinese government, which has imposed substantial fines on him and his wife, Wang Xiaofei, for organizing religious activities.

The fines amount to 400,000 yuan, approximately \$55,100, and are regarded by watchdog group ChinaAid as an act of religious persecution.

Leading the Xunsiding Church, the largest house church in Xiamen, a port city on China's southeast coast, Pastor Yang and his wife have steadfastly refused to comply with the fines. Their defiance comes as the culmination of a battle that has been ongoing since 2021, during which the fine was reportedly doubled on June 28.

Xunsiding Church is part of the underground Christian movement in China, comprising congregations that have chosen not to register with the officially recognized Protestant or Roman Catholic churches. Such unregistered churches face increased scrutiny and restrictions from the Chinese authorities.

Pastor Yang, a fourth-generation minister, follows in the footsteps of his father and aunt, who were imprisoned for their refusal to join the state-sanctioned Three-Self Church.

The troubles for Xunsiding Church began in May 2019 when it was banned and fined 25,000 yuan.

ChinaAid reports that the Chinese government deployed police to intimidate and harass the congregation for a month, leading

them to frequently change locations. Church members have endured continuous surveillance, raids on their gatherings, destruction of private property and pressure to enroll their children in public schools.

The plight of Xunsiding Church is not an isolated incident but reflects a broader crackdown on unregistered churches in China. According to ChinaAid, only five religious groups are officially permitted to practice their faith under close state supervision.

The organization's report earlier this year revealed that Christian persecution in China has reached unprecedented levels at any time since the Cultural Revolution of Mao Zedong in the latter 1960s and early 1970s.

Chinese Christians face imprisonment, torture and manipulation of financial practices by the government.

Authorities exploit the traditional Christian practice of tithes and offerings to fabricate fraud charges, aiming to suffocate the house churches financially. Numerous pastors and elders from house churches have been imprisoned, and religious citizens in Henan province must register with the government's "Smart Religion" app to participate in worship services.

ChinaAid's president, Bob Fu, who himself fled from the Chinese Communist Party and sought refuge in the United States in the 1990s, warns that the tactics employed by Western governments are increasingly mirroring those of the Chinese Communist Party. He emphasizes the urgent need to address the worsening situation of Christian persecution in China.

In the face of adversity, the underground church in China draws strength from their faith and the belief that the Holy Spirit is guiding and protecting them. As 1 Peter 4:12-13 reassures them, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you

share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."

The challenges faced by Pastor Yang Xibo and the Xunsiding Church reflect the resilience and steadfastness of the underground Christian community in China. As they continue to worship in secret and endure persecution, their unwavering faith in the face of adversity remains a powerful testimony.

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