

Christian Counselor Who Refused to Offer Gay Sex Therapy Loses Case

✘ A Christian marriage counselor in London who lost his job for refusing to provide sex therapy to gay couples lost a discrimination lawsuit on appeal.

Gary McFarlane, 48, was fired from Relate, a marriage counseling service in Bristol, England, in 2008 after refusing to help same-sex couples improve their sex lives because it violated his Christian beliefs.

Photo: Christian Legal Centre

China Sentences House Church Leaders to Prison

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Bypassing the court system, China arbitrarily sentenced five more leaders of the Fushan Church in Linfen City, Shanxi Province, on Monday, this time to re-education labor camps for two years, according to China Aid Association (CAA).

A Chinese court last week sentenced five house church leaders

to three to seven years in prison after they were arrested en route to Beijing to file a complaint about an attack on their church, according to the advocacy organization. The five leaders sentenced to labor camps this week were accused of “gathering people to disturb the public order” after they organized a prayer rally of 1,000 people the day after military police and others attacked their church members and building on Sept. 13.

Pastors Yang Rongli (left) and Wang Xiaoguang, shown in this image released by China Aid Association, were among 10 house church leaders sentenced to prison or hard labor in recent weeks.

China Sentences Five More Christian Leaders

In what CAA termed “an arbitrary administrative sentence by the Public Security Bureau enacted so the leaders would not be ‘required’ to go through the court and prosecution system,” China delivered the verdicts to church leaders Li Shuangping, Yang Hongzhen, Yang Caizhen (wife of Pastor Yang Xuan, who was sentenced to three years of prison on Nov. 25), Gao Qin (also known as Gao Fuqin), and Zhao Guoai.

“Yang Caizhen was seen being beaten severely during an interrogation,” CAA said in a press statement. “Having had one of her front teeth knocked out during a beating, and fasting and praying during her detention, Ms. Yang is reported to look very fragile.”

The church leaders, the latter four women, were arrested on Nov. 11. They had helped to organize a prayer rally after the Sept. 13 attack on the Fushan Church branch congregation in Linfen, when some 400 uniformed police and civilians bearing shovels, batons, bricks, iron hooks and other weapons had beaten members of the church who were sleeping at the nearly finished factory building used as a worship site.

With several Fushan County officials involved in the attack, more than 30 Christians were seriously injured among the 100 Christians who were hurt, CAA reported. According to the *Epoch*

Times, a church member's relative obtained a license to build the shoe factory and was allowing the group to meet there, as the church was growing too large to meet in homes and the building could hold up to 400 people.

As Chinese authorities had kept the families of Gao Qin and Zhao Guoai under tight surveillance, CAA relied on church sources to confirm their sentences to labor camp. The organization said family members had confirmed the sentences of the other three.

"Linfen house church Christians continue to be monitored by Chinese military police, including neighboring Golden Lampstand Church (Jin Dongtai) in Linfen City," CAA stated.

The organization said authorities violated Chinese law by refusing to provide family members of the prisoners with copies of documents notifying them of the sentences.

All 10 of the Fushan Church leaders plan to appeal their sentences, according to CAA.

"To arbitrarily send five innocent citizens to labor camps is in direct violation against the international human rights covenants and norms the Chinese government has signed and even ratified," said CAA President Bob Fu.

The five pastors previously sentenced were arrested on Sept. 25 without a warrant, according to CAA. Yang Rongli was sent to prison for seven years for "illegally occupying farming land" and "disturbing transportation order by gathering masses."

She and four other pastors were sentenced on Nov. 25 at the People's Court of Raodu district, Linfen City, Shanxi Province. Yang's husband, Wang Xiaoguang, was handed a sentence of three years on the charge of "illegally occupying farming land." Cui Jiaying was sentenced to four and half years, and Yang Xuan to three and half years, on the same

charge; Zhang Huamei received four years of prison for “disturbing transportation order by gathering masses.”

The pastors were arrested by Shanxi Province officers of the Public Security Bureau (PSB). Fu characterized their trial as a farce, saying the case demonstrated a deteriorating state of religious freedom in China.

Yang Rongli and Wang Xiaoguang had led the Fushan Church, part of a 50,000-strong house church network in Linfen and the surrounding villages, for more than 30 years.

The Beijing PSB has misrepresented the demolition and attack on the Linfen branch church as a response to a “violent uprising,” Fu said.

Indonesian Theology Students Withstand Threats, Illness

Some 1,000 seminary students are resisting efforts to evict them from the former municipal building of West Jakarta where they have taken refuge after Muslim protestors drove them from their campus last year.

On Oct. 27 officials began evicting about 300 students of Arastamar Evangelical Theological Seminary (SETIA) from blocks I and II of the former mayoral building, but those in blocks III, IV, and V chose to remain.

The students, some of whom had sown their mouths shut as part of a hunger strike, asserted that new quarters offered by the Jakarta Provincial Government are not yet fit for occupancy—dirty and unkempt with broken windows and doors.

They said the property offered, the North Jakarta Transmigrant building, has not functioned since 1999, and its five buildings accommodate only 200 to 300 students.

The seminary students told Compass that unidentified mobs have threatened them, telling them to leave the former municipal complex immediately.

“They threaten us and tell us that if we do not move, our safety cannot be guaranteed,” said SETIA’s Yulius Thomas Bilo.

The Rev. Matheus Mangentang, rector of SETIA, confirmed that the threats had been made. Asked about the identity of the mobs, he said he knew only that they appeared daily to intimidate and threaten students.

“We are going to move as soon as possible—Dec. 31 at the latest,” Mangentang said. “If we don’t, the place is no longer safe.”

He added, however, that they would not move until their new location was clear.

“We have not wavered in our desire to return to our own place, because we actually have our own campus in Kampung Pulo, East Jakarta,” Mangentang told Compass.

The Jakarta Provincial Government has not allowed the students and staff to return to their campus, citing fear of more violence.

“It is not permissible for them to return to Kampung Pulo; conditions are not conducive,” the Jakarta area secretary who goes by a single name, Muhayat, told Compass.

In July 2008 hundreds of protestors shouting “*Allahu-Akbar* [“God is greater]” and brandishing machetes forced the evacuation of staff and students from the SETIA campus in Kampung Pulo village. Urged on by announcements from a mosque loudspeaker to “drive out the unwanted neighbor” following a

misunderstanding between students and local residents, the protestors also had sharpened bamboo and acid and injured at least 20 students, some seriously.

Water and Electricity Crisis

Conditions for the 1,000 students living in the former West Jakarta mayor's complex are worsening.

"Since the end of October, we have had no electricity and no water," said Alexander Dimu, head of the student senate. "We have to depend upon our own resources and donations to buy water. We need about