

Underground Church Thrives In Persecuted Hong Kong

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It's been more than two years since China took control of Hong Kong. In that time, dozens of human rights and religious freedom activists have been arrested, while thousands have fled authoritarian rule.

Those who stay face increasing repression as Beijing intensifies its crackdown on religious freedom.

David is a pastor who moved to Hong Kong a decade ago to reach Mandarin-speaking Chinese with the gospel. He had a sense back then that political changes were coming to the city and wanted to be ready.

"I arrived in Hong Kong 10 years ago and saw a big demand among the Mandarin-speaking community. There were very few churches that were reaching this group with the good news of Christ," David said.

CBN News concealed David's identity because of the sensitive nature of his Christian work. The majority of churches in Hong Kong are in Cantonese, the language widely spoken in the city.

"Since Mandarin is my mother tongue, I knew it would be more convenient to reach this group in our soul language," David explained.

A few years after his arrival, he started a small home group made up of people from the mainland. The fellowship grew as he shared the gospel with no restrictions or fear of reprisal from Hong Kong authorities.

Then came the 2019 pro-democracy protests, which suddenly altered Hong Kong's political and religious landscape.

In 1997, Beijing agreed to govern Hong Kong under the “One Country, two systems” principle and it was supposed to last for 50 years. All that changed when China decided to intervene a lot sooner.

In response to the anti-China protests here, Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law that gave it new powers to punish critics and silence dissenters.

One woman, a Hong Kong resident, said, “We were promised, ‘One Country, Two Systems.’ Now we are ‘One Country, One System.’ We are not as free as before.”

Dozens of pro-democracy activists, lawmakers, and journalists have been arrested since the law took effect.

Another resident said, “You cannot think about living in Hong Kong anymore, you should think about yourself living in China.”

Among those arrested, Jimmy Lai, a devout Catholic and defender of human rights and religious freedom. Imprisoned for protesting, Lai could face life behind bars on separate national security charges.

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