

Prisoners of faith

release
PRISONERS

EMAIL ALERT

MARCH 2014

Zhao Guoli China



Zhao Guoli

Nanle County Christian Church member Zhao Guoli was allowed to meet with his lawyer on Thursday, February 20, for the first time since he was taken into police custody on November 15, 2013. Zhao Guoli went missing when he and several other Nanle church members travelled to Beijing to express their concern at the detention of their pastor, Zhang Shaojie (Prisoners of Faith Alert, December 2013). Zhao, with his wife Li Bianling, runs the Nanle church orphanage, which has been in financial trouble since the local government froze the church's assets in November 2013. The orphanage currently cares for about nine children.

Nanle Church has several thousand members that meet primarily in a large, very old and run-down building as well as in a number of smaller buildings across Nanle county. The church committee had previously agreed the purchase of a suitable piece of land and had an architect draw up plans for a new purpose-built complex that would allow for expansion and development of various ministries including the existing children's orphanage and care home for the elderly. When the local government official was replaced, the new official, recognising the commercial potential and increasing value of the land, refused to honour the agreement made with his predecessor and began a campaign to discredit and intimidate both the pastor and members of the Nanle church that ultimately resulted in the arrest and detention of the pastor and several church members.

Three of the church members arrested, Li Cairen, Wu Guishan and Zhao Guoli, went missing and were illegally held in one of China's so-called 'black jails'. These 'black jails' are illegal extra-judicial detention

centres where the authorities hold individuals without charge for indefinite periods of time. The families of detainees are not given any information about the condition of their loved ones or where they are being held. This is designed to increase concern and place even more pressure on the detainee and his or her family.

When the existence of the black jail in Nanle was recently exposed the authorities quickly vacated the buildings, dismantled CCTV apparatus and transferred the detained Nanle church members to another location. The following morning some of the church members, seeing that the main gate had been removed and that the buildings were lying empty, went inside to discover squalid conditions, torn clothing, leftover food and several bottles of urine.

We understand that, in an attempt to build a case against the church, the authorities will regularly interrogate the Nanle church detainees and 'encourage' them to make statements discrediting their pastor while confessing to alleged criminal behaviour. The families of church members detained including pastor Zhang's family are very concerned about their loved ones and have asked if Christians across the world would pray for their release.

HELPING CHRISTIANS IMPRISONED FOR THEIR FAITH

'I am in chains for Christ' Philippians 1:13

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PLEASE PRAY

- ▶ That Zhao Guoli, Pastor Zhang Shaojie and the detained Nanle church members will be released.
- ▶ That God will protect Zhao, along with his wife and son, during his detention and when he is released.
- ▶ That the church in China will continue to be faithful and courageous in its witness.

PLEASE WRITE

Christians in China are often taken into police custody without any prior notice, leaving their loved ones to spend days, weeks or even months trying to discover their whereabouts and condition. Even when the detainees are released the authorities will often monitor, harass and intimidate both the individual and his or her family, leaving them feeling isolated, vulnerable and nervous. They need and deserve our support and prayers.



Nanle 'black jail'

When writing please do not mention Release International, advance your political opinions or include anything which could be insulting to the authorities.

At present Release's ministry partners in China believe it would be helpful simply to write to the Nanle church members to assure them that their brothers and sisters in Christ are standing together with them in prayer and that they are not forgotten.

Please consider sending a card or letter of encouragement to Li Bianling (Zhao Guoli's wife), Wang Fengrui (Pastor Zhang Shaojie's wife) or simply to church members at Nanle Church to let them know that Christians here in the UK and Ireland are supporting them in prayer. Release will endeavour to send these cards to them.

Send cards to: Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 9RT.

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