



NEWS REPORT

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CHINA: Underground Priest Arrested, Detained Bishop Released In Hebei

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HONG KONG (UCAN) - An underground Catholic priest in Hebei province has been arrested for holding summer catechism class, according to Church sources.

The arrest comes close on the heels of news that Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, also in northern China's Hebei province, has been released after being held for three months.

In late August, Church sources in China, on condition of anonymity, told UCA News that public security officials on Aug. 9 took Father Chi Huitian of Baoding diocese, Hebei, and two lay Catholics from Lijiatong village in Zhao county. About 100 Catholics live in the village, which is near Shijiazhuang, Hebei's provincial capital, about 280 kilometers southwest of Beijing.

The sources said Father Chi was celebrating Mass for students attending a summer catechism class when he was arrested. They added that catechism classes have been disrupted for two years and that this was the third time the same priest has been taken away. However, the sources also claim that his latest arrest was harsher than before.

According to sources, 35 police cars came to the scene carrying more than 100 public security officials, including some from the provincial level. The officials confiscated the priest's new

motorcycle and 10,000 yuan (US\$1,208) in cash, and closed the worship venue where the classes were held, they said.

The two lay Catholics were released the same day, the sources added, but Father Chi was detained in nearby Ningjin county for "seriously disturbing social order." He reportedly has not been allowed to see anyone and there has been no news about him since then, the sources said. As of Sept. 5, they also said, he was still being held at the detention center in Ningjin county.

Meanwhile, various Church sources in China have confirmed that Bishop Jia, 68, was released on Aug. 23 after three months of confinement and that he arrived back home in Zhengding two days later. He was arrested on May 23, soon after he was treated for a protruded inter-vertebral disc.

Sources told UCA News that Bishop Jia was questioned during his confinement about his contact with people outside China, including the U.S.-based Cardinal Kung Foundation. The bishop was asked to cooperate with the government-recognized Bishop Paul Jiang Taoran of Shijiazhuang on Church affairs, the sources said.

Bishop Jia did not reject cooperation, but insisted that he first discuss the matter with other underground bishops in Hebei. The open Church refers to Zhengding diocese as Shijiazhuang diocese, reflecting the name of the civil administrative division.

On Aug. 27, Bishop Jiang told UCA News that cooperation between the open and underground Church communities would please him, but he sees chances of such cooperation as slim because the underground group is not agreeable to it.