

PRISONER PROFILE

Prisoner Name: **Wang Yi**

Location: **China**

Sentenced: **December 2018**



Early Rain Covenant Church Pastor Wang Yi outside a U.S. congressional office building during a 2006 trip to Washington, D.C. Photo: ChinaAid

Arrest and background

Pastor Wang Yi (also known as Wang Li) is the influential leader of Early Rain Covenant Church in the city of Chengdu, Sichuan province – one of the best-known house churches in China. He and his wife, Jiang Rong, have been detained since December 2018 and charged with ‘inciting subversion of state power’. If convicted, they could face up to 15 years in prison. A former law professor, Pastor Wang has been vocal in calling on the state to uphold religious liberties. The couple’s current whereabouts are not known.

Early Rain Covenant Church had been under pressure from the authorities for some time but matters escalated on December 9th, 2018. That night and the next day, police raided church members’ homes and arrested them. By the end of the week, about 150 church leaders and seminary students were in police custody, and the church had been forcibly closed.

Eleven church members are still believed to be in detention: Pastor Wang and Jiang Rong; elders Li Yingqiang, Tan Defu and Li Zihuo; deacon Ge Yingfeng; and Li Xiaofeng, Zhang Guoqing, Liang Huali, Ding Shuqi and Dai Zhichao. Sixteen others have been released on bail. Some have been charged with crimes such as ‘illegal business operations’.

Lawyers have been denied access to the detainees and family visits refused. Some Early Rain church members have been sent back to their hometowns and banned from Chengdu. Others have lost their jobs or been evicted. Church elder Su Bingsen was released in April and was flown home to Fujian in the company of security officials; his family had been evicted from their home while he was in custody. Some of those who have been released say they were abused and deprived of food and water.

Early Rain may have been targeted because of its open approach to church mission, which has included posting sermons online and street evangelism. The church also runs a Bible school for about 100 students and has a primary school. Its meetings around the city regularly attract more than 800 people each week.

Pastor Wang himself has been a prominent campaigner for greater religious freedom. He recently wrote a declaration, signed by hundreds of Chinese pastors, which includes a statement of Christian beliefs and a call for an end to persecution; it also recognises the Chinese Government's authority. Many of those in China who have signed the 'Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith' have suffered persecution since.*

The persecution of Early Rain members has continued. When believers met in private homes on February 24th, 2019, police raided both meetings and arrested 44 people, including some later that day. These included 11 children, as well as elderly people and pregnant women. Pastor Wang Yi's 74-year-old mother was humiliated and beaten by police; she is under 24-hour surveillance as she cares for her 11-year-old grandson, Shuya, while his parents are in custody. Release partner China Aid says that at least 11 of those arrested in February were given 10 to 14 days' 'administrative detention'.

Again, in April 2019, when church members met in a park to celebrate Easter, at least seven of them including children were seized, interrogated for several hours and held until the early hours of the following morning.

PLEASE PRAY:

- 1. That God will sustain, encourage and comfort Pastor Wang, his wife Jiang Rong and all the other members of Early Rain Covenant Church who are in detention. Ask God to give them opportunities to speak about Him to their fellow inmates and guards.**
- 2. That the Early Rain congregation will grow in faith and courage, amid sustained persecution. Pray that their powerful witness will inspire and encourage other Christians in Sichuan province and across China.**
- 3. That the Chinese Government will end its persecution of Early Rain Covenant Church and release those in custody.**

TAKE ACTION: *

Church leaders around the world are being encouraged to add their name to Pastor Wang's 'Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith'. The petition will be presented to the Chinese Government.

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