

# Pastor Hao Zhiwei

Country: **China**

Charge: **'Fraud'**

Date of arrest: **July 2019**

Sentence: **8 years imprisonment**



## Arrest and background

### Eight years imprisonment (Sentenced February 2022)

Pastor Hao Zhiwei graduated from South Central Seminary in 2001 and was offered the position of minister at Ezhou's Three-Self Church. However, Pastor Hao's pastoral certificate application was rejected in 2007 because she disagreed with the Religious Affairs Bureau's governance of churches. Subsequently, Ezhou Three-Self Church shut down and converted into a house church, later called Egangqiao Church. Hao Zhiwei pastored the church for 18 years.

In early 2018, the local government issued a request to demolish and relocate the church building but church members denied the request. Officials issued Pastor Hao a notice and asked her to cooperate with the project. Distraught from her husband's, (Zhang Youwu - pictured), recent death from liver cancer she could not respond to the notice in time and in July 2019 she was arrested under the charge of 'fraud.'



The prosecution explained that her case hinged on the fact she preached the gospel without approval from the state-sanctioned church. By accepting a tithe, she fell into suspicion of fraud. Her lawyer said her church is valid and paying the pastor conforms to house church tradition. He also disclosed that police tried to induce church members to provide evidence against her.

Pastor Hao's case might be the first case in China where a house church pastor was accused of fraud for preaching the gospel. After Hao Zhiwei was arrested, many house church pastors were also charged with 'fraud.'

In August 2019, the Egangqiao church building was demolished and in February 2022, after being detained for more than two and half years, Pastor Hao was sentenced to 8 years imprisonment. In December 2022 the court rejected Pastor Hao Zhiwei's appeal and upheld the original verdict.

Pastor Hao has two sons, Paul and Moses. After the verdict she wrote a letter to her older son Paul telling him that God's amazing peace was with her in the prison and she sleeps well.

## Pray:

1. Pray that Pastor Hao would continue to experience God's amazing peace in prison.
2. Pray that her children, Paul and Moses, would be strong and grow in faith despite missing their mother. Moses struggled with depression after her arrest and dropped out of school for a time.
3. Pray against the injustice of 'fraud' charges against pastors. Pray that pastors will be vindicated and house churches would be able to continue to function.

## Take Action:

We encourage you to write to your constituency MP and ask them to raise Pastor Hao's case with the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). Please ensure that you follow our letter writing guidance detailed in [Speak Out](#).

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