



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on December 10, 2018

100 Chinese Christians Arrested in Coordinated Raids on Unofficial Church

Beginning Sunday evening and continuing into the UN-proclaimed Human Rights Day, Communist Chinese authorities raided a prominent Protestant church and detained about 100 of its leaders and members in an apparent attempt to force the church to close permanently.

As part of Beijing's ongoing [crackdown](#) against churches that have not been sanctioned by the state, officials targeted the Early Rain Covenant Church of Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province in southwestern China, and its outspoken pastor, Wang Yi. Early Rain, which has a weekly attendance of around 800, was an easy target since, unlike most other unofficial churches, it meets openly and has a significant online presence. In fact, it had been raided once before, in mid-May, but little came of that incident. "This time," reported [World](#) magazine, "multiple government departments worked together to fan the city of Chengdu and locate church leaders and members at their homes or workplaces."

According to *World*:

The persecution began around 6 p.m. Sunday, when police cars whisked away Early Rain's cameraman outside the church's building. Police officers also showed up at the cameraman's apartment and searched it. Around the same time, authorities shut off the electricity to the apartment of another church staff member, Song Enguang. Police then knocked on his door and detained him, and about a dozen police officers arrested three other church members who had come to check up on him.

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Church member Paul Huang (name changed to protect his identity) told *World* that the news spread quickly among the congregation, who began contacting others to make sure they were safe. By that time, Pastor Wang and his wife, Jiang Rong, and elder Qin Defu were already unreachable. Assistant deacon Zhang Guoqing, one of two church members who were released from police custody Monday morning (both are now under 24-hour surveillance), told the [South China Morning Post](#) he went to Wang's house around 7 p.m., but neither Wang nor his wife was there.

"His home was ransacked," Zhang said. "It was a mess."





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The magazine continued:

As the night progressed, more people were arrested. Police surrounded the office building where the church meets and cut electricity to the seminary's library. One church member had gone to visit her parents in northeastern China, and Sichuan police officials followed her there, knocking on her door in the middle of the night to take her into custody. Another church member, who managed a printing business and helped Early Rain design hymnals, found his business raided by police and his printers confiscated.

Around 9 p.m., church members' personal accounts and group discussions on social media were blocked, and the church's telephone line was severed, wrote the *Morning Post*.

Police tried to compel church members to sign a document stating that Early Rain is an "evil cult" and promising they will never attend the church again; those who refused were arrested. They also raided the church's seminary, detaining the students, and closed its primary school, forcing its students to attend government-run schools.

"This round of crackdown is unusual as it seems that the authorities want to close the church down for good," elder Li Yinquiang told the *Morning Post*. "Our social media channel accounts such as WeChat were not closed in previous rounds and they have taken a large number of our members into custody this time. The scale was unprecedented."

Bob Fu of U.S.-based China Aid [said](#) the operation "represents a major escalation of religious persecution in China." Fu says more than 100,000 Chinese Christians have been detained this year, more than three times as many as last year.

Despite the persecution, Christianity continues to grow rapidly in China. According to the [Associated Press](#), Chinese Christians' "numbers rival the membership of the ruling [Communist] party, which stands at around 90 million."

The state's latest attack does not appear to have deterred everyone at Early Rain, either.

"Even if we are down to our last five, worship and gatherings will still go on because our faith is real," Li told the *Morning Post*.

"Persecution is a price worth paying for the Lord. We would rather live through it than to hide our faith and we hope more Chinese churches will speak up and stand with us."

Image: Screenshot of [Facebook page of Early Rain Covenant Church](#)



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