

ACAT (Harrow) - prayer case of the month (September 2022)

Please pray as you feel led for independent house church leader **Pastor Hao Zhiwei** (China) who was sentenced in February 2022 to eight years on 'fraud' charges by the authorities in Ezhou in China's central Hubei province.



Hao Zhiwei graduated from Zhongnan Theological Seminary in 2001, and in 2003 Ezhou's government-approved Three-Self Church offered her the minister's position due to her excellent preaching. Her pastor's licence was revoked in 2007, however, because she disagreed with the Religion Bureau's governance of churches. The Ezhou Three-Self Church was shut down and became a house church, later named Egangqiao Church, and in 2013 **Hao Zhiwei** was ordained as a pastor by three other pastors in accordance with house church tradition.

Hao Zhiwei had been held in pre-trial detention since 31 July 2019 - a year after her husband's death - prior to her trial in February 2022. According to *China Aid*, she was criminally detained for preaching and collecting offerings from her house church members without the approval of state-sanctioned associations. The Chinese government claimed that her action in collecting the money amounted to fraud due to her illegal status as a preacher in a house church, despite the fact that the tithes were tracked and verified by others in the church. This 'fraud' charge is widely understood as targeting leaders of house churches, which are independent and not registered with the government or affiliated with the state-sanctioned church. At least ten leaders and co-workers from four unregistered Protestant churches were arrested in 2021 and are facing similar charges.

Egangqiao church had been repeatedly raided by local authorities prior to **Hao Zhiwei's** detention, and members of the congregation had been brutally attacked and detained. The church was demolished in August 2019.

In November 2021, her lawyer revealed that during her prolonged detention, her health had seriously deteriorated and her younger son Moses, who also lost his father to cancer in 2018, had developed depression and dropped out of school. The pastor has said that she will appeal against her conviction and sentence. Her lawyer also commented that her faith had remained strong, saying that she had "*peace in her heart*".