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CHINA | Senior Pastor Arrested

Pastor Gu Yuese, also known as Joseph Gu, the former pastor of the state-sanctioned Chongyi Church in Zhejiang Province, was formally arrested Jan. 7 and charged with misappropriation of funds.

According to China Aid, Pastor Gu was detained in December 2016. On Jan. 7, his family received a notice of his arrest. Previously, Pastor Gu was detained from January to March 2016 before being released on bail.

In January 2016, Pastor Gu was dismissed from his post as senior pastor of Chongyi Church in Hangzhou. Chongyi Church is reportedly one of the largest, if not the largest, registered church in China.

Pastor Gu was also dismissed from his role as the chair of the local branch of the China Christian Council (CCC), a state-sanctioned religious organization which, along with the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), oversees the practices and organization of registered churches in China. He was arrested the same month, January 2016, and placed under "residential surveillance at a designated location," accused of misusing funds. He was released on bail in March 2016.

His dismissal and detention are believed to be linked to his public opposition to the authorities removal of hundreds of crosses from Zhejiang churches, and in particular, an open letter opposing the cross removals, which was published by the Zhejiang China Christian Council in July 2015.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide said, "It is not clear why Pastor Gu has been detained again. However, his re-arrest comes at a time of increasing restrictions on religious activities and organizations, including both registered and unregistered churches. Given that Pastor Gu was first detained in connection with his peaceful opposition to

the removal of crosses from churches in Zhejiang, it appears this case is part of a trend of intolerance towards any expression of views contrary to the government's policies and actions. We call on the authorities to release Pastor Gu and to uphold the rights of freedom of religion or belief and expression in accordance with international law."