

China: Pastor Yang Hua Sentenced

After secretly trying Yang Hua for “divulging state secrets,” a judge sentenced the pastor of Living Stone Church on Jan. 5 to two years and six months in prison. Pastor Yang, also known by his legal name, Li Guoshi, has been held since Dec. 9, 2015.

While incarcerated, prosecutors tortured Yang and threatened his family to force a false confession. Yang subsequently requested that the prosecutors be banned from the case and his lawyers sued members of the prosecution. However, the court still allowed the prosecutors to continue with the case. They eventually provided forged evidence that implicated Yang.

Pastor Yang co-founded Living Stone, also known as Huoshi Church, with Pastor Su Tianfu. Chinese officials reportedly forced Pastor Su to “take a trip” in recent weeks. The details of his trip and his current condition are unknown. The church has grown from its original 20 members in 2009 to more than 700 today.

Pastor Yang was originally taken into custody after he tried to prevent officials from confiscating a church hard drive. He received two consecutive, five-day administrative detention sentences for “the crime of obstructing justice” and “gathering a crowd to disturb public order.” When his wife, Wang Hongwu, came to pick him up on Dec. 20, 2015, she saw four men put a black hood on his head and throw him into an unmarked van. Wang later learned her husband was being transferred to a criminal detention facility, having been charged with “illegally possessing state secrets” About a month later, Yang was charged with “divulging state secrets,” but given no trial date.

