

Authorities detain unregistered Chinese Catholic bishop

HONG KONG - A Chinese Catholic bishop not registered with the government was taken away from his residence by Chinese public security officers and government officials.

A Catholic source told the Asian church news agency UCA News that Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, 73, was resting and talking with some Catholics in his room in the Christ the King Cathedral compound when the officers took him away Aug. 24, the closing day of the Olympics in Beijing. The Diocese of Zhengding is in Hebei province, which surrounds much of Beijing.

The source said the incident occurred after the prelate celebrated Mass at the cathedral in Wuqiu, a village near Shijiazhuang, the provincial capital, about 170 miles southwest of Beijing.

The officers, from the Shijiazhuang area, told Catholics at the scene that the authorities have arranged "a summer tour for the bishop" and that "he will not be back soon," the source added.

Some of the hundreds of Catholics who attended the bishop's Mass that morning were still in the cathedral and saw security officers lead Bishop Jia away.

As of Aug. 25, the bishop, who is in ill health, was under house arrest in Shijiazhuang, the source told UCA News.

Local Catholics said they do not know the reasons for removing the bishop, the source said, but surmise that it could be linked to the upcoming Paralympic Games in Beijing Sept. 6-17. Bishop Jia runs an orphanage that also cares for disabled children, the source noted.

Bishop Jia had celebrated Mass Aug. 15 for the feast of the Assumption. More than 1,000 Catholics attended even though public security officers had warned Catholics in the diocese to stay away from the Mass at the cathedral.

The U.S.-based Cardinal Kung Foundation said Aug. 24 that this was the 12th time the bishop has been arrested since January 2004. Bishop Jia was arrested in August 2007 and released in December, then placed under house arrest.

“We do not know where Bishop Jia is detained at this time,” the foundation said. “We also do not know why he was arrested again at this time.”

Church sources told UCA News in early August that a small house was built in April in front of the cathedral for public security officers to guard the bishop around-the-clock.

Sources reported officers were taking eight-hour shifts and entered the bishop’s residence in the cathedral compound every two hours to check on Bishop Jia, who was on medication.

The Chinese government requires the registration of bishops and church communities, but Bishop Jia has not registered with the government. Some Catholics view registration as a tool for control and prefer to exercise the faith in a semiclandestine manner.