

# Jailed Chinese priest released for medical treatment

HONG KONG – One of two Chinese priests jailed for “illegal exit” after a trip abroad was released provisionally for medical treatment in mid-May, about one and a half months before the end of his sentence.

Father Peter Shao Zhumin, vicar general of the Wenzhou Diocese, was released due to severe hearing and gallstone problems. He was arrested in September and was sentenced in March to nine months in jail, with time already spent in detention applied to his sentence.

The priest will soon undergo medical treatment in Beijing, church sources told UCA News, an Asian church news agency, in late May.

Father Shao and the diocesan chancellor, Father Paul Jiang Surang – also known as Jiang Sunian – were arrested together in Shenzhen Sept. 25 after returning from a pilgrimage to Europe.

According to church sources in Wenzhou, Father Shao has suffered from a hearing problem for years, but it has worsened since his detention last fall. The nerves in his right ear are not functioning well, and he is almost deaf now, they said. At the same time, he has been diagnosed as having gallstones, they added.

A Catholic source who contacted Father Shao after he was released told UCA News May 25 that the formerly chubby vicar general looked slimmer now, but was otherwise in good spirits. The source said the priest joked about his size, saying his body “now conforms to international standards.”

The source added that many Catholics are worried about him and Father Jiang, who remains in jail.

Father Shao told the source that his ear problem was evident during the trial, when he could not hear what the judge, the prosecutor and the lawyer were saying. He recalled that he was allowed to move around in the courtroom so he could hear the proceedings more clearly.

Father Shao also said he “got accustomed” to the prison environment, but regretted that authorities confiscated all the photos he and Father Jiang took while on their pilgrimage to Rome and other places in Europe.

While imprisoned, the two priests counseled some emotionally disturbed inmates who approached them for spiritual support.

Father Jiang, who earlier was jailed for illegally publishing hymnals, was sentenced to 11 months’ imprisonment, also with his time in pretrial detention applied to the sentence. He is expected to be released in late August.