News



A boy prays during mass at a Catholic church in China's Shanxi province. (CNS/Jason Lee, Reuters)

by Catholic News Service

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Hong Kong — August 30, 2017

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Several priests and laypeople defending church property were injured during an assault by security officers and workers in China's northern Shanxi province.

The incident occurred in Wangcun village, part of Changzhi Diocese, Aug. 29, reported ucanews.com.

Frs. Chen Jun, Gao Binglong, Ma Ning, Shen Xuezhong and several laypeople were assaulted by security officers and workers who came to demolish a building returned to the church four years ago. Cui Hewen, a layman, was beaten by workers and suffered injuries to the head.

Prior to the assaults, the priests joined hundreds of laypeople sitting in front of heavy earth-moving equipment to block the demolition work.

News of the assault went viral on the internet, with some Catholics calling for prayers. Others asked for more laypeople to go to the site and provide support. By the afternoon, about 20 priests and nearly 2,000 laypeople gathered at the site.

Unable to carry on with their demolition order, the workers and security officials left the venue.

Overnight, more than 200 laymen stood guard at the site.

"The security officers and workers left only to discuss countermeasures. I fear that they will come back," Shen, parish priest of Wangcun Church, told ucanews.com.

The former church property was demolished in 1992 and was rebuilt as a factory by local authorities. In 2012, the village committee decided to return the property to Changzhi Diocese.

The committee issues a document noting that since the original church property had been demolished, the committee decided to allocate all facilities of the old factory on the property to the diocese. It also stated that the resolution took effect immediately.

"But in April this year, the village committee suddenly said that they have to demolish the old factory and the fencing wall that now belongs to the church," said Shen.

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On Aug. 28, the Wangcun village branch of the Communist Party and the village committee announced they would dismantle the remaining old factory buildings and fencing, claiming they were built illegally. The old factory buildings were built by the village committee. The fencing was built by the church.

Local authorities claim the demolition is based on a city government requirement to "demolish the old and broken." They said the development is the "joint work of five villages" and part of an "environmental revolution" relating to the transportation network of Changzhi city. The project was discussed and studied twice by the village committee, which passed the decision unanimously.

Shen criticized the committee for retracting its 2012 decision in returning the property to the church.

"We lodged a complaint in April. The local authority set up an investigative team that was meant to negotiate with the diocese, but there was no right of reply about their proposal, and so they straight away tried to demolish it by force," said the priest.

"If it is demolished, the authority would not give any compensation to the diocese. We surely will not agree," he said.