

Chinese government enforces restrictions on Christian funerals

Christian funerals outside of churches have been banned in some areas of China as the communist government begins to enforce new regulations on religious practices.

As often happens, however, the rules are not enforced uniformly among the provinces.

In the eastern province of Zhejiang, the government has put in force a set of regulations on centralized funeral arrangements, which bans priests from attending funeral prayers outside a religious place, reported ucanews.com.

The government claims the new rules aim to “get rid of bad funeral customs and establish a scientific, civilized and economical way of funerals.”

“Clerical personnel are not allowed to participate in funerals” at homes and “no more than 10 family members of the deceased are allowed to read Scriptures or sing hymns,” the rules state.

The new rules began to take effect recently, although enacted Dec. 1, said a Catholic in Wenzhou Diocese in Zhejiang.

The regulations strictly ban “religious activities outside religious places, so the priest will not be able to hold funeral prayers outside the church,” he told ucanews.com.

Huang Jian, also of Wenzhou, told ucanews.com priests could visit parishioners’ homes but could not conduct any religious ceremonies or prayers.

A priest identified only as Father Guo of Henan province said government officials have asked priests to strictly follow the new regulations on religious affairs.

“Otherwise there would be penalties. The punishment could even be closing the church and canceling the priest’s priesthood certificate, letting the priest go home,” he said.

But Father Peter Lee, a priest in eastern Shandong, told ucanews.com that government instructions had not come to him so far.

“I still hold sacraments at the homes of dead parishioners. The day before yesterday, I sent a greeting to a church member from home to the cemetery. No one blocked it,” he said Jan.30.

“As a priest, we need to accompany church members to make them feel like

everyone is a family. Particularly, baptisms and funerals are very important for families.”

Zhang Haomin, parish leader in Cangzhou in Hebei province, said the parish had not received any notification from the government, “so everything will continue as usual.”

“The government now requires society to simplify funerals. The funeral ceremonies held by our church are simple, do not burn paper, and do not pollute the environment,” he said.

China has banned funerals, burials and other related activities involving the corpses of deceased victims of the coronavirus that originated in Wuhan in Hubei province.