

Kong Hee Lawyers: Funneling Church Money Into Wife's Music Career Was in Church's Best Interest

Attorneys for City Harvest Church Pastor Kong Hee now argue the convicted pastor believed he was using church funds for his wife's music career to help his congregation.

"It is beyond question that the accused believed wholeheartedly that they were using church funds for an approved church purpose," lawyer Edwin Tong said.

At the sentencing in November, the judge gave five other church leaders—former CHC fund manager Chew Eng Han; deputy senior pastor Tan Ye Peng; ex-finance manager Serina Wee; former finance committee member John Lam; and former finance manager Sharon Tan—prison terms ranging from 21 months to five years.

Kong and the others were found guilty in October of using a management company, Xtron, to financially support his wife, singer and CHC pastor Sun Ho, as she planned the release of an album in the United States. The church leaders were found guilty of misusing about \$50 million in church funds, including \$24 million to bolster Sun's career.

Kong and the others told the court they are considering appealing their convictions and sentences, CHC Pastors Aries Zulkarnain, Bobby Chaw and Sun said in a prepared statement.

"We want to thank each and every one of you, our church members, for demonstrating such strength and unity throughout all these years, and particularly in these last few extremely difficult months," the pastors said in a statement. "We ask

you to remember and hold close to your heart the call of God upon City Harvest Church.

“We have learned lately what it means to have faith, trust and rest in God—let us put what we have learned to practice. Let’s band together to fulfill the heavenly calling for us through CHC 2.0. Let us continue to pray for the six and their families as they prepare for this next step in the legal process. May God grant them grace and the peace that surpasses understanding.”

The defense attorneys for Kong and the others have argued that the church suffered no financial losses and that Kong and the others did not profit.

In a statement, the judge wrote he had no doubt that Kong and the others “had no wish to do any harm” and “believed that they were using church funds for an evangelistic purpose that was not just permitted but positively mandated by the vision and mission of CHC, and which was supported by the vast majority if not the entirety of the congregation.”

“But saying that they believed they were using ‘church funds for church purposes’ is not an answer to the charges; so long as they intended to use CHC’s funds in such a manner that amounted to a wrong use in the knowledge that they were not legally entitled to do so, the element of dishonesty would be made out,” the judge wrote.

Following the sentencing, Kong declined to comment.

Attorney N. Screenivasan, who represents Tag Ye Peng, told *The Straits Times*: “This has been a very trying case. He needs to pray, reflect and discern, before deciding what to do.”

Serina Wee’s husband, Kenny Low, said: “We are thankful that we are able to have some time to go back and settle our family and to (think) about what’s ahead.”

Paul Seah, Sharon Tan's attorney, said he would talk with his client before deciding on the next step.

John Lam said he would speak to his lawyer before deciding whether to appeal.

"I'm just glad we have cleared this stage, at least the sentence has been passed and we know what we are in for," he said. "It's obviously a very difficult time and we want to get the family ready. We have to prepare ahead."