

Singapore Pastor Kong Hee Considering Appeal Following Conviction

Following the conviction of City Harvest Church founder Kong Hee for diverting funds to bolster his wife's musical career, church officials say they are disappointed by the ruling, "studying the judgment intently" and seeking legal advice regarding a potential appeal.

The conviction of Kong and five other church leaders on Wednesday on charges of misusing more than \$35 million in donated funds follows one of the longest trials in Singapore history.

"As was the case throughout these past three years of court trial, and the earlier two years of investigation, we have placed our faith in God and trust that whatever the outcome, He will use it for good (Rom. 8:28)," Sun Ho, co-founder and executive director of the 17,000-member church, said in a statement.

"This protracted season has been extremely difficult, not just for the six, but also for all their families and friends, as well as for our congregation. In spite of these challenges, City Harvest Church has an unshakeable calling from God."

Ben Ferrell, owner of the BMC Ferrell Advertising and Media Agency, said he's known Kong and his wife for many years and believes they are "some of the finest Christians I've ever met or known."

"I have no doubt that they were honest and sincere," Ferrell said. "They planned to take the gospel of Jesus to the pop culture through music and bring young people to Jesus. That was their intention. That's what they preached in their

church, that's what they did, and they succeeded. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese young people are in the kingdom of Jesus because of that."

Since the trial began in 2012, the church has operated under new management with a new church board, Sun said.

"Therefore, let's stay the course with CHC 2.0," Sun said. "God is making us stronger, purer and more mature as a congregation. Thank you for your unwavering faithfulness in loving God and loving one another. More than ever before, let's have a unity that is unbreakable. We are not alone as many of our friends and churches around the world are also interceding fervently for us."

Kong and five other church officials were convicted of diverting nearly \$37 million in funds to support the pop singing career of Kong's wife, Ho Yeow Sun, *Reuters* reported. Ho was not charged in the case.

In a *City News* article on the church website, the authors wrote that the case involved the alleged misuse of church building funds to finance the Crossover Project via bond investments into Xtron and Firna, along with a subsequent "misappropriation ... in a related series of 'round-tipping' transactions."

"It had been shown in evidence that the church did not actually lose money in these transactions; in fact, the bond investments had been fully redeemed with interest," according to the *City News* article. "The defense team also showed that none of the six had benefited personally from any of the transactions, and that these transactions had been drafted, checked and cleared by the professionals engaged by the church—lawyers from Drew & Napier and Rajah & Tann, and auditors from Baker Tilly. However, the court noted that the prosecutor's case was not the intent for wrongful gain but wrongful loss to the church."

In a statement posted on *City News*, City Harvest Church's advisory pastor, Phil Pringle, said he went to court Wednesday to support Kong.

"It's easy in hindsight to pass criticism, but at the time, it obviously seemed right to them, as they had sought professional advice on their plans," Pringle said. "I also think that the judge felt that Pastor Kong was the only one making decisions and that everyone was simply doing what he was directing. I think it's true Pastor Kong presided over the larger vision; however, the activating was certainly in the hands of many people in the team.

"The judge noted the facts that Pastor Kong has not wrongfully gained, nor church wrongfully lost money. However, the fact that the funds had been, in his words, misappropriated, attracted the judgment he delivered."

Kong and the others will be sentenced Nov. 20.