

Singapore's City Harvest Church May Have to Remove Pastor Kong Hee

The commissioner of charities (COC) in Singapore is proposing to remove eight individuals from their positions at City Harvest Church (CHC), including founder Kong Hee. The leaders have until Monday to challenge the decision.

If the leaders are removed from their positions, their executive memberships at CHC will be terminated, and they will not be allowed to resume their memberships for at least two years.

"This is a very challenging time for our eight church leaders and members, their families and our church," CHC Executive Pastor Aries Zulkarnain said in a statement. "Please continue to pray ceaselessly for them and for the church. Let us remember what our Advisory Chairman Dr AR Bernard has exhorted us to do: Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer (Rom. 12:12, ESV)."

In addition to Hee, the leaders being threatened with removal include Pastor Tan Ye Peng, Serina Wee, Sharon Tan, John Lam, Chew Eng Han, Teo Meng How and Jacqueline Tan.

The COC instituted an inquiry under Section 8 of the Charities Act into the church in May 2010 and named nine individuals following the inquiry—the eight mentioned above plus Sun Ho, Hee's wife.

In addition to the COC's investigation, six church officials—Hee, Lam, Peng, Sharon Tan, Han and Wee—were charged in June with misappropriating S\$23 million (U.S. \$18.6 million) from the church and falsifying accounts to cover it up.

“In December the COC requested that the suspended individuals voluntarily extend their suspension until six months after the conclusion of the criminal proceedings involving six of the eight affected individuals,” said Zulkarnain, who is also a chairman of CHC’s management board.

“Under section 29 of the Act,” he explained, “before the COC makes an order to remove without his consent a governing board member of a charity or trustee for a charity, or an officer, agent or employee of a charity, the COC shall give him not less than one month’s notice of the COC proposal, inviting representations to be made to the COC within a time specified in the notice. The eight have until 13 May 2013 to make their representations to COC on why they should not be removed.”

In the meantime, pastors Hee and Peng will continue to perform pastoral duties.

“I understand that the Commissioner of Charities has assured the CHC Board that I will not be prevented from preaching at CHC’s services,” Hee said in his own statement. “This is only fair as there is no basis for the COC to encroach on the services of the church.”

He continued, “I look forward to being in church to worship God with my friends and family. I hope that you continue to keep me, my family and the church in your thoughts and prayers.”

Hee also says he is confident “that there is no basis for the COC’s actions and [he] will in due course make the appropriate representations to the COC.”