

# Church announces new appointments

*Note posted on website says no change to operations and weekend services*

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**SINGAPORE** – In the wake of the arrests and suspensions of some of its leaders, City Harvest Church last night informed its congregation of new appointments.

This as members of the charity and corporate governance sectors said the findings of the authorities' probes have once again brought into focus the importance of sound governance and the responsibility of individuals given this task.

CHC executive pastor Aries Zulkarnain wrote in a note posted on the church's website that two overseas pastors on its advisory committee — Dr Phil Pringle, founder and Senior Minister of the Christian City Church in Sydney, and Dr A R Bernard, founder and CEO of Christian Cultural Centre in New York — had been appointed advisory senior pastors of the church.

He added that there was no change to the church's operations and weekend services, and that the church management board "continues to provide guidance on the running of the church".

He did not say who made up the church's management board following the suspensions of some of the members.

Mr Kong made an oblique reference to yesterday's happenings on Twitter and Facebook at about 7pm, calling it a "tough day".

At CHC's Jurong West premises, the gates were locked when TODAY visited yesterday afternoon, even though they should have been open according to a sign stating the church's opening hours.

Ms Joleen Seem, 24, an assistant marketing executive who has been attending the church for six years, told TODAY that she was "shocked" by the news.

She said: "There were no hints of such issues. Pastor Kong was still preaching and the care groups were still functioning. But this hasn't changed my impression of the church."

Corporate governance and charity experts cautioned against rushing to judgment.

"Lapses can happen in any organisation. I think we should reserve our comments until the case is up," said social service veteran Gerard Ee.

He did not think this latest develop-

ment in the charity sector would affect the public's generosity.

"It's just that people will be more selective which organisations to support and, therefore, it makes it more critical that organisations must be seen to be practising good governance and transparency," he said.

Marine Parade GRC Member of Parliament Seah Kian Peng, who chairs the Government Parliamentary Committee for Community Development, Youth and Sports, cautioned against linking the case to religion: "The public ought to be clear it's about (the) governance of charities, and of individuals entrusted with this process of governance."

Singapore Management University accountancy don Leong Kwong Sin noted that the COC findings cover various types of "misdeeds" ranging from the obviously wrong — such as falsification of records — to the bypassing of due process, and "forgetting that 'self-interest' has to be explicitly separated from organisation's interest".

"The last is sometimes ambiguous because it is so easy to convince oneself that 'if what is good for me is also good for the organisation, then it should be okay'," he said.

"But it is not ... unless it is decided by independent stakeholders of the organisation," he said.

This episode perhaps shows the need for a whistle-blowing policy for charities, said Associate Professor Ho Yew Kee of the National University of Singapore's business school.

He pointed out that the similarity between the City Harvest Church and previous charity scandals lies in the presence of "influential people" on the board who want things done in a certain way and they attract the acquiescence of other board members to go along.

Speaking to Channel NewsAsia, NUS Associate Professor Mak Yuen Teen added: "You can see that the board was dominated by people who were essentially employees of the church. So, the question therefore is where is the check and balances in place."

The charity sector as a whole should not be judged because of this episode, cautioned chief executive of the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) Laurence Lien.

"Generally, good governance is practised in most charities. What is perhaps more critical though, is good leadership and planned leadership succession," said Mr Lien.

"NVPC will continue to work with the Centre for Non-Profit Leadership to help strengthen board leadership and advocate for board renewal."