New Creation Church opens up

Is more business info enough?

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IRST, it came forward with information on its business entities, how they are run and who is running them last Sunday.

Now, the New Creation Church (NCC) has posted a fact sheet on its website, detailing its business entities with additional information on the breakdown of the number of shares each registered shareholder held in trust for NCC.

No further information on the financials of these companies was provided in the fact sheet.

In previous reports, experts The New Paper spoke to had underlined the importance of church members in ensuring accountability and transparency.

So is the information that the NCC had given lately adequate for members to act in the spirit of good governance?

Without further information on the financials of these companies, nobody is any wiser on how well the church and its entities are doing, said Mr Gerard Yeoh.

Mr Yeoh, a social service veteran, added that it was good for any organisation to keep its members informed of how its finances are managed by providing information on the major headings of expenditure such as how much money it collected for the year, the deficit or the surplus for the year and how much is the accumulated reserves.

Associate Professor Victor Yeo Chuan Seng of the Nanyang Business School was for "as much disclosure as possible" in the interest of accountability and transparency.

Other than providing information on the ownership of business and who the shareholders are, a charity should also explain how the business ties in with the objectives of the charity and provide full disclosure of financials of the charity and its subsidiaries, he said.

Mr Yeoh added: "The more you share with your supporters, the better it is for your organisation."

NCC's move to come forward with information on its business entities, follows intense media scrutiny on police investigations into individual and companies related to City Harvest Church.

Last Sunday, Deacon Jack Ho of NCC took its congregation that the megachurch owned five business entities (see report at right).

They include two childcare centres, a travel agency, a gifts and books store as well as Rock Productions, a venue provider that is also behind the construction of its new meeting premises at one-north in Buona Vista.

'Money not motivation'

In his address, Mr Ho also explained the rationale behind the setting up of these business entities, stressing that money was not the motivation.

It was to meet NCC's needs, particularly to accommodate the large congregation for church services, he said.

In terms of the church's management, NCC's constitution also has mechanisms in place to ensure accountability and transparency.

It states that the Church Council - currently made up of eight members and identified as "the highest executive body of the Church" - has to keep proper books.

It also states that an Annual General Meeting (AGM) should be held every year in which the previous financial year's accounts and report of the Church Council are to be considered, and the Council must present a budget for the new financial year.

At least one-third of the voting membership of the Church has to be present at the AGM to constitute the quorum. Based on records obtained from the Registry of Societies, at its AGM held last August, the NCC - with a congregation of 25,000 - had 542 registered members of which 186 were voting members.

"From an outside observer's perspective, it may not seem to be sufficient. However, the information is provided to members of the church, who interact with the church leadership over the years," said Associate Professor Tan Woei Liang of Singapore Management University.

"It will not just be the information provided recently but the announcements, notices, circulars, talks, meetings and stakeholders' reports that the observer may not have had access to."

Prof Yeo added: "The problem for religious organisation is that they are a different creature from business entities because of the religious authority that churchgoers place in the pastor.

"There is less of a willingness to question and more of a willingness to accept what the person in authority says."

"It is essentially a chicken-and-egg problem," he said.

"Why is there not as much disclosure as you like? It is because the members are not asking for it," he added.

"You should always have an open and questioning mind and not accept everything that an individual says at face value without satisfying yourself that what is said is true."

Its business entities

1. Daystar Child Development Centre
What: Two branches - in Holland Avenue and Jurong West - providing childcare and early childhood education.
Who: No shareholders or directors. Management committee for Daystar Holland - Pastor Jeannie Yeo, Pastor Joshua Lee and Deacon Jack Ho, Management Committee for Daystar Jurong - Pastor Jeannie Yeo, Deacon Jack Ho and Deacon Matthew Kang. None receives any remuneration.

2. BrightStar Child Development Centre
What: Offers childcare in Suntec City Mall.
Where: 2004
When: Company's shares held in trust for NCC by four registered shareholders - Pastor Jeannie Yeo, Pastor Joshua Lee, Deacon Matthew Kang and Deacon Koh Ching Hong.

3. Rock Productions
What: Established at Suntec City Mall as venue provider. Also owns and manages Marine Cove, Rock Gifts & Book Centre and oversees the construction of NCC's new venue at one-north in Buona Vista.
Where: 1996
When: Company's shares held in trust for NCC by the same four people as 1.

4. Rock Gifts & Book Centre
What: Sells Christian books, music, sermon resources and gifts.
Where: 1996
When: Wholly owned by Rock Productions.

5. Omega Tours and Travel
What: Travel agency organising tours especially to Israel and other parts of the Middle East.
Where: 2010
When: Wholly owned by Rock Productions.