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## Letters from children in Philippine orphanage are source of charges against Hudson pastor, two others

Children allege Randall ignored reports of abuse

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The voices behind the charges against the Rev. Tom Randall, who is jailed in the Philippines, belong to children who were living at the now-closed mission operated by the Hudson pastor's ministry.

"Two girls from the institution, at great personal risk, smuggled out letters [detailing abuse] to the teacher who gave them to [my daughter] who gave them to me," said Joe Mauk, a missionary in the Philippines who reported alleged abuse at the Sankey Samaritan Orphanage in Lucena City, Philippines.

The orphanage, founded by Randall and his wife, Karen, in 1998 was raided on Jan. 12 amid reported allegations that the facility had been operating as a front for human trafficking and that children living there had been sexually abused for years. Randall, a pastor at Christ Community Chapel in Hudson, and two orphanage workers were arrested.

According to Filipino news reports, Randall is charged with obstruction of justice for negligence in handling allegations of abuse and sex trafficking. Orphanage administrator Perfecto "Toto" Luchavez and his son, Mark "Jake" Luchavez are reportedly charged with violating Filipino anti-human trafficking laws. The younger Luchavez is also charged with rape.

At the time of the arrests, 31 orphans were rescued and released to the Department of Social Welfare and Development. Their sworn statements allege that they had been routinely raped since 2005 and that Randall failed to take action after being told of the abuse. The orphans reportedly avoided going to the police for fear of having to find a new home, according to media reports.

As the number of people calling for Randall to be freed increases, some are advising caution in declaring his innocence and encouraging prayers for the alleged victims of abuse. Swelling support for Randall is evident by the increasing number of followers (more than 35,000) on a Free Tom Randall Facebook page. The page, which is not owned by Christ Community Chapel, was created Jan. 14 by members of the church, which attracts more than 4,500 people to weekend services at campuses in Hudson, Aurora, Stow and Akron.

Beverly Shellrude Thompson, president emeritus of Missionary Kids Safety Net, said that, historically, it has been difficult to expose issues of abuse within overseas missionary communities. She said that while she is not assuming Randall's guilt or innocence, she is hopeful that people will allow the process to continue, so that the voices of the children can be heard.

Missionary Kids Safety Net is a clearinghouse of information and support for missionary kids who were abused. Among the organization's board members is Dianne Darr Couts of Akron.

"Whenever news breaks that a beloved pastor, missionary or family member is accused of a sexual impropriety or crime, the impulse of many within the Christian community is to discredit the report. This is also true when the accusation is one of negligence and/or complicity of not reporting sexual assault to the police and other civil authorities," Thompson said. "It has been particularly difficult for Christians to accept that missionaries they have been supporting, both financially and through prayer, are capable of sexual crimes. It is also very, very difficult for missionaries to make a report that there is credible evidence that a colleague is either engaged in sexual abuse or is complicit in not reporting known sexual abuse."

Mauk concedes that it was difficult to report his longtime ministry partner, but said he had "a legal and moral obligation" to protect the children.

"I am not the one bringing charges. I did pass on information [about alleged abuse] I received. I passed the information

first and foremost to my longtime (33 years) friend and ministry partner, Tom Randall. We have ministered together on many outreaches over many years. He is one of the finest servants of the Lord that I have ever met. I considered him closer than a brother. I, of course, assumed when he heard reports of abuse that he would act immediately. This he did not do, in fact he said he knew of some of these reports and I should leave it to him to handle it himself," Mauk said in email correspondence from the Philippines.

Mauk said that he reported the alleged abuse to his legal counsel and a pastoral-crisis intervention team to report to authorities. His daughter, who is trained in detecting child abuse by the Head Start program and who has worked in missions involving anti-abuse and child trafficking, and the teacher, whom the girls confided in about the abuse, reported the allegations directly to government authorities.

Since reporting the alleged abuse at the orphanage, Mauk said he has been accused of betrayal. He said when people ask: "How could Joe do this?" his response is: "Kids were being raped, what did you want me to do?"

Mauk's cousin, Melanie Wasson, said she is disappointed that some of Randall's supporters have painted him as a villain. As a member of Christ Community Chapel, she said it has been particularly disheartening to read remarks made by her pastor in his blog.

In the days immediately following Randall's arrest, the Rev. Joe Coffey described Mauk as a "rival missionary" who made accusations against Randall and "a single man with a vendetta." Coffey, lead pastor at Christ Community Chapel, characterized Randall as a friend of 18 years and "a remarkable person in a number of ways."

The local church has supported the Randalls' mission [World Harvest Ministries] for about 20 years.

"It's been really hard for me. I love my pastor and I love my church and its members. And I also love my cousin. I just wish people wouldn't rush to judgment, before hearing both sides," said Wasson, of Tallmadge.

"Both Tom Randall and my cousin, Joe Mauk, have stellar reputations in the mission field and have devoted their lives to this cause. Missions are not in competition with one another but rather unite together in promoting Christianity throughout the world. My cousin acted in the best interest of the children, and I don't want people to lose sight of that. We need to pray for the children and for the truth to be revealed."

Coffey, who has since removed the negative descriptors of Mauk, said he has been operating on information that he received from Randall, who is a close personal friend. He said he understands that there are two sides to every story but that he trusts Randall.

Although he supports Randall, Coffey said that he is also concerned for the safety of the children. He added that he and his church membership are committed to the truth and continue to be vigilant in the fight against human trafficking.

"While we believe Tom is not guilty of negligence, our fervent hope is for the safety and care of the children removed from Sankey Samaritan," Coffey said. "Our hope is that the accusations are untrue, that nothing happened to those children. But more than that, we pray for the truth to be made known and justice to be served if necessary."

Several hearings have been scheduled and rescheduled for Randall, who is now awaiting word on whether authorities in the Philippines will move forward in his prosecution. Under Filipino court procedures, Randall can be held for 15 days, or until Wednesday when he will either be released from this charge and prison, or a decision will be made to try him for negligence in court, according to local church leaders.

"We don't take these accusations lightly," Coffey said "But we believe the evidence will result in the government dropping the case against Tom."

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