

Clergy seek IRS probe of D.C. boarding house: The C Street Center

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A group of 13 Ohio clergy is asking the Internal Revenue Service to investigate the tax-exempt status of a Washington boarding house used by conservative members of Congress.

The C Street Center, a redbrick townhouse on Capitol Hill, came to public attention last summer when use of the building was tied to several Republican politicians who had admitted to extramarital affairs.

The three-story townhouse is less a church than an “exclusive club for elected officials,” the Ohio clergy charged in a statement on February 23.

The group, called Clergy VOICE, also filed IRS complaints in 2006 and 2008 against conservatives in Ohio for allegedly running afoul of tax laws that require nonprofits to remain neutral in political elections.

Clergy VOICE includes pastors from a variety of mainline Protestant churches. Eric Williams, senior pastor of North Congregational United Church of Christ in Columbus told the *Washington Post* that the letter would be mailed to the IRS February 23.

The C Street Center’s tax exemption was partially revoked last year after an investigation by Washington, D.C., officials found that 66 percent of the house was taxable and the rest exempt. The house’s estimated worth is \$1.8 million.

Clergy VOICE, whose legal counsel is the former head of the IRS’s exempt organizations division, says none of the house should be tax-exempt. “An organization whose chief activity is providing room and board to members of Congress is not a church,” Clergy VOICE said in a letter to IRS Commissioner Douglas Shulman.

The C Street Center is affiliated with the Fellowship Foundation, also known as the Family, a secretive international group of Christian powerbrokers. The foundation

sponsors the annual National Prayer Breakfast. The foundation's president, Richard Carver, told the *Post* that "we have no direct connection in any way with [C Street Center] or what goes on at C Street."

South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford and Sen. John Ensign (R., Ariz.), both of whom admitted to extramarital affairs last year, have ties to the C Street Center—Sanford as a spiritual seeker and Ensign as a resident. -*Religion News Service*