

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG

August 21, 2012

SENT VIA MAIL & EMAIL
(mborchar@sedgwick.gov)

Mr. Mike Borchard
Sedgwick County Appraiser
4035 E. Harry St
Wichita KS 67218

Re: Investigate False Claim of Exempt Property

Dear Mr. Borchard:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to request that you investigate exempt property owned by Grace Baptist Church in Wichita. We were contacted by a concerned Wichita member of FFRF about property tax exemption abuse. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 18,500 members across the country, including many in Kansas. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

Grace Baptist Church owns a home located at 1435 West Haskell Street. Sedgwick County records show that the property has been exempt from property taxes as a church parsonage since 1996.

It is our information and understanding that the use of the West Haskell home does not qualify as an exempt use. Michael O'Donnell II lives at the home. He is the son of the senior pastor of Grace Baptist Church. We understand that Mr. O'Donnell is on the Wichita City Council and also works as a communications director.¹ He is running for state office and filed forms with the Kansas Secretary of State listing 1435 West Haskell Street as his residence. The *Wichita Eagle* reported that Mr. O'Donnell rents the house from Grace Baptist Church and that Mr. O'Donnell "promises that he lives where he says he lives."² It appears that the property has not been used exclusively as a home for an acting minister who regularly conducts religious services in a long time.

We request that you investigate this matter. Sedgwick County taxpayers should not have to pay more taxes because a church and its leaders have falsely claimed an exemption. We request that

¹ See enclosed excerpt from *Wichita Eagle* candidate questionnaire

² See enclosed 7/12/12 *Wichita Eagle* article

Grace Baptist Church or Mr. O'Donnell pay the appropriate amount of current taxes, back taxes, and penalties owed. We would appreciate hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Patrick C. Elliott". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Patrick C. Elliott
Staff Attorney

Enclosures