

# INCARNATION CATHOLIC CHURCH

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A watchdog group called Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics has called into question financial dealings of Pastor Mac Hammond, who leads Living Work Christian Center in Brooklyn Park—a so-called megachurch. Hammond calls the groups complaints to the IRS that he violated federal tax law, along with published reports about his dealings, a misunderstanding of the prosperity gospel. Complaints include alleged sweetheart deals such as a \$1.9-million loan with favorable rates given to Hammond, who reportedly lives lavishly, by the church. But Hammond says his riches are a tool for the ministry. His Porsche, for example, is a way of bringing people into the church, he says. Expensive clothes are also important, he says because if he looks better he preaches better. Wealth is a way of spreading the gospel, he says. What do you think about the prosperity gospel ministry—the idea that riches are a tool to spread the Gospel, and that wealth can somehow be evidence of God’s favor? Can it go overboard?

Meister Eickhart, the 12<sup>th</sup> century mystic, remarked that the Gospel has more to do with subtraction than addition. Jesus’ own words underline this thinking: “If you wish to be my disciple you must deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow me.” Much of the Christian world today seems to disregard the first two requirements wishing to follow Jesus without the cost. Jesus himself is the template. “Even foxes have their lairs, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

Religious leaders have the unique opportunity to lead by example and to demonstrate why the Gospel is counter-cultural. Mother Theresa of Calcutta is one of the most revered human beings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her renown came not from jet setting around the world, living in fabulous surroundings, and wearing designer clothes. Rather, she wholeheartedly served God in the “poorest of the poor” by living a style of life she believed reflected that of Jesus himself.

So much of the Gospel reminds us that the love of material possessions distorts our ability to seek God without reservation. Living simply enables us to address justice issues such as providing for those whose burdens are greater than our own. I believe it was Pope Paul VI who said, “Live simply that others may simply live.”

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(231 words)