

Ministry Ethics Panel Named

After concluding his three-year probe of ministries accused of financial misconduct, Iowa Senator Charles Grassley invited the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) to form a 15-member panel of ministry leaders to conduct an independent review to “self-reform” religious organizations.

The newly-formed Commission on Accountability and Policy for Religious Organizations (CAPRO) includes in its membership Oral Roberts University President Mark Rutland, Campus Crusade for Christ President Stephen Douglass and megachurch pastors Joel Hunter and Bishop Kenneth Ulmer.

The commission will address tax and policy issues involving religious organizations, such as whether churches should file the same highly-detailed annual information return that other nonprofits must file; whether legislation is needed to curb abuses of the clergy housing allowance exclusion; whether the current prohibition against political campaign intervention by churches and other nonprofits should be repealed or modified; and whether legislation is needed to clarify tax rules covering “love offerings” received by some clergy.

The ECFA has no oversight of ministries outside of its membership, and none of the ministries investigated in the Grassley probe were members at the outset of the investigation. (Joyce Meyer Ministries received ECFA accreditation in 2009.) Instead, the role of CAPRO is “to review and provide input” to government policy makers “on major accountability and policy issues affecting such organizations.”

Although Grassley found no wrongdoing in his investigation, he said reforms are “most effective when they originate from within the sector involved than from congressional fiat.”

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