

Celebrity Megachurch Churchome Slapped With Class- Action Lawsuit

A Seattle-area megachurch that has hosted celebrities such as Russell Wilson and Justin Bieber among its thousands of members has been accused in a lawsuit of requiring employees to tithe back 10% of their earnings or face repercussions including termination.

Churchome is led by Judah Smith and his wife, Chelsea, who according to the Churchome website, are the church's lead communicator and lead theologian, respectively.

The Smiths are named as the plaintiffs in the 44-page lawsuit along with CEO David Kroll and his wife, Jenna Kroll, which was filed on behalf of Rachel Kellogg and no less than 100 fellow employees of Churchome who have been affected by this mandatory policy, according to The Christian Post.

"Defendants have engaged in a systemic scheme of wage and hour abuse against their employees, including the requirement that all employees rebate ten percent of their gross earned wages back to Defendants in the form of tithes on a monthly basis or face actual or threatened pressure, discipline, or termination," the complaint states.

As reported by *The Seattle Times*, "Kellogg, who worked in video and production for Churchome, says she was never informed of this policy until after she was hired in 2019. The lawsuit argues the practice violates the state's Consumer Protection Act, and wage and hour laws."

Kellogg works remotely from Greenville, South Carolina.

"Regardless of whether this is a church, or not a church, or a

nonprofit or a for-profit corporation, requiring employees to rebate any wages to an employer is an unlawful practice,” said Eric Nusser, one of Kellogg’s attorneys at Seattle’s Terrell Marshall Law Group.

Within the complaint filed, Kellogg alleges that she was not notified, or even aware, of employees being required to tithe back a minimum of 10% back to Churchome itself.

It was during a remote staff meeting in April of 2020 with Judah Smith that she became aware of how serious a policy this was to the church.

“Defendant Judah Smith reminded all employees of Defendants’ policy that the employees were required to tithe ten percent of their paychecks back to Churchome, warning that former employees had been fired because they had failed to meet this company requirement,” the complaint reads.

“I’ll be very honest: people have already been transitioned and moved on and fired because they were not tithing,” Smith allegedly said during the meeting.

Contained in the lawsuit are allegations of Smith telling the staff where he stood personally on the matter.

“Giving 10% of a paycheck that comes from the tithe—to not tithe off of a paycheck that comes from a tithe doesn’t work for me. I’m just going to be real clear: it just doesn’t work for me,” Smith allegedly told the group.

In a statement released by their attorney Nathaniel Taylor, Churchome says that the employee handbook and statement of faith includes tithing and that the church does not deduct the tithe from employee paychecks. It does however ask that employees live out the practice.

“The First Amendment protects a church’s right to restrict employment to those employees who choose to abide by church

teaching. Churchome intends to vigorously defend the rights of all religious institutions to live, teach, and model their faith through their employees,” the statement said.

One question comes to mind: Does the employee have to tithe exclusively to Churchome, or can they decide where to give their money?

In a recent article, *Fortune* reported that “Churchome is primarily supported by membership tithes and offerings, according to a 2021-2022 financial report. In 2022, the organization listed \$35.4 million in total assets.”

This lawsuit is also coming on the heels of the recent report that Churchome was among the churches listed in an honorarium scheme run by Hillsong Church.

The Christian Post reported that, “Churchome paid up to \$100,000 annually in membership fees to be part of a network called Hillsong Family. Whistleblower documents allege that pastors of churches in the Hillsong Family gain access to a preaching circuit where pastors travel and dine in luxury at the expense of host churches in the network while collecting tens of thousands in cash honorariums.”

While few know what has occurred behind the closed doors of a congregation, Paul writes about such a situation in 1 Corinthians 6:1-20.

Pray that this issue be resolved, potential relationships restored and that, in all things, God would be glorified in its wake. {eoa}

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