

Megachurch Pastor Steven Furtick Draws Criticism for \$1.7 Million Home, Secret Salary

Pastor and author Steven Furtick is facing criticism for his newly built \$1.7 million 16,000-square-foot mansion, which critics say does not reflect the heart of a servant.

Furtick is founder of the 12,000-member Elevation Church in Charlotte, N.C., and author of best-selling books *Greater* and *Sun Stand Still*. Since its founding eight years ago, the church has given away more than \$10 million to nonprofit organizations.

“The pastor should be the servant of his people. He should be the one that is most transparent,” said Ole Anthony of the Trinity Foundation, a nonprofit that monitors and investigates religious fraud, in an investigative report from NBC Charlotte. “It saddens me to see what the church is becoming.”

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NBC Charlotte said they tried asking Furtick about his home for weeks, sending emails, letters, making phone calls and even meeting with him. He did not publicly respond until Sept. 29, when he spoke about it in a sermon.

With eight campuses spread out over four counties, Elevation Church brings in close to \$400,000 in donations each weekend. But Furtick told his congregation he and his wife, Holly, didn't use any money from his salary to build their home.

“I built it with money from my books and I gave money to the

church from the books and you start getting real defensive and being like this ain't right. This ain't right," he said.

But Chris Rosebrough—who runs Pirate Christian Radio, a podcast that protests against preacher profiteers—says it isn't that simple.

"I'm sorry, but there's something wrong with that," he told NBC Charlotte. "There's no distinction between Elevation Church and Steven's books. The two get mashed together in a way that creates a real conflict because the job of the pastor is not to preach his book."

Elevation Church paid for full-page ads promoting his book *Greater*, and also paid to air sermons featuring the book on TV. In addition, Furtick gave away a backpack to children in need for every sale of the book.

Many people wonder: If Furtick's books made him enough money to build his mansion, then how much did he make from them? No one knows, NBC Charlotte says. In fact, no one knows what he makes from the church either.

In another article, NBC Charlotte reported, "Furtick and his lieutenants refuse to tell the people who pay his salary, the congregation at Elevation Church, just how much he makes."

Furtick has a "board of overseers" that sets his salary, made up of other megachurch pastors. Apparently he agrees to pay them to preach at Elevation, and they pay him to preach at their conferences or megachurches.

"When Furtick held his Code Orange Revival last year, three of the headliners, pastors Stovall Weems of Jacksonville, Fla., Perry Noble of Anderson, S.C., and Kevin Gerald of Seattle, were all board members at Elevation," noted NBC Charlotte. "Those are three of the five votes that set Furtick's salary."

James "Chunks" Corbett, the executive pastor at Elevation

Church, told NBC Charlotte that pastors do get paid to speak at Elevation Church, but the pay is “small in scope,” and he would not divulge any amounts.

Though Elevation Church doesn’t have elected deacons or elders overseeing the church like many Baptist churches do, it was founded by, got loans through and gives missionary money through Southern Baptists.

Many evangelical groups—like the Billy Graham Evangelical Association and Samaritan’s Purse—release their tax returns by law, so it is public knowledge what their leaders make. And the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina publishes a salary chart on its website. But megachurches like Elevation hire compensation consultants to look at other megachurches.

The church does, however, have a 2012 annual report available on its website, with a section regarding its finances. Elevation reportedly received more than \$20 million last year, a 43 percent increase over 2011.

In a breakdown of the megachurch’s operating income allocation, it reports that nearly \$6 million was spent on personnel, but there is no further explanation. The church does note, however, that this was 29.1 percent of its budget, while adding that the national average of personnel expenses for churches is 40.5 percent.

The financial team is made up of Finance Director Jerry Sumner, a certified public accountant and chartered global management accountant, and Controller Gary Sessions, a CPA.

In a letter posted on the website, Sessions said, “It is the continuing goal of the Elevation Finance Office to stay ahead of our growth through the use of technology and additional resources, and to instill the highest standards of accounting practice and integrity.”

He concluded the letter by noting: “Finally, as Pastor Steven

has stated from the stage before, if you ever have a question about how our processes work, please let us know.”