From:	Marianne Blair
To:	Preston Christie A
Cc:	Marianne Blair
Subject:	Form 990 - Taxpayer Feedback
Date:	Friday, September 11, 2015 9:03:58 PM

Dear Ms. Preston:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on Form 990. I do think changes are necessary and important, for the following reasons:

1) **The current distinctions between religious organizations and other non-profits puts the IRS in the untenable situation of having to rule upon what constitutes a "church" or "religion", vs. what constitutes a non-religious nonprofit.** At one time, when our country was simpler, this might have been less problematic. However, it 2015, it is increasingly difficult and I would say impossible, to come up with a clear definition of "religious organization" that can be provided to the IRS to rule on these situations.

Without making judgments that drag the IRS into conflict with the establishment clause of the US Constitution, how can you rule on what is a "church," vs. what is a tax dodge or social group? Is the IRS to be put in a position to decide that Catholicism is a religion, but Rastafarianism is not? That Scientology is a religion, but Aum Shinrikyo was not? How do you make these decisions - do you say that a religion must be established for X number of years? Do you say that it has to have X number of members? Do you pass judgment on the values, purpose, or mission of that organization? There is no good way to define this, and it leads us down a path that government should not tread.

2) **The 990 Exemption encourages widespread tax dodging.** If I decide to found a new religion with a friend or two, and declare my home a parsonage, and "donate" all of the income I receive to my "church," what is to stop me? With a little consultation, easily available online, it's not that hard to set up as a 501 (c) (3) and call it a church. And once I'm over this hurdle, what is to stop me from then dissolving my governing body, ceasing to track my organization's income and what is done with it? And what is to stop me from soliciting donations, under any pretense I choose, and using that money in any way I choose? It is clear to me that in fact, many such situations now exist and are increasingly common. As there is no logical and constitutional way to support the designation of "church" vs. "charity," this exemption drags the IRS into a morass of questionable and potentially unconstitutional decision making.

3) **Many "Religious" organizations masquerading as non-profits are profitable private businesses under another name.** The exemption for religious organization was undoubtedly intended to support sincere believers whose religious organizations had a mission of charity in their communities. However, we are seeing a proliferation of "churches" which bring in revenues of millions of dollars, with almost none of it going to any activity that could be considered charitable. These churches are (at best) social clubs, and (at worst) wealth accumulators for those running them. They have sophisticated marketing strategies, lavish salaries, and assets rivaling other successful mid-cap businesses. This is not what the religious exemption was meant to address.

4) **The 990 requirement is not onerous, for true religious organizations.** Most true churches and religious organizations would have relatively little trouble conforming to the requirements of the 990 - they have governing bodies (even independent churches usually have a vestry, or Council of Elders, etc.) and the form itself is not highly complex. Most true religious organizations maintain financial records and are conscientious about how they use donations. I do not consider myself a tax genius (1040 EZ for most of my life!) and having reviewed the 990, it's reasonably straightforward. No organization with serious purpose should have a problem filing this form honestly.

5) **Members of religious organizations deserve financial transparency.** This may be the most important consideration: An honest religious organization has nothing to hide from its members. Filling a 990 would allow a mission-driven religious organization to demonstrate to its members, as do other nonprofits, that the donations received are going to the intended purpose, and that the organization's overhead is reasonable. It is sad to see many in our country donating beyond their means to "religious" organizations that do not in fact use their donations for the purported purpose. Requiring religious organizations to file a 990 would let in the light of day and give the members of these organizations some fighting chance to make informed decisions about which organizations they support.

Requested change:

At a minimum, religious organizations must be required to follow the same 990 filing requirements as other 501(c)(3) organizations. They must be required to show, year over year, what their assets are, what revenue they're bringing in, how they're disbursing it, and that they are indeed pursuing their stated mission. This is a reasonable requirement, followed by every charitable organization, and should be welcomed by sincere religious organizations.

Thank you again for soliciting taxpayer input on this very important issue.

Sincerely,

Marianne Blair
4553 N. Magnolia Avenue, Unit 507
Chicago, IL 60640
312.420.0407