

Fancy, tax-free parsonages

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The U.S. Tax Court recently ruled in favor of Phil Driscoll: the evangelical musician's \$400,000 second home qualifies as a tax-free parsonage.

Driscoll isn't a pastor in any conventional sense. The *Wall Street Journal* [reports](#) that he "turned to the ministry after a popular music career." That's one way of putting it: the ministry he turned to is Mighty Horn Ministries, an organizational framework for Driscoll's ongoing music career. The major difference is that his approach to music is a good bit more evangelistic than it was back when he played with Joe Cocker.

Letter of the law aside, it's hard to imagine that the parsonage allowance--passed in 1921--was aimed at relieving the tax burden on second homes for successful musicians "[duly ordained, commissioned, or licensed](#)" to the call of continuing to make records and play concerts, but for Jesus this time. The *Journal* article helpfully explains a lot of the background on the issue of parsonage allowances for folks who, unlike most pastors, don't really need the help. This unqualified use of the word "parsonage" made me laugh, however:

According to the report [from the Senate Finance Committee's recent investigation into high-profile evangelical ministries], Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, who lead Kenneth Copeland Ministries in Fort Worth, Texas, live in an 18,280 square-foot lakefront parsonage on 25 acres. The report said county officials valued the church-owned property at \$6.2 million in 2008.

I'd have at least picked a fancier-sounding synonym, like "manse" or "rectory." But Webster's [agrees with the Journal](#), so whatever. In any case, it's sad to see wealthy Christians avoiding taxes on their second homes while some conservatives are busy [calling Warren Buffet a socialist](#) for [proposing](#) higher taxes on the super-rich.