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# Inside C3: Portrait of a Megachurch

Andrew Chandler

*Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism*

Reece T. Williams

*Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism*

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## **Inside C3: Portrait of a Megachurch**

**Project Authors:** Andrew Chandler & Reece T. Williams

**Our project centers on C3 NYC, a popular evangelical megachurch that has exploded in popularity despite allegations of abuse and financial impropriety currently swirling around it. Through photos and an accompanying audio piece that features voices from current and former members of the church, our piece seeks to go inside of C3 and answer three central questions:**

1. Over the last 30 years, the number of 18-29 year olds who describe themselves as having no religious affiliation has quadrupled, rising from 10% to 39% according to recent data published by the PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute). Despite this, global “megachurches” like C3 have exploded in popularity. With 500 churches worldwide—and five churches in the New York City area alone—C3 has attracted hundreds of thousands of millennial followers worldwide, despite an adherence to conservative religious orthodoxy as well as questions of financial impropriety. Why are they popular and succeeding where so many churches have failed?
2. Despite its modern aesthetic, many of the theological principles that inform C3’s teachings are stridently traditional. Their doctrine published on their website rejects same-sex marriage, promotes abstinence, and considers abortion to be a sin. This seems to be at odds with the beliefs of their mostly millennial audience, whose attitudes towards these issues tend to be more liberal. How to explain this discrepancy? Considering that these positions are often not brought up in sermons, are congregants generally aware of C3’s beliefs on these issues? Does it change their view of the church? Does C3 obscure these positions publicly?
3. Questions have surrounded C3’s encouragement of followers to tithe 10% of their income. While tithing is a practice common in many churches, questions have swirled around the large amount of wealth C3’s founders have accrued in a short amount of time. According to a 2005 report, a fledgling C3 was already clearing around \$100 million a year. According to preacher Phillip Powell, who was interviewed for the report, C3 is not led by pastors but by “business managers who have cashed in on a loophole in the Western governmental tax system.” Is C3 abusing their tax exempt position? Do congregants feel pressured to give?