

InfoTech: is a website a church?

The USA's tolerance of "religious freedom" is tested daily. It's not about architecture, but rather it's about what constitutes a church. Amongst the strangest of the strange is "First Church of Tiger Woods." And no, we are not making it up.

With the debate over Scientology, and other groups, and whether their claims to be a religion are accepted not just in the USA but elsewhere (Scientology, for example, is not acknowledged in the UK) the USA's policy over what constitutes a religion, or even a church, is either liberal or just plain daft depending on one's point of view.

To whit: John Ziegler says he believed (but "not entirely") that Tiger Woods to be the second coming of Christ - based on a comment by Woods' father. So Ziegler formed "The First Church of Tiger Woods."

And it launched on the internet with its website TigerWoodsIsGod.Com.

The website includes "evidence" of Woods' divinity. It says "Tiger's birthday is December 30th, which is much closer to Christmas day than what most scholars believe was Jesus Christ's actual birthday," amongst other things.

The site also includes two new prayers, created by "Pastor John Ziegler."

The site also includes a statement on 19th March 2003 "*John Ziegler, the Pastor of the First Church of Tiger Woods, in response to the Vatican stating that it is against the war with Iraq, released this statement:*

"We at the First Church of Tiger Woods believe that this war is completely justified and we support our President and our troops 100%. We pray that the USA kicks ass quickly enough so that television coverage of Tiger's next three tournaments, including the Masters, will not be overly interrupted."

The validity of the Church is demonstrated by links between the employment history of Ziegler, an erstwhile radio talk show host, and the success - or failure - of Woods at his chosen game.

But now that Woods has been found out to be human, with weak flesh despite a strong spirit, Ziegler - who in the absence of a job has become a "freelance" broadcaster and film-maker, trying to ape Michael Moore but failing due to a conspicuous lack of talent, has gone off Woods.

As the bizarre story of the Tiger Woods crash unfolded, Ziegler posted the following dated 29 November: *[Woods said]"I'm human and I'm not perfect. I will certainly make sure this doesn't happen again."* ***Obviously Tiger declaring that he is indeed human is of particular interest to the First Church and will certainly contribute to our impending decision to disband this website in light of this week's revelations."***

On 1 December, Ziegler defaced the logos on the website and said he was disbanding the Church; the web domain, he said, would not be renewed when it expires "in a couple of months." No doubt there will be a queue of cybersquatters and spam-ad website operators queuing for the name due to the widespread coverage it is getting and will no doubt continue to get as the Tiger story continues to develop.

But Ziegler's first reaction to the car crash that started all of this was somewhat different: he said "The Paster (sic) has always feared an untimely death for our Messiah and since he is 33 (the same age as Jesus was when he was sacrificed) the danger was even greater this year."

Of course, the site - and the supposed Church - may be nothing more than a joke fan site. But if it is, it's a joke that Ziegler has persisted with even though it has gone badly wrong: by his own admission ***"I have spent much of the last fourteen years completely dedicated to you. I have exhausted an uncountable number of hours watching and rooting for you and have put my personal credibility on the line (and probably lost jobs because of it) to create the largely misunderstood FirstChurch of Tiger Woods"***

So far as we can tell from the website, The First Church of Tiger Woods has a following of one: Ziegler himself. The website does not contain any mechanism for "converts" to join or make donations.

For that, we let us all be truly thankful.