

Dear Anonymous Parishioner

I received your letter last week and, although saddened that you choose to be anonymous, want to reply to your concerns. This open letter is the only way I have to reply and perhaps is best since others may share your concerns. So let's go through your letter . . .

First, I did not attend the annual meeting because I was not invited and clearly was not welcome. As I have been declared by the Rector to be a "former parishioner" I was ineligible to attend and certainly had no intention of creating a disruption by crashing the meeting.

You state that you heard I "want a million dollars be placed into a separate graveyard account to be used only for the graveyard." That's not correct. There is a big difference between demanding that the church set up a fund, and demanding that money taken from an existing fund be put back. Monies **were removed** from existing accounts restricted for specific uses. People gave to those funds over many decades. The Vestry cleaned out those accounts in 2016 and placed them into a single account with no restrictions. I want that money put back where it belongs. When donations were made to those funds, the church accepted them to be held **in trust** and to be used for the specific purposes intended for each fund. That trust has been breached. We no longer have a Churchyard Fund, Building Fund, Organ Fund, or Remembrance Fund due to this breach of trust. I understand that you don't want your pledge used to defend the lawsuit. But in the same vein, I'm quite sure that people who donated to the Churchyard Fund and the other restricted funds do not want their gifts to be used for other purposes. The same logic applies.

You ask who made the decision to combine the funds. The Vestry did in the spring of 2016 at the recommendation of the advisors. Mike Russell had sought this change for several years as the Operating Fund reserve was running out. You state that I was a member of the Vestry when this occurred. That is not correct. My term ended with the January 2016 annual meeting. But I did object to the transfer and worked quietly for three years to reverse the transfer. Filing the lawsuit was only done as a last resort.

You state that I "must be angry that [I am] not involved in directing decisions of the vestry committee." I'm not, but that's not the kind of thing I can back up with facts & figures.

But consider this: before this dispute arose, if I were asked to list people I know who I most admire and respect for their integrity, that list would be dominated by fellow Caroline Church members. It's rather gut wrenching to have come to the conclusion that at least a couple of those on my "heroes list" very likely knew in 2000 that, when they made the first \$50,000 raid on the Churchyard Fund, it was an unlawful breach of trust. Others were not aware. They, like me, believed the myth that these funds were transferrable, and made other transfers over the years, culminating with the clean-out (totaling about 2.8 million dollars) of the restricted funds in 2016. But now, when shown the facts, too many of those people remain silent. Rather than working to correct the error and restore the trust of former and potential future donors, they may fear speaking up would put strains on friendships. It would mean having to make difficult financial decisions. And since the authorities may not step in and force the issue, perhaps this will all blow over.

But we're a church—I would hope we would hold ourselves to a higher standard than that of “we can do it because we can get away with it.” There's too much of that attitude currently. So I certainly have no desire to rejoin the group of financial decision makers at Caroline Church.

That these funds were restricted, as pointed out by the audits in the 1990's, can not be disputed by simply saying “they are not restricted.” It's in those audits and in the minutes. The Vestry or auditors are not empowered to change that—only the courts can, via a cy pres petition. Those who have come to realize this, yet stand by silently, have to understand that they are disrespecting those generations before us who set up and gave to those funds. It's not just the Melville family, it's many of our families and prominent community members. The Churchyard Fund is over a century old. The Remembrance Fund was established during Reverend Jack Mitton's tenure. The Organ Fund during Canon Paul Wancura's tenure, which also saw tremendous growth in all the funds. I had three separate and lengthy discussions with Canon Paul after the Vestry's 2016 approval of the consolidation of funds. I can tell you that he was tremendously displeased with those transfers, which destroyed the funds and our endowment. Shame on all of us.

Finally, you state that I need to apologize to the Rector, who stated at the meeting that nothing is personal and that you think he is trying to resolve things. That didn't work for three years. Then my attorney offered to hold off on serving the Vestry and instead negotiate. That was refused. We offered to mediate. That was refused. We want a ruling of the status of the funds. They want to avoid that ruling and instead seek dismissal--not on the merits, but on the contention that I am not a parishioner, thus have no right to seek a ruling. I do not feel a need to apologize for attempting to restore funds to their rightful place.

I hope this gives you, and all others reading this, a better idea of what has taken place, and why I felt it is my moral duty to make every effort to restore the funds. Despite rumors to the contrary, my only motive is to restore those funds and to amend the by-laws that I helped incorrectly amend years ago. The by-laws need to make clear that the Churchyard, Organ, Building and Remembrance Funds are reserved for specific purposes. That way donors can be confident that their money is used in accordance with their wishes and vestry members will clearly understand the difference between restricted and unrestricted funds.

Chris Haring
February 14, 2020