

Dear Parishioner

It's been a month since my last update, so I'm writing to let you know that little has changed. But I want to clear up a couple of misconceptions.

First, at the last "town hall" meeting apparently the slide show stated that I had agreed to the Diocese of Long Island mediating this matter. Not so, and at least one of the meetings the statement was clarified—although not accurately. While my position (being open to mediation supervised by any not for profit or religious institution as long as the mediator was shown to be impartial and knowledgeable) was unchanged, the church was only agreeable to mediation by the Diocese of Long Island. Clearly, the Diocese is not an impartial disinterested party. As the church was not agreeable to any other party, there will be no mediation. That was relayed to me by my attorney more than a week before the "town hall" meeting.

I don't believe that Senior Warden Mark LaSorsa was knowingly lying to those in attendance. I don't think Mark would do that. So the conclusion I draw is that he simply was not aware of this. And if Mark is not being kept "in the loop" as Senior Warden, how much does the Vestry really know? Sadly, I think the answer to that question is that they know very little. As the Vestry's principal fiduciary duty is the finances of the church, this is pretty scary. It is the Rector's responsibility to keep them informed, and the Vestry's responsibility to insist on full disclosure of the facts. Both seem to be failing to meet those duties.

I'm also disappointed in the Rector's repressive, evasive and less than truthful behavior during this conflict. Rather than addressing the issues, he is keeping his vestry and parishioners in the dark. He expended thousands of church dollars for legal fees unrelated to the lawsuit in a completely unsuccessful attempt to have the savethechurchyard.org site silenced in violation of the First Amendment. In August he signed a sworn affidavit that I had not contributed to the church **just three days** after an electronic donation was made, then returned to me. He directed the volunteers who count and deposit the weekly collections that they are not to process or deposit any donations made by Linda or me. An image of that note will be put up on the savethechurchyard.org website. Are these behaviors worthy of the leader of our Christian community?

Lastly, have you heard a statement similar to this?: "The Vestry put the money there, and they can move it."

The problem is that the statement just isn't true. The Vestry didn't put it there. The Melville family put it there. Your families and my family put it there. If you paid to have a loved one buried in the cemetery, you put it there. Every time a check was made payable to "Caroline Church Churchyard Fund" or "Caroline Church Remembrance Fund" (or a check to the church with a memo designating the fund), and the church cashes that check, they are accepting the restriction on the use of that donation. To use the money for a different purpose violates the restriction.

Where that statement would be correct is when a donation is made to the church without

restriction. For example, Olga Weinert left her estate to the church without specifying a particular fund. There, the Vestry initially placed the bequest in the Building Fund, later moving about half to the Remembrance Fund and later all to the new “consolidated fund” in 2016. As this was an unrestricted donation, the Vestry can indeed move it. That bequest was never the subject of my objections.

But the Vestry’s actions from 2000 to 2016 making interfund transfers to use restricted funds’ assets for purposes different than the donors’ intents represent a fundamental breach of trust. It’s going to take a long time to rebuild the community’s trust in the organization after this breach. Recognizing this error and correcting it remains the sole motivation for my action against the church I have attended for over 60 years.

Chris Haring

emailed October 16, 2019