

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are writing you as members of the congregation of St. James the Great Episcopal Church in Newport Beach. You may not be aware, but Bishop Bruno has entered into agreement to sell the church property and buildings to a developer. We were notified of the sale on May 17, 2015 have been told that our last service in the facility will be on June 28, 2015. As a growing parish established only 18 months ago, we were shocked, perplexed and deeply saddened by Bishop Bruno's decision.

As you will recall, four parishes in the Diocese disaffiliated with the Episcopal Church in the mid-2000s over theological differences. St. James Episcopal Church, as this property used to be known, was one of the churches that aligned with the Bishop of Uganda and became St. James Anglican Church. The Diocese of Los Angeles filed suit to prevent the four disaffiliated parishes from retaining the properties and won after a nine year legal effort. The St. James property was returned to the Diocese in September 2013. In October of that year, Bishop Bruno appointed the Rev. Canon Cindy Evans Voorhees as Vicar and asked her to revive the parish as St. James the Great Episcopal Church.

Without compensation, staff, computers or infrastructure, Rev. Canon Voorhees set about building a new model of a 21st century church and rebuilding the congregation. Coupling her unique preaching and teaching style with the beautiful sanctuary and supporting facilities, she has achieved astonishing results in just 18 months:

- Grew a congregation from 0 to 150+ members who give freely of their time, talent and treasure
- Year-on-year pledge growth of over 100%, while maintaining robust plate contributions
- Established and planned strategic business partnerships and collaboration to achieve financial sustainability as well as support key church missions
- On plan to reach financial self-sufficiency by 2016
- Created new and innovative ministries such as programming classes (www.holycoding.org)

Given the time, effort and treasure expended by the Diocese to recover the four disaffiliated properties, the appointment of Rev. Canon Voorhees to establish a new congregation, and the success she has had in creating a growing, vibrant and relevant 21st century Episcopal church, why abruptly sell the property and cast the new congregation to the wind?

From our perspective, the decision and action to sell the church property was handled in a non-transparent manner. At no time was the congregation contacted by the Diocese indicating that we were too expensive to support, or that we were not meeting the financial and growth goals established for our parish. Further, we dispute the claims made to the press by the diocesan spokesperson that our parish required "hundreds of thousands" to start up, or that we are costing the diocese \$25,000 a month to support—this is simply untrue, it has been a fraction of this. Finally, claims that we could not meet city requirements for 40 additional parking spaces are spurious. We had negotiated an agreement with a local developer to combine our parking spaces with theirs to meet both the city's requirement and bring in a substantial monthly rent further driving us to financial self-sufficiency well ahead of schedule. The Diocese chose not to sign the agreement.

Selling a unique property such as ours can only be done once. While the figure of \$15M seems large, the speed and stealth with which the sale was negotiated fails to convince us that a thorough, financially responsible and well-reviewed process was followed. Other analysis places the value of the property at \$28-\$34M. If selling the property is the right thing to do, then a careful analysis of the financial situation will support that. To proceed so quietly and in such haste lessens confidence that good judgement and good governance were exercised.

Furthermore, this action seems like a betrayal of our flock and what we've done in helping Rev. Canon Voorhees build a thriving, relevant and most importantly, growing Episcopal church. It feels to us that we are being punished for the sins of the disaffiliating congregation of 2004. We are only 18 months old, and we are a *growing*, dedicated group of Episcopalians. We are all aware of the Pew research showing the degree to which mainline Protestant churches are *shrinking*.

We need your help. We believe this process is far too hasty. Such a significant transaction deserves a thorough review along financial and pastoral lines. Time will not lower the value of the property. If this is the right thing to do, then it will be the right thing to do in the future. To allow this abrupt sale and subsequent scattering of our growing congregation to occur would be a stain on the Church.

We ask for three things...

First, please **share this letter** with your congregations. Let them know we need them.

Second, join us in raising concerns about this sale directly with the Diocese, *most specifically with the Standing Committee*. **Ask them to delay the transaction** and allow us to work with the Diocese to find a reasonable solution.

Third, and most importantly — **please pray for us** as we face this difficult period.

Yours in Christ,