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## *An open letter to the church at large from the Congregation of St. James the Great*

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July 17, 2016



## **No More Silence**

Dear members of the L.A. Diocese, bishops and friends,

This update is overdue, and we want to thank you for your patience, as we were asked to remain quiet for a few weeks. Since the Conference Panel met on June 20 we have received official written notice that our complaint against Bishop Bruno was formally referred to a Hearing Panel (essentially, a public ecclesiastical trial). The date and time are to be determined, within a very specific timeline. The notification with the allegation of offenses can be viewed on our website. As the hearing will be public, we will do our best, within the parameters provided by the national Church, to be transparent as we move forward.

We had hoped and prayed in the days leading up to the June 20 session that we would reach an accord with Bishop Bruno. Our proposed accord would have created a win for the national Church, a win for the L. A. Diocese and a win for St. James the Great. It would have allowed us back into our beloved church building, which has been standing empty for more than a year. It would have ended conflict gracefully, preserved our sacred space from the threatened sale and restored the congregation as well as benefits to our vicar. Unfortunately, we did not reach such an agreement. We did not even have a negotiation, as one side refused to participate in any discussion. So the faithful Episcopal congregation of St. James the Great remains locked out of its church, which remains empty and unused.

We did, however, have an excellent meeting on June 20 with the Conference Panel of three bishops, one priest and one lay person. We presented, both in writing and in person, our canon law complaints against Bishop Bruno and the panel listened to us carefully, as it listened to Bishop Bruno. The statement we submitted to the Conference Panel in advance of the meeting is posted on our website here. Our statement presents in plain English how Bishop Bruno misrepresented the facts about St. James the Great; how he engaged in conduct unbecoming for a bishop; and how he violated the rules regarding sale of consecrated church property. The Conference Panel confirmed the legitimacy of our complaint by moving the process to the next and final stage: the Hearing Panel.

In notifying us in writing on July 1 that The Episcopal Church was forwarding our case to a Hearing Panel, they also formalized the charges against Bishop Bruno and named the panel's members. We have posted this document on our website as well, so that all can see the charges against Bishop Bruno in the following pages.

The July 1 appointment of the Hearing Panel is a major step forward, but one we hoped could have been avoided. The main purpose of a Conference Panel is to see if a dispute can be resolved through a negotiated agreement, and we were hoping for just such a resolution. A Hearing Panel, on the other hand, is a formal public disciplinary process. The action is brought by The Episcopal Church, not the complainants, and the Hearing Panel has the authority to impose sanctions up to and including restricting or terminating a priest or bishop's rights and titles. It is a step that is inherently traumatic for all involved. We hope and we pray that, before this happens, Bishop Bruno remembers his vows as a bishop, sees the "handwriting on the wall" and begins to act pastorally by restoring both the Congregation and the Church to active service of the community. His misconduct has hurt the entire Los Angeles Diocese and The Episcopal Church, as well as St. James the Great. If Bishop Bruno persists on taking this dispute to a public hearing, there will be yet more adverse publicity for him and the Church. It is painful and embarrassing to watch the damage he is inflicting on all parties involved, including himself.

Let's bring our collective focus back to our calling to ministry: to serve the needs of our communities and share the Good News of the Gospel with as many others as we possibly can. Please urge Bishop Bruno to do the right thing—to reconsider his actions and restore St. James the Great—by writing to him at [bishop@ladiocese.org](mailto:bishop@ladiocese.org), and copy Presiding Bishop Michael Curry at [mcurry@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:mcurry@episcopalchurch.org), so that he can use his powers of persuasion and the authority he has with Bishop Bruno to prevent further damage to the Church as a whole.

For now, we continue to worship in the Community Room at the Civic Center of Newport Beach, which has been gracious enough to house us at this time. We invite you this summer to join us for worship every Sunday morning at 10 a.m., at 100 Civic Center Drive in Newport Beach.

Please feel free to share this letter with your friends, family, colleagues, and on your social media accounts.

Yours in Christ,

**The Congregation of St. James the Great**

Latest News:

<http://www.ocregister.com/articles/church-716782-diocese-congregation.html>

Learn more about our community's efforts to save the church at: [www.savesaintjamesthegreat.org](http://www.savesaintjamesthegreat.org) Please visit our webpage, and "like" our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/SaveSt.JamestheGreat/>