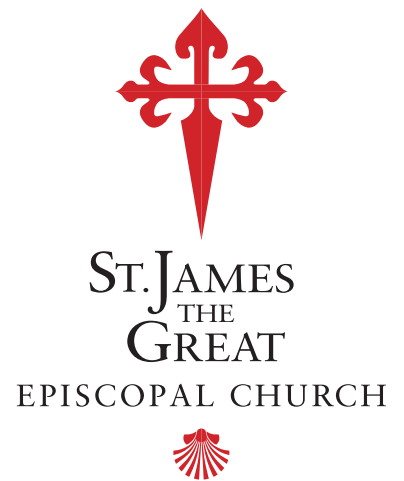


May 25, 2015

A letter to Bishop Bruno from the St. James the Great Evaluation Team

The Rt. Rev. J. Jon Bruno, Bishop Diocesan
The Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles
The Cathedral Center of St. Paul
840 Echo Park Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90026-4209



Dear Bishop Bruno:

Allow us to introduce ourselves. We are an Evaluation/Transition Team from St. James the Great appointed by our Vicar, the Rev. Canon Cindy Voorhees, to help discern the best path forward in how to transition the parish as a result of the announcement of the pending sale of the property. She has been bombarded with communications and the emotional reaction of others, and needed help in handling the extra workload. Following your instructions, our task is to discern how to move forward as a parish community, or if we should simply disband and scatter to the other churches in the area.

Our goal is to handle this in a positive fashion, looking forward to the future and trying not to dwell on the past. We all recognize that this is a loss—and a sudden, unexpected one at that—so we will all have to deal with the emotional process of fear, anger, grief, and eventually, acceptance. It was an emotional meeting last week with a significant amount of shock. That being said, we want to apologize for any lack of respect or decorum that prevailed. It is not who we are as a faith community, so we'll chalk it up to the charged emotions that resulted from your surprising announcement. Moving forward, we would like to work together with you, the Rev. Canon Cindy Voorhees and the diocesan staff in a respectful and collaborative fashion, and we hope you can overlook the behavior of the few people that responded in a less-than-ideal fashion.

As a foundation for this process, we would like to acknowledge our gratefulness to you in securing the property again and in having the vision to place Rev. Cindy in St. James the Great as our leader. In 18 months, we have grown to average 100 to 135 people on a given Sunday (we had 135 yesterday) and several hundred on the “high holy days.” We have been entrepreneurial in developing the financial resources to become self-sustaining—that would have happened either this year (if the parking lot lease were approved by the diocese) or by 2016 at the latest, with a budget of just over a half-million dollars. We would have been off diocesan support by the end of this year (or sooner), while paying our people, supporting our ministry, and still funding the deferred maintenance costs we incurred (and budgeted for) with the neglect of the building during the nine years it was out of your control.

There was collective confusion when you said we had to close, with the primary reasons being the 40 (additional) parking spaces and that we were not financially sustainable. Many people have felt a great deal of emotion, pain (and anger) over those remarks and wonder where they stem from. Maybe you could shed some light on what we are missing about these issues? The city was being very cooperative over the 40 spaces, and from our perspective were almost finished with the process of developing solutions for the parking issues and the financial sustainability.

In an era where by all published reports, mainline religion and churches are on the decline in a significant fashion, Rev. Cindy was able to cast a vision of a 21st-century church and get collec-

tive involvement and investment of most everyone's time, talent and treasure. We were hoping that we could have been seen as a model for the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles and the Episcopal Church as a whole on how to be relevant and growing (in an era where many congregations are struggling with membership, finances, and relevance in their communities) with your guidance.

Instead, without any previous discussion or involvement, many feel like we are being cast out as unimportant or irrelevant. That seemingly discounts all of our efforts, our investment of time and money, and our nurturing of each other and the local community, in being a relevant force in our local community. We have developed something very special here, and if we failed at anything, it was apparently in our ability to effectively communicate to you what a tight-knit, relevant and meaningful spiritual community has been developed at St. James the Great and the impact we were having with the local community with all of the ministry we have going. That is why we believe you experienced the emotions and resistance last week and we will all continue to face that to some degree for the foreseeable future until we can help people understand the reasons for selling the building and creating such a negative impact on our spiritual and local community. We will continue to look to you to help all of us understand the reasoning, as the parking issue could have been overcome easily, and the financial facts speak for themselves.

We held a town hall meeting yesterday and kept it fairly orderly and tried to focus on the future. When emotions did start to escalate, we reminded people of who we are as a faith community and led people back on a positive path. We have started the journey as you directed us to do.

To move forward, we feel we need some clarification from you and collaboration amongst all of us on some key issues and topics as follows:

- Do you want our spiritual community at St. James the Great to continue on in the future? We recognize that without your blessing, any attempt to move forward would be futile. Many of us ended up at St. James either after not attending any church, like many others, or because the other local churches in the area weren't working for us in terms of connection, ministry, relevance, and spiritual nurturing. One of our parishioners asked that very question of our group in the town hall meeting yesterday—do we want to just move on to other local churches, or do we want to attempt to stay together as a group, recognizing the “special community” that we have developed together? It was unanimous, with everyone raising their hands in support of trying to stay together.
- Will you allow the Rev. Canon Cindy Voorhees to continue to serve at St. James the Great? It has been her energy, her leadership and her vision that have driven the commitment, the involvement, the investment, the relevance, and the effectiveness of St. James the Great. We have become a positive influence in the local community again, in spite of all the confusion and bad press that has surrounded St. James in the past. We have become a beacon of light and a safe place where everyone is welcome (no small feat in Newport Beach) and encouraged to explore and develop their spirituality and their journey with Christ, while sharing it with others. The meeting yesterday witnessed a standing ovation for Rev. Cindy for several minutes, as she sunk into her seat. We recognize that we probably could not continue on without her in the immediate future, particularly as we have introduced an awful lot of “unknown” into the picture. It will not be an easy journey, but we are confident that with our leader and our involvement and commitment, we can collectively make it work. Once you respond, we will need to ask her the same question. You indicated in our meeting that she could work for both you and us. If that is a viable option from your perspective and her perspective, we would welcome the opportunity to continue to explore that option.

- If the answer to the first two questions is yes, can we continue on in our existing facility until at least October, or maybe longer, as you indicated in our initial meeting together? It would allow for an orderly transition and allow us to keep our existing commitment to the Connelly wedding. Your gracious offer to continue the employment of our existing staff people for two years will help with the transition as well.
- Can we reverse the course of selling the existing building? Is there anything we can do as a mission and with the diocese as a whole, to alternatively raise the funding you would otherwise be receiving from the sale of this property to fund the mission and ministry you are planning to fund with these proceeds? The property has a rich 75-year history and is a classic example of sacred space. During our town hall meeting yesterday, several people passed by and walked through it that had no affiliation with St. James. They said that they had heard that it was being sold and wanted to see what it was like on the inside, because it such a presence in the neighborhood and provided a peace-of-mind that we are here and serving the local community. They left saying what a shame it was to lose this facility. We clearly feel the same way. This all came together by surprise and so quickly that it does not leave us any real time to develop alternate solutions. We are confident and committed to developing alternate solutions if you give us the time to do so.
- If the sale of the building goes through, your offer to help find and fund a new building with some of the proceeds was generous and helpful as well. Can we begin to identify some specifics and parameters to start strategically planning a transition?

In summary, we are here to work with you and the diocese to find creative, entrepreneurial and strategic solutions to allow a growing and thriving ministry at St. James the Great to remain a beacon of light in Newport Beach and to share our vision and our tactics with other parishes in this diocese, the Episcopal Church and worldwide Anglican Church to reverse the trend of decline and provide the spark and lead the way to help people find, develop, and nurture a meaningful relationship with God in their lives. We closed the town-hall meeting referring to several biblical stories: Christ taught us that we should be shepherds, going after the one lost sheep to save it, as well as the redemptive story of Joseph returning to leadership after being sold. Both carry the same theme—everyone matters!

St. James the Great has been a bedrock for the Episcopal Church in Orange County for approximately 75 years, successfully springing many of the other local Episcopal parishes in the area. That spiritual impact on the community has not been lost. We have been a phoenix rising from the ashes already—we can do it again with all of our collective commitment, support and energy. We are here to help do that in any and every way we can, and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to begin that exploration process and continue our spiritual journey.

Respectfully,

BILL KROENER

SUE RAWLINGS

DAVID MOORE

TONY CROWELL