
'MARTIN LUTHER'

PRESENTS A MESSAGE FROM OUR VICAR

Here I Stand

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Here I stand in the eye of such an unnecessary storm. I can no longer remain silent and watch such an injustice be imposed on the congregation of St. James the Great, Newport Beach, California.

There is a lot of misinformation being published by the Los Angeles diocesan leadership about the status of St. James the Great as recent as this past week.

Facts:

- ❖ St. James the Great is a financially viable and sustainable congregation that is not expending hundreds of thousands of dollars of diocesan or corporation sole funds per year. The parish has a \$530,000 budget and paying ALL its bills.
- ❖ I am not non-stipendiary – I am being paid.
- ❖ There would be no parking issue if the diocese signed a shared parking agreement with a neighboring organization that is sitting on their desk.
- ❖ The property the church sits on was donated in 1945 by the Griffith Company. The Griffith Company is still in business today and wishes that the land remain a church in perpetuity and has written the diocese a letter affirming these wishes.
- ❖ The California Superior Court awarded St. James back to the Diocese of Los Angeles, not Corporation Sole.
- v St. James the Great had no voice, no process and no consideration in the sale of the property. The Standing Committee has refused to talk with the church.
- v The sale of the property is still pending and can be stopped.

Some History:

When the court awarded St. James Episcopal Church back to the Corporation of the Diocese of Los Angeles in September 2013, I asked Bishop J. Jon Bruno if I could “startup” the new St. James the Great. I felt both called and uniquely qualified to do so after having been on the architectural design team for the new church building, I attended almost every court hearing in the 9 years it was under litigation, and have a Fortune 100 corporate background. I have also been on the Standing Committee, Diocesan Council, and am currently a Director of the Corporation of the Diocese of Los Angeles so I understand process.

I offered to work non-stipendiary for up to two years so there would be no-out-of-pocket expense for the diocese. I had watched another church recovered in the lawsuit expend hundreds of thousands of dollars of diocesan funds to no avail. I didn't want the diocese to go through this again. I was confident, with

God's help, that I could raise the church from the ashes; no, I felt called to raise the church from the ashes into a new 21st-Century church model.

In October 2013, I entered the building without any computers, sound system, admin, sexton, altar guild, ushers, greeters, readers or funds—in other words, nothing. But soon, people started coming and we cast a vision together that caught people's imagination: "St. James the Great Episcopal Church embraces Christ's teaching as a way of life, and is creatively building a 21st-century vision-driven, inclusive, relevant and dynamic spiritual community whose mission is spreading the Gospel to the world."

In the last 12 months alone, the parish rallied and we doubled our attendance and pledge base, I started being paid ahead of time along with 2 paid staff employees and 7 other paid staff members. We were financially sustainable and on fire. Our financial records are open to anyone who wishes to verify our claims and are happy to let the facts speak for themselves.

On May 17th, Bishop Bruno without warning or discussion told the parish he sold the building. Not only had he sold it, but there was no plan as to where anyone should go or do. The parish was devastated. To some this was the second time they had lost their building; to most, who were just starting to come back to church or who are unchurched, could not understand how one man could unilaterally make this decision, especially on a church with a 70-year legacy and *the* last church near Lido Isle.

The pastoral care I have had to administer as a result of this decision has been exhausting. I have had parishioners fall into my arms with tears of disbelief. One couple told me they waited 53 years to find a church they could both agree on and finally found it at St. James the Great.

When I asked what was to become of the 150 families Bishop Bruno said they could go to other churches in the area. This, after spending 18 months of their time, talent and treasure to rebuild a viable, *growing* church.

The sale is still pending and can be stopped if Bishop Bruno wants. I have implored him not to sell the church. The land upon which it stands is sacred. Sacred for 70 years where thousands of Christians have been baptized, confirmed, married and buried.

Call to Action: I am asking you to please pass this along to your network of friends, share this on social media, and ask Jon Bruno to stop this sale.

The Rev. Canon Cindy Evans Voorhees, Vicar
St. James the Great Episcopal Church