

Prodigal Son

Pondering pecuniary particulars of pronouncement

By Prioleau Alexander

As a life-long Episcopalian (although one that took a 20-year break from church altogether) my pedigree is fairly decent: I was baptized, confirmed and married at St. Michael's Episcopal Church, and currently attend The Cathedral Church of St. Luke and St. Paul.

Needless to say, I was shocked upon reading the news of the South Carolina Supreme Court's ruling that both of the above-mentioned churches do not belong to their congregations, but to TEC. This tentative ruling states that a total of 29 local churches do not belong to the people who worship there.

The legal disagreements are far from over, but issues surrounding the lawsuit are numerous and complex, involving matters of both theology and the law.

But let's set those aside for the moment, and ponder the question, "Why does the National Episcopal Church want these 29 buildings?"

As they are Christians and we are Christians, I can only assume they will use the buildings to pour Christian good out into the world.

It will be exciting to see what unfolds. Estimates claim the local church properties are

worth \$500 million — so selling them at even half their value would net \$250 million. Imagine all the good that can be done with \$250 million!

Perhaps they will launch dozens of local evangelical programs and pack the newly acquired churches with new believers.

Another possibility is that they will sell the properties, and use the funds to build non-profit facilities around Charleston — Christ-centered shelters for the homeless, the infirm and those caught in a web of abusive relationships: If my church must go on the auction block, I could get behind that repurposing of funds.

I'd also support the endowment of Christian missionary efforts. There are untold numbers of Christians around the world doing evangelical and service work who must return to the states every year to seek funding. Fifty million dollars could fund thousands of these Kingdom-focused individuals for decades.

Another \$100 million could go to Water Missions International, a local Christian organization delivering clean, safe water to impoverished nations around the world. It boggles the mind to ponder the lives that would be saved with a donation of that size from the Nation-

al Episcopal Church.

I confess that during my years away from the church, I reveled in stories like this one. I'd belly-laugh at the Christians, fighting among themselves and hurling

when I saw the hundreds of millions of dollars being given to Christ-centered causes. It might even get me looking at the possibility of investigating Christianity.

TEC has filed more

along to TEC-loyal congregations. TEC's Lowcountry bishop, Gladstone "Skip" Adams, III, oversaw the sale of one church building to a group of Muslims, which is now used as an Islamic Awareness Center.

I am confident that will not be the case with Charleston, as both the local Episcopal churches and the local Anglican churches are committed to spreading the Good News of salvation through Christ and "making disciples of all nations."

I believe they will likely follow the example set by Anglican Bishop Mark Lawrence in 2010, when St. Andrew's Church in Mt. Pleasant — wearied of the strain with TEC — made the decision to pre-emptively leave the Diocese of South Carolina. This was a real blow to the diocese, as St. Andrew's was an important provider of funds to the diocesan budget.

Bishop Lawrence had standing to sue them ... so what did he do?

Exactly what you'd expect a Christian to do: He did nothing.

He wished the congregation of St. Andrew's well, knowing their shared goal was to serve the Kingdom of God.

In a letter to his diocese, TEC's local Bishop Adams recently wrote, "Healing is our desire, and we renew our com-

mitment to the hard work of reconciliation in whatever form it can come." I'm fairly confident the bishop will do anything and everything possible to bring about healing — perhaps he and the leadership at TEC will decide to lease the properties back to their fellow Christians for \$1 per year.

Should the S.C. Supreme Court refuse to rehear the case and the United States Supreme Court follow suit, the national media will triumphantly report the breaking news, then follow that with dozens of breathless stories about parishioners being forced to leave the church where generations of their family worshipped. Non-believers across the fruited plains will shake their heads in amusement.

I'm certain, however, TEC is an organization of faithful Christians, so it's certain they have a plan to use every dime from a lawsuit victory for the good of Christ's Kingdom. My guess is their giving will be with an open ledger, so that every penny of their generosity will shine the light of Christ throughout the nation.

It will be exciting to see all this new life breathed into the Body of Christ.

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insults back and forth. It actually gave me joy, as it offered me yet another reason to have nothing to do with God or His churches.

Believe me, I'd be laughing right now ... but I'd surely quit laughing

than 80 lawsuits to seize the property of break-away parishes and dioceses, and Christians across the country have been evicted from their churches. The empty buildings are either shuttered, sold or passed

Loving God through your divorce

By Debbie Martinez

"However, as it is written: What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived, the things God has prepared for those who love him." — 1 Corinthians 2:9

Loving God when life is rolling along and as you want it — that is the easy part; loving Him when you are in the midst of despair is the real test of faith. Your emotions are so raw and so strong during a divorce that they are hard to get rid of; they seem to take on a life of their own. It seems you have carried the bitterness, hurt and anger with you for so long that now you have accepted those feelings as your new normal; they have become a part of you.

God says, "No," that is only the devil creeping in and trying to rob you of the future God has planned for you post divorce. The devil wants you to continue to live in the past because by staying there, you are holding onto all those negative emotions that will not allow you to move into the plans God has for you. Anger, hate, revenge and bitterness are the emotions that will hold you back but hope, faith and forgiveness will get you to where you are supposed to be.

Isaiah 43:18-19 says, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." Allow God through prayer to unburden you from those past emotions and restore all that you have lost and make a new you. It is not easy. Just burying those feelings doesn't work, because they can resurface when you least expect it and impact your life. Self-medicating through sex, drugs, overspending and alcohol only numbs you; prayer is the only way. I mean, on your knees, tears in your eyes, heart pounding prayer.

Ask God to help you forgive, to see the lessons in all this, learn them and restore you so that you in turn can be



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a testament to His grace to others. Ask Him to heal your memories so that they no longer cause pain when they return. Ask Him to restore you and make your new life better than the past so you will remember the old one less and less. Pray that He removes all fears, worries and anxiety about your future. Keep looking ahead as there is nothing back there for you. Your prize lies in God and your future.

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize." — 1 Corinthians 9:24

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