An odd thing happened in March of 1992. I was Treasurer of St. Patricks school, the private school run by St. Patricks church. The Priest, Jim Steen, asked me to run for Treasurer of the church itself. I asked why. He said “competition is always good.”

I said, why not., I liked the treasurer, Dan Bourque, but agreed I would provide competition.

Steen then told me something important. I could not be treasurer of both the school and the church… if I won in the church, I would have to step down from the school. I started to be suspicious.

On the night of the election I voted for Dan and went home. The vote count was absolutely equal, so they had a second vote. Dan won, and I remained treasurer of the school.

I hadn't put two and two together. The chaplain of the school, a guy named Steve Davenport, had taken a 50,000 dollar mortgage against the house where he lived – but the church owned half the house, and it was already mortgaged. Steve had borrowed against the half of the house that he didn't own. Jim Steen had approved it, and it was my job to try to get the money back. Up till then I accepted Jim Steen's story that it was just an accident, and I wasn't putting much pressure on Davenport to pay up.

I had not been paying attention to what was going on in the church. There were a lot of whispers about Jim Steen.

He had been married when he came to the church. Now he was divorced. There were rumors that he had affairs with men in the church. There was a rumor that his boyfriend, a black football player, had beat him up. People said that he gossiped about members of the church, saying things that were not appropriate.

Some things they said were true. He insisted that he had to make more than the headmaster of the school, even though the school's budget was 10 times bigger than the church budget. He did not care that the church always ran a deficit – we were spending the money set aside to buy a place for our priests to live in order to pay him. The reason the budget deficit was not yet even worse was that he sweettalked a rich old lady into giving about 25,000 dollars a year.

It was certainly true that there were more homosexuals in the church. They came to the 11:00 service where there were lots of bells, incense, and other fancy stuff. Families came to the nine o'clock service. Even though it was a natural place for families, since we had a school, families were drifting away.

By September it was pretty clear I was not going to get the 50,000 dollars back, and that Jim Steen was part of the problem. After church one day I talked to my good friend John Nicholson.

"John, how long can this church keep going downhill in this massive corruption before it runs out of gas?"

"Graham, they can go for a very long time, because the people who recognize the corruption are just going away."

"John, how do we fight the corruption?"

"Graham, the next election is in March. If we don't win the church back this year, we have lost it."

"John, we have to do something."

The church published a monthly bulletin called the "Limerick." John and I started to publish something called the "laity limerick," where laity means peoples. We wrote about everything that was wrong with the budget and the things that the priest was doing that were improper. The whole church was aroused. Lots of them believed Jim's claim that we were only picking on because we hated homosexuals, but many others knew that the basic problem was that he was dishonest.

One night I got a telephone call from somebody who wouldn't tell me who he was threatening to sue me for libel. The same kind of threat that the Kiev Post gets from Akhmetov. I told them I was ready – everything we printed was true.

We had a real democracy, open and very heated debates prior to the election. Washington is a political town, and we had a very precise process for counting the votes. In the end we won by a small margin. I was on the church council and we voted to get rid of Jim Steen. Our lawyers did a typical Washington thing – paid him too much money to make him go away. But anyhow, he went. We got another priest, a woman, who was there for 13 years.

This is supposed to be a story with a moral. For me it had two. The first moral is to be suspicious. If something doesn't look right, if people are talking about the possibility that something is wrong, I should pay attention. You can't ignore problems and hope that they go away.

The second and most important moral is that when something is wrong, you can't depend on somebody else to fix it. You have to look inside yourself, and ask why shouldn't you take the lead? My success in dealing with the problem at the church was surely one of the things that gave me confidence to tackle the Toastmasters Ukraine bylaws. We had a situation that wasn't right, and I was in the best position to articulate what was wrong with it, and to do something. So I did, and now we have bylaws to define the relationship between the clubs and the area government. There is still a little bit of friction sometimes, but it is easy to resolve because the relationship is defined in writing.