

Several times in my life I've had to take a moral stand. Tolerate something I knew was wrong, leave, or stand up and fight. This year, when fighting would not have worked, I left the Rotary Club. Today I'd like to tell you about a time when I chose to fight, and won.

By 1992 I was deeply involved in the church. I served on the board of the associated day school and was involved in several church ministries, including its outreach to the black communities in Washington. I served as a chalice giving communion. James Steen, our priest, asked me to run for the position of treasurer of the church.

Why, I wondered? I was already treasurer of the school associated with the church, which had a much bigger budget, and could not do both. He said that some change of personnel would be good. The current treasurer was Dan Bourque, whom I didn't know well but respected. I should have been suspicious, but I was naïve.

It turned out to be a contested election. I didn't care. I voted – for Dan – and went home. It turned out that the vote was tied on the first ballot. We both got the same number of votes. They had a second ballot, and Dan won. I congratulated him. I continued as treasurer of the school.

Steen had in the course of the ten years I had been attending St. Patrick's Church, gotten divorced, come out of the closet. I knew that. What I had not observed closely was that he had engaged in homosexual affairs with a couple of members of the congregation including the choir master. The assistant director and day school chaplain, Stephen Davenport, had gotten divorced and engaged in affairs with teachers. Moreover, an action that affected me as Treasurer, Davenport had refinanced his house, half paid for by the day school, and kept all of the money, leaving the school owning nothing. His friend James Steen had made it possible, pressing the leadership in both the church and the school into approving the deal without understanding it.

Dan Bourque was now on to Steen. The church leaders wanted to remove him. Steen had asked me to run in order to get rid of Bourque. I wish somebody had told me. But I wasn't political. I was not on anybody's side.

As the Treasurer of the day school I should have demanded some action about the mortgage, but I did not sense I had enough political strength to make anything happen, so I just waited. Meanwhile, Steen got himself into more

difficulties. He arrogantly demanded more salary than the church could afford at a time when membership was not growing at all. His rather flagrant homosexual affairs were an embarrassment, and his gossip about parishioners violated his priestly obligation to respect confidences. Many members of the congregation, including a handful of gays, openly opposed to him. Nonetheless, he had the strong support of many longtime members.

The church's newsletter was called the Limerick, mailed sent every two weeks to everybody in the church. Steen, the priest, used it for his propaganda. John Nicholson, who had been at the church much longer than I, recruited me to lend my computer skills in putting out a competing newsletter called the Laity Limerick, documenting Steen's lies and crimes.

We started it in November 1992, and kept going until the parish vestry elections in March. We won a slim majority of the vestry on a slate committed to getting rid of Steen. Despite his complaint that we were acting out of homophobia, we did manage to get rid of him, though the lawyers who handled it chose, in typical Washington fashion, to do so by giving him money to go away. It was a settlement we couldn't afford, but we got it.

The headmaster of the school, Rob Peterson, had done nothing wrong except to put too much trust in these evil priests. However, the clerics had compromised him on other issues than this, and a strong new chair of the Board of Trustees, Jeff Stewart, had to ask him to leave. Once Peterson and Steen were gone we were able to get rid of Davenport as well. That job was also expensive because Davenport simply didn't have any money. We had to write off the loss as well as give him some money to leave.

This was the most political experience I have been involved in in my life. Steen and Davenport fought back with lies, ugly threats, and all manner of activity unbecoming to men of the cloth. I am glad to have prevailed, but if you ask me where God lay in all this, I would certainly have no answer.

That's how it is in life. Too often we have to choose between putting up with something wrong, just leaving, or trying to fix it. No answer is right all the time. That's what makes life so interesting. My job now is, how do I tell my son Eddie about all this?