

My Unificationist Memoirs Chapter 24

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St. Eugene's Cathedral, the Diocese of Santa Rosa

St. Eugene's serves as the cathedral parish for the Diocese of Santa Rosa. Over the three years of the Renew program, my work came to the attention of the Bishop, G. Patrick Ziemann. Within any religious institution, the participants will normally span a spectrum from conservative to liberal. Bishop Ziemann rested comfortably on the liberal end. In terms of Catholicism, this means he embraced the changes unleashed by Vatican II and actively worked to draw the laity into the ministry and governance of their parishes and diocese. Lay assistance with the financial management of the local church was seen as a particularly important step in modernizing the institution. It makes sense: why not recruit a community's business and finance leaders to help run the financial affairs of the diocese? However, a common sense change such as this ran headlong into the obstacle of old, less transparent practices. These practices were the means by which the priests protected themselves, their parish fiefs, and maintained a priestly patronage system. The old system preserved a fraternity of clergy that protected the interests of the professional religious. Letting the laity in threatened this system.

At the end of 1998, Bishop Ziemann approached me and asked if I would consider becoming Executive Director of the Catholic Community Foundation ("CCF"). He thought, and I agreed, that the fit was perfect. I could use my legal, financial, and organizational skills to raise money and pursue the spiritual goal of supporting the schools, parishes, and ministries of the diocese, including Catholic Charities. As Executive Director, I would also serve as the Director of Stewardship for the Diocese. I would wear two hats. The CCF was a separate nonprofit corporation apart from the diocese, though the Bishop sat on my CCF Board; in my stewardship role, I would be working directly for the diocese or the "corporate sole." Needless to say, I was elated. I felt as though I had just joined an MFT on steroids. In both roles, I would report directly to Monsignor Thomas Keys, the Vicar General of the Diocese. The Vicar General functions as the diocesan executive officer and often manages the finances as a CFO. And it is at this juncture that the plot thickens.

Idealistic and naive regarding the church, I had no idea about the Byzantine world I had entered. At the end of January, 1999, I had been on the job for less than two weeks when I received a phone call from an Arab financier in London. He asked me about the investments the Catholic Community Foundation had in Switzerland and Austria. I had familiarized myself, I thought, with the full range of CCF investments and they were appropriately conservative, local, and in keeping with the cautious investment guidelines of a religious nonprofit. I informed my caller that I was new to the job, got his number, and promised to return his call. I immediately walked down the hall to Monsignor Keys and asked about the investment. His response put me on guard. Delivered in Irish accented tones, he said, "Oh! Oh! Different investment. I'll handle that. None of your concern!"

My entire legal career had been spent litigating fraud, and this did not pass the smell test. I returned home that evening and told Cindy, "I don't trust this Monsignor Keys."

Thomas Keys grew up in Derry, Northern Ireland, in the midst of "The Troubles." He attended seminary in Ireland and was recruited to work in the Diocese of Santa Rosa. He developed a reputation as an effective pastor and a compassionate minister to the poor and the sick. Very early on, he was drawn into the financial management of the diocese. While bishops would come and go, Monsignor Keys remained and always had hold of the purse strings. The consequence of this was a financial system that ran more like a family (some might say a racket) than a corporation. Moreover, his Irish loyalties were as strong and deep as his brogue.

Keys' loyalties came into play when he hired Tony Culley-Foster as his business consultant. Culley-Foster was his boyhood friend from Derry. They grew up together marching, throwing rocks, and dodging tear gas canisters. They would kid each other about taking cover whenever they heard a loud noise. Monsignor Keys asked Tony to mentor me in the finer details of running a foundation and raising money.

I first got to know Tony on a long drive north up Hwy 101. The Diocese of Santa Rosa extends from the Marin-Sonoma county line all the way up the coast to the border of Oregon. Msgr. Keys had a Winnebago motorhome which we piled into after work. Keys drove while Tony, two accountants, and me got to know one another. As the winter night settled in, the accountants withdrew to the back and left me alone with Tony. Our conversation began pleasantly, then gradually became more of an interrogation. The questions were wide ranging and had little to do with my work and much to do with my family and past associations, in particular, my Qui Tam litigation with the US Attorney. The setting began to feel ominous, the darkness purposeful. Towards the end of our "conversation," Culley-Foster asked about my father's work with a Washington D.C. think tank and then responded, "Oh, so he's CIA." My discomfort turned to anger and I thought, "How the F**K does he know that???" Any trust I had for Tony or Keys evaporated. Neither did they trust me. It became evident they suspected me of being a government plant.

When I flew back East to work with Tony in his Dulles office, things became more clear. He currently served as the North American Representative of Sinn Fein. In photos scattered throughout his office and across his walls, he stood with the IRA's Gerry Adams and American presidents, as well as political luminaries such as Ted Kennedy, Tip O'Neill, and Roger Stone. One had to wonder what business this international and cosmopolitan figure had in the rural Diocese of Santa Rosa. At the time, my younger brother had been reassigned to the National Security Council. He constantly warned me to apprise him of any associations I might have that could impact his security clearance. Since I was back in Virginia, I spoke to both my brother, and my father, and gave them a detailed rundown on Culley-Foster. They in turn, had to report this problematic business relationship to their respective security officers. When they got back to me, both warned me to "exercise extreme caution."

And their advice could not have been more timely. In a short while, the Diocese of Santa Rosa would be at the center of an international media storm, as the sun and the moon darkened, and the stars fell from the heavens.