

BEFORE THE ZONING COMMISSION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Z.C. Case No. 06-11L

June 23, 2014

**TESTIMONY OF FATHER DARWIN PRICE SUBMITTED
ON BEHALF OF ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

My name is Father Darwin Price. I was the Rector of St. Mary's Episcopal Church from 1990 to 1997. During my tenure as Rector of St. Mary's, I lived with my wife and children in the Rectory. In the Episcopal Church, the Rector is a priest who is responsible for leading the congregation. I have served as Rector at churches in Brookline, MA, Suffield, CT, Newport, RI, and Easthampton, NY. I now live in Brewster, Massachusetts where I am semiretired. I flew from Boston this morning so that I would be able to give my testimony to the Zoning Commission tonight.

As a result of living in St. Mary's Rectory, I understand the importance of that house and having a Rector who lives there. By living in such close proximity to the Church, I was able to become deeply involved in the life of St. Mary's and its congregants through pastoral counseling and the many other ways in which a pastor engages with his congregation. In addition, by living in the Rectory, I was very engaged with our immediate neighbors, such as Hillel, St. Mary's Court, a low income apartment building, GWU, and the Foggy Bottom neighborhood. St. Mary's was a meeting place for lesbian and gay community activities, especially hosting and offering space in our sanctuary for funerals/memorial services for individuals who died as a result of their affliction with HIV/AIDS. This was a time when other churches in the Washington, DC community, were, for the most part, unwilling to welcome those afflicted with HIV/AIDS into their sanctuaries. This engagement enabled St. Mary's to play an important role in building important relationships in the community – a role that was of value both to the

Church and its neighbors. In order to encourage a pastor to live in the Rectory so that he or she can be engaged in the community, it is essential that the quality of life in the Rectory be maintained

During my tenure at St Mary's, I had a very good relationship with the Rabbi at Hillel. We worked together to make life better for both institutions. One important way in which the Rabbi assisted me was in permitting me to use Hillel's driveway so that I could bring groceries and have large items such as appliances delivered to the Rectory. This access was necessary because of the limitations in all of the other methods of access. Although the Rectory faces 23rd Street, parking is typically very difficult. And while there is a method of ingress and egress at the west end of the Rectory property, it was often blocked when I was the Rector. It also backs onto a public alley which can be blocked by students parking there. St Mary's, for its part, helped Hillel by making its parking lot available to Hillel during the Jewish High Holiday days when attendance at services at Hillel was heavy and by making the Church Parish Hall available to Hillel for some of its programming activities.

In the mid-1990's, GW made plans to build the Health and Wellness Center, which is located to east of St Mary's and a dormitory, which is located to the north of St. Mary's. I participated in negotiations with GW that were designed to protect the Church during and after construction of these large buildings. As a result of these negotiations, GW agreed to build a wall and west gate at the rear of the Rectory backyard and a wall and a north gate at the north side of the Rectory backyard. GW gave St Mary's keys to both the west and north gates. As a result of construction of the north gate, anyone living in the Rectory would be able to have ingress and egress from the Rectory through Hillel's parking lot to H Street, as necessary. In

addition, GW agreed to give St Mary's an easement beyond the west gate to give us access to a parking area and the public alley behind the Church

Unfortunately, despite GW's planning, the construction of the Health and Wellness Center inflicted severe damage on St Mary's Church. The floor of the sanctuary cracked. The archway between the altar and the chancel collapsed. The sanctuary was condemned. As a result of these tragic events, the Congregation was forced to relocate to the Parish Hall for three years while the Sanctuary was reconstructed. Having lived through this experience, St Mary's congregation is understandably very concerned about the risks posed by Hillel's construction project on St Mary's historic and very important buildings.

My concerns about Hillel's project relate not only to the potential impact on the structure of the Church buildings, but also the impact Hillel's proposed building would have on the quality of life for anyone living in the Rectory. Major construction activity occurring three feet away will have an enormous impact on the life of anyone living there while construction is underway. There will be construction debris, noise, trucks and many other inevitable negative impacts that occur when undertaking a project of this scale. In addition, access through the north gate will be lost – an important amenity for anyone living in the Rectory. And finally, the Rectory backyard will lose the light and open sky to the north. The north side of the backyard will be entirely blocked by a high wall extending four stories upwards and running the entire length of the Rectory's backyard. The wall will create a feeling of enclosure for anyone who lives there. There is no question that this will diminish the quality of life for anyone living in the Rectory. It will make it less attractive for a Rector to live there. And that, unfortunately, will diminish the quality of life both at St Mary's and the surrounding community.

Thank you