

Puzzled by Rev. Olinger Letter

Letter to Western Queens Gazette
September 26, 2005

To the Editor:

Rev. Olinger's letter in your 9.21 issue puzzled me. In it, he criticized Long Island City Alliance (LICA) as being a secretive group making baseless allegations. These include criticisms against the proposed Presbyterian Church of Astoria high-rise development based on two plans introduced to the congregation by architects.

I question his credibility.

That is because I attended the LICA meeting on September 8th where the Presbyterian Church of Astoria's plans were a focus of community concern. My name appeared on the LICA evening agenda, as did others. I spoke out against the church plans to develop to an audience of approximately 50. Reverend Olinger must not be puzzled as to my identity, because I am an active member of his congregation.

He should know. He was there.

Other congregation members were also present ? and signed the petition against the church development. He saw us all. We were neither masked nor in hiding. Moreover, my talk was based on factual information provided in all of the development meetings held at church during the last two years; and on my dismay with what I have always felt was a biased approach favoring high-rise development from the start.

Equally puzzling to me is why, in his letter to you, Dr. Olinger championed the proposed high-rise plan in detail, as if it were a done deal. It is not. Recently, the Presbytery of New York rejected our approach due to clear dissention in our ranks. They are requiring us to debate how we can develop the church in a manner that is agreeable to all congregation members. Many of us feel that the church can be developed (and saved) without tearing down the church. That Dr. Olinger's letter did not acknowledge the weeks we are spending on this process illustrates the divisiveness within our ranks ? some of which is directed toward our leadership.

Last, Dr. Olinger wrongly accused LICA of writing an anonymous letter to the Gazette some weeks ago. No one at LICA wrote that letter. As Dr. Olinger is well aware, during the last few years, anonymous member(s) of our congregation have repeatedly written letters of complaint to our pastor and the New York Presbytery which they have also circulated to all congregation members.

It is unfortunate that our congregation members have felt they need to take to community protest, writing letters to the newspaper and issuing anonymous letter-writing campaigns. Due to the media coverage and strong community emotions about our church's situation, we are now in the process of dealing with our conflict at church, where we should be. We are there, because all of these circumstances have forced us there. I am not alone in thinking it is for the better.

Sincerely,

Shannon Wilkinson

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