

HECK NO! WE WON'T GO!

Howard Cantrell
January 29, 2015

Cape Coral January 29, 2015. In a defiant move today, a local Religious Community notified the City of Cape Coral Florida that they will refuse to vacate their home and Chapel located at 2307 SE 15th Place, in the City of Cape Coral Florida. On Monday, January 26, 2015, Officials of Cape Coral and LCEC, the local electric company, had the power shut off at the resident building claiming that the building was unsafe, and ordered the residents not to enter. The order to turn off the electricity and ban the residents from entering the building was made by Paul B. Dickson of the Cape Coral Building Department and Dennie Hamilton the CEO of LCEC.

"This is our home, and they will have to drag me by my feet to make me leave," said Sarah Rodriguez, a Minister and Deaconess of The Haven of Divine Love. "What they are doing is very wrong, and we will fight to the end to stop their abuse and discrimination against us," S. Rodriguez stated.

"There is nothing unsafe at all with our house, I can climb up and down the inside stairs with no problem, and I will not allow anyone from the City to stop me from doing so," says Anthony Rodriguez, the Chaplain and Deacon of The Haven. "Even the outside stairs was structurally sound before they tried to make it an issue," A. Rodriguez added.

According to the web page, www.havenofdivinelove.net The Haven of Divine Love is a Non Profit Religious Community that provides low cost housing for low income senior citizens and parties with limited disabilities. It was founded by Eleanor Nelsen, a prior Carmelite Nun in 1993, and operated by her until her death in 2008. Since then it has been operated by a small group of volunteers who vowed to continue Nelsen's legacy of providing services to the poor and disadvantaged members of the local community. According to the Florida Division of Corporations, The Nelsen Residence Inc. operating as The Haven of Divine Love, is a Florida Non Profit Corporation. Jerome F. Valenta is listed as the Registered Agent, President, and Director. Wilfred A. Rodriguez and Sarah A. Rodriguez and are listed as Directors and the Deacon and Deaconess respectively.

"Call it Civil Disobedience if you will," stated Jerome Valenta, the President of The Haven. "We have drawn a line in the sand after suffering over 25 separate violations of our Civil and Religious Rights from actions by the City, and we will not take it anymore," he said. It is not a commercial property subject to their regulations. This is a single family residence, it has always been a single family residence, and a change by the City zoning can not make it anything else," Valenta said

According to County records and zillow.com, the property is a residential 3 bedroom, 4 bath home with a private Chapel built in 1979. "It was originally a convent, but now operated as a Religious Community of both male and female members," Valenta stated. Valenta, a Director and Vice President since 2002, and the younger brother of Nelsen, took over the overseeing of the entity in 2008 upon the tragic death of Nelsen. The records also show that the residence has 2 separate stairways, one inside and one outside. It is the outside stairway that Officials from Cape Coral claim need to be repaired. "That's silly," says Valenta, "a single family home only requires one stairway, we have the luxury of two, and the interior

stairs are adequately functional, and the majority of the repairs they are now requiring for the outside stairs was caused by the City of Cape Coral in the first place," Valenta claims. "We attempted to repair the minor problems on the stairs in June 2014 when they ordered us to stop. Now, because of the weathering and the environment exposure, the stairs have been damaged substantially," he says.

The recent problems arose when Officials from Cape Coral raided the single family residence of the clergy on December 12, 2014, claiming that the City had rezoned the property to a Commercial zoning, making the residence a Commercial Property and subject to their commercial conditions. Fire Department Acting Chief, John Maher, Building Department, John McConnell, and 2 other unidentified officials from the Code Enforcement entered the property and residence and cited the organization for not having fire sprinklers, fire extinguishers, fire walls, fire safety signs, and an unsafe stairway. "That is ridiculous," says Valenta, "I wonder how they would feel if I entered their private homes, without a search warrant, and cited them for commercial requirements. That is a serious violation of our privacy."

Previously, in May of 2014, a prior resident and guest of the facility, Mr. Michael Anagnos, contacted the City Code Enforcement to complain that the stairs were unsafe. "He stated to various other Residents that he 'was going to fall down the stairs and sue this place for everything they got' and then tried to get the Code Enforcement to justify his attempts to defraud," Valenta said. "At no time has the City Code Enforcement ever communicated with any Officer, Director, or authorized representative of The Haven. All communication was with Mr. Anagnos and an agent of Code Enforcement. In fact, it was later learned that the Code Enforcement Agent had no experience whatsoever of construction, and only stated information supplied by Anagnos," Valenta added. "It was a clear cut case of an attempt to defraud which in turn was conspired with the Code Enforcement Agent."

In a statement provided by Valenta, he states, "The vindictive shutting off of the electricity by the City and LCEC denies us access to our first floor chapel which has no connection to a stairway issue, and effectively denies us our religious practices. This is not a issue of the outside stairs being unsafe, it is a issue of extortion, blackmail, attempts to defraud, bias, prejudice, discrimination, retaliation, conspiracy to extort and defraud, an abuse of authority, and a colluded effort of the City Departments to close us down. On top of that, we have a Police Department who continuously fails and refuses to provide our Officers, Directors, Clergy, and Residents protection. They simply do not want poor people in Cape Coral. They have no Homeless Shelters, will not allow Missions, and have absolutely no HUD low cost housing for the low income seniors, disability, or veterans. We are the only facility in the entire City of Cape Coral to provide low cost housing for the low income seniors and persons with disabilities. Some State or Federal Agency need to investigate the actions of this City. They are the most Un-Christian and Inhumane City I have ever experienced."

Whatever happens now apparently is up to the City. In a letter to Mr. Dickson, with copies sent to the City Council, Mayor, City Manager, and City Attorney, Mr. Valenta states " You will have to force them, or physically remove them. In fact, we want you to physically remove them. We actually dare you to do so."

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