

## **Episcopal Diocese Says Fight For Control of St. Paul's Church in Darien Now Over: Diocese and Rector Win, Former Parish Officers Lose**

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A conclusion has been reached in the legal fight for control of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Darien, involving on one side various local officers of the parish and on the other the rector and the Episcopal diocese.

The rector — the Rev. Canon George Kovoov — and the diocese won, the Episcopal Church of Connecticut announced on Monday.

According to the announcement, the former wardens and vestry members of the church are founding their own Christian community, called the New St. Paul's Church. The Rev. Kovoov remains, now unchallenged,

as the rector of the church.

The dispute between the parties had involved both control of church property and accusations made against the Rev. Kovoor that before he was appointed rector, he had mislead the hiring committee about his background. State courts repeatedly decided cases in favor of Kovoor and the diocese.

Kovoor posted the announcement on his Facebook timeline with the brief statement: "THIS IS GOOD NEWS Please continue to Pray for the ministry entrusted to my care here at St Paul's Church Darien."

All parties have agreed to forego further litigation and disputes, the announcement said:

- Under the settlement agreement, St. Paul's Episcopal Church recovers control over the funds held in trust, and the former wardens and vestry members relinquish all claims to the property of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. The parties have withdrawn all of the pending matters, including the appeals. Further, the parties have mutually agreed not to sue each other in the future.
- The settlement recognizes that St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Darien continues as a Worshipping Community in ECCT. All accusations against the Rev. Canon George I. Kovoor have been withdrawn and his status as a priest in good standing in The Episcopal Church is unchallenged. The former Wardens and Vestry members have chosen to move forward as a separate Christian community, now referred to as New St. Paul's Church.

## **Full Text of the Announcement**

*This announcement [was published](#) Monday on the diocese website:*

On Dec. 10, 2019, the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (ECCT) settled three legal cases involving the former Wardens and Vestry members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Darien.

The settlement will result in a withdrawal of all pending litigation, bringing to a close a period in which the former Wardens and Vestry Members filed five different lawsuits against ECCT since 2005.

The most recent litigation began in late 2017 when the former wardens and vestry members refused to adhere to the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church with respect to church governance and attempted to remove their duly chosen rector, the Rev. Canon George I. Kovoor.

When Bishop Diocesan of ECCT, the Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas, chose to support Canon Kovoor and enforce the canons of The Episcopal Church, the former Wardens and Vestry members sued to have their rector removed.

Further, when the former wardens and vestry members refused to participate in church ordered reconciliation efforts, the ECCT Annual Convention unanimously changed the status of St. Paul's Episcopal Church putting it directly under the supervision, direction and control of the bishop in October 2018.

This occasioned a second lawsuit by the former Wardens and Vestry members seeking control of the church and its property. Both of these lawsuits were heard in state Superior Court in Stamford in late 2018 and early 2019 and were dismissed by the court in the spring of 2019. The former wardens and vestry members had appealed these decisions.

In a related action, in October 2018, ECCT and The Episcopal Church sued three former vestry members and wardens who served as trustees responsible for holding real estate for the benefit of St. Paul's. The trustees had sold the real estate in 2011 in violation of church canons.

This suit sought to secure the proceeds of the sale of the real estate to benefit St. Paul's Episcopal Church and prevent the trustees from using the monies for other purposes, including to pay lawyers pursuing lawsuits against ECCT.

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— Bishop Ian T. Douglas

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Commenting on the settlement, Bishop Douglas said:

“While this has been a long and trying legal process, I thank God that we have been able to reach a settlement that both maintains the Canons of The Episcopal Church, while offering a hand of reconciliation to those who have chosen to leave St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Darien.

“We are particularly indebted to the faithfulness and hard work of our legal team who have worked tirelessly on the Church’s behalf, Canon Kovoov who has been steadfast in support of ECCT at great cost to himself and his reputation, and the devoted congregation at St. Paul’s in Darien who have chosen to remain in The Episcopal Church.

“My prayer is that we all now move forward in God’s mission to restore and reconcile all people to unity with God and each other in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.”