

Dolan's adviser defends cemetery fund money transfer

Joshua J. McElwee | Jul. 11, 2013 NCR Today

A former adviser to now-Cardinal Timothy Dolan has written to defend the prelate's actions when he served as archbishop of Milwaukee, saying [the shifting of some \\$57 million](#) [1] from the archdiocese's treasury to a cemetery trust fund in 2007 was not an attempt to protect the money from lawsuits by sexual abuse survivors.

Instead, the head of the archdiocese's finance council wrote Thursday, the decision was made following the unanimous recommendation of the council in order to "preserve and maintain cemeteries as sacred places forever."

Shifting of the money has been a key point of discussion following the release July 1 of [thousands of pages](#) [2] of records from the Milwaukee diocese regarding its handling of cases of sexual abuse by clergy. Abuse survivors have alleged that the transfer of the funds was done to protect the money from lawsuits of victims and impending bankruptcy proceedings.

Dolan, who was Milwaukee's archbishop from 2002 to 2009 but now serves as the archbishop of New York and president of the U.S. bishops' conference, has repeatedly denied that claim. The Milwaukee archdiocese filed for bankruptcy in January 2011.

[In an opinion piece Thursday in the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*](#) [3], Mark Doll, who in 2007 was the chair of the archdiocesan finance council, said the transfer was a "reflection of now New York Cardinal Dolan's ongoing devotion to the Catholic faith and its teachings on the resurrection of the body.

The entire finance council, Doll writes, recommended that funds existing previous to 2007 be moved to a "new formal trust."

"Our committee made this recommendation to help ensure that the church honored the fundamental promise that all Catholic cemeteries make to our deceased loved ones and their families -- that the church will preserve and maintain cemeteries as sacred places forever," Doll continues.

Among the files released July 1 in the cache of Milwaukee documents was [a 2007 letter](#) [4] written by Dolan to the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith asking for permission to make the transfer.

"I foresee an improved protection of these funds from any legal claim and liability," Dolan wrote as reason for the move in that letter.

Doll says in his column that "it is impossible and wrong to not recognize the hurt and pain of abuse survivors and the evil done to them."

"It is understandable that there is a focus on the real suffering and legitimate hurt in cases such as this, but a fair and balanced look at the facts shows that for the cemeteries and the families of those buried there, the archdiocese did the right thing the right way for the right reasons," he continues.

"The families of those resting in the Catholic cemeteries should not become new victims in the cause of trying to fairly address abuse victims and help heal their pain."

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Links:

[1] <http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/milwaukee-documents-show-dolan-transferred-funds-protect-money>

[2] <http://ncronline.org/node/55176>

[3] <http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/cemetery-trust-created-for-the-right-reasons-b9949880z1-214990801.html>

[4] <http://www.archmil.org/reorg/clergy-offenders-info.htm>