

Rev. Jim VanderWeele

This message was sent to our members in our church newsletter. Minor alterations have been made for the benefit of a larger national audience.

My primary area of local involvement during this past year (among several such efforts) has been in building a support system for our new Inspector General. I was delighted to see this wish reach a transformational step for New Orleanians on the 27th of November when our council offered unanimous support to our new Inspector General, Robert Cerasoli, who had previously held this position in Boston.

In the middle of their annual Budget Hearing our City Council members shared their concerns about the poor reputation our city has developed regarding graft, bribery, and the taint of personal gain in our city's contracting procedures. And then, one after the other, they supported full funding for Robert Cerasoli's office and operations. (Our mayor offered \$1.3 million from a tax lien. The council offered \$3.3 million, taken from savings in other areas.) In my humble opinion this is a huge step in reconstituting our municipal approach to how we do municipal business in New Orleans and do so for the benefit of those who live in New Orleans.

One benefit of having an effective IG is the ability to investigate and uncover graft. But there is more. The power of subpoena and the IG's ability to pursue funds from point of dispersal to point of receipt (no matter the intermediary stops) are designed to eliminate any loss of funds (as are several of the other tools Cerasoli will bring to his office).

There are many ways that our local history of the *loss of appropriate and acceptable services* has led to a "fiscal and emotional stagnation" in our city. Many locals have reached the point where they do not expect anything from our government. Why? They believe the funds for our projects will lead to fatter pocketbooks for those who arrange these projects, and for their friends, and for the intermediaries who help to grease the way. As I have heard it said, way too often, "That is the way it is done around here."

In contrast, Cerasoli quotes Jim Bernazelli (leader of the local FBI) who has said, "It is time for us to realize that public service is about serving the public." Cerasoli continued by speaking of those who lack services, the poor in our society (including the homeless who live across the street from city hall), and how he intends to see to it that our government eliminates waste and shares the resulting gains with the public, especially those who need it the most.

On the evening of the 27th, after I had spent four and a half hours watching the lengthy process of a City Council Budget Hearing, I accepted the invitation of Common Good, the League of Women Voters, and One New Orleans to a Cerasoli address at Loyola University. Nunnemaker Hall was packed (close to 1000 people). An enthusiastic crowd welcomed Cerasoli to the dais and exploded in applause (many times) as he shared his opinions about the work he intends to do for us.

I was pleased to discover that Cerasoli was once a student of Cornel West at Harvard, whose guides for *effective* government include: 1) discernment, 2) human connection, 3) keeping track of human hypocrisy, and 4) hope. My hope, expressive of my concern for ethical practice, is that Cerasoli will be effective and productive during his tenure as our IG.

Anyone who is interested in hearing directly from him is welcome to attend our *Ethical Living in NOLA* session on the 5th

of December at 7:30pm. Bring a guest. Let's fill the room.