

ISN'T THAT SPECIAL

MAY 2007

"Hello, I'm the Church Lady, and this is "Church Chat". Well, it's almost Halloween, and what a delightful little holiday! Let's see, what do we do on this holiday, let's count it out: we dress up our children like witches and vampires; we put them out into the night like little candy prostitutes - "Look at me, Mommy, I'm a sugar slut in a Devil mask!" Speaking of all that is unholy, I'm delighted to welcome my first guest - she's a sweet little peach - our First-Lady and Senate candidate, please welcome Hillary Clinton."

Saturday Night Live 10/21/00

Where is the Church Lady when you need her? In case you missed her/him Dana Carvey used to play a holier than thou host of a fictional television show called Church Chat. The Church Lady was always quite pointed in her condemnation of her guest's behavior. I think the Church Lady would have a grand old time taking apart the dirt-bags that use God, bible verse, and the church to rope unsuspecting victims into their investment schemes. This type of affinity fraud seems to be becoming more and more prevalent according to me just by the volume of stories that cross my desk every week. These guys are master salesmen that know exactly how to push their marks into turning over their assets.

Apparently, Rosemary's Baby is all grown up.

Michael Zeditz claimed he could use the power of prayer to deliver triple-digit returns to investors, pleaded guilty to four felonies and was sentenced to 36 months in federal prison and pay restitution to the victims according to *Arkansas Business*. Zeditz told investors that he developed he could double to triple their money with some divinely inspired software he developed. He also told investors that he would begin each trading day by kneeling before his computer, placing his hands on it and praying for divine guidance in his trading activities. Who thinks his victims will get any restitution?¹

Who could it be, I just don't know. Could it be...Satan??

A Bradenton investment broker who solicited his clientele through his church social circles is under criminal investigation for allegedly selling millions in phony investments, according to Todd Ruger of the *Sarasota Herald Tribune*. Michael Traynor used members of the Bradenton Christian Retreat Church and Bradenton Christian School as a lead source for his investment schemes. Investors now say they cannot get their money back.²

According to the Tribune at least 10 investors filed complaints with state regulators and many had "unfruitful" meetings with Traynor. Retired Baptist Pastor Berkley Helms recounts, ***"I took his hand and said, the first thing I want to do is pray with you. He said I'm going to work it so you get your funds."***²

In my experience, Pastor Helms is going to be disappointed. Michael Traynor is currently under investigation by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement along with his 27 year old son who was involved in his scam. Traynor sold fake investments called "Freedom Bond Accounts" through a brokerage firm called InterSecurities (ISI) and was actually the firm's branch manager. According to the *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, losses are in the millions, and an attorney for one of the victims is fearful the Traynors are going to disappear into thin air like many other con-artists. Another one of the victims stated, ***"He sold himself as a trustworthy guy, a churchgoing guy***

who was sincerely trying to help you. He wronged a tremendous amount of people. He needs to pay the piper.”²

You can't keep a bold criminal down! Frightening stuff here, after being fired from ISI, Traynor registered several companies with the state: Lifetime Advisors Group, Strategic Planning Concepts, National Institute of Professional College Advisors, and National Association of Professional College Advisors. Famous last words...***“Mike was always a nice guy, very friendly, we never had any trouble with him. We wanted to help out a guy from my church.”²***

Just when you think your story's over, you pop up again, just like some nasty bacterial fungus you get at a gas station bathroom.

Gary McNaughton got a job working as a youth ministry assistant at Church of the Open Door in Elyria, OH in 1996. According to the *Chronicle-Telegram* that is when he started using his position at the church as a “catapult of sorts” for a phony investment scheme that bilked investors of millions. McNaughton promised “high returns”, to investors in “safe investments.” Instead he took their money and used it to fund a posh lifestyle, which included two six figure motor homes, real estate and five other automobiles. McNaughton ran a classic ponzi scheme; using new investors to pay dividends to old. In an interview with *Chronicle-Telegram* McNaughton said he expected investors to get their money back because ***“God is in control.”*** Of course to this date, none of the investors have gotten their money back.³

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I go on, but I think and hope you get the picture. Several weeks ago on the radio show I was highly critical of individuals and entities that advertise and market themselves through the church. My own church weekly bulletin, the entire back page is a collage of businesses advertising their services or wares. I understand that the church needs to raise money to survive, but in my opinion this type of revenue generator is a slippery slope. (There was actually a pretty funny *Simpson's* episode where Mr. Burns buys the church and uses it as a glorified billboard.)

In my humble opinion, if you want to donate money to a church, do so without the strings attached. It also makes me very uncomfortable when any business uses God, Bible-verse or the church to sell their products or services. Being able to cite Bible-verse is commendable; yet it does not make one a good investment advisor, accountant, or plumber anymore than the ability to recall the atomic weight of ruthenium makes one a chemist. In fact it does not make one pious either. It is my belief that **Piety, Decency, Integrity and Honor**, are demonstrated through ones actions not words.

1. [Securities Fraud Nets Benton County Man 36 Months in Prison](#) *Arkansas Business* Gwen Moritz 5/18/07
2. [Broker Accused of \\$7 Million in Fraud](#) *Herald Tribune* Todd Ruger
3. [Former Church Worker Pleads](#) *Chronicle Telegram* Shawn Foucher