



# The Saint Joseph Foundation

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Charles M. Wilson  
Chairman

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Dear Steve:

Confirming our exchange of emails, I enclose my statement regarding Mother Angelica's retirement as CEO of EWTN, her continued involvement in the affairs of the network and the role of its Board of Governors and management. I would be grateful for your assistance in making the contents of that statement and this letter known to those who may have read your post of March 29<sup>th</sup>, *Mother Angelica's Legacy: Speaking Christ's Truth to Power*.

The enclosed statement consists of a review of the facts and the conclusions that I drew from them. In this letter I will touch upon some related issues, especially the supporting evidence. Before doing this, I want to make it clear that I have no authority whatsoever to speak for EWTN. The views that I express here are strictly my own and I neither asked for nor received permission from EWTN to publish them here.

Much of the evidence is the property of EWTN. Other records are in the files of the Saint Joseph Foundation; but they cannot be released without the express, written permission of the client. Moreover, I have a moral obligation to hold in confidence certain other facts, which I would otherwise be at liberty to disclose.

Nevertheless, there remains some important and usable evidence that was made public in 2003. Please allow me to explain. One of the amendments to the EWTN by-laws that was approved Board of Governors at the special meeting held on St. Patrick's Day in 2000 was the elimination of ex-officio members. In addition to Mother Angelica and the mother vicar, this included the bishop of Birmingham, Most Rev. David Foley, who was present at the meeting and opposed Mother's retirement. When the amendment became effective, he was no longer a member of the board. Three years later, Bishop Foley's judicial vicar, Very Rev. Gregory T. Bittner, J.C.L., J.D., presented the bishop's side of the case to the 2003 Annual Convention of the Canon Law Society of America and it was published in the society's periodical, *Proceedings*. A copy is enclosed with this letter. The periodical can be purchased from the CLSA and copies are available in the libraries of many law schools and other institutions of higher learning. This evidence, though not widely circulated, is available to anyone willing to take the time to find it.

Fr. Bittner confirmed what was common knowledge at the time; i.e., from the early days of EWTN's existence, the U.S. bishops wanted to take over the network or at least exercise more control over its

programming. The key question was this: Was EWTN an apostolate of the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration or, as Mother Angelica claimed, her personal apostolate? On St. Patrick's Day in 2000, this was an open question and Mother decided to take preemptive action. I believe that she had good reason to do so and she was supported by Deacon Steltemeier and the lay members of the Board of Governors. I also believe that they acted wisely. Had they not done so, a decision by the Holy See in favor of Bishop Foley's position — which was a real possibility — would have placed the network under the control to the American bishops. And there is another reality that we need to take into account. A month after the meeting, Mother celebrated her seventy-seventh birthday. If she had remained as CEO, even with a favorable decision from Rome, the length of her tenure was uncertain. Had her stroke in 2001 proved fatal, there could have been complications.

My final point is to acknowledge that your post included excerpts from EWTN: A Network Gone Wrong by Christopher A. Ferrara, published in 2006. I have worked with Chris on several cases of mutual interest and have a high regard for him, however much I might disagree with some of the conclusions he proposes in his book. I am not going to comment further on his opinions about EWTN for these reasons: (1) EWTN is what it is and I am not sure that its present state is the same as it was in 2006. (2) My observations here concern only the circumstances and immediate aftermath of Mother's retirement. (3) People are free to say whatever they will about EWTN and its programming. Any questions or criticisms they may have are best directed to the network's Viewer Services Department.

There is one thing about which we can all agree. The situation in the Church has deteriorated since 2006. Serious, faithful, orthodox, traditional — or whatever adjective you choose — Catholics need to put our differences aside and support each other. Internecine warfare is a luxury that we simply cannot afford. I have no intention of precipitating another skirmish; my only purpose is to present another point of view. If some continue to believe that Mother Angelica was forced to retire against her will and that her successors took the network down a path other than the one taken by her, so be it.

Thank you very much for your consideration in this matter. With assurance of my prayers and best wishes, I am

Sincerely,



Charles M. Wilson

## **EWTN and Mother Angelica**

By Charles M. Wilson

At about 6:00 PM on Easter Sunday, the telephone rang and my wife answered. She told me that Michael Warsaw, Chairman and CEO of EWTN, was on the line and handed me the telephone. I guessed that his call could be about just one thing, which he confirmed a few seconds later. The news of Mother Angelica's passing was sad but not unexpected and I was very sorry that I was unable to accept his gracious invitation to attend her funeral.

There has already been a flood of moving and eloquent tributes to Mother and I cannot find the words to add to them. Suffice it to say that I hope and pray that she will one day be raised to the altars of the Church she so dearly loved and served with such steadfast and heroic devotion.

In the aftermath of Mother's death, besides the many tributes, I was saddened to see some statements about her relationship with EWTN. Here is an example:

*For it was precisely Mother's "enemies within the Church" who had gained the victory by driving her from her position of control over EWTN, leaving the network entirely in the hands of lay people, many of them ex-Protestants, who did not have her traditional pre-Vatican II spiritual formation and old fashioned Catholic militancy. The nun [Raymond] Arroyo calls "the undisputed matriarch of Catholic communications" had been neutralized.*

This statement was first made public about ten years ago, when I was a member of the EWTN Board of Governors. Management decided not to make a public response, which I believe was the right move at the time. Now that I have retired as an officer and Governor of the network, to see justice done and in respect for the memory of Mother Angelica, I am obliged to set the record straight by stating my firm conviction that **Mother's decision to resign as CEO of the network was her own, freely made and supported by good reasons. She was not forced into exile; afterward, she continued to appear on EWTN and exercised considerable influence over the affairs of the network for as long as she was able to do so.**

Much of the evidence that could be produced to support my claim is and must remain confidential. Be that as it may, some facts have become public — albeit not widely known — and it is upon them that I base my argument. I will address only three subjects; (1) whether Mother's decision was truly her own, (2) whether she was really neutralized and (3) what I believe are unintentional mischaracterizations of the EWTN Board of Governors and management.

It is well known that a special meeting of the EWTN Board of Governors was held on Saint Patrick's Day in 2000. On the agenda were resolutions to accept Mother's resignation as CEO and amend the corporate by-laws to eliminate ex-officio memberships and rescind her reserved power to veto any action of the Board. I was not on the Board then but was present on the telephone as spokesman for the Saint Joseph Foundation, which prepared the canonical arguments supporting Mother's reasons for her decision. Also present with me were our consulting canonist and one other member of the Foundation's staff. Even if I was free to disclose details of the meeting, I do not think it wise to do so here out of respect for the privacy of the participants, especially those who have died since, and a desire to avoid reopening old wounds that have long since healed; but I can say that no one who heard her words on that occasion could have had the slightest doubt that Mother's decision was made freely and personally, however much they might have disagreed with the prudence or timeliness of her action. In the end, the Board approved the resolutions by a lopsided majority. She surely spoke Christ's truth to power on that morning.

A few weeks after the meeting, Mother Angelica invited me to join the EWTN Board of Governors, on which it was my honor and privilege to serve until I retired in 2014. Speaking only for myself, I am obliged to challenge the mischaracterization of the Board as consisting only of lay people, many of them ex-Protestants. The EWTN Board has always included men who are in holy orders, including her immediate successor, Deacon William Steltemeier (R.I.P.). According to the network's non-profit tax return for 2014, one priest, a diocesan bishop and two archbishops were members. Furthermore, at the

time of the 2000 meeting, those lay members of the Board were personal friends of Mother Angelica who had been appointed by her. I find it inconceivable that they would have cooperated with an effort to neutralize her and the proceedings of the meeting prove it.

I believe I am accurate in saying that no one could attain or retain membership without Mother's approval. This practice continued after her retirement and only ended after her physical condition made it impossible. As one ex-Protestant who was personally and directly involved, I am convinced that the Board and the network's management have always done their utmost to uphold Mother's vision. Even if it turns out that in spite of their best efforts they did not always succeed, their good intentions are beyond question.

In the interests of clarification, the EWTN Board of Governors functions in much the same way as do boards of other non-profit corporations that are large enough to have full time, professional management. Our role was to govern but not manage. Those members who were not paid employees had their own businesses, professions or apostolates and most of them did not live in the Birmingham area. We could not involve ourselves in the day to day management of the network and did not participate in decisions regarding such things as programming, personnel, fund raising or technology. These subjects were part of the reports given by members of management at the annual general meeting and our questions and comments were welcome. We entrusted management with the execution of the policies we put in place. In over fourteen years, I never saw the slightest indication that our trust was misplaced.

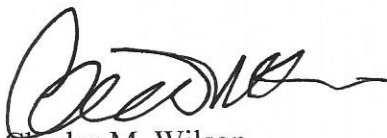
I should also say that I am acquainted with and respect the work of some of those who have made and support the conclusions that I have discussed here. I believe they acted in good faith and share many of their views concerning the crisis in the Church. I now invite them to reconsider their positions on the three matters at issue here. If they continue to maintain that EWTN has strayed from its original mission or have opinions about the programming offered by EWTN, I suggest that they make their views known to the network.

EWTN  
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Finally, I recall what I heard Mother Angelica say on St. Patrick's Day sixteen years ago: "I will watch over this network after I retire and I will watch over it after I'm dead." We can thank God that she kept the first part of her promise and now continues to keep the second.

Reverend Mother, pray for us.

Respectfully,



Charles M. Wilson