

Richmond Confidential

Evicted pastor joined by police chief, county supervisor in denouncing bank, asking for support



Sydney Keys addresses the crowd at a press conference, with his wife Patrice Keys (center), his mother (lower left) and Councilmember Corky Booze (upper left).

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Pastor Sydney Keys of the recently evicted Bible Way Community Church in Richmond joined community leaders Tuesday to denounce the church's mortgage holder, Torrey Pines Bank, for foreclosing on the church last week, and asked the community for financial support.

Councilmember Corky Booze, Congressman George Miller of the 7th District of California, Richmond Chief of Police Chris Magnus, County Supervisor John Gioia as well as representatives of Mayor Gayle McLaughlin and Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner also spoke in support of the church.

“What church is next? What institution is next? What business is next?” Keys asked. To Torrey Pines Bank, he added, “We’re calling you out.”

[Keys was arrested by Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department deputies](#) — along with his wife, mother and two activists — last Thursday after a [two day sit-in protesting the eviction](#). They were released early Friday morning from the county jail in Martinez.

When the church fell behind on its \$6,800 per month mortgage payment, church leaders requested a modification to the loan, but Keys said the bank was unwilling to work with them. Since the first eviction notice a week prior to the sit-in, Keys, his wife Patrice, and his mother, known as “Mamma Keys,” have been speaking out about what they call predatory loan practices, and have alleged that their signatures were forged on several loan documents.

In a press release issued last week, Torrey Pines Bank denied any allegations of wrongdoing and stated that the bank had given Pastor Keys over a year to pay the loan. “[Torrey Pines] understands and regrets the disappointment of those who have been affected by this situation. However, any suggestion that the Bank acted improperly or illegally in any way is simply untrue,” stated the press release.

Bank spokespeople did not return requests for comment on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, a chain was wrapped around Bible Way’s ivory gates, and the locks to all of the doors had been changed. While its pastor addressed reporters, TV cameras and members of the community from the sidewalk outside the gates, a private security guard that church members said was hired by Torrey Pines circled the property from inside.

“I’ll go [to jail] right now,” said Mamma Keys when she took the podium. “I’ll go again. It’s all right, I’ll sleep on the ground. I feel good. I feel like going on.” With her last words, a line from a hymn, a voice from across the street began to sing the rest of the song. Mamma Keys soon joined in, as did the crowd behind her.

Congressman Miller also spoke at the press conference, expressing outrage that a community fixture could be evicted despite numerous pleas from both the pastor and city officials to work with the church to find a solution. He called the closing of the church “arbitrary” and “capricious.” But Miller also said he knew who would win this fight. “I am no bookie, but we’re going to bet on Mother Keys against Torrey Pines Bank,” he said, as Mamma Keys laughed behind him.

Keys said that he spoke to the Reverend Jessie Jackson Tuesday morning and had received advice on how best to organize and raise awareness of the church’s situation. He also said that he had approached the Contra Costa County District Attorney with allegations of wrongdoing on the part of the bank, although so far without result.

Richmond Councilmember Corky Booze said that while he and Keys were discussing alternatives to foreclosure with a representative from the bank a week before the eviction, he was assured that the bank would be willing to wait on executing the eviction. However, he said that during the meeting a sheriff’s deputy was posting the eviction notice on the doors of the church.

During the press conference, Booze said he had spoken with Congressman Miller and they were planning to host another meeting with representatives from the bank. Representatives from the mayor’s office and Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner said their respective bosses would also participate in the meeting, although a date has not been set yet.

Keys ended the press conference with a final plea for financial support from anyone who could afford to help, and a hat was passed around the crowd to take donations. “I want to say to Torrey Pines Bank, you have my number,” Keys said. “Call me up. Let’s sit down, let’s make good on this loan. I am looking for your call.”

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