

Fisherman finds letters sent to God

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NEWARK, N.J. (RNS)—A fisherman who found a bag of 300 letters to God floating in the ocean off Atlantic City will give most of them to the daughter of the dead minister for whom they were intended.

Bill Lacovara, an insurance adjuster, said he plans to give the letters to Vanessa Cooper, the daughter of Grady Cooper, a former associate pastor of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Jersey City who died nearly two years ago.

Lacovara found the letters in a shopping bag in the surf under a pier in October. About 150 of the letters were too damaged by the water to be legible. He placed the remaining ones up for auction on eBay but canceled the auction after more than 25 people pushed the price past \$550.

Lacovara and his family have received many hostile letters and phone calls from people upset that the letters were put up for auction, but he said it never was his intention to profit from them.

"I apologize to anyone who was insulted," he said. "It was never my intention to offend anyone. I was looking at these more like antiques."

Lacovara said he heard from individuals and churches across the country who were interested in obtaining the letters so their own congregations could pray over them.

Many of the letters were addressed to Cooper, but many more simply said "Altar." According to the text of several of the letters, they were intended to be placed on a church's altar and prayed over by the minister, the congregation or both.

It's still not clear how the letters, some dating to 1973 and most unopened, ended up in the ocean. Lacovara speculated that someone cleaning out Cooper's former home found the letters and, instead of tossing them in the garbage, set them out to sea as a sort of final tribute to the authors.

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