

## **St. George's Church Vestry Meeting Minutes**

**April 15, 2021**

Present: Sean Albert, Carol Gaige, Meg Hughes, Sandee Hughes, David Kennison, Debbie Lambeth, Lynn Paska, Paul Smigelski, Fr. Matt Stromberg, Rich Unger, Jeff Wengrovius

Absent (excused): Jon Ewbank

Vestry convened via Zoom at 7:05 p.m., as Father opened the meeting with a prayer. Rich Unger moved to accept the March minutes, and Sandee Hughes seconded. All voted in favor.

### **Rector's Report**

Father Matt reported on these activities:

- Celtic Mass will be held at 6 p.m. Sundays, April 18 through May 23 in the Memorial Garden, weather permitting. This will entail Celtic music with neighbor/member musicians participating. A different Celtic saint will be the basis of the sermon topic each week.
- April 25 we will celebrate Saint George's Day with representation from the Saint Andrew's Society.
- Ascension Day will be celebrated with a Mass on Thursday, May 13, at 7 p.m.
- Pentecost Sunday is on May 23 and Piper, the baby daughter of Nathaniel and Angela (new congregants) will be baptized. The couple also plan to be married in the church this fall.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Jeff Wengrovius reported that with less than a third of the year behind us, we have already received almost 50 percent of anticipated pledge income. Loose plate income is also ahead of budget thanks to generous Holy Week giving. Unfortunately, we are also ahead of expectations in terms of spending (even if not counting the large unbudgeted expense for the Great Hall boiler). Utility expenses are running high, particularly for electricity. Water and sewer bills have been paid for the entire year.

The new boiler is fully installed and paid for with money from our endowment. Our roofs have been inspected and minor repairs made to the Great Hall roof. We paid for the bulk of that job but still have an estimated outlay of about \$745 for slate work still pending.

Jeff informed Vestry of another costly repair needed to stem a significant leak originating in the boy's bathroom on the second floor of the Great Hall. The current estimate is about \$6,500. We have enough building maintenance money in the budget, although it will wipe out that budget line for the year. (Note: That estimate does not include rebuilding a wall in the first floor men's room that will have to be torn up to access the pipes, so there will be an additional cost for that.)

Total YTD expenses are over budget by about \$8,000. Jeff anticipates that we will need to take additional money from endowment principal in 2021. He expressed fears that our endowment funds are shrinking and believes we need to get serious about generating new income.

Sean Albert commented that this may be the impetus we need to institute some of the outreach efforts (mailings, calls, etc.) that we talked about earlier this year. Father believes that we should be focusing on attracting new members, not trying to regain former churchgoers. We are beginning to see an increase of attendance as people are gaining immunity from Covid-19. Father agreed that maybe it would be helpful to send out postcards to some potentially lapsed church-goers announcing St. George's Day.

## **Senior Warden's Report**

### *New Website*

David Kennison had high praise for the outstanding job Jon Pearson has done to upgrade our website. He also thanked all who helped by reviewing and offering suggestions for improvement, particularly Lynn Paska, Sandee Hughes, and Sean Albert.

The new site is more user-friendly and ready to go live. It will always need ongoing work and frequent updates, however. David encouraged the website reviewers to stay together as a committee to keep an eye on the site and back up Jon in his work.

Father would like to add a bit more “welcome to St. George’s” text. He believes the latest iteration is a bit choppy. Another area for improvement lies in the photography. David commented that we need to get more people pictures with the people smiling. Sandee noted that photos need to be in a “landscape” format to adapt well to the web platform.

Another improvement that Vestry agreed upon will be the elimination of the Google calendar, as long as Mass times and upcoming events are featured prominently elsewhere.

### *Livestreaming Issues*

Audio and video glitches have been mostly resolved. Attempting to stream to both Facebook and YouTube simultaneously was found to be an issue, as they have different technical requirements, which often conflict with each other. We standardized on streaming solely to YouTube, as most other churches have. That fixed most of the problems, but there is still some tweaking to do, including going to full HD resolution of 1080p, not 720p as currently. We also need to determine optimal microphone levels.

### *Former Sextons*

David is working with Matt Lyman of Ideal Legal Services to evict Sondra and Jeremy Kravetz. They were served with a Notice of Non-Renewal of Tenancy on March 31, and we are now in a 90-day waiting period which ends June 30. If they leave during this period the eviction process will end. If they don’t leave, we will petition the court for a hearing date and be represented by an attorney provided by Ideal Legal Services. The Kravetzes could contest the eviction, but assuming we prevail in the hearing, the Sheriff’s Department will handle eviction. Total cost to St. George’s will be about \$610.

David still wants to meet with Sondra and Jeremy to deliver a letter that will formally clarify:

- The correct dates of their employment termination.
- Their violation of Lease Agreement terms resulting from the failure to vacate the apartment.
- The fact that we have not received rent nor recompense of any expenses from December 1 onwards.

- The rescinding of any previous offers of a month's rent and security deposit meant to assist them in their transition to a new apartment.
- Immediate cancellation of cell phone and laundry privileges.

Sondra has delayed meeting with David pending a consultation with the Department of Social Services. He will reach out to her once more tomorrow and will attempt to recover her (church-provided) cell phone and key to the laundry room.

### **Junior Warden's Report**

Jon Ewbank was unable to attend. Jeff noted that a faucet in the Great Hall that was leaking hot water has been replaced. Sean asked whether we should undertake a National Grid audit of our buildings to see if there are opportunities to save energy. We already have energy-saving lighting in the church but there are undoubtedly other areas where we can upgrade to save money.

### **Community Liaison Report**

Rich Unger listed the following upcoming summer activities in the Stockade:

- Neighborhood sidewalk sale - June 5
- Stockade neighborhood picnic (Riverside Park) - July 24
- Stockade Garden Tour - August 7
- Stockade Art Show - September 11 (20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11). (Note: Perhaps the church can host some sort of musical event to memorialize that solemn date.)

### **Fundraising Committee**

N/A

### **Garden Ministry and Book Club**

Meg Hughes had requested that the church purchase six euonymus bushes and mulch at an expected cost of about \$350 to beautify the back of Great Hall where it borders Green Street. This money is in the budget so Vestry had no objection. Meg will work with Bob McCloskey to obtain the materials.

Meg asked Vestry to consider the dangerous condition of the sidewalk on Green Street. We are legally responsible for maintaining that public way, and it currently poses a tripping hazard. George Soltysiak has painted the jutting edges of the

sidewalk slabs to caution pedestrians, but this could potentially work against us if someone is injured, i.e., they could say that the paint indicated that we were fully aware of the problem.

The buckled-up cement is a result of tree roots. At least one of the trees is fully dead and the City has failed to remove it. We could cut down one or more trees but would need a permit to remove them, along with a plan for replacing them and restoring the sidewalk. Rich Unger has good knowledge of the problem and will attempt to obtain guidance from the City without committing the church to any particular course of action just yet.

Our parking lot is also in bad shape. Jeff noted that Bob McCloskey has obtained a quote of \$48,000 to repave the lot, but that number may not reflect the full scope of work needed to do the job correctly. In 2009 we had a quote that was much higher and took into account the fact that there are old home foundations and bulldozed fill underneath, which is now decaying and settling and causing the uneven surface.

Sean commented that there is a length of rebar sticking up from the lot's southern perimeter. David believes he can fix it with a sledgehammer.

Next, Vestry considered a request by our sexton George Soltysiak. He wishes to plant a modest (perhaps 8' x 18') vegetable garden in the southeast quadrant of the Memorial Garden. Garden Ministry members have already worked with George to select an appropriate site and warned of potential issues he may have with rabbits, skunks, woodchucks, and other native fauna. The garden will not interfere with any church activities nor any current plantings. Vestry approved the notion as long as George bears the expense and work of the garden.

Debbie Lambeth inquired as to George's arrangement with the church. Vestry was informed that we pay him \$15 an hour for up to 30 hours a week. He is responsible for cleaning the offices and church, shoveling snow, taking care of the grass, plus other miscellaneous maintenance tasks that arise. Garden Ministry may rely on his help as long as it doesn't take him away from his regular duties or cause him to exceed his 30 hours.

Painting of the shed will take place when the weather warms. The current plan is to pressure-wash it and allow plenty of time to dry before painting. Meg will work with Bob McCloskey on the project.

## **All on the Same Page**

The book club will discuss "Island at the Center of the World" by Russell Shorto this Sunday, April 18, via the Zoom coffee hour. On June 20 the club will address "The Vanishing Half," by Brit Bennett.

## **Hospitality Committee**

Sandee Hughes will take an inventory of paper goods in the Great Hall. We are waiting for direction from the Standing Committee on restoring in-person coffee hour.

## **Communications**

Lynn Paska advises that pictures are now up on the website of Lenten and Easter activities. The deadline for the summer *Georgian Report* is Tuesday, June 1.

## **Old Business**

### *Education Endowment Spending*

As Jon Pearson reported at our last meeting, there is about \$7K unspent interest in the 250th Anniversary Education Endowment Fund. The money has been accumulating for several years and Vestry is obliged to spend it.

Meg proposed a motion that Vestry renew efforts to disburse the Education Fund by switching the focus from individual student grants to the support of one or more educational programs that St. George's can host to benefit all in the parish and perhaps others in the community.

Jeff will consult with Jon Pearson to assure that this is within the rules governing the restricted endowment. Father would like to see some of the money left available to pay for youth to attend Beaver Cross summer camp.

### *SICM Financial Donation Proposal*

Sean Albert moved that St. George's donate \$2,400 to Schenectady Inner City Mission (SICM) to support them in addressing food insecurity. Sean will reach out to SICM to assess how they will use the financial support, and report back to Vestry. The money will come out of our restricted "Mission" endowment fund. Meg seconded the motion. All were in favor.

### *Dishwasher Installation*

We have a paid-for dishwasher awaiting installation. Vestry would like to see the work handled in anticipation of the day when we are once again able to assemble for meetings and celebrations.

**Meeting adjournment**

There being no objections, the meeting was adjourned at 9 p.m. The next regular Vestry meeting will be at 7 p.m. May 20.

Respectfully submitted,  
Meg Hughes, Vestry Clerk