

St. George's Church Vestry Meeting Minutes

March 18, 2021

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

Guest: Jon Pearson

Vestry convened via Zoom at 7:04 p.m., as Father opened the meeting with a prayer. He then turned the meeting over to Jon Pearson for reports on our endowment funds and new website.

For the benefit of new Vestry members, Jon supplied basic details on our endowment funds. There are two types, both held in brokerage accounts:

- General – No spending restrictions. We try to avoid spending the principal and use the income as needed to support our budget. In 2019 we were even able to roll over the earnings untouched.
- Special/Restricted – The earnings from these funds may be spent only on specified needs (e.g., building repairs, education, our music program), per bequests made by past Georgians. Vestry was supplied with a printout describing these restrictions.

We are constrained to be prudent in our spending of endowment income but it is also true that if we do not spend these funds at all, we are not adhering to the wishes of those who left the church the money. Jon highlighted a few specific funds that have built up untapped and should now be a focus for Vestry:

- Education: This fund was launched with \$30,000 upon the occasion of St. George's 250th anniversary, and in the past was used for student scholarships. We have not spent out of the fund in a few years, however. At the end of 2020 it contained \$78,589 of principal and \$6,999 of unspent income. It is up to Vestry as to how we spend these earnings, as long as it goes for education purposes. It does not necessarily need to be for school tuition support.

- Mission: At the close of 2020 we had principal of \$187,387 including \$13,436 of unspent income in this fund. We should be using the money to support worthy missionary efforts, whether local, national, or worldwide.
- Whittingham Howe: The Howe Lecture Series was endowed by Harry Whittingham (former president of Trustco Bank) and his wife Gladys. Its primary objective is to pay for adult education events, but alternatively it can be spent on anything proposed by the Rector and approved by three-quarters of Vestry. Current principal is \$198,211 with \$8,837 unspent income at the end of 2020.

Website Development

Several weeks ago, David Kennison asked Jon to assume responsibility for our new website being created by Groupiehead, a process begun by Sue Hartz more than a year ago. Jon has long been the church's web manager, using a simple application known as Adobe Dreamweaver. Adobe charges a \$500 annual subscription fee to access and maintain the most up-to-date version of the Dreamweaver software, and for several years, Jon has been thinking about switching to WordPress instead. It is a simple web-building tool that is widely used by not-for-profits. Groupiehead will host the new site for \$300 per year and their fee includes no-cost use of WordPress. Our current site is hosted by Hostway, and we will need to continue a relationship with Hostway to retain our domain name and email setup. Overall, the above-described modifications are expected to result in an increase of about \$200 per year for web support.

We will be able to flip the switch to the new site very shortly, but first we want to import a little more content from the old site and develop a new welcome page. David and Jon will be working with Jon, Sean Albert, and Lynn Paska to put some finishing touches on the site. We want the launch to be as flawless as it can be, although we understand it will always need ongoing attention.

Resumption of Regular Meeting

Jon was thanked for his informative presentation, and released from the meeting. Jeff Wengrovius then moved to accept the February minutes. Carol Gaige seconded, and all approved.

Rector's Report

Father Matt reported on a variety of current events:

- Our Sunday evening Lenten study on *The Way of Julian* has seen good participation and spirited discussions.

- The success of our outdoor Stations of the Cross has been thwarted by low attendance and suboptimal weather (sleet and wind). The stations also kept falling off the fence. Our support workers George and Tommy refitted them with eyehooks and zip ties so they should be safe now. Also, now that we are on Daylight Saving Time it will be brighter at 7 p.m. when the ceremonies begin.
- George Soltysiak is meeting with Father for catechism lessons and will be baptized on Easter Saturday. He recently was given a calligraphy copy of the Lord's Prayer created by Sandee Hughes, and will also receive the Apostle's Creed and books that explain these tenets of our faith.
- Certain Holy Week rituals will be slightly curtailed due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic:
 - Palm Sunday ordinarily includes a procession from the Great Hall but that will not occur this year, partially because of fewer attendees/servers, but also because livestreaming equipment is based in the church, i.e., not mobile.
 - On Maundy Thursday, no foot-washing ceremony will be held. The stripping of the altar will still be a feature of that solemn evening.
 - Our Passion Watch will continue only until 10 p.m. as with last year.
 - Our usual Good Friday noontime service will go ahead, but veneration of the cross will be touchless.
 - Easter Vigil ordinarily entails the lighting of the Paschal flame out in front of the church, but that cannot be livestreamed so may be modified somehow.
 - Kevin Decker has agreed to decorate our sanctuary for Easter. Last year it was resplendent with forsythia harvested from our gardens but the season is not as advanced this year so he will likely get creative with other floral arrangements.
- St. George's day is April 23. It is unlikely that we will be marching around the Stockade and we certainly will not be able to host a buffet luncheon. We may still get a bagpiper from the St. Andrew's Society to help mark our patronal festival in some meaningful way.
- Dr. Brian Taylor has proposed offering outdoor services on Sunday evenings during Eastertide to accommodate our parishioners who are considering coming back to church but not quite ready to go indoors. There is a suitable

Celtic Mass setting that can be performed on the portable keyboard, and homilies could focus on the Celtic saints.

- Father had circulated an updated Parochial Report for Vestry's approval. Jeff is pleased to note that we are being more transparent on our income and membership figures than we have in previous years. He noted two minor things that still need fixing. The answer to question #21 "Did the church apply for a PPP loan?" should be yes. Under expenses, we double-counted a \$1,350 expenditure for outreach (page 4, lines 10 and 18). Jeff will work with Bob McCloskey to finalize the report. He moved that Vestry approve the document pending the two changes noted above. Rich seconded the motion and all approved. It will be filed electronically tomorrow.

Treasurer's Report

Jeff Wengrovius noted that pledge giving remains strong, as driven by numerous lump-sum annual contributions early in the year. Loose plate contributions are off, but we should not be concerned, as it is reasonable to assume that we will see a boost in that form of giving once Covid fears loosen, and out-of-town visitors begin venturing into our church more freely.

Jeff had provided Vestry with a new Excel spreadsheet that he is now using to track 2021 income and expenses. This document features a consolidation of accounting lines, shows rolling monthly income and expense numbers, and is much easier to read than the reports previously used. Jeff highlighted interesting items in red and urged Vestry to review the document. He is happy with the new format and would like to go over it with Vestry in greater detail on another occasion.

As a segue to the Senior Warden's report, Jeff noted that we have been waiting for warmer weather to have the new Great Hall boiler installed. It looks like we will be blessed with favorable conditions within the next few days.

Jeff also touched upon unbudgeted video ministry expenses. These have been reviewed with David, who will address some lingering performance issues that are not expected to result in further expenditures. Details provided below.

Senior Warden's Report

David Kennison commented on mediocre video reception of services he recently experienced while watching at home. He noticed that St. George's was broadcasting with a stream resolution of 720p, whereas the Cathedral was able to muster 1080p, with far better picture quality. The dip in resolution on YouTube dates to December 20, according to Paul Smigelski. David will discuss this issue with Sound Solutions. Perhaps there is a simple setting that needs to be changed to enable us to stream at a higher resolution, using the bandwidth available to us.

Vestry members generally concur that the audio portion of our services is bad, too. The cantor is scarcely audible. Cantors may be being heard clearly within the sanctuary, but for the benefit of folks at home they need to be wearing wireless mics.

Sean Albert chipped in another concern regarding the hyperlink from the website and Father's emails. It is not clickable. Users must copy and paste it into their browser to be connected to livestreamed services. This shortcoming should be remedied once we switch over to the new site. The link will be more prominently placed and should take the user directly to the YouTube video when clicked.

We should proceed promptly to solve all shortcomings in video and audio transmission, and improve access to the livestreaming link, so as not to discourage potential users.

Former Sextons

David has reviewed the documents previously presented to the Kravetzes regarding the need to vacate their apartment and has determined that these entreaties are not legally enforceable. He has consulted a lawyer, the Schenectady Civil Court, and an eviction company. The court docket for evictions is currently backlogged into May/June. According to Ideal Legal Services, we may have recourse to a 10-day eviction path (for cause) with the alternative being a three-month path (for non-payment). David has tried to engage Ideal Legal Services further, but they have not been answering his inquiries.

On March 1, David and Rich Unger went ahead with the rekeying of perimeter locks at the church, Cranmer Hall, and all doors of the Great Hall except one (the patio door, which remains the Kravetzes' sole means of access). New keys were distributed as appropriate. David spoke informally face-to-face with Sondra about the new keys and advised her that we will proceed with a legal eviction if we must. She inquired if it would be possible to store her possessions at St. George's

for an unspecified period, should she be unable to secure an apartment. Father Matt said that she had approached him with that same question. It seems like a relatively harmless request but one that would unduly prolong the relationship, therefore probably not advisable. All agree that David should be the sole point of contact for any interactions with our former sextons. If they ask any of us for help or advice, we should refer them back to David.

Junior Warden's Report

N/A

Community Liaison Report

Rich Unger asked about the status of Father Matt's garage door opener as he had noticed the door left ajar recently. The opener is indeed scarcely functional, but that is probably not the reason the door was left open. According to Father, a repair crew had to go through the garage recently to fix a stone wall that had collapsed from the property next door into the Rectory backyard.

Rich registered an ongoing concern about maintenance of the dog waste station. The trash receptacle gets full very quickly and it becomes difficult to lift the bag out of the can. Father assured Vestry that this chore is on George and Tommy's radar and agreed that it must be handled on a timely basis. The fact that the amenity is seeing such brisk usage is an indication that it was much needed, and we hope that it is leading to improved sanitation across our property and neighborhood walkways.

Fundraising Committee

N/A

Garden Ministry and Book Club

Meg Hughes voiced a concern regarding the accumulation of filled lawn waste bags in the shed. Ordinarily the Garden Ministry volunteers would have removed them one or two bags at a time for collection at their own homes, but these bags were placed after the gardeners wrapped up their season in early November. Rich commented that he and Sean are willing to take them to the transfer station this Saturday.

Meg is also interested in organizing volunteers to give the shed a new coat of paint. Already several on Vestry have agreed to help, including Jeff, David, Sandee

Hughes, and Debbie Lambeth. Meg will scout out needed materials and convene the group later in the spring once the weather is more agreeable.

Hospitality Committee

Sandee inquired of Vestry as to our notions of how coffee hour should proceed in the not-too-distant future once we are able to congregate in groups again. In the beginning (summer, hopefully) we may be happy just to have the capability to converse over coffee and a sweet treat. For later in the year, we should be mindful that we are competing with the new Arthur's and many other dining venues in town that may attract attendees away from our humble church fellowship offering. Sandee is proposing that we institute an "adult education forum" on an established schedule (perhaps monthly). Already we have book club and a few other activities, but we should look at a calendar and begin filling in a few dates with fun and educational activities to garner some ongoing interest in sticking around after Mass. These could be as simple as a "show and tell" by a parishioner or as grand as a visiting Anglican Bible scholar funded by a Whittingham Howe grant.

Communications

Lynn Paska announced that the March newsletter is up on the website and the deadline for the next *Georgian Report* is Tuesday, June 1.

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. April 15.

Respectfully submitted,
Meg Hughes, Vestry Clerk