

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

**November 19, 2020**

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

Absent: Paul Smigelski

Vestry convened via Zoom at 7:05 p.m.

Father opened the meeting with three prayers and welcomed Sean Albert, new Vestry member, and David Kennison, provisional Senior Warden. Members took a moment to introduce themselves.

Jeff Wengrovius moved to accept the October minutes. Sandee Hughes seconded, all approved.

### **Rector's Report**

- November 22 is Christ the King Sunday, a time to celebrate Christ's sovereignty. It will also be stewardship Sunday. A letter and pledge cards will be distributed.
- On Thanksgiving Day, Mass will be offered at 10 a.m.
- Advent begins November 29.
- St. Nicholas Day and the Stockade Christmas Tree Blessing coincide on December 6. Brian Taylor will dress up as St. Nicholas. Another special feature for that Sunday will be the blessing of two icons of St. Nicholas which Jeff Wengrovius generously donated to St. George's.
- On Saint Lucy's Day, December 13, Helen Stromberg will portray St. Lucy. Her brother Isaac and James Smigelski will also wear costumes to accompany her in procession. Jeff will be the organist that day, and he is preparing to play Santa Lucia.
- Unless Covid-19 restrictions force us to reduce our schedule and/or close altogether, Christmas Eve Mass will be celebrated at 10 p.m. (possibly preceded by carols at 9:30). There will be no earlier Christmas Eve service as the children's pageant has been cancelled.
- Christmas Day Mass will be offered at 11 a.m.

### **Senior Warden's Report**

David Kennison thanked the group for drafting him back into Vestry service. He previously served for 14 years, eight of them as Senior Warden. He also thanked Sue Hartz for her time

as Senior Warden. He credits her for being a big part of the reason we are in good financial shape today. David plans to meet with her personally to get up to speed.

David voiced a concern about the church's security system, something that is required by church insurance. He discovered that church landline has not been working for some time, so we've had no security or fire protection for an unknown time. International Built-In Systems has proposed a cellular connection instead of land line. This would cost \$675 each for the Great Hall and for church. There are also annual fees of \$636 for each building, so our overall costs are expected to go up for this service.\* There is one more alternative to be researched, which is an Internet-based communication link. He will work with Bob McCloskey to finalize arrangements. (\*Decision subsequently made to stay with landline to save money.)

David also spoke about the new website, which has been in the works for nearly a year and still not completed. We signed a contract with Groupiehead in January 2020 and paid \$1,000 deposit on \$3,000 estimate. Father has been working on the project and would like to circulate a close-to-final draft site to Vestry for review very soon, with hopes that we can have it operational early in 2021. It was noted that Jon Pearson is key in web maintenance for the church, and should be looped in asap.

Next on David's list of concerns was the audio/visual room. Streaming of services was especially necessary with the Covid-19 shutdown and will continue to be of critical importance. Currently the video feed is accomplished with cellphones. Larry Vrooman (a friend of Bob McCloskey's) installed wireless mics and has been paid \$1,875 so far. In cooperation with Sound Solutions, Gansevoort, Mr. Vrooman wants us to invest another \$7,200 for video equipment. This far exceeds what we have budgeted, but it seems like a necessary expense and a worthwhile investment in our video ministry. David can verify that the equipment quotes are reasonable (he comparison-shopped on Amazon) and we will receive training on all the new technology. He is on top of this and wants to get it completed by Christmas. Jeff moved to proceed with this proposal. David seconded the motion, and all approved. Next year we will probably want to add yet another camera to be focused on the Lady Chapel.

Finally, David raised the possibility of garnering an historic preservation grant. We've done a lot of building maintenance in 2020, but additional work is still needed inside the church. Approximately eight years ago we received a grant for steeple work from the NY Landmarks Conservancy Sacred Sites program. There are five basic criteria and we meet them fairly well:

- 1.) We easily qualify as having a historic structure of national and regional significance.
- 2.) We are actively involved in our community.

- 3.) As for project scope and need, we must prove that repairs are needed urgently and go beyond what we can currently afford.
- 4.) We also need to demonstrate fundraising campaign readiness. We would need to launch a significant capital fundraising campaign and raise matching funds in new money.
- 5.) It's required that we show evidence of a healthy, vibrant parish with strong clergy and lay leadership.

Simple painting and roofing maintenance projects do not qualify. It needs to be maintenance of historical features, and within the church itself. Our other structures do not count. At present we have one notable project that qualifies, which is the bolstering of internal roof supports. David would like us to think of any others. He also commented that this undertaking may take months if not years, and we would need to select an architect to represent the church in our application process.

As for fund-raising, Covid-19 currently poses a challenge, but we hope the scenario will brighten next year. We used to have numerous dinners and events throughout the course of a year. David commented that in 2000 the church paid something on the order of \$50K-\$60K for a professional organization and raised about \$300K. All agree that it is better if we can manage our capital campaign in-house without paying for outside help.

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

Jon Ewbank reported on a recent spate of repair projects:

#### Sanctuary

- Asbestos removal and steam line leak repair completed and invoices paid.
- Cornice touch-up painting has been completed and paid.
- Vent fans have been repaired and the invoice paid.
- Roof ridgeline bracing – still outstanding.

#### Cranmer Hall

- Dormer repair and painting has been completed and the invoice paid.
- Stone steps repair completed and the invoice paid.
- Boiler re-inspection has been completed.
- Our painter discovered a crack in the rubber roofing material in the back dormer of Cranmer that was allowing water to leak into the soffit and wall. Apparently MSI missed this on their last inspection. The crack has been repaired and the invoice paid.

#### Great Hall

- Kitchen and bathroom plumbing repairs have been completed and invoice paid.

- Dishwasher has been purchased (and paid) for delivery. The balance of \$2,000 will be payable once we decide when to have it installed. Northeast Commercial Appliance, Inc. will store the machine for us for nine months.
- Hallway retiling is on hold. We have one bid in hand (\$7,400) to overlay the existing tile with an engineered flooring system. We need to decide if and when we want to commit the funds.

### Grounds Maintenance

We are nearing completion of collecting bid proposals for contractors to take over the grounds maintenance duties (mowing, snow removal, general cleanup, etc.) formerly performed by the onsite sextons.

Father spoke about two local laborers, George and Tommy, whom he has contracted to do some landscape cleanup this fall, and they have done a good job. With the departure of Sondra and Jeremy Kravetz, Father would like to have an arrangement with these two men to have them available to do some ongoing cleanup of sidewalks and basic maintenance of grounds and buildings.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Jeff Wengrovius commented that we have accomplished a lot of work in the past few months, and done so in a cost-effective fashion. He credits Bob McCloskey with arranging contractors at the best possible price.

Overall, St. George's financial condition is good. We have cash surpluses in both our Trustco bank account and at RBC. Pledge payments are on target. Jeff will send out contribution statements soon, but only to those parishioners who are significantly behind in pledge fulfillment (perhaps five or six family units).

We have applied for forgiveness of our CARES act PPP loan of \$23,300. We qualify for 100% of forgiveness but it may take some time for Trustco to finalize the approval.

The budget will be Jeff's priority next month. Vestry took a few minutes to consider increasing our level of Diocesan support. Our assessment for 2020 was \$14,500, but we only paid \$5,000 towards it. Our 2021 assessment will be \$11,400. Jeff's suggestion is to meet them halfway and pay something closer to \$8,000. If we increase our diocesan payment it will mean we have less to spend on other things.

Father believes we should work towards paying the full shot, and even a significant increase would be a good show of faith. We are not the only parish that has been facing financial challenges. We shouldn't go broke doing it, but we should try to do our share.

David remarked that 75% of the churches in the Diocese have been paying 100% and the Diocese takes a dim view of us paying such a small fraction of what we owe.

Rich reiterated the case for multi-year budgetary planning. We might not be able to reach 100% of our assessment in 2021, but we should aim to increase it each year as feasible.

Jeff will get input from people who have budget line items and hammer out a tentative budget for Vestry to review next month. We'll have to talk about salaries and decide what will be paid on our projects such as buildings and grounds, music, hospitality.

### **Community Liaison Report**

Rich Unger noted that in addition to the Stockade tree lighting, there will be a Festival of Trees hosted by the Historical Society on December 5. Due to social distancing, folks will need to arrange an appointment to see it. Rich also commented that the Stockade Association is working with other neighborhoods on a traffic calming program, and taking a closer look at lapses in enforcement of building codes.

### **Fundraising Committee**

N/A

### **Ministry and Book Club**

Meg Hughes announced the official end of Garden Ministry labors for 2020, based on sub-freezing weather and the end of the growing season. Meg and the other gardeners (Barb Wengrovius, Debbie Lambeth, and Suzy Unger) were engaged in grounds cleanup as recently as November 10. That, plus the efforts of paid laborers, has put us in a good position for spring 2021.

Meg drafted an announcement on "In the Bleak Midwinter" by Julia Spencer-Fleming for the weekly bulletin. All parishioners who are interested are urged to read the book during the holiday season.

### **Hospitality Committee**

Coffee hour continues on Zoom. Sandee Hughes would like to get more people involved.

### **Communications**

Lynn Paska advises that photos of the virtual Diocesan Convention are up on the website.

Deadline for the December Georgian newsletter is Friday, December 4.

### **Meeting adjournment**

There being no objections, the meeting was adjourned at 8:39 p.m. The next meeting will be at 7 p.m. December 17.

Respectfully submitted,  
Meg Hughes, Vestry Clerk