

St. George's Church Vestry Meeting Minutes

December 17, 2020

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: Jon Ewbank

Vestry convened via Zoom at 7:08 p.m.

Father opened the meeting with an Advent collect and a prayer for all affected by the snowstorm.

Jeff Wengrovius moved to accept the November minutes. Lynn Paska seconded, and all approved.

Rector's Report

Father Matt reported on the following upcoming events:

12/24—10 p.m. Christmas Eve Mass will be preceded by a blessing of the creche and carols at 9:30 p.m., hopefully on the front lawn. Kevin Decker is taking point on the greening of the church, using greens that Chris Henry salvaged from a tree that was removed from his property. Kevin was hoping to set up the Nativity scene on the front lawn, but Vestry voiced concerns about placing the figures outside. There is a risk of loss or damage to the fragile statues and there may also be issues due to the 24+ inches of snow on the ground, making setup difficult and potentially obscuring the display. Father will reconsider the plan.

12/25—Christmas Day, 11 a.m.

12/26—Saint Stephen's Day, 10 a.m.

12/27—Saint John the Apostle (Sunday Mass), 10 a.m.

12/28—Holy Innocents, 10 a.m.

1/1—Holy Name, 7 p.m.

1/31—Annual Meeting

Senior Warden's Report

David Kennison had a good meeting with Sue Hartz on November 30 and reviewed what she had accomplished and what she thought were upcoming priorities. They agreed on our

biggest need: to grow the church. Sue inquired about our progress on Groupiehead and the new website.

Security System

Vestry discussed the restoration of our burglary and fire alarms. The costs for a possible cellular connection in the Great Hall and church, discussed at our last meeting, were subsequently verified and deemed to be pricey. The more cost-effective option would be to continue using the landline, but Bob McCloskey continues to research a cellular solution, which would likely involve a hefty initial outlay, then a savings over time.

David is in favor of reconnecting the landline to achieve connectivity right away, even if we ultimately chose cellular. The Great Hall landline was disconnected about two years ago when we switched to Spectrum to save money, only to discover later that the cost was higher than Verizon. The line was never switched back to Verizon for reconnection so we have had no Great Hall fire alarms in that interval.

The church line is still there and we've been paying for it (\$49/month) but it has not, indeed, been working. Verizon determined that the line was broken somewhere between Cranmer Hall's basement and the church (i.e., within the steam pipe tunnel). Verizon doesn't do inside repairs. David has purchased the necessary equipment and new cable, and is willing to do another steam-tunnel crawl if necessary. The heat would need to be turned off in advance so it isn't suffocatingly hot in there. Jeff urged David to hold off on that initiative in hopes that Bob can get a better cellular deal for the church.

Web Site

Father says the work on the website is nearly done and he would like to get user feedback. It can be seen at www.stgeorgesschenectady.com. One thing that will be better on the new site is a more smoothly functioning YouTube link.

Diocesan Commitment and Our Income

The Diocese ranks parishes based on size and income, and we have dropped down a couple of notches. David reviewed 10 years of parochial reports and identified a few trends. Our average weekly attendance is decreasing (although adult Christian education forum attendance has increased). Our operating revenue is going down. Endowment income is strong but our day-to-day financials are in jeopardy due to decreasing pledge income. Jeff noted that our reliance on endowment has been increasing steadily. This is concerning because a bad year for our investments would hit us hard.

David also voiced a concern that we could be doing much more in terms of community activities and support. This would be key in demonstrating worthiness of any historical preservation grants we may pursue. We do work closely with the Stockade Association, have

AA meetings onsite, and host a home school cooperative. Vestry members pointed to other charitable events, but nobody disputes that it would be better if we could do more such outreach.

Sexton Update

Sondra and Jeremy Kravetz were supposed to move out by December 1. Sondra has been looking for work and a new apartment, but hasn't secured either. She has offered to continue paying rent until she is able to move. There is some hope that a family member may be able to take her in. Another possible alternative may be the YWCA or YMCA. If they are unable to find a new residence by next month, Vestry will formulate a strategy to assist them in accomplishing a move. The high utility costs involved in maintaining their residence will negatively impact our budget if we are constrained to continue heating it this winter.

Junior Warden's Report

Jon Ewbank was unable to attend but provided an overview of recent activities:

Sanctuary–Roof ridgeline bracing is still outstanding.

Cranmer Hall–Boiler re-inspections have been completed and our boilers are now certified.

Great Hall–Kitchen and bathroom plumbing repairs have been completed and invoice paid. Need to have Crisafulli look again at the heating. The second floor is still getting too warm.

Grounds Maintenance–Contracts are now in place for mowing, snow removal, and general cleanup.

Cranmer Hall–Stone steps repair completed/paid but work on the railings has not been concluded.

Great Hall–Dishwasher purchased, installation on hold pending required electrical work and a decision on the best timing for incurring installation cost.

Hallway retiling–Project on hold pending a when-to-fund decision.

Fire Monitoring system–As detailed in David's report above, we continue waiting on quotes for best and cheapest solution.

Community Liaison Report

Rich Unger commented on the outstanding performance by Father Matt, Brian Taylor as St. Nicholas, and Helen Stromberg as Saint Lucia at the annual tree lighting. The Stockade Association greatly appreciates St. George's commitment to this community event.

Fundraising Committee

N/A

Garden Ministry and Book Club

Meg Hughes had no report. Both activities are pretty much on hold, although a Zoom meeting may be scheduled in the new year to discuss "In the Bleak Midwinter" by Julia Spencer-Fleming.

Hospitality Committee

Sandee Hughes asked about ideas for getting communion to people who are unable or unwilling to come to church due to COVID. Sean Albert noted that a family member could pick up a blessed host for a loved one. Sandee says some churches are doing drive-by communion. Father isn't completely comfortable with that option or even sure that is approved in our diocese. He will consider other options.

Communications

Lynn Paska reported that pictures are on the website from St. Nicholas Day. A picture will be up soon from St. Lucia Day.

The next deadline for *The Georgian Report* newsletter is Friday, March 5.

Stewardship

Jeff Wengrovius spoke about stewardship. About 20 pledges have been submitted, and some have been increased significantly. Beyond the usual, reliable, loyal members, however, there are many parishioners who haven't committed. These folks should receive outreach.

With COVID, it's a bad year to hit people with a notice that their pledges aren't up to date, but members need to hear from their church, even if it is just a call to check in on them. Father says he does regularly call, visit, and interact electronically with congregants. Sandee commented (anecdotally) that a couple of people remarked that they have not received any type of outreach since the pandemic began. Father will try to step up his efforts to contact people who have dropped off the radar due to COVID and/or other challenges.

Treasurer's Report

We have cash surpluses in both our TrustCo bank account and at RBC, and do not expect to need any withdrawals from endowment principle in 2020.

Pledge payments are off budget slightly, but we hope to catch up in December.

Expenses are still down due to COVID19, and that will probably be the trend for the next several months. This enabled us to get some major repairs accomplished in 2020.

All expense categories are on or under budget, except ministry (due to video spending). Facilities spending is also over budget by \$12,071 due to major maintenance projects accomplished this year. Caution: High spending in 2020 was made possible by depletion of RBC cash reserves and our PPP loan. Our safety cushion for 2021 is reduced significantly and withdrawals from endowment principal are likely in 2021.

Budget

Vestry had been given the opportunity to review a preliminary draft of the budget, prior to the evening's task of approving the 2021 spending plan. Jeff has worked long and hard on the numbers, and walked through a few of the highlights with Vestry.

Estimates on the income side have been conservative. The budget itself is being simplified in terms of eliminating old budget lines that are no longer relevant. Some funds have been consolidated (e.g. Rector's Discretionary and Diocesan Convention) for simplicity.

Some expenses are difficult to predict (e.g., boiler repairs) and in those instances Jeff has left a lot of slack. Installation of the dishwasher and a new floor in the Great Hall are in the budget.

The bottom line is a \$27,000 deficit budget. It will be a tight spending plan. We might have as much as \$15,000 in cushion from endowment interest by the end of the year, which will help. We have made great strides in reining in costs, but income is decreasing and inflation is increasing our expenses. For the first time next year in several years we may have to tap the endowment fund principal. David remarked that the endowment money was given by people, now deceased, who wished to help St. George's thrive and survive. It is reasonable to take money out from time to time, as long as we don't do so habitually.

Rich raised a question about the line item for "Sexton Salary and Fringe." The \$12,000 reflected there is earmarked for services expected to be rendered by George Soltysiak and his helper Tommy. It was suggested that the line item be renamed "Property Maintenance," as the two new workers are not assuming full sexton duties, and will receive no fringe.

Jeff solicited further comments on the budget from all on Vestry. Several had already given their input in private discussions with Jeff. No further concerns were expressed at the general

meeting. Father was asked to excuse himself temporarily so discussion of salary increases could occur in a private executive session.

Jeff moved to approve the budget as amended (Father's salary details, a \$200 correction needed in Brian's fringe, and the change in nomenclature for the budget line formerly known as Sexton Salary and Fringe), Meg seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Meeting adjournment

There being no objections, the meeting was adjourned at 9:53 p.m. The next meeting will be at 7 p.m. January 21.

Respectfully submitted,

Meg Hughes, Vestry Clerk