

St. George's Church Vestry Meeting Minutes

February 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

Vestry convened via Zoom at 7:03 p.m. Father opened the meeting with the collect for Ash Wednesday and a prayer. Lynn Paska moved to accept the January minutes. Sandee Hughes seconded, and all approved.

Rector's Report

Father Matt reported on the following Lenten events:

- Ash Wednesday service had 23 in attendance, including a few visitors from outside the congregation, and many more who watched online from home.
- Congregants are now reading *The Way of Julian of Norwich: A Prayer Journey Through Lent* by Sheila Upjohn. There is a brief chapter for each week in Lent. Fr. Matt will lead a Zoom meeting each Sunday at 7 p.m. to reflect on the readings together.
- Father has created weather-resistant Stations of the Cross. These will be affixed to the iron fence in front of the church, so that we may have outdoor observance of the Stations Fridays at 7 p.m. throughout Lent.
- George Soltysiak (one of our new workers) will be admitted as a catechumen this Sunday, February 21, and intends to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. Dr. Taylor will sponsor him. Sandee Hughes graciously agreed to assist Father in producing artistic renderings of The Lord's Prayer and The Apostles' Creed to be given to George.

Senior Warden's Report

Great Hall Heating—David Kennison reports that the Great Hall boiler parts have been delivered, paid for, and stored in the basement. The burner itself is backordered but expected within the coming week. We are still relying on the old, leaky, patched-up boiler in the interim.

Security System—Our security system is reconnected, rewired, and is operational. We know for certain that the smoke alarm is working properly, as Jeremy Kravetz set it off while frying bacon on February 14. The fire department responded and no damage reported.

New Website—It has now been 13 months since we signed a contract with Groupiehead for the development of a new, more graphically pleasing web presence. We are close to having the new site go live, and Jon Pearson is reaching out to Mark Rose to iron out details on the

maintenance of the site. He may need to obtain some new software to enable him to make updates. Vestry are urged to review the new site at www.stgeorgesschenectady.com and share their feedback before go-live. David hopes everything can be sorted out and the new site live within the coming month.

Former Sextons—Sondra and Jeremy Kravetz were terminated from employment last fall, but they have not vacated their apartment in the Great Hall. David wants to review the original termination notice that Father Matt provided Sondra last September, and then he will meet with her. David outlined the specific legal steps to be followed if she does not voluntarily move out. It is a lengthy proceeding and includes a court appearance.

We considered the NYS moratorium on residential evictions, but they do not pertain in this situation. Tenants must have “endured COVID-related hardship” to forestall eviction until May 1, 2021.

Vestry were surprised to learn that we are still paying for a cellphone plan for them. They also continue to take advantage of free access to the laundry room. These privileges should be rescinded asap. David reiterated the importance of re-keying all doors at the church and Cranmer before he meets with Sondra, and the Great Hall as soon as they leave. All agreed that this was prudent.

Church Growth—We need to renew our commitment to growing the church. Parish membership lists from the recent past indicate that we have about 100 members (not the 249 claimed in our Parochial Reports). Since average Sunday attendance is less than 50, it appears that we have ample opportunities for member retention to begin our outreach.

At the January meeting, Sandee Hughes had made a motion to set up a separate planning session to discuss growing the church, but this was not scheduled. We have now set Thursday, February 25 as the date for this meeting. She and David have a few ideas, but all on Vestry are asked to come prepared to share their thoughts. As Jeff interjected, it is also key to begin sketching out a five-year plan for our church’s future.

Junior Warden’s Report

Jon Ewbank offered an overview of projects, some of which are on hold for various reasons. The roof ridgeline bracing effort is still outstanding. The Cranmer Hall steps still lack a railing for the back entry. The Great Hall dishwasher installation and hallway retiling both await the lifting of pandemic use restrictions.

Treasurer’s Report

Jeff Wengrovius advised Vestry that a new, more user-friendly Excel spreadsheet format is now being used to track 2021 income and expenses. It reflects newly consolidated budget lines and tracks income and expenses on a rolling monthly basis.

We started the year with the unexpected financial burden of replacing the Great Hall boiler. So far, \$25,000 has been taken from endowment principal cash to pay for part of that necessary expenditure.

Giving has been strong and is currently over budget by \$18,690 because some congregants pay their entire pledge early in the year. Loose plate income is down.

We talked about the quantity of pledge envelopes uncollected and sitting in the back of church. We need to get them to people, either by mail or in person, or some combination thereof. In the meantime, Jeff said he and Bob McCloskey will remove them from the back of church and try to figure out if there are some that don't actually need to be delivered (because not everyone uses them).

Expense categories are on budget except for video ministry and the aforementioned boiler expenses. The video ministry budget is already overspent for the entire year and it looks like we will not be able to afford the second camera we hoped to buy in 2021. St. George's spent about \$15,000 in 2020 and 2021 YTD for our video equipment upgrades.

Jeff has asked David Kennison to audit the A/V expenses. David was not involved in the beginning of the process but looking at it now he has determined that our upgrade from analog to digital video was poorly documented and done haphazardly. He can retroactively account for only about \$10,000 of the \$15,000 spent, and believes we paid dearly for unforeseen labor charges.

We recently discovered yet another factor leading to shortcomings in our online services. Our network router was residential quality, not commercial grade, so we did not have enough bandwidth for video streaming. Sound Solutions replaced the router and fixed some wiring for about \$600 (which is included in the \$10K total that David is aware of). The issues have been solved and we can now stream to YouTube and Facebook simultaneously, but that cost was unbudgeted. A new digital sound board which had been on back-order has been installed, but that was included in 2021 budget.

Community Liaison Report

Rich Unger commented that Arthur's Market will have a "soft opening" the weekend of March 4, and people are being asked to register online for a time slot to visit the new store to help maintain social distancing. David inquired about the status of parking spots we were going to lease to Arthur's Market for customer use. Proprietor Haley Whalen made an offer, but we rejected the agreement as it was unfairly low. We have not heard back but may still once the

business gets better established. David registered a concern about liability. Rich says our insurance company has been consulted and it does not look like we would have an issue. We would require that the Market have their own indemnification.

Just as a heads-up, Rich noted that police have begun ticketing drivers for not observing alternate side of the street parking on Union Street. Signs have long been there, but the restrictions have not been enforced until recently.

The Stockade Association board appreciates that the church allows residents to park in our lot, but all must recall that during snow emergencies we reserve the right to have cars towed. We have signage to alert drivers. Note: The City allows free parking at the municipal lot on Broadway (across from Proctors) during snow emergencies.

Fundraising Committee

N/A

Garden Ministry and Book Club

Meg Hughes reminded Vestry that we would be discussing *Transcendent Kingdom* by Yaa Gyasi on February 21 at the Zoom coffee hour. Father Matt is preparing a few questions which we hope to be able to circulate in advance of the meeting. On April 18 we will discuss *Island at the Center of the World*, by Russell Shorto, a history book recommended by Debbie Lambeth.

Hospitality Committee

Still on hold as the pandemic persists. Zoom coffee hours are hosted at noon on Sundays.

Communications

Lynn Paska reminds all that the deadline for *The Georgian Report* is Friday, March 5. She awaits reports from Fr. Matt, David Kennison, Jon Ewbank, and Jeff Wengrovius. Her other correspondents have already submitted articles.

Meeting adjournment

There being no objections, the meeting was adjourned at 8:27 p.m. The next regular Vestry meeting will be at 7 p.m. March 18, and our special church growth planning meeting will be at 7 p.m. Thursday, February 25.

Respectfully submitted,

Meg Hughes, Vestry Clerk