

St. George's Episcopal Church
Annual Parish Meeting
January 23, 2022

Meeting Called to Order

Senior Warden David Kennison convened the Annual Meeting of St. George's Episcopal Church following the usual 10 a.m. Sunday Mass. The Rev. Richard Lehmann opened the meeting with a prayer.

Appointment of Clerk

The first order of business was the appointment of Meg Hughes, Vestry Clerk, as clerk of the meeting.

Introductory Remarks and State of the Parish

David welcomed parishioners, whether attending in-person or via YouTube livestream. He explained that due to COVID-19 protocols, the meeting would be brief and consist of a few remarks, treasurer's report, and announcement of the results of Vestry and Senior Warden elections.

The year just ended was marked by the loss of several Georgians and former Georgians. As a tribute, David read aloud the names of those we have lost, and asked that we remember them: Dottie Kennison, Bill Schultz, Johnnie Angus, Stephanie Youmans, Shirley Fahey, Rodgers Cheeks, Ralph Fusco, Julia Burgess, Bill Waller, and Connie Todt.

Next, David offered kind remarks about members of Vestry, noting how each contributes of their time and talents in unique ways. Jon Ewbank, Junior Warden, performs the impossible task of maintaining our aging infrastructure. Jeff Wengrovius, Treasurer, labors long and hard to manage the parish's finances. Meg Hughes, Clerk, heads up the Garden Ministry and Book Club among other duties. Sean Albert has launched an effort to preserve the church's archives. He is assisted by Debbie Lambeth, who is also a church gardener and Altar Guild member. Carol Gaige, newly dubbed "Vestry Nurse," also assists with Altar Guild and is a greeter. Sandee Hughes heads up hospitality and works on Altar Guild and as a sacristan. Lynn Paska handles communications, faithfully publishing the *Georgian Report* each quarter. Paul Smigelski has assumed a supporting role in maintaining the website. Rich Unger is our community liaison, as well as serving as a greeter and lector.

Our music director and choirmaster Brian Taylor also was singled out for well-deserved praise. In addition to his usual duties, Dr. Taylor keeps an eye on the property, hosts receptions, consults on the bulletin, managed the Art Show Café, and has put in many hours as the “head butler” of coffee hour over the past year. Additionally, noted David, Brian is an outstanding raconteur and bon vivant.

David spoke of some major challenges and achievements in 2021, including:

- The Great Hall boiler failed after 47 years, and was costly to replace. We also exceeded our budget to enhance the church’s video-streaming capabilities, and launched a new, more visually pleasing website.
- In staff news, we hired George Soltysiak, sexton, and Liz Catala, cleaner.
- Sadly, the church accepted the resignation of Fr. Matthew Stromberg, who had been our rector for the previous five-and-a-half years.

The next big challenge for the church will be a rector search. Complicating this task is a general shortage of Episcopal clergy, plus a lingering sense that the Diocese of Albany is a liturgically conservative body (that, indeed, continues to refrain from embracing nationally-accepted canons for the marriage of same-sex couples). Finding the right fit for St. George’s will entail a lot of introspection, fact-finding, documentation, and listening to the needs and hopes of the parish.

In 2022 we will also undergo a professional financial audit, which hasn’t happened in many years. Additionally, Vestry will be completing a comprehensive assessment of our facilities. The parish occupies five buildings, and all have been costly to maintain.

Financial Report—Jeffrey Wengrovius, Treasurer

Jeffrey Wengrovius opened his presentation by thanking Bob McCloskey for his considerable support in maintaining the church’s financial records, and Jon Pearson for his knowledge and expert advice. Jeff believes the church is in good shape for the upcoming audit.

Jeff reiterated the message of how burdensome it is for St. George's to maintain its buildings. Assuming that the parish has 100 parishioners (which may be an optimistic estimate), we spent about \$1,100 *per parishioner* last year on building repairs alone, accounting for 32 percent of our expenses. Another hefty portion of the budget (46 percent) goes for salaries and benefits for our employees: the rector; choirmaster; administrative/financial secretary; sexton; and cleaner. Utility costs are also a big headache for St. George's. Our most recent bill for electricity and gas was \$3,600.

Where does the money come from? Jeff noted that much of it comes from parishioner giving, and he thanked the congregation for its generous contributions totaling \$122,716 last year. We are also fortunate to have endowment money that is invested and returns interest equaling almost as much our donations (34 percent of our income last year, or \$121,294).

When there is a shortfall, as there was in 2021 due to unexpected building repairs, we must dip into the endowment principal. We took \$46,740 from endowment investments last year to pay for the new Great Hall boiler. Considering both interest and principal withdrawals, our endowments covered 47 percent of our 2021 expenditures.

In closing, Jeff urged everyone to make a financial pledge for 2022. So far, only 20 families/individuals have done so.

Election Results—Meg Hughes, Vestry Clerk

Meg Hughes reported that she had received 40 votes from parishioners in good standing, primarily via email, and a few paper ballots as of that morning. She noted that it was unusual to have more Vestry candidates than openings. This year, Tarik Wareh had thrown his hat into the ring to be considered along with three incumbents seeking second terms: Lynn Paska, Paul Smigelski, and Richard Unger.

David Kennison ran unopposed for Senior Warden, and was unanimously elected to his first official term. He has just completed a partial term that he graciously agreed to take on when Sue Hartz stepped down from the role in 2020.

Meg read out the vote totals for the four Vestry candidates: Lynn Paska, 31; Paul Smigelski, 37; Richard Unger, 34; and Tarik Wareh, 15. Accordingly, the three

incumbents were welcomed back to Vestry service, and Tarik was urged to renew his willingness to participate as seats open up in the next year or two.

Questions and Suggestions

Two congregants offered remarks:

- Joan Pearson had a concern that the sanctuary is being heated to an unnecessarily high temperature at off-hours during the week. In past years, the building was chilly on weekdays when she arrived to practice on the organ. Lately this has not been the case, and she believes that the thermostat settings are off and need to be adjusted. David agreed that this is a problem that needs to be corrected.
- Suzy Unger voiced gratitude for Vestry's hard work during the past year and noted that she was happy to learn that a survey of the parish was planned as part of the process for selecting a new rector. She also endorses a full assessment of church-owned properties and would like to see some long-range planning to improve the financial picture and put the existing structures to optimal use.

Closing Remarks, Blessing, and Adjournment

In his final remarks, David related an urban legend about the Very Rev. Dr. Fosbroke, Canon of St. John the Divine and Dean Emeritus of the General Theological Seminary. When a cabdriver questioned his demand that he be driven through the gates of the campus, the irascible Fr. Fosbroke thumped his walking stick on the floor of the cab and informed the hapless driver, "I am the [expletive deleted] dean! Drive right in!"

We are the church, David reminded us. St. George's has survived for nearly 300 years because our predecessors did what was needed to make it thrive. Now, it is our turn to take the initiative and steer the right course for St. George's. If we see where improvements can be made, or a need is going unfulfilled, we must "drive right in."

The meeting adjourned at noon with a closing benediction by Fr. Lehmann.

Respectfully,
Meg Hughes, Vestry Clerk