

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

**June 10, 2021**

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

Absent: None

Vestry convened via Zoom at 7:05 p.m., as Father opened the meeting with a prayer. David Kennison moved to accept the May minutes with minor amendments, and Lynn Paska seconded. All voted in favor.

### **Rector's Report**

Father Matt reported on a conversation with a neighbor about her interest in using the Memorial Garden to host luxury picnics. She would provide proof of insurance and no alcohol would be served. It meets the general guidelines for use of church property and would be good publicity for the church. Vestry was receptive to the idea, but wished to clarify the terms of the agreement. For example, this entrepreneur would have to illustrate that she is in compliance with applicable city and county regulations. Does she need access to indoor bathrooms? If so, that would be an additional stress on our antiquated Great Hall facilities and may require a church staffer to be on hand. If it is decided to move ahead on this arrangement, we could adapt the Great Hall rental agreement to reflect the outdoor setting.

Father will be on vacation from June 16-23. Father Peter Schofield will fill in on Sunday, June 20. From July 8-16 Father will be at St. Peter's by the Lake. He is attempting to get Bishop Sisk (formerly Bishop of New York during the era of 9/11) to fill in but hasn't finalized that.

Theology on Tap will resume (Lord willing) on July 29 at the Van Dyck.

Father is considering having a church picnic at the Rectory in August. Details will be announced as they are firmed up.

Conversations have been held about having a Shape Note Evensong this fall. This is a ministry that we host and many people are interested in attending. Stay tuned for details.

Plans for the Stockade Art Show (September 11) are going ahead. Bathroom access continues to be an issue. In the past we have had porta-johns in our parking lot, supplied by the Stockade Art Show. If we have a café, we will need them.

Pastoral Care Ministry is back in action. Ann Duff and Jim Wingate have tracked down several elderly church members who haven't been in church lately, including Rodger Cheeks who now resides in an East Greenbush facility. Father has also been in touch with valued church members Rembert Herbert and Rosemary Pannone. We hope to see them returning to worship this summer.

Sean asked Father whether we had heard from SICM about our recent donation and any potential online PR that might result. Father will check on it. Father has also not heard the AA and homeschooling groups that use our premises. He will be in touch with them.

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

David Kennison reported on the status of George Soltysiak. There was a meeting May 28 with Father Matt, David, Jon Ewbank, and Jeff Wengrovius to decide whether to continue George's employment and if so, whether he should be considered an employee or a contractor. We learned that as an independent contractor, George would not be covered under our Church Mutual insurance policy, nor Worker's Comp. He was added to our payroll during the first week of June, for 15 or fewer hours per week

Father Matt has a draft sexton job description that now needs to be modified, as cleaning of the church, Cranmer, and Great Hall will be removed from George's responsibilities. We are now gathering information and quotes from independent cleaners. These professionals will also need a job description, which can be adapted from an existing Sexton Manual that Rich Unger prepared some years ago.

Tommy (George's friend and helper) has not been hired, but may choose to put in some hours on a volunteer basis.

A 1099-NEC is being prepared to report George's hours worked in 2020. He will also receive another 1099 in January of next year that reflects his hours worked in 2021 prior to being put on the payroll.

Sondra and Jeremy continue to reside in the sexton apartment and after June 30 we will petition the court for an eviction hearing date. David will be in touch with Matt Leyman of Ideal Legal Services to confirm the timing and prepare for the court date.

## **Junior Warden's Report**

Jon Ewbank had no report.

## **Treasurer's Report**

Jeff Wengrovius began his report with a general overview of church finances, but not a lot has changed since our May meeting. We are entering the "dry time" for giving, as many generous church members have given the bulk of their 2021 pledges already. We did receive a very welcome \$30,000 thanks to the Green Legacy recently.

Plans for the installation of the new dishwasher (a \$2,000 expense) will go ahead in July or August.

### ***Reaffirmation of St. George's Investment Policy***

Jeff sketched out for Vestry the basics of St. George's investment strategy, and sought assent that we are on the right track with it. We invest our endowment money into American Funds and Franklin-Templeton with RBC, working with financial advisor Peter Gregory. For a long time the church had a very conservative investment policy but over the last decade or so we have placed about 50 percent of our endowment assets in equity funds (which, unlike bonds, tend to be more risky and aggressive, but have been successful in the recent stock market). Our advisor is comfortable with this asset allocation.

Vestry members posed some pertinent questions about our arrangement with RBC, e.g., how are fees paid, and does our advisor have a fiduciary responsibility? Rich moved that we reaffirm our investment approach for the time being, but asked that Jeff schedule a meeting with Mr. Gregory of RBC so that we can educate ourselves on this important responsibility. David seconded the motion. All voted aye.

### ***Review of Restricted Endowment Spending and Fund Purposes***

Jeff very helpfully furnished Vestry with a spreadsheet showing the recent history of the Whittingham Restricted Endowment Fund. He intends to prepare separate spreadsheets for each of our endowment funds, tracking the earnings and the amounts drawn from each.

The church relies heavily on these investments and has been prudent in using the earnings, dipping into principal only when necessary. Still, we are supposed to use the money, and not sit on it. Having clear guidelines for the usage of the funds, with transactions documented, will be helpful for Vestry going forward.

In a separate handout, Jeff summarized what we know about each of St. George's endowments. Most were set up prior to 1989 and little documentation exists to describe the history or intent. Some funds are obsolete and at this point it may be appropriate to roll them into the general operating fund. An example would be the Pew Rent fund, which was set up more than a century ago.

Our predecessors on Vestry historically launched endowment funds using sums of money from various sources, and occasionally we have only partial information about the intent behind their decisions. If Vestry sets something up and later changes the intent based on changing priorities and conditions, it should not be a problem. We don't have to worry greatly about restrictions on the Education Fund, for example, since Vestry made it up in the first place, and retains the right to change it. The Whittingham Fund/Howe Lecture Series Fund, on the other hand, was initiated based on a verbal agreement between Harry Whittingham and Father McSwain. It was intended to fund "1. A man or men from St George's committed to Traditional Anglican theology pursuing vocation to the ordained Ministry of the Episcopal Church who demonstrates financial need. 2. Provide preaching/teaching for the parish. 3. Augment budgeted amounts for children's Sunday School material and confirmation class materials. 4. For other needs of the Church only by recommendation of the Rector and 3/4 vote of the Senior Vestry. 5. Income need not be spent during year earned, but must be spent during the following two years."

David remarked that he also has Whittingham Music Fund information that he will provide to Jeff. There is an archive room that may contain further detail on some of the funds. Testamentary evidence (for bequests made in a will) must be documented somewhere.

Vestry thanked Jeff for his efforts to formalize the records on our endowment funds. Jon Pearson has also been a valuable resource and should be thanked for his many hours of work done to keep the church in compliance with all known restrictions. Their documentation is a good historical basis, and Vestry wants to assure that we keep the records as accurate and updated as possible.

### ***Reaffirmation of NYPFIMA***

The NYS Prudent Management of Institutional Funds Act pertains whenever Vestry pulls money from a restricted endowment fund. Each time this occurs, we should review the following guidelines. (This relates to our recent SICM donation and any moneys we may agree to take from Whittingham or Education Funds tonight.)

NYPMIFA - NY Uniform Prudent Management of Institutional Funds Act passed September 17, 2010

Requires us to consider eight factors every time we review the endowment, and every time we take funds out:

- 1) general economic conditions;
- 2) the possible effect of inflation or deflation;
- 3) the expected tax consequences, if any, of investment decisions or strategies;
- 4) the role that each investment or course of action plays within the overall investment portfolio of the fund;
- 5) the expected total return from income and the appreciation of investments;
- 6) other resources of the institution;
- 7) the needs of the institution and the fund to make distributions and to preserve capital;
- 8) and an asset's special relationship or special value, if any, to the charitable purposes of the institution.

The Act requires institutions to adopt a written investment policy that reflects the requirements of the Act. Annual withdrawals in excess of seven percent are "rebuttable" as being imprudent.

Note: Vestry agreed that we should review the above documentation at budget time in anticipation of using restricted endowment fund income, as well as any time during the year that we are constrained to make additional withdrawals.

### **Community Liaison Report**

Rich Unger advised Vestry on the following upcoming events:

June 22—The Great Hall will serve as a polling location.

August 7—St. George's will be on the Stockade Garden Tour.

September 11—The Stockade Art Show will occur.

### **Fundraising Committee**

N/A

### **Garden Ministry**

Meg Hughes reports that a small but devoted crew continues to establish new plantings and keep the weeds from invading existing gardens. The group is determined to have the grounds looking their best for August 7 (Garden Tour) and throughout the season.

George Soltysiak has registered a plea that the church consider replacing the church's lawnmower. Jeff agreed that this was a necessary expense and will be taken care of.

### **Book Club**

Meg reported that St. George's book club will next meet on June 20 to discuss *The Vanishing Half* by Britt Bennett. Sandee Hughes recommended this unique and thought-provoking novel.

On August 15 the club will address *The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World*, by the historian Andrea Wulf. It is about a Prussian scientist born in 1769. Jeff Wengrovius recommended the read.

An informal book selection has been slotted in for October (exact date TBA). The meeting will occur at the Van Dyck. Meg has details for anyone interested to learn more.

### **Hospitality Committee**

Coffee hours are currently being held out-of-doors, but once the Diocese allows indoor meetings, Sandee Hughes would like to revive the church tradition of "Adult Forum." These programs can be done on a shoestring or for no cost whatsoever. As an example, Jeff is willing to do a presentation on his collection of Early American coins.

### **Communications**

Lynn Paska informed Vestry that there are now photos up on the website of the Crowning of Mary, the adult baptism of George Soltysiak, and the baby baptism of Piper Weisenburn.

The Georgian Report for June is also up on the website and has been distributed via email. Deadline for the fall edition is Wednesday, September 8 (but Lynn will save space for coverage of the Art Show).

### **New Business**

Jeff made the following motion: To take \$7,500 of accumulated interest from the Education restricted fund to cover the costs for repairing the plumbing in the upstairs boy's bathroom (\$7,000) and faucet replacement in the girl's bathroom (\$500). These bathrooms are used by our church school. The money will be taken when needed to meet budgetary shortfall.

The eight NYPMIFA points (see above Treasurer's Report) were considered. ??? seconded the motion. All were in favor except Jon Ewbank. The motion passed.

Jeff made a second motion, as follows: To take \$10,000 of accumulated interest from the Whittingham-Howe Lecture Series restricted fund to reimburse the church budget

for unexpected boiler replacement costs, enabling us to delay having to take principal monies from the general endowment fund.

Sandee seconded the motion. All voted in favor, none opposed. The motion passed unanimously. Jeff will report to Vestry as to the disbursement of this money.

### **New Business**

Jon moved that Vestry skip the July meeting as is ordinarily the case. Carol Gaige seconded the motion. All members except David voted to approve. Motion passed.

### **Meeting adjournment**

There being no objections, Father Matt adjourned the meeting at 9:02 p.m. Vestry will next meet at 7 p.m. August 19.

Respectfully,

Meg Hughes, Vestry Clerk