

St. George's Church Vestry Meeting Minutes

August 19, 2021

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

Excused absent: Carol Gaige

Vestry convened via Zoom at 7:02 p.m., as Father Matt opened the meeting with a prayer and a collect for peace, thinking particularly of Christians in Afghanistan and Nigeria. The Vestry also prayed for the repose of the soul of Ralph Fusco, DDS, who has passed away in Houston, TX, of Covid. He was a former St. George's parishioner and warden.

Lynn Paska moved to accept the June minutes and Debbie Lambeth seconded. All voted in favor.

Rector's Report

A Theology Breakfast and Book Study is scheduled for August 28. The book is "The Challenge of Jesus," by N.T. Wright. We previously read Bp. Wright's "Surprised by Hope" as part of a Lenten program a few years ago.

St. George's will host a service of Noontime Prayer on 9/11 in memory of the victims of terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. This will coincide with the Stockade Art Show and be in addition to an organ recital.

Back to Church Sunday will be observed September 19 after Mass. Father inquired about refreshments. Some on Vestry urged keeping it simple, commented that finger food would be appropriate. Our new cleaner (Liz Catalan) offered to clean the dishes in advance of the day if we agree that it is within the scope of activities for which she will be paid.

Theology on Tap will take place at the Van Dyck on September 23. The topic is to be determined and Father welcomes suggestions.

Pastoral Care

Father administered last rites and funeral services for long-time parishioners Shirley Fahey and Rodgers Cheeks. He made a hospital visit to James Williams (father of former parishioner Jim Williams).

Jim Wingate and Ann Duff recently visited Helen Parker, who is at Kingsway, and have been in contact with Charles Stamm and Homer Kerr.

Treasurer's Report

Jeff Wengrovius started his report by reminding Vestry that the congregation will soon be losing the Jaquith family as they move to Washington, DC in November. We should begin planning a special farewell coffee hour observance and/or other activity.

On the income side, we are in good shape. Pledge and loose plate income are both over budget for the year. No endowment interest or principal has been taken from RBC since the last Vestry meeting. The interest is building and available to take when needed.

Some expense categories are on budget (including youth/adult ministries, most utilities, maintenance). A donation for \$500 was recently accepted gratefully for use by Garden Ministry. Utilities are down due to summer, but winter is coming.

Please note, however, the following areas where expected expenditures have been exceeded:

- Boiler service expenses are over budget by \$42,887 for total year. Our property enhancement and building repairs fund has nothing left except to cover a few items already approved). Building repairs are over budget by \$222 for the year.
- Website expense over budget by \$2,219 for total year.
- Printing expense over budget by \$125 for total year.
- Office supplies over budget by \$44 for total year.
- Computer tech support over budget by \$51 for total year.
- Video ministry over budget by \$2,514 for total year.
- Equipment replacement budget only has \$175 left.
- Snow plowing/blowing over budget by \$875 for total year.

Vestry was asked to review and approve a new investment policy statement (document supplied earlier via email). Our Finance Committee (Father, Jon Pearson, Jon Ewbank, David Kennison, and Jeff) have consulted with Peter Gregory, our advisor at RBC, and are now recommending that we amend our investment policy, and go with a 40% allocation in bonds/fixed income and 60% in equities (give or take 5% in each category).

Jeff made a motion to adopt that strategy. David seconded it, and all were in favor; the motion carried.

The Finance Committee has also considered the merits of changing from our current no-fee structure with RBC to an advisory fee-based structure for anticipated greater returns. Jeff will get back to the Vestry with a recommendation.

Jeff has completed a detailed spreadsheet on our endowment spending. (Supplied to Vestry.) He is continuing to analyze the information and is planning to do a report in the September *Georgian Report*.

Senior Warden's Report

David Kennison informed Vestry that George Soltysiak has been working reliably under his new arrangement as an employee. Tommy Sarchioto works with him occasionally, for which George pays him from his own pocket. George has asked for more hours per week so he can earn more to make up for what he gives to Tommy. George's current agreement is 15 hours per week. Vestry did not feel that his schedule should be increased, particularly now that we have taken cleaning out of his list of duties.

Sandee Hughes raised a concern that the church is left open and unattended at times during the week. David echoed the concern. Father will reinforce with George that this is not an acceptable practice.

Church Cleaning

The church will be hiring Elizabeth ("Liz") Catalan to clean the church, Cranmer Hall, and Great Hall. So far, on a trial basis, she has done the sanctuary twice, and the other two buildings once apiece. Liz was recommended by Bob McCloskey, who contacted a few other candidates as well. (Bob was familiar with Liz as she cleans the Masonic Lodge.) She was interviewed by a team comprising Father Matt, both wardens, and two Vestry members (Jeff and Sandee). We would like to request that she do her work on Fridays and Saturdays. We also need to specify how many hours per week we want her to work. She will be part-time with no benefits, the same arrangement we have with George.

Eviction of Former Sextons

June 30 marked the end of the 90-day waiting period. Our eviction services consultant, Ideal Legal, then prepared a petition for a court date, a step that should have taken two weeks, but took six due to unspecified "COVID delays" and a requirement that the petition be signed by the owner of the property. (The owner of a property is "the person whose name is on the deed," so a search of historical documents was necessitated in an effort to clarify the church's actual

owner.)* In any event, David provided proof that Vestry has responsibility for church property and buildings, and he was allowed to sign the court petition as “Agent of St George’s Church” on August 18. Court dates now being assigned in mid-September.

*** Parish Archives**

The futile search for a property deed spawned discussion of the state of our parish archives. There is an Archive Room in Cranmer Hall, but it consists of a disorderly collection of cardboard boxes. During Fr. Paul’s tenure, a small team of parishioners attempted to organize and record the archived contents. Where is the record?

Sean Albert, with guidance from Rich Unger, shouldered responsibility for the deed search, and has done some very good sleuthing to trace down historic records through Schenectady Historical Society, NYS Archives, and others. (Schenectady was considered part of Albany County prior to 1809, so perhaps some records can be found there.)

Sean learned some interesting things, but also hit a lot of dead ends. Articles of incorporation for the church may never have been filed, because of disruption by the American Revolution. Sean also found a 19th century deed for the Great Hall property but it is believed that it also may never have been properly filed.

Church Financial Audit

At yesterday’s Finance Committee Meeting, it was agreed that we are long overdue for an independent audit of our financials. This is required by the Canons of The Episcopal Church, Canons of the Diocese of Albany, and The Episcopal Church *Manual of Business Methods*. A CPA-approved audit will be planned for sometime in 2022.

Jeff noted that the church also requires regular reviews of performance of our Rector by the Senior Warden and that Father should be doing reviews of employees who report to him. David commented that he is aware of this requirement and he intends to get to it.

Junior Warden’s Report

Jon Ewbank reports that since the last Vestry meeting:

- The new dishwasher has been installed.
- The dead tree near the parking lot has been removed.
- The plumbing issues in Cranmer Hall have been corrected.
- The leaking shower in the Rectory has been caulked.

Old concerns that continue to be unresolved include:

- Reinstallation of Cranmer House stair railings.
- Hallway retiling – project on hold pending lifting of pandemic use restrictions.
- Gutter strap on northeast corner of the church building has come unfastened. Chris Peters has indicated that he will reattach it when he completes roof repairs.
- Repainting of the sanctuary ceiling.
- Estimates on parking lot renovation.

Jon also notes the following items that need attention:

- Repairs to the rear door of Cranmer House.
- Replacing office air conditioners.
- Repairing the floor polisher/buffer.
- Repairing rectory garage door opener.
- Correcting light fixture/switch issues in Rectory downstairs bathroom and 2nd floor bedroom.

Rich urged that the above lists be retained and referred to at budget time so that we have a basis for allocating funding to projects that remain outstanding.

Sandee inquired if it might be helpful to run small fund-raising efforts for specific projects.

Community Liaison Report

Rich Unger commented on the great job that Garden Ministry did to prepare for the Stockade Garden Tour. The next opportunity for St. George's to shine as a Stockade fixture will be the Art Show on September 11.

Fundraising Committee

N/A

Garden Ministry

Meg Hughes had issued a report updating Vestry regarding improvements to the area near our parking lot Green Street and the new "St. Francis Garden" extending back from Ferry Street. She wished to share credit for these improvements with Barb Wengrovius, Debbie Lambeth, and Suzy Unger.

She also noted her gratitude for several parishioners (Bob McCloskey, Jeff Wengrovius, Alice Polumbo, Paul Smigelski, Jon Ewbank, Rich Unger, and Sandee Hughes) who cooperated to finalize the painting of the garden shed on July 26.

Meg also supplied information on the two bas-relief tablets recently removed from the basement of St. George's House and refinished for use in the gardens. The larger depicts a bishop, quite possibly St. Patrick, and is signed "Kay Boxell / Joanne Boxell 1948." The smaller is presumed to be a representation of the Virgin Mary. They were installed in the Butterfly Garden and Memorial Garden, respectively, on July 30.

St. George's successfully participated in the Stockade Art and Nature Garden Tour on August 7, receiving dozens of curious visitors. Meg thanked Father Matt and Jamie Taft for assisting as docents, and George Soltysiak and Tommy Sarchioto who went the extra mile to see that the grounds were tidy for the big day.

Garden Ministry will shortly be addressing the refurbishment of an overgrown cluster of evergreen shrubs adjacent to the main entrance of Cranmer Hall. Parishioner Kevin Decker has donated \$500 to assist in this project.

Book Club

The August meeting to discuss "The Invention of Nature: The Adventures of Alexander von Humboldt, the Lost Hero of Science," by Andrea Wulf, was well attended. The club is being encouraged to read independently for the remainder of the year, and to identify favorite books for inclusion in the 2022 roster.

Hospitality Committee

Sandee Hughes announced that a newly repaired coffee maker has been donated by the Masonic temple. Bob McCloskey says that it will make coffee more quickly.

The dishwasher has been installed. There needs to be a demonstration on how to use this and how clean the dishes need to be before they are put through the dishwasher. The machine does wash and sanitize, injecting three different chemicals.

Some effort has been put into the idea of bringing back a monthly or every-other-month "forum." This would be an activity held during coffee hour. It would be 20 minutes or so on a topic (preferably a hands-on activity). Forum Sunday would require more extensive food choices and Sandee will be asking for volunteers to provide food for coffee hour. Ideas are welcome on how to inspire parishioners to get involved. Sandee is also concerned about the security of stored food

items. Where should we store coffee, tea bags, sugar, and creamers so they won't be pilfered?

Communications

Lynn Paska reports that pictures are up on the website of two guest rectors (Fr. Peter Schofield and Fr. Paul Hunter) as well as July's Little Red Wagon SICM offering and our guest soprano Laura Taylor.

Deadline for the September newsletter is Friday, September 10.

New Business

Stockade Art Show

A sign-up sheet for volunteers will be placed in the front of church.

Church Front Doors

Rich Unger had requested that Vestry authorize an expenditure for the purpose of rehabbing the front doors of the church. In the meantime, however, Gene DeLong has volunteered to paint the church doors. Gene could probably use some assistance with that. George Soltysiak has stated that he is capable of handling the job, so perhaps it is something they can tackle together.

Diocesan Convention Representation

Diocesan Convention will be October 24, and once again will be held remotely. Parishioners Bob Paska and David and Anne Kennison have indicated an interest in serving as delegates. Jeff moved that this slate of candidates be approved, and Debbie seconded. Motion carried.

Old Business

Sean sought an update on the status of the \$2,400 SICM donation that Vestry approved at our April meeting. Has there been any formal or public acknowledgement from SICM of this contribution?

Lynn inquired about the home school rental agreement. Father stated that they still want to come back but as the young kids are not vaccinated yet they will not be returning this fall.

Debbie registered a request that the bulletin weekly reflect who the flowers on the altar are given by and in whose memory. Kevin Decker has been capably handling this task but he doesn't always specify who the flowers are in memory of

in time to make it into the bulletin. Father will see if Kevin can make his announcements more timely.

The carillon bells have been reprogrammed and are now working to mark the hour and half-hour with Westminster chimes. At some point we will need to replace the program and might have to take up a special collection.

Meg asked to be excused from attending both the September and October meetings due to travel plans. Sean agreed that he would be willing to do the minutes for those meetings.

Meeting adjournment

There being no objections, Father Matt adjourned the meeting at 8:30 p.m. Vestry will next meet at 7 p.m. September 16.

Respectfully,
Meg Hughes, Vestry Clerk