

St. George's Church Vestry Meeting Minutes December 21, 2023

Present: Sean Albert, Jon Ewbank, Carol Gaige, Meg Hughes, Sandee Hughes, David Kennison, Gloria Kishton, Lynn Paska, Fr. Thomas Pettigrew, Paul Smigelski, Rich Unger, Jeff Wengrovius

Vestry met following a well-attended 6 p.m. Mass celebrated at the high altar by Fr. Thomas J. Pettigrew in honor of the Feast of St. Thomas and the 12th anniversary of his own ordination. Father convened the regular monthly business meeting at 6:55 p.m. with a brief prayer in the Shaw Lounge.

Meg Hughes, clerk, had circulated a revised version of the November minutes earlier in the day, which included Paul Smigelski's belated November Outreach Ministry report. Sandee Hughes moved that the minutes be approved and Carol Gaige seconded the motion. It carried unanimously.

Father Pettigrew's Report

The Rector has been heading up the Albany Diocese's effort to assemble appropriate liturgical accessories to present to our incoming Bishop, Jeremiah Williamson, upon his consecration in February. A meaningful gift of historical significance would be the original crozier (staff) used by William Crowell Doane, our diocese's first bishop, beginning in 1867. A few particularly generous parishioners are in a position to fund the restoration and conservation of this highly valuable item, at an estimated cost of \$4,432. If our parish is able to exceed that amount, we would also be able to furnish Bp. Williamson with a cash gift to purchase other relevant gear.

On January 16, St. George's will host a "listening session" for diocesan clergy to meet and speak with the incoming bishop. This event is not open to parishioners, although it is hoped that our Hospitality Committee will coordinate some light refreshments. Sandee Hughes assented to handling that, and will work with Fr. Tom on it.

We still have no firm date for the Institution of Fr. Pettigrew here at St. George's. That event will wait until after Bp. Williamson is consecrated. In the meantime, Father continues to settle in with regular office hours on the mornings of Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. He has been active in charitable outreach work including Loaves and Fishes and the Salvation Army bell ringing.

Christmas brings a busy schedule of services. There will be three worship opportunities on December 24 (10 a.m., 5 p.m., and 10 p.m.) and a sung Mass at 11 a.m. on Christmas Day.

Father reported on the activities of the Society of Mary (coordinated by Kevin Decker) and the Daughters of the King (headed up by Meredith Ewbank). The Society of Mary will host an Epiphany Mass on Saturday, January 6, followed by a breakfast at Kevin's home. The Daughters of the King will sponsor a Lenten Quiet Day on March 2; an Ascension Day Mass on May 9; and a luncheon after Mass on September 9 in honor of Holy Cross Day.

Fr. Tom spoke briefly of the work of a Vestry task force that is looking at staff contracts, but nothing specific was shared.

The parish's Annual Meeting has been scheduled for January 21. Meg noted that this conflicts with Book Club. She will alert Pattie Wareh of the need to reschedule. At Annual Meeting, the parish will be electing new Vestry members to fill slots being vacated by Meg and by Sandee.

Senior Warden's Report

Church Boiler

Senior Warden David Kennison reported on ongoing heating system modifications being performed by our boiler installer, Jack Guarneri, including new thermostats; blowdown drain pipes; and replacement steam traps. These updates should enable the church to heat up more quickly and help conserve fuel.

Rectory Status

Our maintenance worker Fred Leger still has some minor tasks to complete at the Rectory. The rain gutters and downspouts have been cleared of debris but roof issues continue to jeopardize the interior of the residence. Gloria Kishton has been coordinating with Tom Killeen on this work. She reminded Father that he needs to be in touch with this craftsman to arrange access to the building so final work can be done before the weather gets any worse.

Ceiling Repair Quotes

David reminded Vestry that we still have to approve a bid of \$5,350 to have Jim Hope complete work on the sexton apartment ceiling and wall damaged by a roof leak. Gloria

has been coordinating with Mr. Hope and in November we voted to have him complete a bare minimum job of the sanctuary ceiling for \$19,000. (See further discussion in “New Business” below for an update.)

Three-Phase Power to Church Organ

David reports that on November 20 a necessary wiring repair was completed to assure that our organ is safely connected to three-phase power. The church retained a quantity of old copper wiring replaced during that work, and David has been able to strip the insulation from it, preparing the metal for recycling. It’s possible that we could recoup as much as \$1,000 from a scrap dealer thanks to this effort.

Vestry Terms Expiring

As mentioned in Father’s report above, Meg and Sandee are completing their second Vestry terms in January. Jeff Wengrovius will end a partial term and is eligible for reelection. David may also be reelected as Senior Warden, as he finishes his first term. It is now time to convene a nominating committee (consisting of the Rector, the Junior Warden, and those who are cycling off Vestry) to prepare for elections on January 21. Also required are announcements of the open positions in Sunday bulletins and by other appropriate means.

Junior Warden’s Report

Jon Ewbank offered a report that touched upon work being handled by the Senior Warden and by Gloria on behalf of the Asset Management Committee. He also updated Vestry on his research of pest control vendors. He met with three companies on November 9 and asked for pricing for a one-time service and for ongoing pest maintenance services. One provider failed to return a bid. Terminix does not offer one-time-only services and would require a costly ongoing contract. All-Pro Pest Control tendered a bid of \$385 for one visit to the Great Hall, and \$1,922 for servicing the entire campus one time only. Vestry discussed whether there was any value whatsoever in any of these options. We aren’t convinced that roaches are a problem, as only one dead insect has been reported and it wasn’t definitively identified. Mice certainly exist in the Great Hall, and steps have been taken to control them. We can redouble our efforts to kill mice using old-fashioned snap traps. Glue traps may be easier to handle but they are

inhumane as they result in a slow death. David volunteered to set and check traps. It was resolved to eschew professional pest control for now and be vigilant for problems.

Jon asked Vestry to consider a \$935 bid by John Flower for repair of a wall in the first floor men's room of the Great Hall. See "New Business" below.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Jeffrey Wengrovius had encouraging news about the status of pledge income. We are ahead of budget. Unfortunately, we are also over budget on the expense side. Generally, however, our year-to-date expenses match our income almost exactly, reflecting a sound budget and accounting practices. The one big surprise this year was the necessary rewiring of the organ, which required a \$30,000 withdrawal of endowment interest.

Jeff has met frequently with the finance committee to hammer out a 2024 budget, which was presented for Vestry approval (discussion later in these minutes).

In cooperation with the finance committee, Jeff has identified a way to protect endowment money from a potential stock market fall. This would entail an investment of \$100,000 in a three-month treasury bill. The guaranteed interest could help cover the 2024 deficit. If the money is needed before the end of the three-month period, it is easily retrievable. If we choose to roll it over at the conclusion of the term, that is also an option.

A stewardship letter has been prepared and will go into the mail after Christmas, along with a small brochure that Gloria and Father have been working on to inform parishioners of how their contributions are directed and focusing on the many good works of the church.

Communications

Lynn Paska reports that pictures of the Salvation Army bell-ringing and the greening of the church are now on the website. She was also pleased to announce that the December *Georgian Report* has been posted online and is available in hard copy.

Garden Ministry

Meg Hughes had no updates on church garden work but closed the loop on the

restoration of the vintage nativity figures. Ten Georgians attended a December 6 “paint ‘n sip” event to help refurbish the 1920s-era statues. Meg took several candid snapshots that evening, which are now displayed on one of the four bulletin boards in the Great Hall.

Meg encouraged all on Vestry think about ideas for the bulletin boards. She has been trying to update them regularly. One suggestion is to compile a timeline of significant St. George’s events and graphically present that information alongside important dates in national history. If anyone has old photos or other supporting documentation it would be helpful.

Membership

Carol Gaike has met with Jeff, who was helpful in updating the database of parishioners. We do have several new members and Carol appreciates that we have made them feel welcome.

Hospitality Committee

Sandee Hughes noted that a delicious buffet lunch was served after the “greening” of the church last Sunday. Many assisted but Kevin Decker was particularly helpful as he provided macaroni and cheese. Sandee has his recipe if anyone is interested.

Sandee hasn’t been able to compile a roster of volunteers for the “sweets and savories” reception after our Christmas Eve service, but Father did request contributions in a recent email to the parish.

The kitchen continues to need a general cleaning/reorganizing. We also need to be aware that some in the parish appear to have a tendency to borrow items (dishes, cutlery, tablecloths) and forgetting to return them.

Outreach

Paul Smigelski has positive news on the parish’s food donation effort. We are averaging 260 pounds per month, and Carol Gaike continues to deliver this bounty to SICM. We have collected 3,249 pounds in 2023, far exceeding our goal for the year. January 14 is our next ingathering of food and personal care supplies for the SiCM Food Pantry.

March 17 is our next quarterly donation for the YWCA emergency shelter. This continuing ministry benefits women and children escaping dangerous conditions. They need hygiene products such as shampoo, conditioner, menstrual protection, etc.

Jon Pearson once again led a successful Salvation Army bell-ringing campaign on December 9, 2023 at Price Chopper on Eastern Parkway. A dozen Georgians participated in this yearly tradition.

Jamie continues to welcome visits and correspondence at Schenectady Center, 526 Altamont Avenue. Consider visiting or sending Jamie a card.

Father Pettigrew has been consulting with Jim Wingate regarding the parish's shut-ins and plans to begin regular visits to those unable to attend Mass. If you know of anyone who might not be on that list already, and who would appreciate receiving communion during the Christmas season, please speak to Fr. Pettigrew.

Community Liaison

Rich Unger reported to Vestry on a tremendously successful tree-lighting in the Stockade on December 3. Father Pettigrew offered a blessing of the tree and there was carol singing. Attendees then proceeded to the Great Hall for a potluck reception, and Stockade neighbor Bruce Holden played the piano for more singing. According to Rich, the neighborhood is greatly appreciative of St. George's warm hospitality and the rector's blessing.

Acceptance of Above Reports

David proposed, and Rich seconded, a motion to accept Vestry members' reports. All voted in favor.

New Business

Nominating Committee

As indicated earlier in these minutes, Father will convene a nominating committee—consisting of Jon, Sandee, Meg, and himself—to identify potential new Vestry members for election on January 21. There was some discussion of the legality of a Vestry member leaving service at the end of his or her second term. Apparently such release from duty is neither required by law nor feasible if replacement Vestry cannot be recruited. Both Sandee and Meg, however, voiced their hope that they be allowed to conclude their agreed-upon six years' service on schedule as has long been the convention at St. George's.

Vestry briefly discussed a reduction of the board's size should a dearth of interest in serving necessitate such a move. There are pros and cons and it is not an immediate remedy. We would have to begin by proposing the change and gaining parish approval. Then a reduction in Vestry size could ensue in subsequent years. It was agreed that we should stick with a nine-member (plus two wardens and the Rector) board for now.

'Parish Choice' Funding

As in past years, the parishes of the Albany Diocese have been offered the option of stating where we would like to see 15 percent of our diocesan assessment be spent. This is a quirk of our diocese that has persisted for almost 20 years but in fact no longer results in any real saving or redirection of funds. The Diocese may apportion assessment money according to the parishes' wishes but ultimately must draw funds from another source to fulfill its own commitment to the national church. It is time to end the custom but that would require approval at a diocesan convention and the Albany Diocese is not known for its nimble reaction to change. After a brief discussion, Jeff proposed that we replicate our wishes from last year, i.e. that 10 percent go to the Cathedral of All Saints and five percent to youth education. Rich seconded that motion. There were nine "aye" votes and two "nay." Paul and Jon both felt that the most efficient and ethical reaction to the outmoded and misleading concept of "parish choice" would be to refuse any choice. Those voting in favor felt no harm could come of exercising our option of stating which areas of expense seem most worthy to us.

Repairs

Jon asked for a motion to approve the \$935 expense of having John Flower repair the men's room wall in the Great Hall. Jeff made the motion, stating it should come out of the planned capital repair fund. Lynn seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

Gloria spoke in favor of fixing the front door of the church so that it swings shut properly. A lot of cold air rushes in if people fail to pull it closed. Father acknowledged that this is an issue but tabled any action until we can see a quote for the work. Jon Pearson did attempt a repair recently but was unsuccessful. David is willing to look at it to see if he can remediate the problem. In the meantime, please close the door firmly when entering and exiting the church. Greeters must be alert to the issue, too.

Budget Approval

As Jeff stated in his Treasurer's Report above, the Finance Committee has worked long

and hard on the 2024 spending plan. Father put significant effort into improving the formatting of the document, too. Vestry had ample opportunity to review and asked only for a few clarifications. There were no changes suggested. Meeting the church's obligations next year will require tapping our endowment principal. We always try to avoid doing so, as it ultimately reduces our income, but we have no recourse at this time. We need to find new income and creative cost savings going forward. Rich moved to accept the budget; Sandee seconded; it was unanimously approved.

Jeff's suggestion for purchasing a \$100,000 Treasury bill was brought to the floor. Rich made a motion to approve and Paul seconded it. All voted in favor.

Sanctuary Ceiling Paint Job, Revisited

At last month's meeting, Vestry discussed various options for addressing the peeling paint on the ceiling of the church and settled on the least costly approach of restoring only three of the worst spots for \$19,000. Gloria, who was not present for that discussion, felt that a patch job is not the way to go. She continued to communicate with both the scaffolding contractor (Safespan) and the plaster repair/painter contractor (Jim Hope). They have now agreed to address the entire north section of the ceiling for the same cost previously quoted for just a "patch job" of three water-damaged areas only. Only an extra \$400 is needed to buy more paint, and some of the extra paint cost may be refunded to the church if less paint than estimated is ultimately needed. The contractor would like to use the church's account at Village Paint to purchase paint, saving the church the sales tax cost.

Vestry appreciates Gloria's persistence in finding a middle ground on this. Lynn made a motion that we proceed with Gloria's suggested plan. Sean seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Getting a fresh coat of paint on a larger portion of the ceiling will look much better and will show parishioners the value of keeping up repairs. We hope that in 2024 we can paint the middle third at a similar cost and then the year after we can finish the job, spreading out the cost over three years.

Adjournment

Vestry adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Next Vestry Meeting—6:30 p.m., Thursday, January 25

Respectfully,
Meg Hughes, Vestry Clerk