

St. Stephen's Vestry Minutes

October 12, 2010

Attendees: Fr. Jonathan Sams, Pastor Manisha Dostert, Geoff Benes, Deane Blythe, Bob Bagnall, Alan Giles, Don Ingersoll, Ronny Karlsson, Judy McQuiston, Nancy Papet, Norma Ross, and Paula Somerville

Call to order: Senior Warden Geoff Benes called the meeting to order. Fr. Jonathan began the meeting with a prayer, followed by the sharing of good news from each of our lives.

Clerk's Report: Don Ingersoll presented the draft minutes of the September 14, 2010 Vestry meeting for approval. Alan Giles moved, seconded by Bob Bagnall, that the minutes be approved as presented. Motion carried without dissent. (Copies of approved minutes are posted on the Parish website.)

Rector's Report:

- I am encouraged by the September Financials... naturally, I wish we had no deficit, but our giving was strong, and many individuals continue to stretch themselves quite heroically. I am resisting the temptation to hover over the offering plates each Sunday like a vulture over a dying animal. We are taking all the steps to "restore the connection" between our vision and our financial reality. It is in God's hands.
- Paula Somerville, Bob Hoffman, and I attended the Oakland Deanery Caucus at Christ Church Cranbrook on Sunday evening. Deaneries are comprised of parishes within geographic sub-areas of the Diocese. The Caucus is a once-a-year-gathering of clergy and convention delegates from the 14 congregations in our area. Our contingent concurred with a decision to leave \$2,300 in Deanery funds invested with the Michigan Interfaith Loan Fund (a.k.a. "McGhehee Fund"). This very successful agency provided capital to enterprises in low-income areas that cannot acquire it through conventional channels. They are positioned to double their present assets of \$10 million, and see themselves as playing a key role in the economic revival of Michigan. The Caucus also reviewed the proposed diocesan budget of \$2,192,736, and elected The Rev. Gary Hall, Rector of Christ Church Cranbrook, to a 3-year term as clergy Representative to the Diocesan Council. His predecessor in office (Fr. Jonathan) enthusiastically seconded the nomination.
- Thanks to all who participated in the well-attended "Prayer Vigil at the Circle." Weather conditions forced us indoors for the greater part of the event, but that did not prevent its being a truly significant occasion.
- Please consider attending the Adult Faith series I will be leading on November 4, 11, & 18, 7:00 p.m. - 8:30. It will explore "Reconciliation as a Way of Life" and will involve study of the Bible as well as contemporary writings and reflection upon our own life experiences, including of course our shared time at St. Stephen's. Each session stands on its own, so you don't need to worry if you cannot attend them all. A continuation of this series is planned for February.

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- Please make every effort to attend a SWAT Party. These gatherings represent our best opportunity to focus the congregation's attention upon the future of St. Stephen's and the discernment it invites us to undertake. It is vitally important that Vestry voices be heard in these conversations.

Associate Rector's Report:

- **\$2,000 for J2A Pilgrimage Fund:** After some discussion, the YACYM Committee, asked the new J2A youth (8th and 9th graders) whether they wanted to forgive the church's budgeted pledge to contribute \$2,000 toward their urban adventure/pilgrimage this year. The youth unanimously agreed that they want to let the church "off the hook." Instead, they would endeavor to raise enough money through their own efforts. Alan Giles added that the kids gave this matter a lot of thought, asked good questions, and clearly understood what they were deciding.

The Vestry discussed whether accepting this offer would be inconsistent with our commitment to give youth programs a high priority. After much discussion, the Vestry agreed to accept the it because of the spirit in which it was offered. The Vestry Executive Committee will send a note to the youth thanking them for their willingness to support the overall parish community, and assuring them that we, as a Vestry and individually, remain committed to supporting their projects.

- **Adult Sunday School at 9 a.m.:** Don't forget about it! Spread the word! No experience is necessary! Also, all women's Bible study on Monday nights (over 20 women) and the Gospel of John on Wed at 10 a.m. (12 folks).
- **Urban-Suburban Partnership:** All Saints in Pontiac has informed us that they are unable to get anyone to commit to the partnership. It seems that everyone is feeling burnt out and overwhelmed with all they have going on. This is the 3rd church we have tried to get a partnership with, and the 3rd time we ended with this result. We can understand! So, there is some conversation within our subgroup (Pastor Manisha, Nancy Papet, Frances Hammond and Jim Trask) about how to proceed.

The initial thought of some Vestry members was that perhaps we should pitch in to support All Saints with the things that are burning them out. While we hoped for a partnership, our benefit would flow back to us as a result of being able to help them. Also suggested was that we consider going "outside the box" and partnering with a mosque or synagogue.

In the end, the Vestry's sense was that we should continue to seek a partnership, otherwise resentment might result if giving was perceived by the recipient as being a one way street. Also, we would continue to seek Christian churches as partners. Fr. Jonathan said that he would explore some options during the Diocesan convention later in October.

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- **BeFriends:** We did not get enough people to sign up for training so we have postponed it. Perhaps we will offer a spring training. We have five BeFriends, and all of them have someone they are walking with (storytellers). We may have to double up if needed.

Fr. Jonathan said he feels bad that we couldn't get enough interest in the program to have another training session. Pastor Manisha and others put weeks of work into developing the program and training materials, and it's sad that we can't get more people involved.

- **Group Spiritual Discernment:** We have a group! Alan Giles refreshed the Vestry's memories as to what this program is. It is NOT advice giving. It is a way for people to become "unstuck" as they seek to resolve life challenges. The process is:
 - The group meets for an hour, during which each participant tells what they are wrestling with.
 - The group asks clarifying questions.
 - They all pray for a while.
 - They all share what they heard God say regarding the challenges.

Pastor Manish will explain the process in detail to anyone interested.

- **Safeguarding God's Children:** Eric Travis, EDOMI Youth and Young Adult Missioner, will be coming on Mon, Oct 18 to speak to all of our Sunday School teachers about diocesan policies for adults with youth. I am also pushing that all of those who are required take the online course do so by this Monday. We do these things for our children, to make sure we are creating a nurturing environment that has strict conduct policies for adults. Please take the course if you need to. Many thanks to Deacon Liz for spearheading this.

Finance Report:

Monthly Update: Deane Blythe reported that we are solvent and the trend line looks OK. Our September expenses were abnormally high and revenue good, so the deficit is not too bad. The September "Flash" report showed that revenues were \$34,750, and expenses were \$40,592, for a negative \$5,841 variance. Actual year-to-date revenues are \$327,262, and expenses are \$337,298. Thus, we have a year-to-date negative variance of \$10,036. October giving will provide another important gauge as to how we will end the year.

2011 Budget: Deane reminded the Vestry that they all received an email providing worksheets for providing the finance committee with their 2011 budget input. In answer

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to questions, Dean provided the following information.

The finance committee hopes that each Vestry liaison will use the budget process to reach out to their committee members for input into their vision for the coming year. Doing so can help them connect giving with mission activities and outcomes. The Finance Committee has asked liaisons to prioritize fund requests within each area, but that does not mean it plans to make these tradeoffs for committees. It just provides a bit more insight for the finance committee regarding what would likely be cut if the full amount requested is not able to be provided. (That is, if needs exceed the revenue we anticipate we will be able to raise.) This also helps those responsible for presenting the budget to and seeking support from the Vestry and ultimately the congregation.

The finance committee has not yet developed a budget strategy for next year. It needs to see the October giving and expense results, and the estimated mission needs from the committees. That is why the worksheets were prepared and why we are asking for them back by October 29th. Once we see this data, we can begin to map out a strategy for how best to proceed. As you know, much of the budget will go toward staff, the building, and operations. The committee will estimate these costs and take them into consideration as well.

Don Ingersoll added that we were conditioned to watch our pennies when cash was short and revenues uncertain. We all still need to be prudent, but we hope that your mission areas won't cut back on their visioning for the coming year. Think big, use discernment, and carefully and creatively cost it out.

Deane concurred and noted that last year Membership had zero budget. Even though we need to be careful with our money, that important function should be funded. Judy McQuiston noted that in the past Membership has been able to pick up funds from Communications and others to cover costs as they arose.

After discernment and banging the cost estimates against revenue scenarios, the finance committee, Vestry and ultimately the congregation will come up with a budget. We will put our dreams and money together. Perhaps not everything will be funded, but if not, we will know specifically what shiny red balls are left out.

Meijer and Kroger Community Rewards programs: Deane reported that he has put together a package of information about the Kroger and Meijer programs, including applications. Essentially, these programs give the target charity/church a percent of the amount spent by reward program participants. The Kroger program seemed more flexible and he thought it would generate more revenue. Ideally Deane would like to see a volunteer take on the task of looking into these programs and perhaps others.

After discussing what uses might be made of such revenues, the Vestry's sense was that having them used for mission-related purposes, such as outreach, would be more justifiable and more likely to prompt parishioner participation, than using it to "pay to operate the building." The Outreach Committee agreed to consider picking up this form of fundraising to support its mission.

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Old Business

Updates on Vestry Retreat Goals: There were no reports.

Basketball Court: Don Ingersoll reported that Deane Blythe followed up on our letter to the neighbor who had erected the court on our property, and that she agreed to remove it. Deane walked through our woods today and saw that in fact the hoop and pavers had been removed, thus ending this episode after 14 years. A letter will be sent to the property owner thanking her for taking this action.

Communications "Ad Hoc" Committee: Deane reported that the committee didn't need to meet in October because its actions and recommendations seemed to be working. It will meet in November if needed. Some asked if we should be thanking parishioners for responding so well. After a discussion, the sense was that we have been communicating our interim success, and that since we are not out of the woods yet, we should wait to see how October's numbers and the SWAT program turn out.

Pastor Manisha said that we should thank God for what has gone on here. Norma suggested that we add this to our committee agendas and deliver the message that way.

Fr. Jonathan suggested that the Vestry might wish to do something light-hearted and whole-hearted on "Gratitude Sunday" November 7th. Geoff Benes said he has some ideas and will work on that idea. Some Vestry members, including the Clerk, suggested that it would be more joyful for all concerned if they didn't have to sing.

New Business:

SWAT Parties: Geoff reminded everyone to attend one.

Breach of Security: Nancy Papet asked about the outcome of the breach of our wireless network security that was reported in a recent email.

Fr. Jonathan reported that the matter has been satisfactorily resolved. We have changed our password and taken other steps ensure it doesn't happen again.

Clergy Transition: Nancy Papet said she was asked by a parishioner about the timing and process related to selection of an interim priest. Fr. Jonathan said that nothing happens until the day after he leaves. At that time, the Diocese will initiate the process that will have lots of opportunity for input from the congregation.

Adjournment: Bob Bagnall moved, seconded by Nancy Papet, that the meeting be adjourned. Motion passed without dissent.

Pastor Manisha closed the meeting with a prayer at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Don Ingersoll, Clerk