

# St. Stephen's Vestry Minutes

November 9, 2010

**Attendees:** Fr. Jonathan Sams, Pastor Manisha Dostert, Geoff Benes, Deane Blythe, Bob Bagnall, Alan Giles, Frances Hammond, 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 October 12, 2010 Vestry meeting for approval. Bob Bagnall moved, seconded by Paula Somerville, that the minutes be approved as presented. Motion passed without dissent. (Copies of approved minutes are posted on the Parish website.)

**Rector's Report:** [Submitted report is in *italics*, comments are in regular font.]

- 1. In the past month there were three funerals (all for parishioners) and (counting the one coming up on November 20) 2 weddings. The SWAT stewardship program has transpired, as well as Diocesan Convention. I also attended two ordination services, one in the Irish Hills and the other in Madison Heights. It has been an intense month.*
- 2. The October Financial report is not so much discouraging as it is bewildering. There were 5 Sundays in the month, and last year October was one of our best giving months. We have communicated a consistent message regarding the importance of giving. When I think about the giving patterns of this congregation, I am reminded of a Jerry Lee Lewis tune that was popular when I was a teenager: "You shake my nerves and you rattle my brain/your kind of love drives a man insane!" The message here, I think, is that the time has come for us to **entrust the remainder of 2010 to God.** We've done our homework, and the outcome is not in our control. We need to keep the congregation informed, and not allow ourselves to be distracted from the tasks at hand, which are:*
- 3. **Observe Advent with eager anticipation.** We have "Advent by Candlelight", the Christmas Walk, the Advent Cantata, and the Children's Christmas Play to look forward to, plus the Christ-Mass. I also plan to go hunting Up North.*

*"...while gentle silence enveloped all things . And night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed..." Wisdom of Solomon, 18:14.*

*I wouldn't want to miss out on that! Advent is for paying attention.*

The question arose regarding how many pledges were received so far. No one was sure, and Dave Stein will be contacted for this information.

A discussion of our finances followed, centering on the question of what we should do to increase the likelihood that giving is at the level needed to cover expenses and to show a capacity and willingness to support going forward at our current level of programming and staffing. Some felt we should continue to drive the "crossroad" message, while others felt the point has been made enough and that to keep beating

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the drum would be counterproductive. Pastor Manisha reminded the Vestry that God put us here to do good things. We need to continue to do God's work and have faith that God will be good to us if we are good to Him.

Fr. Jonathan reiterated his view that we should keep informing the parish community of our budget situation via updated numbers in the bulletin and so forth, but not do anything more until the November numbers are in. If things look bad then, we can decide what action is appropriate, including perhaps calling back the "Ad Hoc Communications Committee." No vote was taken, but the Vestry seemed satisfied to accept this suggestion.

4. *I have no doubt about the validity and God-blessedness of our ministry together, but if I did, such doubt would have been erased by the Temple talk presented by 3 of our youth on a recent Sunday. Their insight and eloquence blew me away! Such moments provide the impetus to carry on when the way forward seems obscure. As the hymn says it, "And when the warfare's fierce the conflict strong/ steals on the ear the distant triumph song/ and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong. Alleluia! Alleluia!"*
5. *Please give consideration to attending the Community Thanksgiving Celebration" sponsored by the Troy Area Interfaith Group. It will be held SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21<sup>ST</sup>, AT 7:00PM AT THE BHARATIYA TEMPLE , our neighbor to the north of us on Adams Rd.*
6. *An accompanying letter will describe proposed efforts to improve our relationship with our immediate neighbor to the north, Mr. Terry Winter.*

Fr. Jonathan provided a history of our relationship with Mr. Winter, going back to when we granted him a free easement so he could drain his property to make it buildable. Recently he has been highly incensed about what he perceives to be our flagrant dumping of leaves, limbs and trash on his property. During our recent cleanup, he became abusive toward our volunteers, and he later filed a complaint with the City of Troy.

A City of Troy inspector came out and met with Fr. Jonathan. Fr. Jonathan asked the inspector if he thought it would be make Mr. Winter happy if we picked up anything that looked foreign. The inspector was sympathetic to our situation, and said he didn't see anything objectionable on Mr. Winter's property. He said that Mr. Winter has no recourse even if he is not happy. Fr. Jonathan said we would pick up foreign materials [a few plastic bags and water bottles] and write Mr. Winter a letter. The inspector requested that he be sent a copy of our letter.

Fr. Jonathan read a draft letter to Mr. Winter. After some discussion, Judy McQuiston agreed to redraft the letter in consultation with Norma Ross and Pastor Manisha, and send it to Mr. Winter and the city inspector.

**Associate Rector's Report:** [Submitted report is in *italics*, comments are in regular font.]

□ ***Urban-Suburban Partnership:*** *At the diocesan convention, I had a conversation with Rev. Shannon McVean-Brown of St. Matthew's/St. Joseph's Episcopal in Detroit. After*

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*speaking to her and her senior warden, we decided to pursue again an attempt at a partnership with this congregation. The senior warden is working on getting their group of three laypeople.*

□ **Changes in leadership:** *In 2011, I will be chair of Member Development Committee and hand over the Outreach Ministry Team to Judy McQuiston and Cheryl Davenport.*

Fr. Jonathan suggested that it might be better to let the Member Development Committee select its chair rather than assuming a swap of leadership positions. Pastor Manisha agreed.

**Discretionary Fund needs:** *Caring Ministries Team has come up with a program called Family2Family. We are helping members of our church family who have needs. The needs for our families who are on the edge are great. The discretionary funds' resources are in high demand.*

Pastor Manisha added that while parishioners are giving generously, more is needed. When developing the budget, we might wish to increase the discretionary funds which are the main sources of help.

**A Suggestion for the Way the Budget Is Presented:** *At Outreach Ministry, we were discussing how the amount of offerings that this congregation gives away is considered outreach and it should include the diocesan apportionment. In other words, we more than tithe our offerings. Is there a way to indicate this as part of our narrative of our budget?*

Pastor Manisha said this is an important story. We more than tithe if everything we do that is "caring for people" is considered. We have our Diocesan tithe, our YACYM outreach activities, Habitat for Humanity, etc. It adds up to a lot and we should be proud of it.

Also, the Outreach Committee is requesting that its budget be increased by \$4,000 for 2011. As a church, we pledged to give \$5,000 to Habitat each year to get us into their Circle of Faith. This guarantees us "blitz build" slots for our highly motivated and dedicated workers. We have been budgeting for \$1,000 and relying on the Habitat team to raise the other \$4,000 through appeals. The committee's sense is that the church should budget for the full \$5,000 considering that it was the church that made the pledge. This question will be considered as part of the budget development process.

**YACYM is adopting a set of guidelines for nursery/preK Sunday School teachers:** *see attached. I think we may have to add something to the nursery guidelines, but we are getting close to finishing it.*

**Safeguarding God's Children:** *As of last night, 3 staff members, 2 vestry members and 1 Sunday School teacher need to take the online course. We are also having meetings with all the Sunday School teachers to go over line-by-line the diocesan policies for adults who work with children and youth.*

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**Habitat for Humanity Interfaith Panel:** I served with Padma Kuppa on this. We discussed how a Christian organization can reach out to people of other faiths.

## Finance Report:

Monthly Update: Deane Blythe reported that we seem to be continuing to operate at about a \$30K/month income rate. Revenue to expense is running at a BUDGET deficit of \$34,945 YTD. However, due to your diligent management of expenses, we are operating at an ACTUAL deficit of \$13,875 YTD. October had 5 Sundays, so we were hoping for a bigger revenue number.

	This Month			Year to Date			YTD	YTD
	Actual (This Year)	Actual (Last Year)	Actual Variance	Actual (This Year)	Actual (Last Year)	Actual Variance	Budget (This Year)	Act/Bud Variance
Rev.	\$31,177	\$43,224	(\$12,047)	\$358,439	\$353,430	\$5,009	\$395,697	(\$37,259)
Exp.	\$35,016	\$33,944	\$1,072	\$372,314	\$369,929	\$2,385	395,698	(\$23,384)
Var.	(\$3,839)	\$9,280	(\$10,975)	(\$13,875)	(\$16,500)	\$7,394	(\$0)	(\$60,643)

2011 Budget: Deane thanked the Vestry for submitting their budget requests. The committee will start crunching the numbers Monday. This will be an iterative process, so everyone will get a chance to provide input on their initial allocations, and the overall budget in December.

## **Old Business**

### Updates on Vestry Retreat Goals: .

Don Ingersoll reported that the Welcome Center Desk has been completed and that Mike Brokenshire will be delivering it to the church in the near future. The Membership Committee could begin using it upon arrival. The final step in the process is the erection of bulletin boards above the rail behind the free-standing bulletin boards in the gathering area, and installation of a writing surface along the rail for sign-up sheets. The design and construction management team met tonight to fine tune construction plans and coordinate the process of pricing out the work. An open question is whether lighting above the bulletin boards can be funded with the funds remaining from the Endowment Fund grant.

Communications "Ad Hoc" Committee: Deane reported that the committee didn't need to meet in November, but will meet in December if needed.

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## New Business:

### Alternative Gas Provider:

David Williams alerted us to a way to save on our gas bill each month. Dean Blythe and others investigated the method and recommend we sign up for it. Highlights of the information Deane provided follow.

Background--Alternative Gas Suppliers have only been permitted in Michigan for the last decade. Today about 12% of Michigan gas customers use an alternative supplier, versus Ohio where the option has been in place for over 20 years---and over half of the gas customers use an alternative supplier. About a dozen companies sell gas in Michigan, however many are small and restricted to certain areas. There are 5 key firms in the state.

How can they sell for less—Consumers Energy is a regulated monopoly. By law they can make money delivering gas, but not selling it. In addition, they are required by law to buy 60% of their estimated annual usage by the end of March each year. Gas producers understand this and adjust prices accordingly. Alternative energy suppliers buy gas year round and take advantage of the high and lows in the marketplace.

How the system works—Consumers delivers the gas in their system and monitors usage. They continue to charge for distribution and collect other fees. Volunteer Energy replaces the usage in Consumer's wells. Volunteer gas charges for replacement are reflected on the monthly Consumer bill.

### **St. Stephens's comparisons—**

	Total Bill	Gas Charge	Would Have Saved
11/06 to 12/15/09	\$2559	\$1982	\$134
12/16 to 01/18/10	3852	2970	78
09/15 to 10/13/10	282	203	32

Other Customers—Detroit Lions, Detroit Casinos, Walgreens, Kroger, Shields Pizza, Oakland Hills CC, Red Run CC, Andiamos, Red Wings, Tigers, Fox Theater. Volunteer claims they have a 96% retention rate. Most of the cancellations come from foreclosures where by law, the new customer must start with Consumers.

Competitors—Deane checked with the two largest competitors to Volunteer. They offer:

- IGS \$6.19 Fixed Rate through March 2012
- Direct Energy \$5.99 Fixed Rate for 12 months—can cancel anytime.

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**Alan Giles moved, seconded by Bob Bagnall, that we accept the recommendation to change gas suppliers and sign up with Volunteer Energy. Motion passed without dissent.**

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

Pastor Manisha closed the meeting with a prayer at 9:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:  
Don Ingersoll, Clerk

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## **Draft ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH NURSERY AND PREK/K SUNDAY SCHOOL GUIDELINES**

The safety of our children is the top priority of our parish. In keeping with that, St. Stephen's volunteer and paid staff are expected to adhere to the diocesan policies when working with our children. The following guidelines are to be used to help ensure that we are meeting this goal.

Nursery:

1. Nursery staff will have completed the training courses required from time to time by the diocese for adults who work with children.
2. Staff members, whether paid or volunteer, will be required to agree to a background check that will be executed and paid for by the church.
3. At least one parent or guardian is required to be in the church building at any time their child is in the nursery.
4. Two (2) nursery staff members must be present with the children at all times.
5. If a child needs to leave the room for any reason, the parents or guardian will be contacted immediately and required to come to the room and attend to their child. To help facilitate this important guideline, pagers, cell phones, or walkie-talkies will be provided to allow staff members immediate communication with the parents or guardians of the child.
6. If an emergency occurs that requires the child to leave the room immediately, one of the staff members will attend to the child as deemed necessary, the parent or guardian will be notified, and they will be required to come immediately to attend to their child. Upon arrival of the parent or guardian the staff member will then return directly to the nursery to resume their duties.
7. Should any of these guidelines not be met because of unusual circumstances, the nursery staff or volunteers are required to report the incident to their supervisor (clergy or Sunday School Coordinator) at the earliest possible opportunity.

PreK/K (3 – 5 year old ) Sunday School Class

1. Teachers will have completed the training courses required from time to time by the diocese for adults who work with children.
2. At least one parent or guardian is required to be in the church building at any time their child is in the class.
3. All children in this program must be potty-trained.
4. Two (2) teachers must be present with the children at all times. To help facilitate this important guideline, pagers, cell phones, or walkie-talkies may be used to allow communication with the parents or guardians of the child.
5. If an emergency occurs that requires the child to leave the room immediately, one of the teachers will attend to the child as deemed necessary, the parent or guardian will be notified, and they will be required to come immediately to attend to their child. Upon arrival of the parent or guardian the teacher will then return directly to the classroom to resume their duties.
6. Should any of these guidelines not be met because of unusual circumstances, the teachers or volunteers are required to report the incident to their supervisor (clergy or Sunday School Coordinator) at the earliest possible opportunity.