

# St. Stephen's Vestry Minutes

June 8, 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, Michelle Pickering, Norma Ross, Paula Somerville and David Williams (Treasurer designate).

**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 May 11, 2010 Vestry meeting for approval. Bob Bagnall moved, seconded by Nancy Papet, that the minutes be approved as presented. Motion carried without dissent. (Copies of approved minutes are posted on the Parish website.)

Don Ingersoll informed the Vestry that he and Fr. Jonathan have reviewed the Diocesan Canons regarding signature authority in parishes. In doing so, they found that only Wardens are permitted to sign contracts on behalf of their parish. In some cases, Fr. Jonathan has signed contracts, such as for Ray Aiello's services. To bring us into compliance with the Canons, the Senior Warden will add his signature to contracts that have been signed by Fr. Jonathan. The contracts are all in a single folder, so this should not pose any problem.

Another administrative matter that we will tidy up is our count of baptized members, which has not been evaluated lately and is likely overstated. The only time we use this number is as a required entry on our annual parish Parochial Report. The important number is our active membership, and that number is accurate.

## **Rector's Report:**

Fr. Jonathan introduced David Williams who has volunteered to become our new Parish Treasurer. A native of Alabama, David was married at St. Stephen's in 2008 to Sara Chapman Williams. He has his own health care consulting firm, and is a self-confessed "numbers guy" who brings a fresh eye and a genial spirit to this important ministry.

The actual "changing of the guard" will take place once the new Treasurer has been mentored on the mechanics of the Treasurer's role and our financial management system.

Bob Bagnall moved, seconded by Michelle Pickering, that David Williams be elected to the office of Parish Treasurer, effective upon the transition date agreed upon by the incoming and outgoing Treasurers. Motion passed without dissent.

Fr. Jonathan and the Vestry acknowledged that St. Stephen's owes a spiritual debt of gratitude to Dave Stein, our outgoing Treasurer. He shepherded our finances through some of the most challenging fiscal years since the Great Depression. Dave's day job has expanded, and with it, his global travel obligations.

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Fr. Jonathan recounted his recent auto accident, and thanked everyone for their prayers and encouragement. Special thanks to the Roberts family for providing him temporary transportation. He noted that the impact of the love and support he and Nancy received far outweighed the impact of the crash.

In view of the continuing pattern of donations below our budget and last year's experience, Fr. Jonathan will devote his "Rambling Rector" message to this topic in the Summer *Witness*. He provided a draft of his message to which he plans to add some specific numbers. The Vestry supported this measure, and thought the draft was excellent. Suggestions were offered for making the supporting numbers clear to regular parishioners who are unaccustomed to reading our financial summaries.

**Associate Rector's Report:** Pastor Manisha provided the following updates:

- **Outreach Ministry:** We have exceeded our goal for Habitat for Humanity! Despite a slow start, contributions exceed our \$5,000 goal. We should have learned by now that God always provides, even when it looks impossible. The mini-grants are very successful, and the team is excited about them.
- The **youth activities** recently completed and still to come are too numerous to go into in detail. They have been great, and youth Sunday is shaping up to be spectacular. Preparation is well underway for VBS, the RAMs Mission Trip, and the Pilgrimage to San Francisco. Very exciting. Very powerful!
- **Summer Sunday School** will consist of weekly DVD showings, and perhaps some crafts as well. Children will start in the regular service, but leave after the collect, and then return during announcements. Pastor Manisha will handle the Sunday school when she can, but she will not be available for several of them. Volunteers are needed.
- **Urban/Suburban Partnership:** We are making progress! Pastor Manisha is working with Spirit of Hope in Detroit. Their program seems well suited to help us meet our objectives for this line of effort. Pastor Manisha is lining up three parishioners to lead this endeavor.
- **Caring Ministries:** We are exploring a new way for offering care to parishioners. BeFrienders is a great ministry and we are looking to train a new group in September and October.
- Please **use our church calendar!** New Sexton Ray is relying on it for planning his work. Please increase your diligence by adding all your events to the calendar **AND** including the email address of a contact in case Ray has questions.
- **Safeguarding God's Children:** Deacon Liz has done a great job arranging for the Vestry to be able to take this on-line course. It is required for all Vestry members. Please take it if you haven't already done so. Vestry members who have taken it mentioned that the course is interesting, very informative, and not burdensome to take.

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**Finance Report:** The May financial report was discussed during the Rector's Report, so Deane Blythe just highlighted some of the key numbers. In summary, our budget for parish giving for 2010 is \$453,000. Parishioners approved this level during the annual meeting when their hearts sensed that this level was needed to fund what God has in mind for us this year. But, projecting our current rate of giving, we will receive \$417,000 for the year, even accounting for the usual "end-of-year catching up." We are doing a good job of keeping variable expenses down, but most of our expenses are fixed, such as salaries and benefits. Therefore, we cannot cut our way out of this problem. If this pattern persists, we may have to freeze spending which will hurt our ministries.

Deane provided the following update on the Finance Committee's plan, which he presented at the May Vestry meeting:

- Post the Treasurer's monthly message on the parish website, (This is in progress for May numbers.)
- Have Phil Pierce evaluate contribution patterns, (In progress)
- Have the Treasurer do a temple talk, (Aiming to be done before July 1)
- Prepare a budget message for the Witness, (Included in the June edition and Fr. Jonathan's article will be in the July/August edition)
- Send a letter to homes this summer on this matter, (planned) and
- Periodically insert a budget message in bulletins. (Started and will continue)

In addition to these previously planned activities, the Finance Committee will review the E-Giving accounts to ensure that contributions are being properly transferred.

Pastor Manisha provided the May 2010 edition of "The Parish Paper," a newsletter she receives. ([www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com)) It contained an article called "Generous Givers: A Product of Motivation and Methods." In it were listed effective and ineffective ways to motivate and solicit increased giving.

Paula Somerville moved, seconded by Alan Giles, to approve the financial report. Motion passed without dissent.

## **Old Business**

### **Drainage and Sidewalk Update**

Alan Giles reported that several bids were received ranging from about \$15,000 to \$20,000. Phil Pierce is currently evaluating the bids.

### **Vestry Retreat Goal Updates:**

- **Transition and Reconciliation**

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**Lore Committee:** Frances Hammond reported that the Lore Committee has interviewed Fr. Jonathan on 3 of 6 identified topics. To date it has covered "diversity," "People over structure," and "Life as a Body." Summaries of these are being written up. As we proceed, we may find that though reorganization of the material we can strengthen the points being made and improve cohesion. We may find that we can cover our targeted points with fewer than 6 topics. The Committee plans to do similar interviews with Pastor Manisha and perhaps Miranda. It is also considering an interview of both Fr. Jonathan and Pastor Manisha so we can explore more deeply how they interact with each other and the Parish.

An early Lore Committee objective was to ascertain and provide information to the Parish about the Diocesan process for Priest transitions. However, the Dioceses will not tell us the process to be followed until we are ready to begin it. Part of the reason might be that they are cutting staff and changing roles; and may not know what the process will be in the future. Fr. Jonathan believes it may be more flexible than in the past, but only time will tell.

- Looking Out/Building Up: (Building membership & reaching out to the world)

Pastor Manisha provided more information about our plan to work with Spirit of Hope, an organization that is highly successful at creating effective partnerships between urban and suburban churches. They have identified a church that seems well suited to partnering with us. Pastor Manisha is lining up three parishioners to serve on our team to work out the partnership. She has two volunteers so far, and hopes to have the third soon.

The original order of replacement bulletin boards has arrived. Subsequently, we identified the need for another board to go over the baskets where pull-tabs, old cell phones and such are collected. This added board will provide for better signage and a fuller explanation of the ways these donations help others. We are waiting for that board to come in along with some mounting hardware that was missing from our original order. Once we get them, the boards will be installed with assistance from the Building & Grounds group.

The Vestry discussed whether the collection baskets for phones, tabs, etc. should also be upgraded. In the end, this matter was deferred to the Outreach Committee with the expectation that we would hear their judgment at the August retreat.

Ronny Karlson provided a drawing of the proposed Welcome Center, along with a cost estimate (\$1,000 to \$1,500). Shown were the three bulletin Board panels, the writing surface for sign-up sheets, and the welcome station where members and visitors will be able to get information and guidance. The current blue bulletin boards will be put aside for other uses.

A full discussion followed to ensure that Vestry members understood the plan for the physical changes to the gathering area, and for the "people" component of the Welcome Center implementation. Fr. Jonathan warned that any time we change

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anything; some people inevitably disagree with it. All Vestry members said they agreed with the plan and agreed to support it. Pastor Manisha said that the best way to defend change is with its purpose: "To facilitate helping to focus folks who don't know what to do or how to do something."

Basketball Court and land encroachments: Deane Blythe reported that he had a letter from the Diocese's property attorney. The key part of the letter reads:

"Depending on the relationship between the church and its neighbors, and whether the Diocese wants to actually remove the basketball court and other items placed on church property, you may want to consider sending letters to the neighbors informing them, either gently or more pointedly, of their trespass on church property and that the church would ask that they refrain from depositing or storing any items on church property or, alternatively, that the church consents to the neighbors' use (or certain uses, e.g., stacking firewood, basketball court) of church property with the understanding that it is in fact church property and the church retains the right to remove any property, including removal of the basketball court, in its sole discretion. By consenting to the neighbors' use of the property, it establishes the church's claim as owner and frustrates adverse possession claims by the neighbors."

Deane said that the Executive Committee plans to follow the concept in the second (underlined) alternative. Specifically, Don Ingersoll will draft two friendly letters, one for the house with the basketball court and another version for the others. Both versions will give our permission for piling leaves and wood stacking; but assert our ownership rights, including the right to remove anything on our property at our sole discretion. The letter to the house with the basketball court will also say we want to have the court removed and will help you do so if they wish.

Once the letters are drafted, we will ask the Diocesan property attorneys to review them to ensure they contain the right legal terms to achieve our purpose. Once finalized, the letters will be sent to the homeowners. We will check with the attorneys to determine the best way to transmit the letters. We suspect registered mail will be preferred so we can get a record of receipt.

Archivist: Don Ingersoll reported that the rumor that Phil Pierce and John Morley have agreed to be "co-archivists" is not completely accurate. Phil has agreed to be a Co-Archivist, "since I am the originator of some of the documents, many of the photos and all of the videos (including those on our YouTube channel). I have also scanned most of our archives and documents for various other projects, so we have much in digital archive format. I would also suggest that either John Morley or someone with WebMaster experience assist, since we will eventually want to put much of this on our website for all parishioners to be able to access and enjoy."

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John Morley gladly agrees to work with the Archivist(s) to get info on the website, etc. but prefers not to be considered a "Co-Archivist."

Mary Alice Heaton has offered her assistance to the Archivist(s) but doesn't want to be considered wholly or partly the archivist. As a Charter member of the parish, she has historical information and personal knowledge of events and people. She can be extremely valuable as we seek to portray properly our past, and what it says about who we are today. We need to be sure that we include her in our efforts as we go forward.

We seem to need one more person who can complete the team and work with these highly effective, committed and already heavily involved volunteers.

## **New Business**

Website Update Don Ingersoll reported that webmaster John Morely is working with Pastor Manisha's sister Bina this summer to do some significant technical, format and content revision and updating of our website. This is well timed to coincide with the emergence of the Archivist function and the development and implementation of a strategy for including historical info, and for adding new content as events occur.

We are seeking feedback on the site from the full spectrum of parishioners. This will help us identify areas for improvement and potential solutions. A call for info will be going out in the *Witness*. Please take time to review the site and provide us your thoughts. Please encourage others to do so as well.

One suggestion is to have current directory info on a password protected part of the site. The situation now is that while we have a password protected area, the password is in the *Witness*, which is accessible on the site without using the password.

During a lively discussion, opinions varied; but there were strong voices against having directory info on the site; and in the end, this notion prevailed. Instead, the Vestry prefers that a process be develop to simplify our maintenance of up-to-date directory info, and to make it available to Members by other means. Various solutions were suggested, but attendees lacked sufficient knowledge of the ACS software system, on which our directory info resides, to enable proper evaluation of them. Judy McQuiston agreed to ask Dennis Bishop about ideas he might have stemming from his efforts to pull that data together for the hard copy directory.

## **Summer Operations**

Geoff Benes reminded the Vestry that during the summer, the Vestry's Executive Committee will continue to meet and track things; and will ensure that the full Vestry is kept informed. If a meeting is needed for any reason, one will be called.

## **Future meetings:**

Our next scheduled Vestry meeting will be a retreat on August 22, at Judy McQuiston's residence from 4 p.m. until 8 p.m.

## **Coming events:**

- Congregation picnic and Prayer Circle groundbreaking June 13<sup>th</sup>

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- VBS June 27 through June 30

**Adjournment:** Alan Giles moved, seconded by Nancy Papet, to adjourn. Motion passed without dissent at 9:17 p.m.

### **Actions taken subsequent to Adjournment:**

Alan Giles moved, seconded by Paula Somerville, that the Vestry supports the Building and Grounds Group's acceptance of the Capital Project's recommendation to accept Miller Landscaping's bid of \$19,560 for the entire specified work for the sidewalk and drainage project. The Vestry recognizes that this bid exceeds the Capital Projects' original cost estimate for this work. Motion approved without dissent on June 13, 2010.

Motion by Deane Blythe, seconded by Don Ingersoll, that the Vestry hereby authorizes the Treasurer to transfer up to \$20,000 from the Capital Contingency Fund to the Mission Development Fund if needed to provide cash to pay 2010 operating expenses. The Vestry's intention is that any funds so transferred will be returned to the Capital Contingency Fund when revenues permit. Motion was approved without dissent on August 6, 2010.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Ingersoll

Clerk