

St. Stephen's Vestry Minutes

May 11, 2010

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

Call to order: Fr. Jonathan opened 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 April 13, 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.) Members commented that they appreciated the level of detail provided. Nancy Papet cautioned that minutes should to avoid having details about any individual's specific ailments, as doing so might violate health privacy laws. (A reference to a health condition was removed from the minutes of the April 13th minutes based upon this suggested friendly amendment.)

Rector's Report: Fr. Jonathan provided the following information:

A. When we think of truly significant occasions in the history of St. Stephen's, surely "**Sexton and the City**" will rank among them. This was a great party and a successful event, but yet more: it was paradigmatic, to use a \$10 word, an occasion that both reflects and helps establish the true character of what this parish community believes and how it acts. It provides a model and template for the way Christianity is practiced here. In the course of the evening it could be clearly seen how individuals like Miranda help to create St. Stephen's, and how the parish community contributes to the flourishing of their gifts and their faith.

In the aftermath of this event, let us resolve to continue to seek, with God's help, to discern and affirm each other's gifts, remove every obstacle that obstructs their flourishing, and turn them loose.

B. I am aware of the **Finance Committee's concerns** about cash flow and the stress coming months will place upon our finances. I endorse the idea of publishing excerpts from the Treasurer's Flash report in the Bulletins and *Witness*, as well as Temple talks by Wardens and the Treasurer. If concern continues to mount, we could consider sending a special mailing to alert parishioners of the need to keep up their giving. However, we should avoid allowing anxieties to drive our messages.

Fr. Jonathan is thankful for people who keep an eye on the financial situation. The energy and love he sees tells him that we will be OK.

C. Regarding the **Diocese of Michigan**, the Diocesan Treasurer (a volunteer) has resigned, which complicates the budgeting process. I will know more after the Diocesan Council meets later this month, and will inform you of any developments that seem relevant to St. Stephen's.

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D. We have another area that will require us to modify our processes due to the Sexton transition. In recent years, Miranda has been the principle conduit for information flow between the congregation and the **Co-Op Pre-school**. We cannot expect the new Sexton to take on this role, at least not in the beginning. Therefore, it seems that the revitalized Building & Grounds Committee, or some other person or group, needs to assume this role. The Preschool continues to struggle to get enough enrollment to survive, and we need to stay in touch with their efforts to adapt to current conditions. This has been an outstanding program, and we ought to do what we can to help them not just survive, but flourish.

Their Board doesn't have any history with us, so they are asking us to approve a contract so they can be certain what their rent obligation will be. (Their proposed contract was presented and approved under New Business.)

E. Ray Aiello has signed our contract to be the **new Sexton**, agreeing to our proposed terms. Ray will work a 90-day probationary period at \$14.00 per hour. If completed successfully, his salary will be raised to \$15 per hour. Ray will work Sunday mornings. He will start May 17, overlapping with Miranda who will show him the ropes. Due to a prior commitment, Ray will be off part of the second week. He will liaison with the Building & Grounds Group. We will introduce him to the congregation the first Sunday he works.

F. Regarding the **pension liability** we have for Miranda, we are waiting for paperwork from the Diocese. Once we receive and complete it, we will return it with our check. We will have a pension liability for the new Sexton after one year of service.

A. The **Prayer Circle** situation is great! We needed a minimum of \$5,000 to complete the basic structure. We received more than that at the party. A mailer went out to those who did not attend the party, which reflected that we have received the minimum needed to proceed, but that to do all aspects of the plan we need about \$10,000. The plan does not provide for wheelchair access. It may not be necessary, but we will look into that before proceeding. We cannot finalize our plan or begin construction until we finish correcting the drain problem because the two projects may overlap.

H. **Treasurer** Dave Stein's work demands have increased significantly, so we have been seeking a replacement. A good candidate is seriously considering the position and hopefully he will decide to accept it soon.

Associate Rector's Report: Pastor Manisha reported spending a lot of time meeting with ministry teams, and provided the following updates:

- **Outreach Ministry:** We are excited about this year! We have mini-grants and are focusing on 10 charitable organizations. We have new SOS co-chairs (Joan Morgan and John Morley).

We are also trying to raise funds for Habitat for Humanity. When we became part of

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the covenant with Habitat, we obligated to raise \$5,000 per year, for which we got priority on slots for our volunteers. But, we are having a hard time raising it this year. Outreach needs help and is open to ideas.

Some Vestry members asked if perhaps our collective energy for this endeavor has run its course. If so, we might wish to cut back or eliminate at least our funding commitment next year. This will be a hard choice as several members are "up to their necks" in support of Habitat.

One suggestion was that we "put a face" on Habitat by having someone who has benefited come and tell us how it has changed their lives. Perhaps Phil Pierce, in his leadership role with Habitat, could arrange for a "face" to come and speak to us. We might wish to call it "Habitat Sunday."

- **Urban/suburban Partnership:** We are making progress! Pastor Manisha provided St. Mathew/St. Joseph leaders an outline of ideas for things we might do together, and they were well received. However, that church is 40 minutes down Woodward, and they have been exploring partnering with St. John's Royal Oak which is much closer to them.

Considering this, perhaps it would make more sense to explore partnering with a church in Pontiac which also has an urban sense to it and would be closer. Pastor Manisha will gather more information on this prospect, and then call people together that have skills needed to make it work.

- **Vacation Bible School:** We are going to Egypt! We have so many people signed up to help that we have the nice challenge of finding ways to use them all. We are blowing the top off for this one. It runs from June 27th to June 30th from 5:30 (supper) to 8:15 p.m. Steve Fragnoli is preparing a sign to let the world on Adams Rd. know about it. Pastor Manish is grateful to the Vestry for its support, and she invited us all to come and see it. There will be an Adult Faith event every night, led by Troy Dostert.
- **Adult Faith:** One Vestry goal in the "Looking Out/Building Up" category is to teach members how to reach out to potential new members. A class on evangelism was envisioned as a way to work toward this goal; but for various reasons, Pastor Manisha has cancelled it. Consequently, the Adult Faith Group will gather and decide what to do.
- **RAMs Mission Trip:** Dan Smith, Director of Living Waters Ministries, could not believe we were sending College Kids to participate in his program! They have never had college kids come to the camp, and we are sending nine of them.
- **Children's Choir:** Seung has given an amazing gift to the kids and us. Seung has helped to fill what Pastor Manisha considers to be a "hole in her ministry repertoire" (music), and she blessed Seung for filling in.

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- **Youth Sunday:** June 13. Don't miss it. The Parish picnic follows.
- **Sunday School Program Change:** The YACYM Committee is looking to change the way we run the Pre-K and Kindergarten Sunday School class by instituting a "Children's Chapel." Valerie Wilson has agreed to lead this endeavor. We will have to clean out our craft room and redesign it to make it into a chapel. More details will be provided on this change later.
- **Hospitality Retreat:** Pastor Manisha led a Lutheran clergywomen's retreat entitled: "*Hospitality: Creating Open Spaces.*" One of the highlights of the retreat was the video shown during our Vestry retreat in January, in which a pastor talked about a circle of drummers who left one drum open so others might join in. This situation embodies the open question we need to keep asking ourselves: how are we keeping an open drum available while we keep the beat?

Finance Report: Deane Blythe reported that the April financial numbers were not yet available, but that we would be receiving them along with Treasurer Dave Stein's comments as soon as they were ready.

Deane took this opportunity to discuss the concerns raised by the numbers through March, and the thoughts of the Finance Committee about how to increase parish giving. The suggestions were to:

- Post the Treasurer's monthly message on the parish website,
- Have Phil Pierce evaluate contribution patterns,
- Have the Treasurer do a temple talk,
- Prepare a budget message for the Witness,
- Send a letter to homes this summer on this matter, and
- Periodically insert a budget message in the bulletins.

Phil's giving pattern evaluation is intended to provide insights for how best to tailor our communications with parishioners.

Fr. Jonathan said that it is important to remember that we pledge to God, not the budget. Our ability to do all we want to do for Him is limited if we don't take in enough money. The reason people give is not because we are behind on the budget.

A wide-ranging discussion followed during which the following views surfaced:

- The message to parishioners is different if the problem is that they are behind on their pledges, rather than that we budgeted more dollars than our giving history might lead us to expect to receive.

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- Over the past few years, we haven't been focusing on pledges to the Church in our stewardship campaigns. Instead, our approach has been to have folks "pledge to God" without necessarily telling us how much they pledged. Consequently, we do not have enough pledge information to use for budget setting. The notion has been that we should budget for what we hope to accomplish and have faith that the dollars will follow. .
- If we need more money, we need to say why. Perhaps we need to use "narrative budgets" that focus more on what we plan to accomplish (including things like paying our staff fair wages) than it does on dollars in various categories. If parishioners buy in to the vision, and we go back to formal pledging to the Church, we might be better able to ascertain where we stand during the year and head off funding problems.
- Overlaying much of the discussion is the Parish's history of rising to the occasion if they have something important and tangible to support in addition to normal budget items. Examples include funding appeals for the new organ and the prayer circle.

No decision was reached regarding approaches to pledging and stewardship. The sense of the Vestry seemed to be that the Finance Committee and SWAT Team should work synergistically. The focus of this teamwork should be to find the optimum way to help parishioners discern what kind of vitalized Church we want to be, what it costs to achieve that, and what they should be giving based on their relationship to God.

Old Business

Review of Vestry Goals and Group Activities:

Drainage and Sidewalk Update

Due to illness, Alan Giles was unable to provide the update at the meeting. He provided it by email subsequently.

Vestry Retreat Goal Updates:

- Transition and Reconciliation

Lore Committee: The committee's ultimate goal is to help parishioners and leaders understand their roles in creating the supportive environment we seek to preserve as our leadership changes. Frances Hammond reported that the Lore Committee has identified six categories of behavior that are important to an environment characterized by acceptance and reconciliation. These categories overlap, and may need to be smoothed as we proceed. We have interviewed Fr. Jonathan regarding his views and behaviors related to two topics, and we are summarizing the results. We also plan to interview Pastor Manisha on these topics.

Our thinking at this point is that we will put together summaries of these interviews and include them on our website and in the *Witness*. Hopefully, reading about the thoughts and behaviors of our clergy on these topics will keep parishioners mindful of their importance to creating and maintaining the environment that helps us thrive

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here. The examples of behaviors should also help parishioners to model them.

Pastor Manisha noted that it is great that we have the freedom to talk about how we interact with each other.

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

Ronny Karlsson has ordered the replacement bulletin boards, and some have arrived. If all the boards arrive by the Building & Grounds' cleanup day on May 22, the boards will be installed and touch-up painting completed.

Don Ingersoll reported that he, Ronny Karlson, Bob Bagnall, Judy McQuiston and Alan Giles will be meeting soon to finalize the design of the Welcome Center, and to develop a construction plan. Mike Brokenshire will also be invited because of his construction experience and ability.

Judy McQuiston (Membership Committee) reported that parishioners' feedback on the new directory has been very positive. Thanks to Dennis Bishop for his exceptional effort. Forty extra copies were ordered so new members can have one (free). Others can get a copy for \$10 by asking in the office.

- The Adult Faith Group will be meeting soon to consider what it should add to its future offerings. Evaluating past results, they have found that events held between the Sunday services draw better than offerings at other times.

Basketball Court: Judy McQuiston informed us that under Michigan law, if unused property is used by others in ways that meet certain criteria for 15 years, the using party could claim the property. We are approaching the 15th anniversary of the basketball court being erected on our property, and, therefore, we should take steps to ensure we are not open to losing that part of our land. The safest way to do this is to have the court removed.

Deane Blythe, Fr. Jonathan and Don Ingersoll reported on their walk of the property. They found it difficult to know exactly where the property line was, even with a city aerial photo that showed it. John Morely, one of the property owners, said he is not aware of any boundary stakes on his property, and few were found during the walk. The basketball court appeared not to have been used for some time, probably years. The basket and pole were all that was visible. The court surface was covered by a thick layer of leaves. The court appeared to be made up of many small slabs of concrete, not a single slab.

A neighbor said that he did not believe ownership of the house with the court had changed. Instead, he believes that the son of the woman who has owned the house for many years has moved in with her.

During the walk, several instances were found where wood and/or leaves were piled on what might be our property. Some wood looked like it was intended to be burned in a

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fireplace, and some was larger lengths that looked more like someone had either cut down or cut up a fallen dead tree, and made the wood look more orderly. If the involved trees were ours, they probably did us a favor. We noted several piles of dead leaves, none of which looked like part of an organized compost heap. We could not tell if the leaves were from the entire yard of the adjoining property, or if the owners had merely blown leaves from our trees back onto our property.

Deane Blythe will be discussing our situation with the Diocesan lawyer who oversees the Diocese's many properties. Based on his advice we will develop a plan for proceeding, and Deane will report back to the Vestry.

Fr. Jonathan reminded us that we are planning to use a neighborly approach to resolving these matters.

Locks: Fr. Jonathan talked to Miranda about the lock and key situation. Miranda said she knows where most of the keys are. She has signed out 53 of the 72 keys we have, and has a key register where she has recorded the key assignments.. Only a small number of keys are not under control. This has resulted from folks passing keys along to their successors and not informing her that they have done so. Her sense is, and Fr. Jonathan agrees, that we do not need to change the locks.

After a discussion, the Vestry decided to keep the locks the same, but to change the key assignment process. The feeling was that it would not be right to put new Sexton Ray in the position of having to make decisions related to the assignment of keys. The Building and Grounds Group was tasked with consulting with Miranda and Ray and developing the new key control process. The sense was that we should be liberal about who has a key, but more diligent about keeping track of who has them, and ensuring that they know how to use them.

Don Ingersoll agreed to broadcast an email asking folks with keys to email Alan Giles to let him know what number key they have so we can have an up-to-date record. The email will also ask folks to turn in their keys if they no longer need them.

New Business

Archivist: Fr. Jonathan said we would benefit from having an archivist to help us control the historical documents and items we have, and ensure we are tracking our history as it unfolds day-to-day. The Vestry concurred and Don Ingersoll agreed to solicit parishioners seeking a volunteer.

Future meetings: Fr. Jonathan said that traditionally there are no regular Vestry meetings in July or August, but it instead has a 4-hour retreat in late August. After a discussion, Judy McQuiston agreed to host the retreat from 4 p.m. until 8 p.m. on August 22. During the summer, the Vestry Executive Committee will continue to track things and will ensure that the full Vestry is kept informed. If a meeting is needed for any reason, one will be called.

Coming events:

- Vestry members were encouraged to sign up for the Parish picnic on June 13th

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and to participate in the cleanup day on May 22nd at 9 a.m.

- Confirmation will be May 15th at St. John's Royal Oak.

Preschool Rental Contract: Fr. Jonathan summarized the situation with the pre-school that rents the Fellowship Hall. They are feeling the bite of the slow economy, and are having trouble keeping their enrollment high enough to enable it to continue operating. They have been paying us \$3,500 per year in rent. However, if they can't get enough enrollment they will have to fold. To enable them to know where they stand, they would like to have a signed contract so they can be confident of the rent portion of their budget. They are proposing also that we have a sliding scale tied to their enrollment. Specifically, they are proposing that the base rent be set at \$2,100 for the year, with \$100 added for each student above 15, up to a maximum of \$3,500.

Bob Bagnall moved, seconded by Michelle Pickering, that we approve the contract as presented. Motion passed without dissent.

Fr. Jonathan said that we also need to find someone to be our liaison with the school. Norma Ross said that she would consider accepting the role.

Fr. Jonathan **adjourned** the meeting with a prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Ingersoll

Clerk