

St. Mark's Vestry Meeting January 23, 2023

Present:

James Normington, Senior Warden
Stuart Paul, Junior Warden
Laurie Voedisch, Clerk
Cathy Chipolone-Collins
Rebecca Ethier
Dayna Hume
Brenda Matthews
John Mentzer
Libby Moore
Stephanie Powers
Jean Robertson
Chaille Sims

Absent:

Fr. William Bergmann
Frank Ruggiero, Treasurer

Due to inclement weather, the Vestry met remotely on ZOOM. The formation teaching planned for this meeting was deferred to the February meeting.

Review of Minutes

The minutes of the Vestry Meeting held on November 21, 2022 were reviewed. Stephanie Powers made a motion to accept the minutes; seconded by Dayna Hume; all in favor.

The minutes of a Special Vestry Meeting held on January 8, 2023 in the Rectory were reviewed. References to the total compensation package to be offered to the candidate for Rector will be modified to read "total annual compensation". Rebecca Ethier made a motion to accept the minutes as amended; seconded by Dayna Hume; all in favor.

The minutes of a Special Vestry Meeting held remotely on ZOOM on January 14, 2023 were reviewed. The following amendments were requested to the specifications of the agreement with a candidate for Rector that was confirmed by a Negotiation Committee:

- The Rector will receive four weeks paid vacation annually, ***inclusive of five Sundays.***
- The Rector will receive an annual salary of \$58,000 (middle of Tier III salary), ***which includes \$4,000 annually to defer the cost of health insurance.***
- ~~The Rector will receive \$4,000 annually to defer the cost of health insurance.~~ (combined with above statement)
- St. Mark's will reimburse the Rector ***up to*** \$750 annually for business related travel expenses (The Vestry will make an adjustment to the budget for these expenses, if needed.)
- The ***annual*** compensation package offered to the Rector totals \$76,246.

Rebecca Ethier made a motion to accept the minutes of the January 14, 2023 meeting as amended; seconded by Stephanie Powers; all in favor.

Budget – 2023

Rebecca Ethier reviewed the 2023 Budget proposed by the Finance Committee.

- We will need to work on repaying the investment income that was borrowed for the tower.
- A fund drive for deficit reduction should be planned (\$18,718.92).
- The budget includes a set aside for a future sabbatical.
- The Search Committee funding was moved to fund the reception of our new Rector and Father Will's farewell party.
- The line item for utilities was increased.
- Rectory rental income will be added when that projection can be made.
- The property and liability insurance line includes the Rectory.

Cathy Chipolone-Collins inquired about the reduction in the budget income for Plate Offerings. Rebecca noted that since pledges increased, the Finance Committee projected that plate offerings may go down.

Cathy Chipolone-Collins questioned the projected income for the Christmas Bazaar as we have raised significantly less in the last few years. James Normington responded that it is hoped we can make some changes for the Bazaar in 2023, including considering a date that does not compete with so many other local events and also ramping up our promotion efforts.

Cathy Chipolone-Collins made a motion to approve the 2023 budget as presented; seconded by Brenda Matthews; all in favor.

Treasurer's Report

Rebecca Ethier reviewed Frank Ruggiero's written 2022 Treasurer's Report, which will be included in the 2022 Annual Report and incorporated herein as an attachment to the January 23, 2023 Vestry Meeting minutes. Rebecca noted that as has been past practice, the budget for the current year (2022) will not be final until the final accounting of the Trustee Funds is made available. Other highlights of his report include:

- Repayment of the borrowed Trustee funds is important so we can restore this source of income.
- There were no snow removal costs in 2021- 2022 winter season for various reasons, which accounts for the decrease in 2022
- There was an adjustment made to correct an accounting error involving the proceeds from the bricks sold for the Memorial Garden.
- Vestry will need to develop and vote on a plan to reduce the \$17,294 deficit (this number won't be final until February)
- The final payments for the tower work that have not been made yet are for work to install stairs to the tower from the ground level.

Stuart Paul made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report; seconded by Chaille Sims; all in favor.

Buildings and Grounds Report

Stuart Paul reported that he has been walking through all the church properties regularly, and there have been no issues with frozen pipes this winter. There are some minor issues (electric and heating) in the Rectory that need to be addressed prior to renting the property. A medicine cabinet should be installed in the second-floor bathroom. New windows also need to be installed. Frank Ruggiero has suggested forming a property management committee to coordinate the rental of the Rectory. Stuart noted that he would be part of this committee and suggested Chaille Sims also participate. Chaille said he would be willing to help.

Senior Warden's Report

James Normington reported that he and Stuart Paul had explored St. Mark's House and located the electric panel. They discussed installing an electric vehicle charging station, which was discussed earlier this year by Vestry. Grant funding opportunities will open soon, and it is hoped we will be able to receive funds for the charging station. James noted he had met with an authorized supplier who is partnered with National Grid, and he is waiting for a proposal. Libby Moore asked whether it was reasonable to pursue this as it is not likely a lot of our church members have electric vehicles. James noted that Leominster's downtown does not have a charging station, and it may be a source of revenue. We could make it free for church members or charge a lower rate for church members and a higher rate for other users.

The Episcopal Church Building Fund provides grants to improve buildings and grounds, especially projects that improve energy efficiency. James will meet with their Executive in the first week of February about funding a loan to install solar panels that would eliminate our electric bills. The duration of a loan, interest rate, and what projects the Episcopal Church Building Fund supports is negotiable. James recommended that Vestry members watch a video on the Western MA Episcopal Diocese website on Big Buildings/Big Problems which explores ideas for repurposing church properties.

Audit Committee

Rebecca Ethier requested that the Vestry establish a three-person Audit Committee. The Western MA Diocese requires the parish to submit the names of the Audit Committee to them annually. Dayna Hume made a motion to establish an Audit Committee for 2023 to include Terry Downing, Rebecca Ethier and Diana Anttil; seconded by Libby Moore; all in favor.

130th Anniversary

James Normington discussed events that are being planned for the 130th Anniversary of St. Mark's.

- There will be an organ music concert on May 16th with Robert Potterton, who is the organist at Christ Church in Fitchburg. He is also the Chairman of the North American Guild of Organists. This event would include hymn favorites suggested by parishioners with Robert improvising. Refreshments would be served following the concert. An admission fee of \$10 would be charged. Robert offered to create a promotional flyer for the event.
- A magic show will be planned in September, possibly the weekend after Labor Day on that Sunday afternoon.

- A walking tour of downtown churches and historic buildings. This could be coordinated with City Hall and include the Congregational Church and St. Mark's. We could have tea and baked goods. Dayna Hume suggested that Mark Bodanza, a local attorney and historian may be able to help in planning this event. Laurie Voedisch suggested that he might have information about the buildings in downtown that we include on the tour that we could print on a guided map for participants. Dayna Hume offered to reach out to the Mayor about including City Hall in the tour.
- A tea party / showing of The Chosen is being planned for February and would continue for several weeks to view episodes from Season One combined with bible study/discussion. James Normington suggested and it was agreed that doing this as a Lenten video study group might be better timing. Laurie Voedisch will follow up on finalizing plans.
- James suggested having a Haunted House at St. Mark's House in October as a fund raiser.
- Our organist has requested \$400 from the music fund to hire a professional choir for Easter Sunday. We will plan to advertise this special service to everyone connected with St. Mark's. Rebecca Ethier made a motion to approve \$400 from the music fund for the organist to hire a professional choir to perform at St. Mark's on Easter Sunday; seconded by Libby Moore; all in favor.
- Our organist is planning an ecumenical Lessons and Carols event for the first week of Advent. His idea is to invite other church music groups/choirs to participate in singing the carols and inviting clergy to participate in the readings of the lessons. No funding is needed for this event. Robert Potterton from Christ Church in Fitchburg has already expressed interest in participating.
- Our organist is also thinking of planning monthly music concerts during the spring and fall months of 2023. Dayna Hume noted that Mark Marquis, a member of St. Mark's, is a talented musician who does performances and perhaps he may be interested in participating. Laurie Voedisch suggested that the organist reach out to Mark Marquis.
- Laurie Voedisch suggested that the next edition of the church magazine include a profile of the new organist, including his picture, as some members have not had the opportunity to meet him, and he is not visible during services when he is playing the organ.
- James Normington noted that when Fr. Will and he spoke about the 130th Anniversary, Fr. Will stated that like our predecessors, "We are planting oak trees under which we will never sit." Out of that discussion came the idea to make an annual tradition of presenting an award to members of the parish at the Annual Meeting who have done great and exemplary service during the previous year. It was suggested and agreed that the award will be named the Lion's Heart Award. James has ordered pins. The Vestry agreed that the following teams/individuals would receive the Lion's Heart Award this year:
 - Search Committee – Terry Downing, Cathy Chipolone-Collins, Dayna Hume, Sarah Gammel, Bob Young, Rebecca Carpenito, Gary Courtemache
 - Rectory Work Team – Stuart Paul, Joan Paul, Chaille Sims
 - Prayer Team Leader – Larry Bennett
 - Fr. William Bergmann

James Normington made a motion to establish the Lion's Heart Award to be presented by the Vestry annually at the Annual Meeting to members of the parish in recognition of great and exemplary service to St. Mark's Church; seconded by Rebecca Ethier; all in favor.

Fr. Will's Farewell

The celebration of Fr. Will's service to St. Mark's will be on February 19th, the last Sunday before Lent. It was suggested and agreed that we ask Fr. Will to announce a combined service for that day so that all members of the parish will be present for the celebration immediately following the service. James Normington will bring a cake; Laurie Voedisch will bring a sandwich tray; Jean Robertson will bring chips; Brenda Matthews will bring a fruit salad; Cathy Chipolone-Collins will bring beverages; and Rebecca Ethier will bring a salad.

James Normington will coordinate a collection for a gift for Fr. Will.

Dayna Hume will coordinate collecting pictures of church members for a Shutterfly book that can include written sentiments people may want to include. Dayna will email an invitation to all church members to contribute a picture/sentiment.

Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting is confirmed for Sunday, January 29, 2023 at 9:30 a.m. in the church hall. A potluck luncheon will follow.

Closing Prayer

Stuart Paul offered a closing prayer.

Meeting Adjourned

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Next Meeting

The Vestry meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 20, 2023.

2022 Treasurer's Report

In 2022 St Mark's ended the year with a sizable deficit of \$17,922.38 which was much lower than the budgeted deficit of \$52,437.35 but not as good as the surplus of \$38,226.91 we had in 2021. The 2022 deficit will be funded out of the 2021 surplus.

Note as has been the practice for last few years the numbers for 2022 are not considered final since we still do not have the final accounting for our Trustee Funds. The 2022 numbers will be finalized next month and will be included in next year's report. The numbers for 2021 are the final numbers and may reflect small changes for last year's report for the same reason.

Operating Income

Looking at the top half of page T-3 you can see our operating income was about \$10,000 lower than budgeted and about \$35,000 less than we received in 2021. The two big differences between 2021 and 2022 was the absence of government aid in 2022 and a decrease of investment income. All pandemic-related government aid ceased in 2022 and we had a significant drawn down our Trustee Funds, which provides our investment income, in order to pay for the Tower repairs.

The major difference for actual income received in 2022 compared to the 2022 Budget is a shortfall in projected fund raising as well as Bazaar proceeds that were less than expected and Pledge payments coming in a little under what was originally pledged. For the 2023 Budget we will be more modest in our expectations for Fund Raising.

Operating Expenses

In 2022, for the second year in a row, we budgeted for a full-time Rector to come in mid-year and, for the second year in a row, that did not happen. Because of that when looking of the Operating Expenses on the bottom half of page T-3 it is more instructive to compare the 2022 actuals with 2021 rather than the budget. Overall our expenses were about \$21,000 higher in 2022 than in 2021. The biggest contributor that that was the roof repairs to St Mark's House which was anticipated. Heating and electrical costs for the three buildings on the property increased by \$9,000. Also in 2022 we were repaying our Small Business Administration Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) for the full year where in 2021 it was only half of year. You will note that we had no snow removal costs in 2022. Issues arose with the snow removal last year and the vendors decided not to bill us. This will not be the case in 2023.

Other Operating Income and Expenses

On page T-4 is a summary of the net changes in our special accounts. Not surprisingly the market value of our Trust funds decreased this year, tracking the financial markets. The reduction of the Memorial Fund was due to correcting an error where Memorial Bricks were inadvertently credited to the Memorial instead of the Tower Funds. There was a net outflow in our Outreach Fund for 2022. Money flows into the Outreach Special Fund through donations and Quarterly distributions from our Outreach Fund held by the Trustees. In 2022 the Outreach fund supported providing pizzas to the Orchard Street Shelter. Initially this was done every week but then cut back to every other week. The Restricted Funds Projects Expense of \$3,911.26 represents a close out of the Depreciation of the Church's Siding Replacement Project.

Tower Project

Page T-5 provides the financial status on the Tower Project. While the exterior work on the Tower has been completed, there is still some work needed to be done inside and thus final payments have not yet been made. The project has been funded by contributions, the EIDL loan mentioned above, and most significantly by withdrawals from some of Trust Funds. Based on the Tower dedicated funds that we still have set aside and the expected remaining costs we will be short by about \$4,300. Therefore we will still be taking contributions for the Tower so that we don't have to withdraw any more Trust Funds. In the longer term we will need to work as a parish to restore the funds we withdrew in order that we rejuvenate our source of Investment Income to help our operating budget and to provide a source of funds to borrow against in the future when the next major repair is needed.

Balance Sheet

The balance sheet as of the end of 2022 compared with 2021 is on pages T-6 and T-7. Overall the bottom line shows a reduction of about \$54,000 in 2022. This is mainly due the deficits in our operating and other accounts. However within the individual accounts there were some significant changes, mainly due to the Tower Project. The amount of cash in our checking account was significantly reduced as we payed the project's contractors. However if you look at the Fixed Assets section you see under Building Improvements a nearly \$250,000 increase in balance for the Tower Project. This is a standard bookkeeping procedure. While we spent cash to make the tower repairs we improved and made more valuable the building and property by essentially having a new tower. From a bookkeeping perspective, we have turned cash into physical property. Going forward the value of the tower repairs as an asset will decrease as depreciate it. This is because as years go by we will be getting closer to making repairs once more.