

St. Mark's Vestry Meeting

July 17, 2023

Present:

Rev. Aileen DiBenedetto
Stuart Paul, Junior Warden
Frank Ruggiero, Treasurer
Rebecca Ethier, Clerk
Stephanie Powers
Laurie Voedisch
Dayna Hume
Brenda Matthews
John Mentzer
Jean Robertson

Absent:

Cathy Chipolone-Collins
James Normington, Senior Warden
Libby Moore
Brenda Cole-Milner

Guests:

Rev. Tanya Wallace
Chaille Sims
Catherine Robertson
Barbara Divoll
Joan Paul
Joy Cohen

Rev. Aileen opened the meeting with a prayer.

Discussion

Safe Church Policy

Rev. Aileen re-introduced Rev. Tanya and the guests. The Safe Church Policy Committee has been working very diligently on the Safe Church Policies and Rev. Tanya is here to answer questions. The guests have not had the opportunity to review the policies. A question was asked if each parish can have their own policy or if they must use the diocese one. Answer: it's actually both as the larger Episcopal church has a model to use and what was sent around for review is pretty much the same as the diocese policy. There are 3 documents to review – what is the plan for discussion of them? The general safe church policy is for when we are welcoming into the parish someone who is a registered sex offender. It includes that they need to have a safety plan in place. The individual safety plan is not part of the policy itself but there are guidelines for it in the policy. The diocese will have a registered sex offender policy after it is approved by the diocese council. The one provided is based on the policy of the Diocese of Connecticut. Concern was expressed about impacted parishioners and for those who would like to see them return while the rest of the policy is being discussed. Rev. Tanya and Rev. Aileen have a meeting scheduled for Wednesday with the current parishioner who is known to be a registered sex offender (hereinafter "Parishioner X"). Stephanie read aloud the "Policy for Inclusion of Registered Sex Offenders". Rev. Tanya asked the Safe Church Policy Committee members if they had any points of discussion. Frank asked who owned the document and to whom he can send suggested changes. Laurie will accept the edits on the policies. Frank asked about the limitations when speaking to the offender's therapist and topics for discussion, etc. Frank also asked about the "Chaperones". As currently defined, they can never have been in a close relationship or friendship with the offender which is a little ambiguous. Also in a small parish this would be difficult. For monitors, it is one person at a time but there could be a list of more than 2. There was a question about events and when the offender cannot attend events outside of the church where minors are, does that mean even with a monitor? These would be events off premises. Also events designed specifically for children offenders would not be able to attend. What about church dinners and how would those be monitored if children are involved? What is the role of the parent in monitoring their children's interactions with offenders? Rev. Tanya mentioned that the policy is designed to protect the most vulnerable of the population which are the children. It was asked where is there room that there is room for mercy and

reformation and for the Holy Spirit? Rev. Aileen brought up a comment from James that his concern that it does not cover those who committed crimes against others than children. The draft policy uses term “offender” repeatedly as if they are still offending. What word can be used instead of “offender”? Maybe use the term “Individual of Concern” or “Covenantor” instead? There was a question about to whom the disclosure will be? The disclosure should be to the Rector with the Safe Church Minister and Senior Warden as backup. These are the same individuals who can grant permission to the church premises without a Covenant in place. Also it was clarified that “Safe Church Officer” is the diocese Safe Church Officer (Rev. Tanya). Rev. Aileen reminded everyone what biblical forgiveness is. The allotted time allotted for this discussion has been used up. We cannot move forward on voting on the policy at this point but it gives the Safe Church Policy Committee the ability to move forward with their discussions.

Laurie indicated there is a 4th document that needs to be circulated which is the “Policy for the Protection of Vulnerable Adults” which is in draft form and will be sent around at a future time.

The meeting on Wednesday with Parishioner X will still happen and Parishioner X will be provided with a sample of the Covenant. There was a question if the Sex Offender policy should be incorporated into larger document. The answer was no, but maybe it can be referenced as it is better to keep the overall policy shorter.

Stephanie then read the “Policy for the Appointment of a Safe Church Minister.”

Frank asked if this policy was typical of other churches. Frank also asked how long the term of the Safe Church Minister would be. It was decided it would be a 1 year term. Frank moved that we adopt the “Policy for the Appointment of a Safe Church Minister” as written with the following changes: 1) add in a 1 year renewable term, 2) Safe Church Minister must be at least 21 years of age, and 3) clarify that “active” in church life means at least 6 months active. Jean seconded. All voted in favor.

The “Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth” was presented and it mostly follows the template. The Safe Church Minister contact information will be added along with St. Mark’s information. Frank reminded all that when working with youth, don’t ever put yourself in a position where you are alone with a child. This is for the protection of the adult as well as children.

Rev. Tanya asked what are the items that the Safe Church Policy Committee could not agree upon?

Among the items were:

- Financial part of the policy whether double counting/background checks are needed for check signing authority.
- What should the additional protection for children when they come to Sunday School such as signing in, cell phone numbers for parents, and parents monitoring bathroom behavior?
- Some of the similar items that people are asking questions around during this Vestry meeting such as naming of the Safe Church Minister and the permanence of the Covenant.

Rev. Aileen thanked Rev. Tanya on behalf of the Vestry for attending. Does the Safe Church Policy Committee know what the next steps are going to be? Rev. Tanya should probably review the next draft before it is recirculated but she will be away for a month so the Safe Church Policy Committee should provide it to her between August 23-28. It was asked what the policy is to share the drafts with the parish? It would be hard to get consensus and also getting comments from the larger parish would be difficult to accommodate. However, it was suggested to proactively share a draft to the guests that attended this Vestry meeting and then send to others who have requested a copy of the draft policy after seeing the Vestry agenda.

Walk Through St. Mark’s House

Deferred to next meeting

It was suggested to maybe have this as an optional walk through starting at 6:30 before the September Vestry meeting? Rev. Aileen will confirm if she can attend by 6:30 for the September meeting. The purpose of the walk through is to review what is the current use of that space and the future vision for that property.

Information

Review of June Vestry Minutes

Frank suggested some edits to the "Resolution" section. Steve Abow confirmed to Frank that there is no annual cost for the corporate registration. Frank also noted that the 2nd budget item listed in the draft June minutes had already been approved in May. Frank moved to accept the June Vestry meeting minutes as amended; Laurie seconded. All voted in favor.

Senior Warden's Report

Deferred as James is absent.

Buildings & Grounds

Stu and Terry Downing noted water in basement of rectory after all the rain along with pinhole leaks in roof.

Brenda Cole-Milner is helping with the rectory de-leading project. So far estimates have been around \$25,000 to de-lead. It is projected St. Mark's would get around \$3000/month in rental revenue. Frank asked how de-leading works with windows that need to be replaced. Rev. Aileen said you de-lead first and then replace the windows as taking out the windows would cause lead to be released. Which is the most cost-effective option, i.e., to remove windows first or after? This should be discussed and decided.

Rector's Report

Rev. Aileen provided a handout. She suggested the Vestry take time to express some gratitude. Thanks to Mike, our Sexton, for fixing the cross that broke. Thanks to Rev. Tanya and Canon Rich for being with us at Vestry meetings last month (both) and this month (Rev. Tanya). Thanks to Laurie for all the work that she did to prepare the drafts of the policies to review. Thanks to the Safe Church Policy Committee. Thanks to Stu for setting up for worship downstairs. Thanks to Stephanie for leading us in song. Thanks to the Altar Guild for doing the extra work required when setting up for worship downstairs. Thanks to Rebecca Carpenito for playing piano last Sunday during the 10am service. Thanks to Stu and James for leading morning prayer.

Administration: Aileen will demonstrate the new church management software if we have time. Brenda Matthews brought in plants for the altar during worship. Once we are celebrating back upstairs we will start asking people to bring the flowers in little bouquets.

Organist: we have 2 possible leads: 1) at Aileen's former church service times are changing so that organist is considering our position; 2) another organist may be available every other week.

Worship: How amazing our congregation is at singing!

Community: There will be a Christmas in July sale at Thrift Shop the last Saturday of July. The Thrift Shop will be starting up serving lunch again. We are looking for members to volunteer to help out with things that need to be done.

Vacation: Rev. Aileen is discussing with wardens to take off August 21-27; Rev. Aileen is also taking off the week of Thanksgiving (November 20-26) as well as a Sunday in October.

Pastoral: Most of Rev. Aileen's time has been taken up with pastoral care over other duties during the summer along with safe church work.

Discussion

Time Capsule

Time Capsule: Rebecca Carpenito has offered to go through photos from the recently opened time capsule and put names on photos of people she knows. Then the capsule can be put back in place. The Vestry approved.

Higher Education Scholarship Policy

There was a question about timing for college acceptances with the deadlines for the scholarship application. Usually high school seniors are accepted by colleges by mid-March so the timing in the draft policy should work. There was a question if trade schools are covered by the policy? It was agreed that all post-secondary training programs are included. The policy will be updated to state it is for post-graduate "vocational" training programs as well. After the policy is accepted, it will be announced and put on our website. It would also be mentioned at the Parish Annual Meeting to remind people. Frank moved to accept the Higher Education Scholarship Policy as amended; Stu seconded. All voted in favor. The eligible potential applicant will defer applying until 2024.

Christmas Bazaar

Dayna wants to get an early start to the bazaar. The last 2 years she co-chaired with Laurie and Libby. She suggested to move the bazaar to the weekend before Thanksgiving as the first weekend of December has proven to have a lot of conflicts with other Christmas fairs. The proposed dates are Friday, November 17 and Saturday, November 18. Someone will check with Vicky at Beacon of Hope to make sure they can attend that Friday. As a reminder, Sunday, November 19 will be an organ concert with Evensong along with Christ Church, Fitchburg.

Dayna asked if a collection box for Operation Christmas Child could be set up so the kids in church can donate. She'd like to have it ready in October for collection.

Decision

Treasurer's Report

The Finance Committee and Vestry put together a 2023 budget with a projected \$18,000 budget deficit for the year. We are on that target. However, we had hoped to shrink that deficit over the year. Frank noted that pledges are running a little behind but may be due to summer, etc. Frank questioned if there has been any financial fallout from issues with Safe Church Policy?

Frank won't ask for approval of the June financial reports tonight but will defer approval to next meeting so the Vestry can review them. There was a question about the "Vacation Replacements" line at \$500. Frank stated this was for organist coverage during Holy Week. Frank also noted that the new "Miscellaneous" expense line was due to a \$100 invoice from diocese. Regarding Building and Grounds for the Rectory, we are \$1600 over budget due to the electrician's bill. Frank said anyone can ask questions about the reports and reminded all of our responsibility to review the financial reports.

2023 Budget Change Vote: This is needed to cover an error in the calculation of “Benefits” line in original 2023 budget. These proposals will have no net impact on overall 2023 budget.

Motion:

To move \$2000 from “Administration” line to “Benefits” line.

To move \$1000 from “Deficit Reduction” line to “Benefits” line.

The above motion was made by Dayna, seconded by Jean. All voted in favor.

Closing Prayer

Rev. Aileen offered a closing prayer.

Meeting Adjourned

Frank made a motion to adjourn and Jean seconded. The motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 9:21 pm.

Next Meeting

The next Vestry meeting is scheduled for Monday, August 28, 2023 (a week later than usual due to Rev. Aileen’s vacation).