

St. Mark's Vestry Meeting
October 16, 2023

Present:

Rev. Aileen DiBenedetto, Rector
James Normington, Senior Warden
Stuart Paul, Junior Warden
Frank Ruggiero, Treasurer
Rebecca Ethier, Clerk
Libby Moore
Laurie Voedisch
Dayna Hume
Brenda Matthews
John Mentzer
Cathy Chipolone-Collins
Jean Robertson

Absent:

Stephanie Powers
Brenda Cole-Milner

Rev. Aileen opened the meeting with a prayer.

Learning

A few months ago we started imagining about what church looks like. We will pick up with that discussion. Church has always changed even though we act like it never changes. The world as a whole is becoming more secular. 1950s-60s churches were expanding but that's not where the church is now. How can we live into our faith? We are entering into the season of stewardship. How can we finance our dreams and ministries? Some creative ideas on what others have done:

Budget fillers

- A Church near a college: They wanted to reach out to college students so they hosted family dinners on family weekends as the restaurants around campus were booked.
- A Reminder that we have unique things about our churches: If we cannot rent out space due to the unique features of our church, then come up with a way to be more creative. Some others rent out space for preschools. Use uniqueness to your advantage. One church had a parking lot in the center of town and made it a paid parking space.
- If interested in mission we need to remember how to support them. Families with young children don't have a lot of money. Seniors living on a pension or social security don't have a lot of money. So we need to move outside of our comfort zone to make money.
- Relate to the neighborhood based on the needs of the area: such as coffee bars, neurodivergent needs, play space in fields, open up to the neighborhood homeless populations, inviting pets for companionship, having multiple denominations in 1 building

We should all start to think about what is needed in the community and bring in the finances so we can support our ministries.

Information

Review of September Vestry Minutes

A motion was made by Frank to accept the minutes as written; Laurie seconded. All voted in favor.

Senior Warden's Report

James is working on a solution for music. John Hansen will serve as supply on piano but we are still looking for a permanent organist.

Laurie and James discussed Halloween and we are joining the parade downtown on October 21 in lieu of a trunk or treat event.

Johnny Appleseed Festival – we got supplies from BJs and a bounce house was delivered. It was a good option for those families that could not afford the paid bounce houses in other parts of the festival.

The Stewardship campaign will launch later this month. There are Multi-parish 9 lessons and carols for December. Each parish is to do a piece of that. St. Mark's may or may not be the host.

James is meeting with Stu to discuss the lift and other building and grounds issues.

Buildings & Grounds

Stu received 1 reply back on fixing the lift. The quote is from Access New England and the amount was \$48K+ to replace the lift. However, there is also carpentry work that needs to be done which is not included in the quote. 2 more quotes are expected.

Eric Voedisch was looking into a few things regarding the lift from the 2 citations we received. The issues were around documentation and the safeties not locking. Where Eric works uses similar mechanisms and that type of locking mechanism may serve the same purpose as the safeties but he needs to confirm that.

There is an issue in the rectory with windows to be replaced. There are still plumbing problems in the upstairs bathroom. The toilet is malfunctioning and the tub drain is not working properly. The de-leading of the rectory starts in November. Frank asked that we work up what needs to be done and figure out upfront costs. Stu indicated 7 windows need to be replaced. Dayna suggested using vocational students for this work as then you only need to pay for materials. Dayna will get the principal's name to Stu.

Rector's Report

Rev. Aileen offered moments of Gratitude for:

Johnny Appleseed Festival: Laura, Libby, Laurie, James, Rebecca, Brenda Matthews, Cathy, Dayna, Rev. Aileen

Blessing Bags: Larry and Sara, Barb Hager, Bob Young, Cheryl, Cathy

Food ingathering: Bob Young and Barb and Laurie and everyone who donated

Amplify: Bob Young and Barb

Celebration of New Ministry: Brenda Matthews, Valerie and Jean Robertson for Altar Guild. Laurie for the reception. Diana, Christine and Joy for service assistance; Rebecca Carpenito for organ

Rev. Aileen provided a written report, but wants to point out certain worship items:

- All Saints Sunday is November 5. Aileen about the St. Mark's traditions. Usually we submit names for prayer. She will make sure it happens.
- Nov 19 Organ Concert/Evensong with Christ Church
- Nov 26 will be morning prayer as Aileen is on vacation.
- Advent starts Dec 3, and note that Christmas Eve is a Sunday.

Laurie asked about interfaith services at the synagogue. They have been busy with flooding and response in the Middle East conflict.

It is time to start scheduling mutual ministry review as Rev. Aileen has been here 6 months already!

Treasurer's Report

Budget vs. Actual –the unknown \$165 were deposits from Amplify software and Frank just got the breakdown prior the meeting:

- \$5 pledges
- \$100 Heating donations
- \$10 organ concert
- \$50.02 cookbooks

We are \$9,000 behind on pledges but there were those who left due to safe church issue. However those pledgors does not take into account the entire deficit.

For the advertising revenue line, we haven't received much of it. James indicated that they are billed dated December to get it in by the end of the year.

Expenses have not been the problem but revenue.

The Building & Grounds line for the Rectory includes a large electrician expense. St. Mark's House heating is running over budget while others are under budget. We are running a current deficit of \$23,700 which is off from the \$18,800 deficit forecasted.

For the balance sheet, the Checking, General Funds, and Rainy day funds are available for operating expenses. The DCU Checking and general funds are available for operating expenses. There is a total of \$14,429 for expenses without dipping into general funds. For the lift repair expenses we will not be able to internally fund but will need to go to Episcopal building fund. Once we get the other bids, we need to prepare a package for approval which will take some time, so we need to be prepared for the lift not to be repaired for quite a while.

Questions from the Vestry: Frank can pull info from Amplify so those lines will be updated in the future. The salary budget line ahead of budget due to the lack of an organist. Regarding the St Mark's House heating line we will look at the October heating bill to see if it is better. We have budgeted \$4,500 for Bazaar all for December but it will actually be in November so that will catch up over the next couple of months.

Discussion

Halloween Parade

The City of Leominster Halloween parade is Saturday, October 21 – 1-3pm. Several people have indicated they can help. Laurie will reach out if we have to use the rain date of October 28 as she is unavailable that day. Monument Square park is where the candy is given out. We will be at the end of trick or treating.

2024 Budget

Frank led the discussion. We have significant hurdles for next year due to loss of pledgers there is approximately \$10,000 in lost pledges due to the safe church issue. This means a reduced amount of money to cover the projected deficit as previous year's carryovers have been used up. We need to put a hard stop on deficit for the 2024 budget to be proposed. Hopefully we will be generating rental income from the rectory but there are still upfront costs to fix, etc. Frank reached out to Brenda Cole-Milner to make sure we are covering all the angles to rent out rectory. There are expenses for renting out the place such as taxes, insurance, other rental fees. It will help but it is not going to solve the deficit on its own and we will need to trim expenses. Going forward, the finance committee will be put together a draft budget in November to give Vestry an idea of where we stand for 2024. The Finance Committee will need information from other ministries to get budget item (Church school, organist, supply, etc.) for expenses. Don't assume that Frank will know. We have made several investments over this year such as Amplify, Church School curriculum and run with them. However, next year we need to scale back getting new things. Please understand that it is not the Treasurer's job to balance the budget or that of the Finance Committee. The Vestry is responsible for the budget, the Treasurer just executes it. All of our easy answers are done and we will have to make hard decisions going forward. It is hopefully only a rough patch that we will get through in the next year or so. If you have any financial needs, please make sure they are covered by the budget. The Altar Guild even as covered by separate sub account.

The Fundraising budget will be decided by Vestry as well as deficit reduction amount. Both will be set as zero until Vestry decides. We should eliminate the deficit reduction line as part of the budget. It was created for one parishioner, who no longer attends, as they didn't want to contribute generally but only for operating expense deficits.

Christmas Bazaar

Laurie provided an update as to where we are with the bazaar. A Wreath making event is scheduled for Saturday, Nov 4. There are chairs in the garage which need to be picked up by Spanish American center. Dayna's son will build a display for the wreaths. We will sell them during the bazaar in the garage space. We are looking for donations for wire wreath frames and foam rings with artificial materials. We are also making felt wreaths so we need materials for those. There is a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board to sign up for theme baskets. Sign-up sheets for volunteers and food donations for kitchen will be done by the end of the week. Flyers have been printed and please take some to share.

Laurie will send Bob Young the flyer to put on website and Facebook, etc. social networks. Please encourage people to think about what to make for baked goods. Think about things for Thanksgiving meals, pies, pumpkin, etc. We will take a photo for the newspaper; Rebecca will reach out to Laurie about a date to do it. An article for newsletter should be written to get in this week to Terry.

Saturday lunch at UU

Rebecca mentioned that at the Johnny Appleseed fest Laurie and Rebecca discussed the weekly Saturday lunches that the Unitarian Universalist church downtown does and maybe we can start thinking about helping out.

Stewardship

Laurie and James are working on stewardship and have some good materials. Each member will be asked for testimony. "Rooted in Abundance/Faith" is the theme and each person can form their own from there. Each Sunday someone should speak for 1-2 minutes about what does it mean to be rooted in faith at St. Marks. It will be our theme in October into November.

Commonwealth of MA signatures

Rebecca circulated the docs to be signed. All signed except Stephanie Powers and Brenda Cole-Milner. Rebecca will follow up with them.

Thrift Shop Snack Bar

John indicated that 7-8 people are interested in helping with the Snack Bar. There is a meeting next Monday to discuss it further. We are hoping to open November 4 and go from there. We'd like to start by having it open every other Saturday (first/third). The plan is for cold sandwiches and a hot entrée (soup/stew) at reasonable prices to bring in community. There are 2 issues with the Leominster Board of Health. Need to confirm with the BOH: 1) is it acceptable to them if people prepare food at home and it is reheated in the church kitchen; and 2) whether or not we need a Serv Safe certified person onsite during the hours of operation or just affiliated with the program. There was a discussion about the name of the snack bar to indicate it is something new. Snack Bar is a plain name but "jazz it up." Some suggestions were Blessings Café, Chapman's café (named after architect who designed church), or the Community café name and logo. Community Café would best portray what we are trying to do. John spoke with Brenda Cole-Milner and she confirmed the name is no longer in use and the ministry is no longer in operation. No one else would need to provide permission. Discussion ensued. It was agreed to use the name "Community Café."

Decision

Treasurer's Report Vote

James moved to accept the Treasurer's report, Jean seconded. All voted in favor.

Closing Prayer

Rev. Aileen offered a closing prayer.

Meeting Adjourned

Laurie made a motion to adjourn and Brenda Matthews seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

Next Meeting

The next Vestry meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 20, 2023.