

St. Mark's Vestry Meeting
February 19, 2024

Present:

Rev. Aileen DiBenedetto, Rector
Frank Ruggiero, Treasurer
Rebecca Ethier, Clerk
Brenda Cole-Milner
Brenda Matthews
Stephanie Powers
John Mentzer
Laurie Voedisch
Terry Downing
Gary Courtemanche
Cathy Chipolone-Collins

Absent:

Rebecca Carpenito
James Normington, Senior Warden
Stuart Paul, Junior Warden

Rev. Aileen offered an opening prayer

Welcome to New Vestry Members

Rev. Aileen welcomed the new Vestry members and reminded everyone of our community guidelines. Handout:

- 1) Speak respectfully
 - a. Respond slowly, you may need to pause will engaging in conversation
 - b. Use "I statements"
 - c. Practice empathy
 - d. Speak clearly
 - e. Address the issue not the person
- 2) Listen to hear
 - a. Listen to hear what is being said instead of listening to respond
 - b. Let someone finish what they are saying
- 3) Timeliness with meetings
 - a. Begin and end within 5 minutes of agreed time
 - b. Stay on topic
 - c. What is and isn't covered
 - d. Set time limits
- 4) Confidentiality
- 5) Email respectfully
 - a. Don't rush to reply
 - b. Be mindful of recipient
 - i. Be mindful of tone does not carry as well in email as in face to face conversation
 - c. You may want someone else to read your email (being mindful of confidentiality)
 - d. Replies by next business day

Rev. Aileen asked the Vestry how we've done with these guidelines over the past year. A question was asked about confidentiality given they are open meetings and minutes are taken. Some parishes don't have open meetings. There may be some discussions that need to happen within the Vestry before the wider parish discusses. Sometimes we are

making difficult decisions. There are disagreements sometimes, and the entire parish doesn't need to know about those. The broader parish doesn't need to know how we got to a decision and who said what to whom. It was asked why the Vestry meeting has to be an open meeting, as it wasn't always the case. If guests asked to be included we can just have them at the beginning. John noted that the Vestry 101 materials state that the Vestry meeting is an open meeting.

We will add an agenda item for next month: do we want Vestry meetings to be open?

If anyone has concerns about how Vestry meetings are being conducted, they can go to Rev. Aileen. Rev. Aileen will support you as we try to stay within community guidelines.

Learning

Please try to attend Vestry 101 tomorrow night at 6pm in lieu of a Learning at tonight's meeting.

Information

Review of January Vestry Minutes

A motion was made by Laurie to accept the January Vestry minutes; Brenda Matthews seconded. All voted in favor.

Frank asked about the diocese assessment reduction request. Rev. Aileen indicated that James followed up and the diocese indicated they don't do reductions anymore.

Senior Warden's Report

In James's absence, Rev. Aileen read his report to the meeting.

James met with Diocese Creation Care Network as a pathway for St. Mark's to be a lead parish for Green initiatives.

James is working with Rev. Aileen on cost cutting measures.

James is working on "Donuts with the Donkey" for Palm Sunday. He is getting a grant application in to cover the costs of a petting zoo and snacks, etc. James has already booked it, so he will cover the costs if the grant does not come through.

Grant applications were submitted with IC Credit Union and Workers Credit Union for community café expenses. IC Credit Union declined at this time. James suggested that we submit for an MDI grant for community café funding

Frank asked about the accounting for grants. Rev. Aileen will work on this and to the extent funds will need to be returned, they will be.

James asked all to think about legacy gifting plans. The "Endowment" funds were funded by gifted funds. We will never be able to repay the loans from the trust funds. But think of it as when the endowments were created they were meant to go towards funding the future security rather than the operating expenses.

Buildings & Grounds

Deferred due to Stu's absence.

Brenda Cole-Milner noted on behalf of the Property Committee that the painting in the Rectory was done, and another painting party is scheduled for March which is for getting the Rectory ready for rent. Stu told the Property Committee that there are things that need to be done beyond the Rectory.

Rector's Report

Moments of Gratitude to:

- Rebecca Ethier for serving as Clerk at the Annual Meeting.
- Terry DellaSanta for preparing the Annual Report materials and to all those who wrote a report.
- Howard and Bob for including additional slides in the Annual Meeting Sunday worship.
- All those who brought food for the Annual Meeting luncheon.
- Brenda Cole-Milner for suggesting Lenten Soup Nights.
- Theone Wallace for assisting at Heavenly Mugs.
- The Property Committee for the Friday Pizza & Paint party: Kim Salazar, Tom Gammel, Rebecca Carpenito, Gary Courtemanche, Stu, Brenda Cole-Milner, John Mentzer, John Rukas, and Frank.
- Frank for all of his detailed work to put together the Treasurer's Report and Annual Report for the Annual Meeting

Rev. Aileen is meeting with Vicki from the Beacon of Hope to try to increase their rent from \$2000 up to \$2500 for the year. Frank asked for clarification of when they pay us; it doesn't matter now but helpful to know for the budget.

A Church group was talking about renting the AA room at St. Mark's House, but they don't want to pay anything so that won't happen.

The Health inspector is coming back for the inspection. Mike the Sexton is cleaning our kitchen as he volunteers with Beacon of Hope as well. Brenda Matthews stated the drainage in the sinks doesn't work that well. The left sink doesn't run all that well, but Laurie said if you run other sinks, it sucks it down. We are licensed in July. A question was asked about the Beacon's refrigerator as they don't use the kitchen anymore. Rev. Aileen indicated that the fridge will be removed.

Rev. Aileen will be attending Credo April 16-22 at the ECCO Conference Center in Oakhurst CA (just south of Yosemite National Park)

- Rev. Aileen will be gone April 16-23. It's a retreat that clergy should go once every 10 years and is funded by the pension fund.
- Gary will tell the Wardens they have to lead prayer on April 21 or Christine Downing can lead.

We are in Lent. Dates to note:

- Holy Week we will worship with Churches of North Worcester County:
 - Maundy Thursday in Gardner
 - Good Friday in Fitchburg
 - Easter Vigil in Leominster
- Easter Day at 10am we will have Baptisms
- Bishop's Visitation will be on June 2nd
 - We will have a baptism, possibly a confirmation

Community Events:

- Wednesday Nights @ St. Mark's in Lent
- Heavenly Mugs
 - A Thursday morning coffee group @ 11am
 - Will continue beyond Lent
 - It is also a Pastoral Care opportunity

Laurie indicated in that Mid-April she will offer study group for Season 2 of The Chosen.

Planning a set of Evensongs with Christ Church Fitchburg:

- Ascension Day: May 9th at 7pm (Thursday)
- Thanksgiving again this year
- One other possibility in the fall

Stewardship opportunity:

Adopt-A-Bill

- a. A program that worked in a church Rev. Aileen once served.
- b. Make a calendar of bills
 1. Special bills such a dry cleaning of linens when Bishop visits
- c. Parishioners can choose bills to pay each month that they are able to pay, in addition to their pledge
- d. James can talk about advantages of this

For those who are not comfortable upping their pledged amount, this might be a better way for an impact. Plus it makes people see where their money is going. James's point of view is that if we get more pledges it would up our level for diocese assessment so this is a better way.

Frank noted that pledging is important. It's the basis for our budget. People picking and choosing for what they want to pay rather than pledging doesn't allow us to properly budget. In addition there are bills that get paid online (gas/electric), and the diocese takes their payments right away. Maybe it can be done on a trial basis for one particular bill to see how tracking it would go. This should be done for budgeted expenses so we can attack the deficit, not for extra things not included in the budget.

Adopt-A-Bill will be added to the agenda for next month for discussion.

Legacy giving entails designating a certain percentage to give to the church upon your death. In Lenten season it is a time that death is discussed. March 10 or later can be chosen for a discussion and following it we can have a celebratory meal for all those who made a pledge. And there can be questions about estate planning or funeral planning. There is a Learning program we can include in the March Vestry meeting discussion.

Gary asked if legacy gifts are accounted for currently or only in the future upon death. There can be a listing of people who have made the church a beneficiary, but no current accrual is made for it.

Treasurer's Report

Frank sent out the final numbers for 2023. The differences from the previous report are bills that were dated in December that came in after Frank left for vacation. The other change is a bookkeeping thing. All expenses paid for the SBA loan were listed as an expense. The payback is not supposed to be an expense; only the interest is an expense, not the principal. The balance sheet is updated with final trust figures. There were some questions about Other Income and negative items from 2022.

For the January report, we don't have the approved 2024 budget yet so we can't show a comparison vs. budget. It will be updated for next month. Pledges are down for January, so it was a slow month. The vacation replacement line is the organist we are currently using until we get him under the salary line. We received in some of the advertising revenue, and received some funds for deficit reduction.

Dumpster expenses: Frank got a quote of \$221/month. For 2024, they had originally proposed raising the expenses by \$50/month but after he spoke to them, they lowered it. The dumpster company sent a contract for 5 years with only first year guaranteed. They can change the rate for certain reasons. Frank will follow up with the Finance committee on

these matters. Perhaps we go out to see if there are other providers out there? Maybe ask the company if there is a year to year version they have?

Grumpy Old Men

Gary presented an idea after the Property Committee meeting and after the painting party where they all had a lot of fun. He discussed with other people on the team. The idea is to get together once a month and have coffee/pastry and work on a project together. They will work around the church or do other volunteer work. It would be self-funded by those that come in to participate by putting \$5-\$10 into a pot. They can have some fun and not use money from the treasury.

You don't have to be grumpy or a man to participate. They are planning to have the first meeting on Monday, April 1. The first project might be to clean out the basement in the Rectory. They already have additional volunteers too.

Discussion

Appointment of Audit Committee

Rebecca Ethier noted that the Parish Audit form needs to be filled out and returned to the diocese by March 31 which indicates what method the Vestry chooses. There was a discussion that typically the Finance Committee serves as the Audit Committee. Rev. Aileen asked when the last time we had an outside auditor. Terry thinks it was about 40 plus years ago. Rev. Aileen noted that it might be a good idea to get fresh eyes on the books. Frank indicated that the diocese person usually does the same things as the Audit Committee, in that they go through controls and then spot check items, so the expectation is that it wouldn't be too much beyond what normally happens. Rev. Aileen offered that for the ones she has been involved with in the past, it went beyond financial. Things like the Asset listing is mentioned every year, but no action has been taken on the recommendations to Vestry. There is some level of risk, for simple things like counting process and the limited resource who does that. The auditor could come back with a recommendation, but we may not have enough resources to make those changes. We should consider it for this year or next year. What is the cost for the audit? Rev. Aileen will ask the diocese.

This will be added to next month's agenda.

2024 Budget

Frank indicated the budget he is presenting isn't much different from what was presented at the Annual Meeting. Our financial situation is dire. Why are pledge units down so much from previous year? They went from 47 down to 34 this year.

The Stewardship campaign this fall was only 2 people and we need to focus on why people aren't pledging. Some major reasons are because people are aging out as they are retiring or unable to pledge anymore. Our parish is not sustainable if we keep going this way. We need to figure out ways to bring more people in and cut expenses.

We should schedule a time to sit and discuss this. There are project resources for a learning exercise. Diocese pays half, and we pay half. We need 4-5 members who can look into stewardship.

What is the plan for the future?

People attend services when the church is happy and we are discussing mission not when we are talking about raising money. That is what will attract people. When people come in, they tend to stay.

The Chosen program and Learn to Knit program can bring more people in.

Back to the budget, we are bare bones on the expenses. We are not budgeting to pay back any money that we took from trust funds. Even with that, we have a deficit of nearly \$50,000. Do we need to discuss what needs to be cut if we don't raise the money to cover the deficit? The current plan to cover the deficit is to use all available funds and then other motions will be needed to move some other funds over.

Approximately \$37,000 of the deficit will still need to be covered by the trust funds. We can use the money from the special envelope for "special projects" against the deficit with Vestry approval. The LCU general funds checking account is owed \$4,280.27 from the Tower Project. We exhausted tower fund donations. An Account in DCU for "Loan Funds paid" has a balance of \$916. It hasn't been used for a while and nothing pending to be paid from it.

Scholarship Program

Laurie will update the policy to finalize. After that, it will be put on website, Facebook and mentioned in the magazine and weekly news.

Rebecca will send the latest draft to Laurie for updating. Rebecca will then distribute for posting and publishing.

Pancake Breakfast 3/17

Rebecca Ethier is organizing the pancake breakfast. She will come up with lists for donation of food items and a sign-up sheet for workers for: 1) set-up 2) clean-up, 3) cooking, and 4) raffle baskets. Rebecca will create signup sheets. We want to have announcements during Sunday's services. Rebecca will write up something for Aileen to announce this Sunday. Rebecca will create a flyer and Facebook event. Laurie suggested maybe doing flower bulb fundraiser at that time. Rev. Aileen asked James and he indicated it was not a money maker in past years.

Contact Information

Vestry members should provide their contact information to Rebecca Ethier to put in the spreadsheet for the diocese.

Decision

2024 Budget

Brenda Cole-Milner moved to accept the 2024 budget as presented; Laurie seconded, all voted in favor.

Additional motions:

To take \$1,381 from the Special projects envelopes from 2023 and move those funds into the LCU General Funds Checking Account. Gary made a motion to move these funds; Stephanie seconded. All voted in favor.

To take \$4,280.27 from the Memorial Funds and move into the LCU General Funds checking account; Terry made the motion to move these funds; Laurie seconded. All voted in favor.

Frank made a motion to move funds from the DCU "Loan Funds Paid" account in the amount of \$916 into the LCU General Funds Checking Account and then close out the DCU Loan Funds Paid Account; Stephanie seconded. All voted in favor.

Treasurer's Report Vote

A motion to approve the final 2023 Treasurer's report was made by Brenda Matthews; seconded by Gary. All voted in favor.

A motion to accept the January 2024 Treasurer's report was made by Brenda Matthews; Stephanie seconded. All voted in favor.

Closing Prayer

Rev. Aileen offered a closing prayer.

Meeting Adjourned

Terry made a motion to adjourn and Brenda Cole-Milner seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:01 pm.

Next Meeting

The next Vestry meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 18, 2024 at 7:00pm.