

**Vestry Meeting
August 28, 2023**

Present:

Rev. Aileen DiBenedetto
James Normington, Senior Warden
Stuart Paul, Junior Warden
Frank Ruggiero, Treasurer
Cathy Chipotle-Collins
Laurie Handscome-Voedisch
Dayna Hume
Brenda Cole Milner
John Mentzer
Jean Robertson

Absent:

Rebecca Ethier, Clerk
Brenda Matthews
Libia Perez-Moore

Opening Prayer

Rev. Aileen shared an opening prayer for the Vestry.

Safe Church

Rev. Aileen reported that the Safe Church Sub-Committee will be taking some additional time to work on the safe church policies for St. Mark's. An individual of concern the church was working with has confirmed that they would be attending a different church. The Safe Church discussion will be deferred for now until the policy work is completed. Rev. Tanya Wallace will continue to participate in the policy development with the Vestry.

St. Mark's House

The Vestry did a walk-through of St. Mark's House. This did not include the Thrift Shop areas. Rev. Aileen asked that as the Vestry members viewed the space, we begin thinking of how we might utilize it in ways could benefit the community. Rev. Aileen noted that she has made a suggestion to relocate the church offices to St. Mark's House and added that once we begin using the space, we may start taking better care of the property.

The former Sunday School room on the ground floor was viewed. Rev. Aileen suggested that we consider other ideas for utilization of this space other than a child centered space. It was noted that it may have lead paint. Suggestions for improvements included painting and new flooring. There is good closet space in the room. It was agreed that this room may be a good place to relocate the Office Manager's office as it has plenty of space and would provide excellent visibility of who is coming and going at the church.

A question was raised about how increased use of St. Mark's House might impact utility costs. James Normington stated that St. Mark's House is already heated during the week for Beacon of Hope and the heat could be turned down in the current offices/church hall area during the week if we moved the offices. The church hall is being used on Tuesdays by a quilting group and this provides income for the church. Other groups who gather in the church hall include the intercessory prayer team and the healing team. Overall, moving the church offices may result in decreased utility costs.

Other comments offered regarding the use of St. Mark's House included:

- The banister on the stairway is not tall enough to meet current code and could be dangerous.
- The meeting room behind the former Sunday School room could make a good small meeting room or also could be the Rector's Office.
- Some space in St. Mark's House might be able to be rented to people who operate small businesses such as therapy and counseling services.

- There is only one bathroom in St. Mark's House. If we moved Beacon of Hope to a different space in St. Mark's House and reconfigured the hallway, we could make the bathroom accessible to everyone who might use the space in the future.

Rev. Aileen asked everyone to try and sketch out their ideas for the space and share them with Vestry.

Review of Minutes

The minutes of the July 17, 2023 meeting were reviewed. A motion was made by Frank Ruggiero; seconded by Stephanie Powers to accept the minutes as submitted; all in favor.

Senior Warden's Report

James Normington reported that the lift remains out of service and there has been difficulty in finding anyone willing to come and make repairs due to its age. Folks who use the lift regularly have suggested opening the belfry tower stairs as they should be able to navigate them safely. An additional greeter will be posted at the door to provide assistance entering the church, if needed.

There was good attendance at morning prayer services this past Sunday which were led by James Normington at 10:00 a.m. and Stuart Paul at 8:00 a.m.

The organist position has been posted. A musician who responded is interested in playing piano or guitar on some Sunday mornings.

Junior Warden's Report

Stuart Paul further discussed the efforts to get the lift repaired. Five companies in Massachusetts were contacted and none of them are willing to make the repairs. They also said that if repairs were done, they would likely only be good for a couple years, which would leave us in the same position again. Replacing the lift with a stair lift was explored; no permits are allowed for commercial buildings. Putting in a ramp was also explored. This would require a new deck up to the granite stairs with a snaking ramp that would be 60 feet long. The walkway is off level by about an inch and would need to be taken out and rerouted and leveled to the sidewalk. A low estimate for the ramp work, which would be a temporary solution, is \$30,000. Stuart said that the lift will need to be replaced. He has requested bids from 101 Mobility and Mobility New England. Regardless of the cost, the work will take some time. James Normington said he reached out to companies in other states and found that due to Massachusetts' licensing requirements for elevator installation, repairs, etc., they would not be able to help us.

Frank Ruggiero discussed de-leading of the Rectory. He said Brenda Cole-Milner has received two bids which are relatively close in pricing (around \$25,000 and \$27,000). The Vestry needs to determine how this can be paid for. A 0% loan of up to \$50,000 is available from the Episcopal Church Building Fund, but there is a \$1,500 loan application fee. Also, if we received the loan, we would be required to rent to individuals within a certain income threshold, which would mean we would likely have to accept a lower rent and reducing the Rectory's income potential. The Diocese said they could move relatively quickly on this. Frank said that we could take money from the Vickery Trust Fund, but we will need to commit a significant portion (50%) of rental income to pay off the loan. This will be required regardless of whether we obtain a loan from the Building Fund or if we borrow from our trust fund. Frank said that if we did borrow from the Vickery Trust Fund, it will not cover the entire de-leading expense as we need to leave at least 20% in the fund; the balance is currently around \$28,000.

Frank noted that the lift replacement is likely going to be just as expensive, so we need to determine a way to pay for that as well.

James Normington said he prefers the idea of borrowing from ourselves with a monthly commitment to pay it back. He also noted that the Diocese would like the idea of borrowing the money for the Rectory de-leading which will allow us to rent the property.

Frank said that we need to plan on paying back all of the trust funds that have been borrowed so they are available for the next generation.

Stuart Paul said that the Rectory will also need some plumbing and window replacements completed prior to renting.

James Normington made a motion to accept a bid of \$25,350 from Commonwealth Lead, Paul Boyle, to de-lead the Rectory with funding to be withdrawn from the Vickery Trust Fund; seconded by Stephanie Powers; all in favor.

Rector's Report

Executive Committee has determined there is enough money in the budget to acquire a software program called Amplify. If we purchase the program by the end of August, we will get 6 months free. The purchase will also include 5 hours of coaching time. The program can be used for church communications, the stewardship campaign, building a church directory that could include pictures in the future, and integration with mailchimp. Rev. Aileen said she would like to have a number of people cross-trained on the software. There is also an on-line giving component in the program. Individual emails for ministries can be created, and then can be set up to be forwarded to your own personal email address so you don't have to manage an additional mailbox.

The Stewardship Campaign is currently being planned by Rev. Aileen and James Normington, but they would very much like others to join in.

We are planning a Blessing of Backpacks and Welcome Back Celebration on September 10th. Several members will be making apple crisp in the church kitchen on September 9 and will be serving it with ice cream and whipped cream along with apple cider donuts and apple cider. Donations of the ice cream, whipped cream and donuts are needed and can be left at the church on Saturday, September 9.

Rev. Aileen said that she met with a potential organist in addition to the musician James mentioned.

Rev. Aileen asked how St. Mark's has celebrated Creation Season. James noted that In the past we have had a harvest festival and in-gathering of food. This season will begin September 1st. The Sunday School will be opening on September 10th with a lesson based on praising God for his creation.

There will be an organ concert on September 17 at 3:00 p.m.

The Johnny Appleseed Festival will be held on September 23. Laurie Voedisch spoke with the festival organizer and was able to confirm that having an inflatable at the church would not present any concerns for the festival vendors who also have inflatables.

We are looking to have an October Trunk or Treat event.

Rev. Aileen has continued to devote much time to pastoral care related to issues that arose out of the work we were doing with an individual of concern in the church.

Rev. Aileen discussed the needs of the Sunday School. The new curriculum is easy to work with and requires less preparation time. The lessons are not sequential, so it is easy for someone to step in and teach a lesson. Laurie Voedisch continues as the lead teacher and Dayna Hume will continue as an assistant. However, we need an additional lead teacher. We also need assistant teachers to be present during the Sunday School class. It doesn't need to be a parent. More assistance will provide regular opportunity for the lead teachers and assistants to attend church.

Rev. Aileen noted that the new Amplify system may have a check-in / check-out system that the Sunday School could use to assist with tracking attendance.

Rev. Aileen asked for a volunteer to be a greeter at the belfry stairs this Sunday; Jean Robertson volunteered. A sign-up sheet will be prepared for following weeks.

Treasurer's Report

On the income side of the budget, Frank Ruggiero noted that the pledges are running about \$5,000 less than expected

for this time of year. We will have a pledge impact from parishioner's who are no longer attending. We budgeted \$5,000 for fundraising for the year, and we are presently at \$1,500. Frank requested that the funds be deposited from the May Organ Concert. The invoice for the cookbooks was just received, and this will also significantly reduce the fundraising account balance until revenue is generated from sales of the cookbook. It was noted that we hope to be able to begin selling the cookbooks in September at the Johnny Appleseed Festival.

For expenses, we have overages in the Buildings & Grounds account related to electrical work at the Rectory that cost around \$2,000 as well as the heating costs at St. Mark's House really exceeding projections. We will need to keep an eye on the thermostat settings.

Frank noted that we really need to focus efforts on fundraising.

The checking account balance is about \$9,000 may seem a little high, but Frank noted that our monthly expenses are averaging about \$10,000. If needed, Frank said he will use general funds in the savings account to make sure we don't miss any payments. The next step would be to go to the Rainy Day Fund, which he would ask Vestry to approve. If the Rainy Day Fund is depleted, we have no other source of money. Deficit reduction for this year is very important to provide a buffer for next year's budget. We will likely have a deficit next year as well.

A motion was made by James Normington to accept the Treasurer's Report; seconded by Jean Robertson; all in favor.

Johnny Appleseed Festival

Laurie Voedisch reported that we will have a table at the Johnny Appleseed Festival again this year. We will be located in front of the churches near the corner of West St. and Main St. We plan to have the cookbooks for sale, a craft activity for children, information about the Sunday School program, and church flyers. Last year, members of the prayer team were present and offered prayers to folks who came to our table. Cathy Collins offered to do this again this year. Laurie said that some additional help at the table would be appreciated to assist with the children's craft and sharing information about the church, including promoting the bouncy house that will be on the church grounds that day. A sign-up sheet for hours will be prepared. Dayna Hume suggested having coolers with ice water to offer for sale at the festival; Laurie will clear this with the Food Inspector as we did not include any food or beverage on our booth application. The fee for the Johnny Appleseed Festival table was waived.

We received \$1,000 in grant money that will pay for a free bounce house at the church during the Johnny Appleseed Festival. The funds will also cover the cost of flyers and other materials we might want to obtain to use that day for games/activities.

Thrift Shop Snack Bar

John Mentzer is leading the initiative to get the Thrift Shop Snack Bar up and running again. This is a new opportunity with some new fresh ideas for the snack bar. John said that we want to have a snack bar that is affordable and nutritious, and perhaps more substantial than what has been offered in the past. The biggest concern is having enough people willing to participate to make it workable. Chris Ryder is also involved in working with John Mentzer to get the snack bar going. Part of the whole concept of trying to make this into something new is trying to change the name to something else. Ideas are welcome. Brenda Cole-Milner said that in the past the Community Café ministry had a logo developed that could be used again. Dayna Hume said that in the past, homemade soups were very popular. John said that food would need to be prepared in the church kitchen. Not everyone would need to be ServSafe certified to make the food, but there needs to be people in the church who are certified and will provide guidance.

Christmas Bazaar

Laurie Voedisch confirmed the date change for the Christmas Bazaar will be November 17 (5:00 to 8:00 p.m.) and November 18 (9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.). Dayna Hume had some great ideas to open the garage and sell wreaths that members make ahead. A workshop will be planned for November. James Normington suggested having a few paid craft vendors in the middle area of the church hall. Vicki at Beacon of Hope has confirmed they would be coming on Friday, November 17. A letter asking for donations of gift cards/gift certificates will be sent to Terry to send out to local businesses. James suggested sending a letter of appreciation to Dana Tusia for her help in organizing the raffle for the

past 20+ years. Laurie Voedisch will send Dana a thank you letter. Barb Hager has offered to lead a blanket making workshop in October, and we could sell the blankets at the Bazaar.

Executive Session

The Vestry spent approximately 10 minutes in executive session.

Exterminator Contract

Rev. Aileen reviewed the proposed agreement with Sweet Pest Control. The monthly cost will be \$85. The initial service fee is \$100, the exclusion fee to cover any holes is \$125, exterior bait stations are \$160. The initial cost is \$470 which includes the first month at \$85 and \$385 in one-time fees.

Frank Ruggiero asked where these expenses would be paid from. It was agreed that we should pay it from the Buildings & Grounds Fund after moving \$600 from the pray ground allocation to the Buildings & Grounds account (the \$600 from pray ground account will be reimbursed by James Normington). James Normington made an additional \$150 donation to cover the balance for 2023. Rev. Aileen will send a copy of the contract to Frank Ruggiero.

A motion was made by Dayna Hume to enter into a one-year contract with Sweet Pest Control with an initial cost of \$470 and a monthly cost thereafter of \$85; seconded by James Normington; all in favor.

Closing Prayer

Rev. Aileen led the Vestry in a closing prayer.

Meeting Adjourned

A motion to adjourn was made by James Normington; seconded by Brenda Cole-Milner; all in favor.

Next Meeting

The next Vestry Meeting will be Monday, September 18, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. in the church hall.