

Special Vestry Meeting  
July 9, 2015  
Minutes

Present: Jim Farrar, John Burleson, Grigg Mullen, Julia Grossman, Susan Cross, George Brooke, Tom Crittenden, Daniel Wubah, Carole Elmore, Don Whittington, Amy Holsten  
Staff: Sharon Massie, Program Director

Unable to Attend: Holt Merchant, Doug Cumming, Diana Kenney, Elizabeth Knapp, Frank Settle

Tom requested that the Vestry grant approval for him and Senior Warden Jim Farrar to execute the contract from BRW Architects. Upon motion made and duly seconded the Vestry of R. E. Lee Memorial Church (RELM) directed the Rector and Senior Warden to sign the contract to engage BRW Architects in the undercroft remodeling project and other aspects of that project as described in the contract and scope of services letter of May 27, 2015 for an amount not to exceed \$18,000.

The remainder of the meeting was dedicated to a discussion of a parishioners letter of June 29, 2015 requesting the Vestry to consider the possibility of changing the church's name. The Vestry wanted to share their views on the subject and consider how best to respond. After preliminary comments from the Rector, Senior Warden and Junior Warden the floor was opened for discussion.

It was established early in the discussion that the subject of a possible name change was not new. In fact, Tom noted that shortly after his arrival at RELM eight years ago he was approached about the possibility of changing the name of the church. The subject came up during the 2013 parish conversations related to the creation of the Mutual Ministry Review and, most recently, at the February 27-28, 2015 Vestry Retreat.

As each member of the Vestry shared his or her thoughts it became clear that there was a broad consensus that if done for the right reasons a name change could be a very positive step for the church. Vestry members were careful to point out that a name change should not be perceived as a politically correct reaction to the Charleston, SC shootings and the broader negative reactions nationwide to Confederate symbols.

There will be those who say that a name change at RELM will be an insult to the memory of Robert E. Lee. A change of name would not sever any connection with Lee. The main window and the cross bear his name, and people will know of Lee's active participation and leadership as a member of the Vestry. There are no plans to eliminate references to Lee, to remove memorial plaques or to otherwise diminish the history of the church or its founding. Any conversations going forward must be focused solely on the future of the church. And should a name change be approved, something reminiscent of the original name of Grace Church, perhaps Grace Episcopal Church, would provide yet another historical link to Lee.

As we seek to live out our baptismal covenant we must ask ourselves if the name of the church helps or hinders our efforts. Does it help us to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves?” Does it help us “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” Many believe the name prevents us from doing that as fully as we might otherwise.

RELM currently has just over 420 baptized members. Because a significant number of its parishioners are elderly, growing the size of the parish is important for the future of the church. In addition, it has been noted by a number of parishioners and a majority of the Vestry that our name is something of an oddity, too secular, out of synch. It is very unusual for a church to carry the name of a layperson. In fact, Tom noted that he knows of only three: Strauss Memorial in Tazewell, VA; Palmer Memorial in Houston, TX; and RELM. He also noted that two other churches in Virginia are named for deceased bishops. As we contemplate the church’s future it might be wise to consider a name change that reflects fully the fact that we are indeed a church, part of the body of Christ. Our name should inspire us to seek Christ in all that we do.

Tom recommended that the Vestry consider retaining a facilitator to assist with the anticipated parish-wide conversation regarding a possible name change. He will contact the Diocesan Office to discuss that possibility. We will also want to share this conversation with architect Bruce Wardell and his staff to make sure they are aware of the issue.

The Vestry agreed to take the matter up again at its August 17 meeting. It is the Vestry’s hope that it could begin to rough out a possible schedule for future parish conversations on the subject.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jim Farrar, Jr.  
Senior Warden