

Vestry Meeting Minutes

R.E. Lee Memorial Episcopal Church

November 21, 2016 (updated draft)

The regular meeting of the Vestry of R.E. Lee Memorial Episcopal Church was held on Monday, November 21, 2016 at 5:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall conference room.

Present: Vestry Members: George Brooke, Tom Crittenden (Rector), Susan Cross, Carole Elmore, Keith Gibson, Julia Grossman, Catherine Marcus, Elizabeth Knapp, Susan Lawrence, Sharon Massie (Program Director); Grigg Mullen, Woody Sadler (Senior Warden), and Don Whittington; **Vestry-Elect Members:** Lynn Dent and Buster Lewis; **Guests:** Megan Hess (Chair, Finance Committee); **Absent:** Doug Cumming, Holt Merchant, and Daniel Wubah

Opening: Woody invited prayer concerns and opened the meeting with the Discovery and Discernment Committee prayer.

“Almighty and everliving God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with us as we seek to renew the mission of your Church as Christ’s mission, working through us in all that we do. Teach us to seek first your wisdom and glory. Guide us to perceive what is your will, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Approval of October minutes: The October minutes were approved unanimously.

Capital Campaign: Woody reported training meetings for the eighteen “Askers” who had agreed to visit parishioners to discuss with them components of the upcoming capital campaign and their potential support. In addition, campaign packets have been sent to parishioners, and announcements about the campaign described in the “Lexington Episcopalian” - a newly-created blog created by Doug Cumming and linked to the parish website.

Committee Reports:

Finance Committee: *(submitted electronically by Don Whittington)* In review of the Revenue and Expense report, it looks as if the year will end on a positive note. We have large honoraria which are over budget, and cost projections for utilities and maintenance were lower than expected. We’re about \$14,000 under expenses and only \$3000.00 under in revenues.

John Dickerson, Property Committee Co-Chair, submitted for review by the Finance Committee the 2017 budget request. Several projected costs, i.e., parish house façade and exterior doors renovation would be removed from the estimated \$61,000 budget since these items could be considered a capital expense instead and requiring vestry approval.

2017 Budget

Megan Hess, Finance Committee Chair, presented information considered by the committee in its preliminary work on the 2017 budget. This information included comparison of 2016 revenues and expenses with those projected for 2017, including personnel and outreach

expenses, and pledging and endowment income trajectories since 2013. There was considerable discussion of reviewing trends and explanations for these once pledges for 2017 are finalized, assessing our priorities, what we can afford, and options for redistribution of spending. Megan distributed a chart listing options that the Finance Committee has considered for balancing the budget, ranking each on a scale of 1-5. She asked Vestry members to indicate their own rankings to help guide next month's Finance Committee deliberations. She gathered these responses and indicated that she will send a confidential draft budget to the Vestry electronically before its December meeting.

Tom reported a possible major repair to the organ that could cost over \$10,000. This raised questions about reasonable expenditures to keep the organ in standard operation, and stop-gap options that had already been considered for the organ replacement time, e.g. piano and digital organ. Since there was Vestry consensus that more information is needed from Ted, Tom will invite him to attend the December Vestry meeting.

Stewardship:

Lynn Dent, Stewardship Committee Chair, reported that 152 pledges have been received, compared to 167 at this point last year, but that a number of pledges traditionally come in late. The committee has followed up twice with those who have not yet pledged. Lynn described possible explanations for this reduction, but anticipated that there will be a marginal increase in the total pledged amount, assuming receipt of these additional pledges. The pledged total is currently close to \$380,000.

Christian Outreach:

Susan Cross reported on "The Community Closet at Christ Church," a relatively new ministry and community service located in Buena Vista (reported to be the 2nd poorest community in the Commonwealth). The closet "provides clothing and household items at no charge to families in need in Rockbridge County." This is an important outreach opportunity in which all three Episcopal churches in the county can join. One has already agreed to provide transportation to BV. The Community Closet is open from 9-noon on Saturdays, and provides a department-store type venue, with housewares and clothing for all ages. Patrons are asked only to provide their first name and zip code, thus there is no vetting. The Closet also partners with Project Horizon, providing toiletries, furniture and bedding. In addition to cash contributions, the closet seeks donations of new socks and underwear (distribution of used socks and underwear are prohibited by law), and clothing and housewares in good condition. Volunteers are needed to sort clothing.

Susan distributed posters for Vestry members to post in prominent areas. The poster includes contact information for Closet organizers. Pick-up service is offered. Susan Cross and Susan Lawrence also volunteered to deliver donations. The closet is housed in the old Rectory. Southern States has donated space heaters, but because there are safety concerns related to these, the Closet leaders have applied to the Gadsden Committee for a grant to purchase a heater. Susan Cross will write up a proposal for Vestry review describing specifics of our parish's role in this ministry.

Susan further reported that the committee voted to shift its review of applications from January to the summer to have better information about how much to request from the parish operating budget.

Construction:

Grigg reported that the contractors resolved the problem with the elevator shaft and are bringing in the elevator car. Woody added that the launching of the capital campaign will be scheduled to correspond with the opening of the elevator.

Discovery and Discernment Committee:

Keith reported that the committee has been meeting regularly on Thursdays, and the focus group phase of the process is complete. Responses from among the nearly one hundred focus group participants were reflective and heartfelt, expressing appreciation for the meaningful experiences. Data analysis is now in progress. Committee members were each assigned review of responses to one of the eight questions asked at focus group meetings. From among 85-90 responses to each question, committee members will identify recurring themes in their assigned set of responses. The committee has already found one or two themes repeated multiple times for each question. The report to the Vestry will include these, some of which may become actionable concepts. How to address recurring themes will be up to the Vestry. Keith observed that there will likely be six to seven themes that will reflect views of the congregation in general, since participants in the focus groups represented a cross-section of parishioners. Tom has asked James and Barbara, the EMU consultants, to present at least a progress report at the Vestry Retreat in January, if the final report is not yet complete. Responding to a question about distribution of the final report, Keith observed that the document is being prepared for the Vestry, which will decide how it is presented to the congregation. There was Vestry consensus about the importance of transparency and timeliness in sharing the report with the congregation.

Comments by the Wardens: Woody noted completion of the majority of brass items, adding that the gates and processional cross will be returned when the restoration has been completed. George pointed out the importance of ensuring awareness in the coming years that the warranty on the brass work will be invalidated if the brass is polished.

Woody announced that Catherine, Susan Cross, Keith Gibson and Don Whittington will serve as the Nominating Committee for the new Vestry wardens. Susan agreed to coordinate the nomination process, to include consulting with the Rector, and gaining approval from candidates who are nominated to serve as wardens. The Nominating Committee will complete its work in time for the Vestry Retreat.

Comments by the Rector: Tom reminded the Vestry of the retreat scheduled for January 13-14. As discussed earlier in the meeting, one of the major focuses will be the report of the Discovery and Discernment Committee. Catherine expressed concern that almost half of the Vestry members did not attend last year's retreat, and suggested that an alternate date be considered sooner rather than later if there are a number of conflicts with the scheduled dates. Tom will ask Vestry members to confirm their availability to attend on these dates.

Christmas Day falls on a Sunday this year. There will be only a 10:30 service that day.

Tom received word from the Diocese that the Anne Grizzle is prepared to move forward to the Diaconate, the next step in the ordination process, and this requires Vestry certification. Vestry members agreed that they would like Anne to make a presentation at the December Vestry meeting before signing the document.

Tom commented further on the brass restoration, which now makes the brass look more artistic, and that the experts noted it was high quality brass that we could not possibly afford to purchase now.

Ted has invited Tom to join the choir as its officiant for services during its Week In Residence in England the last week of July, 2017. Tom reported that he typically builds up his Continuing Education funds for a year or two for a substantial purpose, and currently has approximately \$600 in escrow, plus funds remaining from his Sabbatical. The estimated cost of the trip is \$2000. Tom asked for the Vestry's guidance on whether this trip would be an appropriate use of his Continuing Education Fund. Vestry members decided to consider this and discuss at the December Vestry meeting.

The question was raised about Vestry meeting attendance requirements in the Bylaws. Woody responded that there is a provision for this in the Bylaws, and that he is following up.

Several members indicated a preference for continuing to meet in the more intimate setting of the conference room rather than the Parish Hall. Tom will look at other venue options.

Suggestion Box: Julia reported three suggestions: 1) The Parish Hall is too cold, making adult Sunday School participants unwilling to attend Sunday School classes there. Tom explained that the aging boiler system needs repair, and that we have been trying to get a service call for the past week. Woody suggested including this explanation in the Sunday announcements; 2) Do we really need the news read out during the service, since we can all read the announcements printed in the bulletin. Tom noted that having Vestry members make announcements on Sunday was in response to a previous suggestion, and that there are differing preferences among parishioners related to the timing of announcements. Several members reported hearing positive feedback about seeing Vestry members making announcements, although George heard the suggestion that announcements should not be a repeat of those in the bulletin, but limited to those that require emphasis; 3) Criticism of the post-election sermon. Tom observed that he rarely comments on political issues in his sermons, but that he has received overwhelming positive responses to the recent one, and has invited those who contacted him directly with negative comments to speak with him about these. Vestry members added their accolades and those they had heard from others.

Program Director: Sharon reported: 1) David Cox's classes on Amos had their usual excellent attendance; 2) she feels hopeful after observing that some parents who are not attending worship services are sending their children to Sunday School; 3) all are welcome to the Lectionary class held in the College Room; high school and college students are already participating and interacting with adults. 4) Vestry members are invited to attend the Youth Breakfast on Thursdays; and 5) men and women are invited to the Quiet Morning at the Belfry from 9-1 on Saturday, December 17.

Rhodes Scholar: Elizabeth announced that Paqui Toscano, a W&L student and member of our parish, has been named a Rhodes scholar. This is W&L's first Rhodes Scholar since 1991.

Adjournment: Don offered the closing prayer before the meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

Next meeting: Monday, December 19, 2016; 5:00 p.m.