

Vestry Meeting Minutes (approved)

R.E. Lee Memorial Episcopal Church

August 17, 2015

The regular meeting of the Vestry of R.E. Lee Memorial Church was held on Monday, August 17, 2015 at 5:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall of the church.

In Attendance: George Brooke, John Burleson (Junior Warden), Susan Cross, Tom Crittenden (Rector), Doug Cumming, Carole Elmore, Jim Farrar (Senior Warden), Julia Grossman, Amy Holston, Diana Kenney, Elizabeth Knapp, Holt Merchant, Grigg Mullen, Frank Settle, Don Whittington, Daniel Wubah; Anna Crockett (Clerk).

Guests: Parishioners

Opening: Tom opened the meeting noting current prayer concerns. He asked for prayers as he begins his radiation treatments this week.

Jim thanked fellow parishioners for being present at the meeting and called attention to the sign-up for those who wish to speak. He explained that the agenda allows thirty minutes for comments from parishioners, making the time available for each of the thirteen who had signed up two minutes.

Approval of June Minutes: Minutes of the June meeting were accepted as published. (Tom noted that the minutes of the July special Vestry meeting had previously been vetted, approved, and posted.)

Anne Grizzle's Candidacy for Holy Orders: Tom introduced Anne Grizzle, parish member and postulant for ordination sponsored by our parish. Already vetted by the bishop and our parish in a multi-stage process, Anne has completed her postulancy and is now moving to next level of candidacy. Vestry approval of the sponsoring parish is required for candidacy.

Anne expressed appreciation for parish prayers and support. She described her calling to the postulancy in April 2013. Since then, she has undertaken theological study at Sewanee, completing two weeks of intensive classes and worship in January and June, and online classes in eight canonical areas in the interim months. She is now slightly more than halfway through the program. In addition, she serves at Trinity Episcopal in Staunton, provides pastoral care, and is continuing to offer a retreat ministry at The Belfry. She plans to continue her theological and liturgical education through Sewanee. Anne asked for Vestry discernment on moving from her postulancy to candidacy. **Vestry members and Clerk signed the "Certificate of Recommendation from the Rector and Vestry to the Bishop for Candidacy."**

Committee Reports:

Finance: Don Whittington reviewed highlights of the financial report through July 31. Other than pledges slightly behind and postage over budget (this will be researched), there is nothing unusual on the expense side. The \$13,800 amount listed under “Expenses” in the “Miscellaneous Administration” line is the maximum BRW architect’s fee. Financial Secretary, Anita Ramp, will provide a breakdown next month for this fee. The internal audit should also be available next month. Additionally, the FC plans to have the preliminary 2016 budget completed in December, The budgeting schedule will be published in the Cross and Crown.

Property: John reported that pressure washing is underway and that exterior painting is planned. Farris Precision Painting has been contracted for both projects. There was a significant water leak in the playground. Fortunately, Washington and Lee will cover the repair cost, since the playground is on their property, but the playground equipment and parking will be affected temporarily due to digging in that area. Food left out in open containers caused an issue in the kitchen. The architects presented several different approaches last Monday, and modified these after feedback (e.g. HVAC issues). In response to Frank’s question about who is taking care of the Meditation Garden, John reported that mulch has recently been laid down and that there are plans for free pressure washing.

Space Planning: Tom reported that the architect will meet with the parish between services on Sunday, September 27. The architect will provide concept presentations, including renovation plans for new use of the Undercroft space, and ask parishioners for feedback.

Stewardship: Reporting for Lynn Dent, Tom announced that the fall pledge campaign plans are well underway. Pledge packets will be available on September 27. Tom’s stewardship sermon will follow lay stewardship sermons on two consecutive Sundays. Pledge Sunday is October 11. Tom invited Vestry members to assist the committee with assembling pledge materials on September 8.

New Business

Vestry Elections: Tom announced that Vestry Elections will be held on October 11. The Vestry needs to appoint a Nominating Committee to solicit and receive nominations for parishioners who are willing to stand for election. In accordance with the bylaws, this committee will be comprised of at least three outgoing Vestry members.

Old Business

Bylaws amendment. Now that the vetting by the parish of the proposed amendment has been completed, as required by the bylaws, Tom introduced the second reading of the motion to **reduce the Vestry size from fifteen to twelve, starting with election of four this year, and reduced by one in each of the next three elections.** Reported comments from parishioners included one who expressed concern about the proposed even number of members, and another who anticipated

difficulty representing all parish constituencies if the Vestry size is reduced. Tom commented that all churches where he has previously served have had an even number of vestry members and this has not created a problem. Doug noted that it would be unlikely to find an evenly split vote in the historical record. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Church Name: Jim introduced the final agenda item, stating that it was to determine Vestry consensus on whether or not to continue discussion of the name change issue. Jim called on the parishioners who had signed up to speak to make their comments. Each speaker would have two minutes. Non-Vestry speakers were Peter Fyfe, Farris Hotchkiss, Steve Grist, Tom Gosse, Mary Doyle, Pam Adams, Doug Ayer, Woody Sadler, Merce Brooke, Steve Lawrence, Mary Lawrence, Dick Rathmell and Mo Littlefield.

Comments addressed not only whether or not to continue the conversation, but also:

- how our name is perceived/what statement the name makes to those outside our parish
- Lee embodying the essence of what it means to be a Christian (e.g. servant-leadership, humility, reconciliation)
- what keeps us in the parish and others away
- factors that influence others in choosing/leaving a parish (e.g. liturgy, welcoming attitude)
- longstanding/multiple generation family associations with the parish, closely tied to comfort with and pride in the name
- role “political correctness” may or may not be playing in the conversation
- potential impact on the upcoming stewardship and capital campaigns
- need for attention to other important work that needs to be accomplished in this, our 175th, anniversary year
- impact of continued discussion on the health and welfare of the parish.
- the decision process, including the pros and cons of a possible parish vote

Jim opened the floor for Vestry discussion of the question: Does the Vestry believe that there is enough consensus within the parish to continue the conversation about a name change? He clarified that, implied in this question is that there will be a decision at the endpoint.

Frank stated that, based on what has been heard, we would be remiss by dropping the conversation. However, he does not think that we should react precipitously, and so suggested a series of three conversations on Sunday mornings to address: 1) history, led by George; 2) where we are, led by Dennis; and 3) vision of where we would like to go, led by Tom. We will then be in a much better position to decide on the importance of the name. For the sake of consistency, a handout should be provided at each session. Furthermore, we have to pay attention to the younger people – this discussion is important for the future of our church. Frank added his

opinion that the Vestry should take the heat for the decision. By contrast, Holt expressed his preference for a secret parish ballot.

Julia shared feedback she has received from a number of parishioners expressing their desire for a vote on the issue. As a Vestry member, Julia feels that she would not be comfortable going against the will of the parish majority, whatever that might be. She concluded that the discussion is hurting the parish at this time and should therefore be tabled for now.

Diana reported that all calls and letters she has received encourage continuing the conversation.

George expressed his agreement with Julia's comments, stating that not one of the approximately twenty parishioners who have contacted him favors the name change. They know and love the church and have a history here. A lengthy discussion can be very injurious and divisive, and affect both the stewardship and capital campaigns. Furthermore, two members have told him that they would "cut off the church" if the name is changed. Referring to the letter that Nanalou Sauder had sent to the Vestry, George supported her suggestion that the conversation be redirected to areas more useful and less divisive.

Grigg observed that the Supreme Court's ruling that "Separate but not equal" was not right. We should give the name change issue serious thought and not short-circuit the process. (Grigg's subsequent clarification of his reference to the Supreme Court ruling follows: *The discussion at the vestry meeting concerned a consensus of the congregation as related to the possible name change. I am wary of that consensus ruling our debate and chose to illustrate that point by saying that "separate but equal" was the consensus of the population from the mid 1800s until 1954 concerning education of black and white students. The majority of the (particularly southern) population was quite in favor of the consensus. It took the US Supreme Court to decide that the consensus was wrong. We, as a vestry should listen to the congregation, prayerfully consider the (guaranteed) varying opinions, and decide on the right, but not necessarily popular, course of action. No matter the decision, a significant portion of the congregation may be unhappy. Let the congregation direct their heat at us, not each other.*)

Doug commented that this issue has brought out wonderful insights and a resolve to begin understanding who we are, who was Robert E. Lee, etc. Parishioners have clearly not finished thinking and reflecting on this painful and emotional issue. We need to assure everyone that no one will ram through a divisive decision in a sudden or surprising way. There is not a little faction that will have its way against the spirit of the church. Continuing the conversation seems like a no-brainer. The Holy Spirit is at work. Getting things in writing helps a lot.

John recalled August 24, 1986, when he was welcomed in the parish on his first day away from VMI after Matriculation. He is troubled by the "like it or leave it" attitude he has heard expressed in the past month. We need to look closely at ourselves. Are

we welcoming? Small groups work well and should be part of the process moving forward. He added that further discussion could actually lend itself to the capital campaign, since it is currently only about bricks and mortar and programs.

Elizabeth commented that she has sometimes questioned the church name. Not everyone today has same history, worldview, etc. What is it that we really stand for? She has also heard troubling expressions about who we are. This is an opportunity to think about broader things that are important to us, not just about the name change. We need to have conversations as Christians, not as historians. This could be a growing experience for the parish in a much bigger context, i.e. the future of this church.

Amy stated that she would need to know details about the process going forward , including setting a deadline, before voting on continuing the conversations. Going on for a long period of time would not be healthy for the parish.

There was consensus that the first question to be decided was whether or not to continue the conversation. If that was approved, planning the details of the process could then follow, and would likely require considerable discussion, as was evident by the range of related topics in the current meeting. **Frank seconded Daniel's motion that the Vestry should continue the conversation on the name change. The motion passed with twelve in favor, two abstentions, and one opposed.**

Susan commented that we should now continue in a timely way. Diana added that we should also have an end date.

Jim concurred with John's suggestion that a small group (4-5) composed of Vestry and non-Vestry members propose a plan for the process of continuing the conversations, including reaching a decision. This subcommittee will present its recommendations to the Vestry by the September meeting. Tom invited Vestry and non-Vestry members interested in serving on this group to let him know.

Closing Prayer: John offered the closing prayer.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Next Vestry Meeting: September 21, 2015; 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Anna Crockett, Clerk