

Vestry Meeting Minutes (approved)

R.E. Lee Memorial Episcopal Church

October 19, 2015

The regular meeting of the Vestry of R.E. Lee Memorial Church was held on Monday, October 19, 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, Diana Kenney, Elizabeth Knapp, Holt Merchant, Grigg Mullen, Frank Settle, Don Whittington; Anna Crockett (Clerk). **Absent:** Daniel Wubah **Vestry-Elect Members:** Keith Gibson, Catherine Harcus, and Susan Lawrence; **Guests:** Bishop Moses (from Wau Diocese in South Sudan); Jeanne Day, MJ Mayerchak and Polly Lawrence (Parishioners)

Opening: Tom opened the meeting noting current prayer concerns. He welcomed Vestry-Elect members, parishioners, and Bishop Moses. The Bishop is from the Wau Diocese in South Sudan, and is in the U.S. to attend conferences for the Five Talents non-profit organization and AFRECS (American Friends of the Episcopal Church in Sudan).

Approval of September Minutes: Minutes of the September meeting were accepted as published.

Committee Reports:

Finance Committee: Don reported on the October 13 committee meeting, where invited representatives of the Altar Guild, Music, Programs and Office Supplies presented their budget requests for 2016, all of which were increases over 2015. Income on current financial statements showed a drop in funds values, and pledges below projections. Expenses are still in line, and the investment policy process will be reviewed at the November meeting. Don additionally reported discussion of the potential impact of the name change issue on the budget, which will likely not be finalized until a decision on the name issue is made.

Tom called attention to the financial statements through September 30 and the Vestry summary sheet. Referring to a question asked at the September meeting, he clarified that the "Miscellaneous Vestry Administration" line item includes Property and Liability insurance, along with a few lesser expenses.

Property: John reported the evaluation of church plumbing at Gordon Woodcock's request, due to the array of recent issues. In order to solve one of the problems, rather than continuing to apply Band-Aid solutions, the committee submitted a request to the Finance Committee for \$1000 to install water pressure-reducing valves. **Grigg moved to approve funding for this expense. Doug seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.** John further reported that W&L is working on the water line between the church and the red house.

Stewardship: Tom reported word from Anita Ramp, Financial Secretary that everything is in line for the intake of pledges at this point. To date, the pledge total is \$263,000. This reflects 108 pledges, 29% of which are increases, 18% decreases, and six are new pledges. The remaining amount still needed is \$140,000.

Capital Renovations: Jim introduced a proposal to engage the Sadler and Whitehead law firm to begin review of the qualification and application process for a Historic Tax Credit related to the Undercroft Renovation. Bruce Wardell, owner of BRW Architects has worked with this law firm in the past, and reports that all of the tax credit projects on which BRW has worked have been approved. For these reasons, our

architect is optimistic about the likelihood that the Undercroft project could qualify for the tax credit that could yield approximately \$1000,000 to \$120,000. Jim explained that, if the credit is received, we would not receive the payment until the project and inspection are completed. Tom provided a detailed description of the law firm's role in the qualification and application process, including interfacing with the state board and working with the architects on specifics of the design that would meet qualifying criteria. As stated in the proposal, the maximum cost for the law firm's assistance would be \$13,000. Since the process could take several months, we need to start now if we want to take advantage of this tax credit opportunity. Doug asked how we are able to qualify for a tax credit, since we are a tax-exempt organization. Jim explained that this is a state program to encourage historic renovation and preservation, and that it is common practice for non-profits to sell tax credits to any agencies that could use them.

Carole moved, and Grigg seconded the motion to engage the Sadler and Whitehead firm to assist with the Historic Tax Credit qualification and application process. The motion passed unanimously.

Jim reminded the Vestry that Bruce Wardell will return to the parish this Sunday, October 25, for another presentation that will reflect modifications based on interim feedback since the first presentation.

Administration/Personnel Committee: George reported that the Tom had completed the first cycle of staff evaluations, that there was discussion of possible outsourcing of the Cross and Crown to allow redistribution of staff responsibilities, and that the committee was compiling data on standing committees, e.g. names of members, beginning and ending of terms of service, etc . In addition, the Chair of the Higher Education Committee had requested a change in the designation of this group, since it does not actually function as a committee. It was the sense of the A/P Committee that downgrading the Higher Education Committee would appear to give it a lower level of importance than other areas, and so recommended keeping it as a Standing Committee.

Christian Outreach Committee: Susan reported that the committee is considering modifying its structure into two groups – one focusing on grant applications/budget items and another on action responsibilities. Details are still under discussion.

Old Business

Church Name: Jim noted that this was the deadline for return of the surveys. Tom reported that Shay Peters planned to return the surveys from Kendal tomorrow. 390 surveys were sent out, one to each active parishioner eligible to vote. At this point, 248 surveys have been received. Responses must be on original letterhead to be counted. Tom Gosse and Amy Holston will tabulate the scale responses, then pass the forms to Carole Elmore and Mary Doyle for transcription of the comments. Carole stated that she and Mary plan to complete this process by Saturday and email the summary of comments to Tom.

Tom asked for discussion of the Vestry preferences in terms of receiving the survey responses and sharing these with the parish. There was consensus about the importance of sharing the information with the parish quickly to confirm transparency, enrich the discussion, demonstrate the range of parish thinking on the subject, and to hopefully have a calming effect. Responding to some concern that the survey responses might be viewed as obligating the Vestry to vote accordingly, Tom noted that parishioners had been informed of the information-gathering, non-binding purpose of the survey, and that the final decision was the Vestry's responsibility.

It was decided that Vestry and Vestry-Elect members would receive hard copies of the survey summaries as soon as the tabulations were completed. The summaries may be shared with parishioners, but not photocopied. Shay Peters will have several copies to share at Kendal. Parishioners will be notified via email by the middle of next week about the availability of the survey summaries.

Jim reported that, in view of the planned vote at the November 16 Vestry meeting, it is important to think now about the process moving forward, whatever the outcome of that vote. He noted that he has mentioned this to the Rector and Doug Cumming, both of whom have similar thoughts. Jim expressed his opinion that going into the November vote without considering post-vote steps would be irresponsible. The creation of an Ad Hoc Committee, as provided in the bylaws, would provide a head start in considering a number of scenarios based on responses to the survey, including a fresh perspective on issues that might include how we honor the historical person of Robert E. Lee and the many contributions he made to the parish, communication with the parish, and divisiveness that is dividing us from the larger body of Christ. Doug has expressed an interest in recruiting George, Julia, Elizabeth, Grigg and Don for such a committee. It was also suggested that the Vestry consider a special meeting before the regularly scheduled meeting on November 16 to hear from the ad hoc committee.

George expressed an interest in establishing a committee to be formed after the vestry's November vote to explore ways to bring the divided parish back together based on which way the vote went. It may be that there will be a need for such a committee in the aftermath of the vote.

Julia inquired about the status of a brochure on the history of Robert E. Lee Memorial that the Vestry discussed last year. Tom responded that we have not been able to get on a schedule with the writers, but that we need to disseminate information in a public and sophisticated way. Jim added that he has been collected several published histories of other churches to provide examples of what other parishes have done in this area.

Responding to Frank's question, Doug stated that there has been research on the theological and scriptural Christian reasons weighing on the side of a name change. Frank further expressed his view that the earlier Finance Committee report anticipating pledge decisions made based on the name issue is disturbing and seems unchristian.

It was moved and seconded that the Vestry create an ad hoc committee, in accordance with the bylaws, effective immediately and to be chaired by Doug Cumming, the purpose of which will be to consider the process of moving forward following the November Vestry vote on the name of the church. The motion passed unanimously.

Tom asked for clarification of whether the super-majority vote required for approval of a name change meant two-thirds of total Vestry members (i.e. ten) or two-thirds of Vestry members present at the November meeting. Vestry members agreed that the vote would be based on total membership, that proxy votes would be allowed, and the vote would be by ballot. The option of proxy votes reinforced the need for a meeting with the Ad Hoc Committee prior to the November 16 Vestry meeting.

Tom shared with the Vestry a parishioner-generated petition with signatures of parishioners opposed to changing or modifying the name of our church. Tom offered to make copies for Vestry members who might want to contact individuals who had signed the petition for a conversation about this issue. George read a card he had received in the mail from a parishioner who was opposed to a name change at this time.

175th Anniversary Celebration: Tom reported plans for a special reception after the All Saint's Day Choral Evensong service.

Gadsden Request for Capital Funds: Tom explained that Trustees have fiduciary responsibility for real and personal property of the church. Gadsden Trust guidelines provide for grants to the parish for up to twenty-five percent of annual Gadsden income (currently close to \$17,000) for capital projects, conditional on the parish raising matching funds. The Trustees consider such requests for such from the Vestry. If

approved by the Trustees, requests are forwarded to the Gadsden Committee. This committee needs advance notice of parish funding requests in order to set aside appropriate funds and make decisions on additional grant requests from other sources. **George seconded Jim's motion to submit a capital expense grant to the Trustees. The motion passed unanimously.**

Lee Portrait: Doug reminded the Vestry of its recent vote to donate to Washington and Lee the portrait of a uniformed Robert E Lee displayed in the Conference Room. In exchange, W&L agreed to give the parish in the same frame a fine reproduction of any of the photos of Lee in civilian clothes that Doug shared with the Vestry. The Vestry selected the picture of Lee in a dark suit against a black background. Taken in 1879, when he was Senior Warden, this was the last picture taken of Lee. John suggested including the date and Lee's age with the picture.

New Business: Tom announced that the Vestry Retreat; will be held at The Belfry on January 15-16, 2016 .

Suggestion Box: Julia shared that the only suggestion in the past month was the correct pronunciation of the word "Taize."

Comments by the Wardens

Church Security: Jim noted that we want to take this area seriously and move forward with a plan for recommendations. It seems to be an appropriate responsibility for the Administration/Personnel Committee. Issues to be addressed range from falls to fires. Tom pointed out that there are many moving pieces e.g. ushers knowing what doctors are in attendance and procedures for evacuating the building. We need an SOP to be shared with the parish as well as ushers. Jim asked for volunteers who may be interested in assisting with constructing this SOP.

Comments by the Rector

Tom shared Ted's appreciation for the opportunity to meet with the architect, and request to schedule one or two presentations to help get parishioners understand the need for a new organ. Tom will charge the Organ Committee with this project.

Tom observed that we are moving into an intense time when there will be increased focus on the Vestry and its difficult decision on the name of the church. He encouraged Vestry members to develop a discipline around discernment, and suggested considering attendance at Morning Prayer, offered daily at 8:30 as an option.

Closing Prayer: Susan offered the closing prayer.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Next Vestry Meeting:: November 16, 2015 at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Anna Crockett, Clerk