

**THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE HOLY COMFORTER**  
**Vestry Meeting Minutes**  
**December 12, 2023 at 6:00pm Van Every, Room 207**

Vestry Members Present: Anne Binns, Joyce Bott, Tom Cooke, Jason Evans, Ed Gash, Kirt Hibbitts, Margaret Kahn (virtual), Bob Murphy, Natalie Parker, John Snelsire

Vestry Members Absent: Mary Amos, Carlyle Knox

New Vestry Members Present: Tim Cavins, Niki Manke, Diana Smith

New Vestry Members Absent: Jaqueline Howells

Clergy Present: Fr. Greg Brown, Rev. Cat Connolly

Recording Secretary: Niki Manke

Guest: Karen Crane – Holy Comforter Treasurer and Finance Committee Chair; Pat Mynatt & Sean Hogue – Strategic Modeling Group

**1) Opening Prayer (John Snelsire)**

a) St. Benedict's Prayer Book

**2) Agenda Approval (Joyce Bott)**

a) *Motion (Ed Gash); Second (Anne Binns); Approval (Vestry)*

**3) Scripture/Bible Study (Joyce Bott)**

a) Matthew 22:34-46 – The Greatest Commandment

i) What does this say to us about being a leader on the Vestry?

(1) Takes courage to speak up. Takes courage to say "I don't know".

(2) Put your enemies under your feet, is a pretty forceful statement.

(3) We don't want to be in a place where of "and no one else asked anymore questions".

**4) Finance Report (Karen Crane)**

a) November 2023 Financial Statements

i) YTD Pledge receipts favorable to net pledge budget by \$7.7k; favorable to prior YTD by \$61k.

ii) YTD Total revenue unfavorable to budget by \$0.5k due to plate offerings over by \$0.7k, net pledge receipts over by \$7.7k, General Offering under by \$15.2k, Visitor under by \$0.2k, Sales Tax Refunds over \$1.4k, Interest and Dividends over by \$16.1k, Other Income under by \$0.1k and Pledge Received-Previous Year under by \$10.9k. Month favorable to budget by \$29.4k. YTD favorable to 2022 by \$51.6k.

iii) YTD Expenses favorable to budget by \$43.3k. Salary & benefits under budget by \$16.6k, Ministry under budget by \$28.3k, Office under budget by \$4.1k, and Buildings & Grounds over budget by \$6.7k and Utilities under by \$1.0k. Favorable to 2022 by \$35.1k. In comparison to 2022, Ministry is favorable by \$14.0k while Building and Grounds is unfavorable by \$9.7k.

iv) Note payable to Holy Comforter Foundation balance is \$71k with balloon payment of \$68k due November 2024.

v) Noted that we are out of EXCESS operating cash. The operating cash we have and are operating out of is between a checking account and money market account. We're low on the excess, not actual cash.

b) Draft 2024 Budget

i) We have received \$755k in pledge receipts which is short of our \$850k goal. It is looking like we will not be making our goal this year.

ii) The various types of offerings were discussed and the amount typically received in each.

iii) The draft budget does not include the balloon payment that is due in November of 2024.

**5) Strategic Modeling Group (Sean Hogue & Pat Mynatt)**

- a) This committee was developed not for long term goals, but to help develop ideas and options.
- b) Sean Hogue was asked by Beth to come help us figure out some financial items/goals. He is here to present where we are and some tools to help us going forward. Sean will not be sharing any news we don't already know, but is here to tell us that we need to start thinking about the long term.
- c) We have an aging population.
- d) Pledges and revenues have "flat-lined" over the last 20 years.
- e) Although we are losing pledges, our average pledge is increasing. This is a national trend.
- f) Charlotte area Episcopal churches are doing better than the national trend; however, Holy Comforter is not.
- g) We don't have room for cuts.
- h) Sean presented a tool to use to help us look at different scenarios and we are free to play with it and try different scenarios.
- i) Questions we need to start asking:
  - i) Have we educated our current members enough about the financial situation of the church?
  - ii) Why have pledges stopped?
  - iii) Why are we not netting new members?
- j) It was noted that the staff needs to see this as well as Pathfinders/Genesis group.
- k) We need to challenge the congregation to help bring in new people.
- l) An option to monetize on the real estate next door was mentioned. It was noted that we don't want sell if we are planning on only financing the "do nothing" option.

**6) Update Employee Handbook (Jason Evans & Mary Amos)**

- a) Deferred to January

**7) Vestry Minutes Posted to the Website (Jason Evans & Natalie Parker)**

- a) In process. Several files have been sent and are ready for their review.
- b) Joyce reminded that we are committed to having them posted by mid-month.

**8) Mid-Meeting Reflection/Break (Joyce Bott)**

- a) Liturgies for Hope
  - i) Liturgy for Creativity

**9) Associate Rector's Report (Cat Connolly)**

- a) La Misa – went well!
  - i) Plan in the new year to once a month to preach shorter versions of her sermons in Spanish
- b) Family Circle Group is struggling. Many have moved into other Circle Groups. Amy McKee has been doing an AMAZING job taking over in the meantime.
- c) Becoming more involved with EYC more
- d) Pastoral Care
  - i) Rachel Porters service. Challenges in the coordination but went smoothly. Bill Wilder got a shout out.
- e) Baptism coming up
- f) Wedding coming up. First one Mother Cat has performed here.
- g) Staff retreat was really good. Helpful to get to know everyone a little bit better.
- h) Philadelphia Eleven was a highlight of the month. St. Peter's hosting it in February?
- i) Advent Taize service that was beautiful and well attended. One of Cat's favorite services
- j) Carols, Cocoa, and Cookies at MerryWood was a really good event. Nice to meet people whose names we've heard but got to meet in person.
- k) Christingle service coming up.
- l) Working with Amy McKee and some others on the Epiphany pageant.

## 10) Rector's Report (Greg Brown)

- a) You are the leaders of this church. We need to be at the events and showing our support. Presentation hopefully will spark us to be hungry for ministry and helping this church grow. We've all been added to the leadership group email.
  - i) 10 minutes – 30 sec at peace; 1 min. hallway from church to Henry Hall and look for people we don't know; coffee hour for 7.5 minutes and find out about them. 1 minute on the way to the car say goodbye and thanks for coming.
  - ii) Connect with people – know others, know their ministries, and connect people with them.
  - iii) Tell your story – doing it on Sunday to practice our pitch to others outside the church. Know your giving story.
- b) Clergy Status
  - i) We have been contacted by the diocese about receiving a 2-year diocesan grant to participate in their New Curate Program. Daisy Colon is interested in serving here after she graduates this spring.
  - ii) Bishop Sam is developing a plan to have a deacon assigned to us this summer.
  - iii) Bishop Sam and Catherine Massey and I are in discussions about having the ordination of a deacon from Peru recognized here, so that he could serve at La Misa.
- c) Liturgy & Worship
  - i) La Misa attendance is growing somewhat. Although they volunteered for leadership roles, not much else has happened leadership-wise. Those that identified themselves as leaders still do not attend very often.
  - ii) Volunteer to help create new directory. Data received but no results yet.
  - iii) I continue to celebrate the Eucharist the first Friday of each month at Matthews Glen
  - iv) I continue to celebrate the Eucharist every other month at Southminster.
- d) Staff
  - (1) Staff Retreat occurred on Tuesday, November 28 ON campus. Doug Bacon discussed Strengthfinders results with staff, and helped us determine how we can use our strengths to further our mission and ministries. It laid the groundwork very well for further Values/Vision/Mission work. The Vestry approved the spending of \$4k in 2022 for this purpose.
  - ii) We still anticipate that Patrick will take a three-month sabbatical in 2024. We will adjust supply costs to cover his absence. Jane Arant is being arranged as supply; and we are considering a three month time period which would include Christmas 2024.
  - iii) The search for the position for Childrens and Family Ministries and that of Youth and Young Adults will recommence after the holidays.
  - iv) Looking forward to Vestry input toward generating SMART/STRAM Goals for each and all staff (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound)/(SPECIFIC, TRACKABLE, REALISTIC, ATTAINABLE, MEASURABLE); that process has begun at our monthly meetings in December.
- e) Circle Group updates
  - i) Our next Quarterly Leadership Meeting will happen in February.
- f) Programming
  - i) Advent Movie Night
  - ii) Blue Christmas / Longest Night service will take place on December 21
  - iii) PLEASE CONTINUE TO BOTH PROMOTE **AND ATTEND** parish programs and events!!!
- g) Local Concerns
  - i) The Park Road Clergy group will be singing a Christmas Program at Merrywood tomorrow.
  - ii) Churches in our association include; Holy Comforter, Avondale Presbyterian, Park Road Baptist, Sedgfield United Methodist, St. Luke's ELCA, Southminster, and Woodlawn Community Fellowship.
- h) Vestry Retreat
  - i) Date?
  - ii) Strengthfinders 2.0
  - iii) Staff to visit, joining Strengths discussion and sharing position descriptions
  - iv) Vestry Covenant, to be engaged at Vestry Retreat

- i) **Details on the Diocesan New Curate Program**
  - i) Diocesan grant would be for \$10,000-\$15,000 for two years
  - ii) We had previously expected to pay for Fr. Barry through summer of 2024 (\$40k/year)
  - iii) We had previously covered the cost of Deacon Gene's health insurance
  - iv) We are spending less on the Hispanic Ministries position at Holy Comforter
  - v) We would be responsible for meeting 2024 diocesan minimums:
    - (1) Deacon = \$65,804 + benefits (health, dental, life, CPG contributions \$11,845) [6 mo.]
    - (2) Priest = \$70,788 + benefits (same, CPG = \$12,742) [thereafter]

**11) Senior Warden's Report (Joyce Bott)**

- a) Ministry Liasons - Don't have to stay with current assignments. Don't have to make decisions tonight, but something to keep in mind. Current assignments shared with the agenda.
- b) Mutual Ministry
  - i) Reached out to Earnest Graham and Google, there are documents in the general "2023" folder to read to prepare ourselves for the conversation and preparation of our own document. See what resonates with us and how we want to move forward.
- c) Staff Holiday Bonus
  - i) *Motion to move forward with Option 1 as written in the agenda (JE); Second (EG); Approved (Vestry)*

**12) Junior Warden's Report (Carlyle Knox)**

- a) VPOD Christmas Services:
  - i) Mary Amos (10am)
  - ii) John Snelsire (5pm)
  - iii) Carlyle Knox (7pm)
  - iv) Anne Binns (11:45pm) – Tom Cooke and Carlyle Knox will also be there for the service and can help with the locking up.
- b) Solar Panel Update – An anonymous parishioner donated the \$3,000 for the solar panel project so we can continue to move forward.

**13) Old Business/Reminders**

- a) Approval of September, October, & November Minutes (Joyce)
  - i) September: Motion (AB); Second (EG); Approved (Vestry)
  - ii) October: Motion (EG); Second (KH); Approved (Vestry)
  - iii) November: Motion (EG); Second (JE); Approved (Vestry)
- b) December 2023 BGG Speaker, Anne Binns

**14) Closing Prayer (John Snelsire)**

- a) Shared a prayer that was helpful to him during COVID. Special focus on yesterday and tomorrow.

A HUGE thank you to Ed, Kirt, Natalie, and John for their service the last 3 years! They all stated it was a honor, encouraged us to be more spiritual with the scripture, and to not "kick the can down the road" with some of the big challenges we have ahead. They may be rolling off the Vestry, but reminded us all that we never roll off as leaders. John will be continuing to help with Concert for the Human Family on a national level this year!