

Vestry Check-In Meeting Minutes

March 20, 2020 5pm

Highlights of a special Vestry meeting held March 20.

Vestry met to review developments related to the coronavirus crisis and to build the agenda for its regular meeting scheduled for March 28.

*Based on what is happening in other dioceses, Emily said she's preparing for the day when we can't get into our buildings at all. This means getting documents and software ready for Emily and other staffers to work from home. Emily has already told her sister that she can't be married at Christ Church on April 25.

*Earlier that day, Emily joined almost 700 Episcopal clergy and seminary professors nationwide on a conference call about how to celebrate Holy Week and Easter in a domestic, not public, way. The key is getting back to Scripture, so that we are nourishing ourselves with the Word, even if not with the sacraments. She said Easter is a particular challenge. Usually Easter means crowds and exuberance, but this year, she said, it might look "More like the first Easter: an empty tomb and some frightened people."

* We have received a grant of \$10K from the diocese towards repairs of the east and west walls and foundation, thanks to grant-application work done by Patrick Warner.

*Topics raised for the agenda at the next meeting included: what other Buildings & Grounds work can and cannot be done under current circumstances; how best to stay in touch with parishioners; ways to help our community during the crisis; whether to continue paying part-time staff such as soloists and our Sunday porter; and how to encourage people to send in their pledges even if they cannot be in the pews. Noting parishioners' generous commitments during the pledge drive, Senior Warden Lisa Jones said, "The world has changed, but hearts have not changed."

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Present: Emily Williams Guffey, Lisa Jones, Roger Basse, Betty Warner, Desmond Jones, Denise Crenshaw, Chuck Atwater, Christine Galli, Carolyn Maher, Jim Treece, George Port, Howard Matthew.

Absent/Excused: Phil Brown

The meeting opened with prayer at 5:05.

Lisa: This is a high-level meeting that will serve as the foundation for our full Vestry meeting on Thursday, March 28, to get us up to speed on what's happening and to build the agenda for next week.

Update from Bishop/Diocese

Rev. Emily Williams Guffey

Going beyond what she provided by email a couple of nights ago, based in part of what she has heard other dioceses and cities are doing, she said she is preparing the staff for the not-unlikely event that we can't be in the building at all. We're minimizing staff in the building. If you need to get into the building, let Emily know, to get permission. We may temporarily deactivate all the key cards.

I'm encouraging staff to work from home whenever possible. For all we know, it may be Monday when we can't get in. The hardest part relates to the financials. A lot of that happens in-house; Sarah's been working to make more of that remote.

Q. Can mail be forwarded? A. Yes. We can submit that form at any time. Today, we were working on getting all the calls forwarded – as of 20 minutes ago, all calls to the church are forwarded to Emily's cell phone.

KaClarence will still be taking care of the exterior. He's been planting some bulbs. He and Emily are aware of the nighttime activity, when the campus is vacant. There are no law students parking in the lot, so it looks like nobody is around. Sarah replaced the signs today. We'll probably put up more exterior signage, saying we're an active congregation, just can't be there now. Currently, the cleaning crew still coming three nights a week, disinfecting and sanitizing. Beth Ann and Ed can work remotely. Calebria is set up to do so, also. Sarah's work is the hardest to translate entirely remotely due to the financial items, but she's been transferring as much as she can.

Emily hasn't seen the new signs on the door yet, but since the Bishop's new directive is to suspend all activities until the middle of next month, they will say there are no services plus "premises monitored in person and by video."

- COVID-19 and Impact on:

- CCD in general/worship

Emily said she wouldn't be surprised to see the directive get stricter. Illinois is on lockdown; we might be, too. We still have permission for minimal essential staff to be on site. Some bishops are interpreting that in different ways. Right now, we're planning a lovely Sunday service with Ed, Emily, Calebria and Katrina. But she's prepared for the possibility that by that time, or next week, we might not be able to do that. What would our Lenten series, Deep River, look like from our home? Or a Sunday morning worship service?

Earlier this afternoon, she was on a call with professors and others – almost 700 Episcopal clergy nationwide – on Holy Week and Easter: how to do it in a domestic way, not public. The key is getting back to scripture and Bible study, so that we are nourishing ourselves with the Word, even if not with the sacraments. We don't need to get super clever about any shortcuts around that, but digging deeper into scripture and worship in our homes. Getting down to basics: everything we need, we have already. Worship is the words and the rites—and time and space. The time will be there, it's just the space that's different. Emily has asked Richard Thomas for guidance on how to create sacred spaces in our homes.

Most of the questions on the call were about Easter Sunday. Usually that means crowds and exuberance. Maybe it looks more like the first Easter: an empty tomb and some frightened people. I'd like to develop some ways to add small groups and ministries to engage in Bible study. All of us on Vestry are now acquainted with the African Bible Study method. Could we teach that to, say, altar guild, Sunday school, or other ministries? It's now imperative to develop sacred spaces on our own. We enter Palm Sunday thinking about palms, and there already have been discussions about which palms to offer. But maybe Richard can help with videos to identify plants in our backyard, to find the sacred in other plants.

Jim: Can the Easter offering be redirected to a pandemic need? Doing so might show people how they can help, and be connected. People want to feel they are helping, and that the church is helping.

Emily: We've already had one request that an offering for Easter music/flowers be refunded. But all of this needs to be rethought. Last Maundy Thursday, we washed feet and brought in socks for the Pope Francis Center to distribute to the homeless.

Lisa: Later, we'll discuss how people can give their offerings. I'm coming to realize that people are less savvy on this than we might think. They're used to passing in an envelope. We need to help people be more aware.

- Buildings and Grounds

What projects can continue and what do we need to pause? We will leave that discussion for next week.

Desmond: We received a grant recently of \$10K from the diocese towards the east/west wall repairs. I think we need to thank Patrick. He initiated the idea and worked on the request. It's a good start towards realizing that project. Patrick Warner was asked to join the meeting, and received applause. He noted that there's one caveat. To get the grant, we need to complete the audit and send it in, directly to (Diocese Treasurer) Mark Miliotto. Emily: Jane Forbes of the Finance Committee, Sarah from the office, and Glen Olivache, who conducted the audit, are in touch to make sure it gets turned in.

Desmond: The audio system microphones have been replaced, and it sounds much better in the church. We can discuss other issues next week.

- Anniversary. May need to think about that in a different way; to be discussed.
- Church Operations and Staff.

Emily: When we were looking at a 2-week period, I felt pretty comfortable telling all core and even Sunday-only staff that they'd still get paid as usual. It's a matter for the Vestry how that looks on a longer timeframe. I want to fully support our staff overall. I certainly want to support core staff. They have plenty to do, even if they're not in the building. Some projects are now imperative, but were already under way, like updating our database. Now it's really quite urgent to have what we need to work remotely. I have no question but they have plenty to do to fill their hours. For our next meeting, think about how to proceed with Sunday-only positions, such as our sexton. We would like to support them, but this is one issue before the vestry as we consider our full financial picture.

- Events and Meetings
 - AA. Met last week. But not this Saturday. Sarah contacted them today. Emily:
“I’d think this hard for the entire recovery community. I’ve offered them our Zoom account. I’ll be in touch with them tonight.”
 - Funerals

Emily: There's kind of a baseline: if it's such-and-such activity, we do this. Until a couple of days ago, we had some wiggle room and discretion. But the directive from our bishop on Wednesday evening was very clear: no activities on the premises, except “emergency baptism,” and only minimal staff in the building. We have to practice social distancing all the time. That means if we're streaming worship, we can have only four people present, including the person behind the camera. The entire practice of sacraments, including funerals and grief, is changing around the world. Last Sunday, I could permit the inurnment of Loretta Meade. It was to be part of our 10:30 service. Then, it was ok for a small group to be present, and nine people gathered. Now everything else is on hold.

- Weddings

Emily: This is very hard. I had to tell my sister she can't get married April 25 in Christ Church. A wedding requires 5 people: the couple, 2 witnesses, and priest. So we can't do it. (Her sister is considering her options, including having just a civil ceremony.) This will come up a lot. Q. Are other weddings affected? A. A few couples were looking at May or August, but the only one on the books is in October.

George: I think it's important for Emily and the staff to protect themselves, too, and not just in the building. They shouldn't go to another venue where they might be exposed. Christine: Agreed. You can't go visit sick people anymore. You might be a carrier. Emily: I've cancelled all the home visits I had scheduled.

- Reconstructionist Congregation. Q. Have we offered them our video capabilities?
A. Emily will check with Sarah on that.

- Community Outreach

Is there anything we're doing that we need to reconsider based on the new directives? 1. Meals on Wheels, usually happens Easter morning. 2. The blessing box was to be installed outside on our property at the beginning of April, if their construction sked on track. 3. Holy Spokes is on hiatus. 4. Opera MODO. Emily needs to get back in touch with them, to tell them no rehearsals on our property allowed; previously those were postponed until the end of March. 5. Seth Lloyd is in touch with the Pope Francis Center. They need donations of money.

Lisa: We can talk about that further. We want to understand the requests we get. I'll add that to the list for our meeting next week.

Emily: Another suggestion is to be able to offer relief to individuals and families in our community who've been impacted. Traditionally, we'd do that through the discretionary fund. That's still an option. Or through something we give a more obvious name: relief fund, say, or family relief fund. That goes back to the idea to make clear our commitment to our community. Denise: Outreach Committee is having a Zoom meeting this coming Sunday.

- Creative Ways to Keep Congregation and Community Connected

Lisa: Zoom and other platforms are going to become big. But it's testing those of us who aren't as tech savvy. I had trouble getting on FB Live. I want to make sure everyone knows how to do this.

- Facebook Live
- Sermons
- Lenten Series. Yesterday's on Zoom was "absolutely wonderful."
- Music: Is there a way to have something we can share?
- Suggestions from Partners for Sacred Spaces? None received so far.

*Meditation/centering prayer group on Thursdays. Denise: Kathryn Treece reached out to everyone in the group this past week. If we could have some training, say in Zoom, that's a ministry that could be very effective over the Internet. Useful for the future, say if there's a snowstorm on a Thursday. Christine: People of a certain age aren't going to be able to sit in front of a computer and do this. I'd favor sending out sermons via snail mail. It's really important to find ways to get people connected. I can teach anybody Zoom; I've done it long enough to know there are people who are technically challenged but can learn. But FB doesn't work for everyone. Denise: Let's mail out the Easter sermon, maybe with a photo of flowers by Richard Thomas. Maybe even a pamphlet. That might be a way to use moneys coming in for flowers and music for Easter.

*Roger: Shepherds called their flocks. People were really engaged and enjoyed the phone calls. Maybe to pass the peace, just say, "Go ahead and call somebody." Betty: I'd caution against sending snail mail to the entire congregation. I'm ok with an email, and would be sad if postage wasted on me. Find out who's not on email. Christine: Maybe that's part of the shepherd's question—how would you like to receive information? Roger: The Shepherds asked that, and should have the answers. Emily: One good thing – we had just migrated our database to a cloud-based system, which is made for times like this. Beth Ann and I plan to send out a directory next week, after sorting through active/inactive members, and friends of Christ Church (even if not in touch recently). It'll be easy to mark in that database what people's preferred means of communications are. When we get information about preferred modes, send it to Emily, Sarah and Beth Ann. Denise: Would it be possible to divide up the membership list and enlist every Vestry member to make a phone call to everyone at the start of Holy week? Roger: We have about 12 shepherds, each with about 12 people in their flock. We've made 2 or 3 calls since we put it together.

- Communications to Congregation

- Weekly E-mail Updates from CCD/Emily. Lisa: we may need to come up with some other ways of communicating.
- Stewardship – directed letter regarding pledges. This is up for discussion at next week's meeting, including how to introduce the concept of "what was pledged, needs to continue to be pledged." We made tremendous strides in increasing pledges. The world has changed, but hearts have not changed. Emily: Online giving thru PayPal pretty clearly set up on the website. We need to communicate that we've set up an option for automatic debit. Betty: Almost all banks now have bill pay, for repeat payments. Christine: I'd rather some way other than PayPal, to avoid the fees. Jim: I'll have this in my Stewardship Committee report, but what's critical is staying connected to our congregation. Christine: maybe notes to members during Holy Week.

- Confirmed that we are meeting next Thursday, March 26, at 6:00
- Closing prayer.
- Adjourned at 6:13.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Treece, Secretary