**Vestry Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, March 26, 2020**

Highlights:

\*Emily and the staff are able to work from home, but any mass mailings will have to be done from Emily’s house. We are putting together a list of parishioners who need or prefer to receive information via the post office.

\*The Shepherds are calling their “flocks” to see how those members are doing, but that list is incomplete. The Vestry representative of each ministry team was urged to ask the ministry team leader to call their team members. At the very least, we need to ask, “How are you?”

\*After reviewing some of the major Buildings & Grounds projects that we face, Vestry voted to seek out grants and loans of up to $400,000 from the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan and other sources for those projects.

\*Vestry also agreed to allow Sarah Tribelhorn to set up mobile banking so that she can do her church financial work from home, and to have the church pursue options for online giving through our website.

\*Vestry agreed in principle to weekly, one-hour meetings during this period of “stay home, stay safe.”

**CELEBRATIONS**

* March 1: British vocal ensemble Apollo5 performed at CCD
* March 5: Deep River began (met in person March 5 & 12, via FB March 19 & 26 & April 2) March 7: Partners for Sacred Places, Workshop 3, about community-wide fundraising

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

Written reports received: Outreach, Worship, Staff, Finance, Buildings & Grounds, Stewardship, Green Team. Also distributed: Parochial Report for 2019; Financial Review for 2018. Underlining indicates action items.

Emily opened the meeting with prayer at 6:14 p.m. We then spent just over 10 minutes in Bible study, using the African Bible Study approach with Ezekiel 37:1-14.

Minutes for February 27 and March 20 were **approved**.

**Diocese Updates & Parish Operations** Emily Williams Guffey

Emily referred us to the Staff Reports, the bishop’s directive of March 24, and Emily’s own email to the parish of March 24. She spoke with the Bishop this morning, asking two particular questions related to the Bishop’s directive. First, can Facilities Manager KaClarence work in and around the building on essential matters related to safety, exterior care, and maintenance of the boiler? Response: That’s OK as long as it’s minimal and we’re looking out for his health. Second, what about essential repairs to the building, e.g., repairs related safety/security, or major projects? The Bishop said she’ll consider it case by case, looking first to protect the safety of any workers, and insisting that the strictest precautions are taken. We as the church’s leadership need to determine what we consider essential. If it can be postponed, it should be.

As for operations, Sarah, KaClarence, Calebria and Emily took turns collecting things they’d need to work from home. Mail is being forwarded to Sarah. Emily took home a checkbook, but any bills that can be postponed, will be. She expects more specific directions from the diocese tomorrow. (See also the Finance Committee report for further details.) Sarah prepared a bag that Emily took home with paper, envelopes and stationery. Any mailings that happen will go out from Emily’s house. Keep that in mind in terms of volume, frequency. If we can consolidate mailings into one envelope, do so.

**Connecting Creatively Throughout Crisis**

Communications

See Beth Ann’s staff report for more detail on this. While we were meeting, Calebria led Deep River on Facebook from her home. The post stays there, so anyone can watch it later. We’re trying to figure out the appropriate platform for Sunday morning services. It will probably be pretty simple this Sunday, and we will build on it over the coming weeks. Everyone still figuring out what this tool does and how. There are other church services we can tune into, such as ones from the National Cathedral, if people need more. But we consider the face-to-face connection offered by video as pretty powerful.

We’ll have more frequent emails. We’re adding an extra one during the week, because there’s so much to communicate and so much is changing. We’re cleaning up our contact info/database, to get as clear as possible in identifying those who’ll need print, or for whom anything digital is too much. We don’t want to mail everything to everybody. Sarah and Emily are working on our contacts database. It fortuitously had just migrated from a desktop-based to a cloud-based system, but it was just a data dump and needs to be cleaned up. Emily hopes to send out a print directory in the next week or so – sans photos, to save paper. Carolyn said that in talking to Thelma McCrary, she learned that Gail Smith mails her the bulletin – and in fact, mails them to six or seven people. Jim will call Gail Smith to get that list of names.

Roger said the Shepherds will be making calls this weekend. (Some have already begun.) The first question will be just, “How are you doing?” We’ll also ask if they’re able to go online to see the streaming of the service. If not and they need help, we’ll take their names down and maybe Sarah or Beth Ann can help with that. Shepherds have on hand info on how best to contact them. Roger will gather that info from the Shepherds and pass it along to Emily. Denise: Does it cover everybody in the directory? Roger: about 80%. It takes a conversation to decide if some members are still active, so the list currently is not perfect. As part of that conversation, Denise agreed to be a Shepherd. Roger: I’d like the Shepherds to know their flock, and if someone moves or their situation changes, they’ll understand. I don’t want to fill people with Shepherd calls all the time, but want them to be meaningful. Denise will call Roger this week to follow up. With Denise, we’d now have 12 Shepherds. Roger will speak with Beth Ann and Sarah to coordinate the Shepherd’s calls with the office. Carolyn suggested having the kids and young adults contact each other. Roger: If we get a list of J2Aers who’ve moved on, we could have kids reach out to them.

We further discussed the calling of members, and the mix of organized vs. informal calls. Without making it mandatory, it was suggested that it would be great if each ministry team leader could reach out to their team. Vestry members are to reach out to the ministry teams for which they are the Vestry rep to make that suggestion to the team leaders.

Holy Week & Easter Worship Emily, Denise

This is a big question, still in development. Emily is working the Ed, Richard Thomas, Denise and others, and has been communicating with other priests and seminary professors about it. Her takeaways: This is a season we’re called to worship at home and to trust that we have what we need. It means going back to the essentials of our faith, just as we’re going back to the essentials of daily life. What’s really needed for Maundy Thursday? What’s it really about? And what can we practice at home? Denise has sketched out a booklet to support worship at home to send out next week, perhaps along with the directory and an offering envelope (if those were among the items brought home from the office). We want to have some gesture that strongly affirms our spirituality of giving. Emily also spoke with Josephine Powell, who asked if we could hand out Easter lilies from the church parking lot. Emily thinks not. We shouldn’t be creating a reason to leave our homes.

Emily has asked Richard Thomas to provide any teachings about flowers we might find in our own backyards. We’re also looking to help our parishioners create sacred spaces in our homes – i.e., how as a family to create a little spot set aside for prayer.

Jim said a consistent theme from the webinars related to stewardship he has attended has been that the world endorses a mindset of scarcity, but we as Christians need to affirm abundance – we have grace and more in abundance, even in these times. Betty: How can we help Emily/Denise remotely? Emily said she’d consider that. It was suggested that during the service, when Emily invites us to pass the peace, we might do so by text; that may be a time to invite folks to reach out to someone who normally sits near them in church with a phone call or text.

**Buildings & Grounds** Desmond Jones

Desmond divided his remarks into two groups of projects: The budgeted items, meaning those within the scope of our regular budget, and the unbudgeted ones, the major projects beyond our regular maintenance and repairs budget.

Budgeted ones: \*The audio system is installed, but we’ve not had much chance to test it as a full church, so we’re not sure of the full effect. \*We did some repairs to the boiler, but can’t complete them until after the season, sometime around April 15. There seem to be more leaks somewhere, inside the boiler. \*Vestry approved the budget for new cameras, but the contract has not been signed, so we’ve not given to him yet. Also, Desmond hasn’t been able to get through to the contractor, to ask what he could do now, while the church not as occupied as before. This is a priority, because it would allow us to get remote views of the church while no one is physically present. \*The balcony was repaired, and was not as expensive as we anticipated. While in the building, that contractor also did some work on pews that were leaning.

Later in the meeting, Desmond requested clarification: When a contract is approved by Vestry, what’s the next step? Last month, Vestry approved three contracts. One went through; he’s not sure where the others are. One was for work on the Bell Tower. Ram cannot work on its own, if the oversight as provided by a contract with Quinn Evans isn’t there. He cited the experience of a prior repair to the roof, where the lack of proper oversight led to mistakes in the work. We agreed that upon approval, a copy of the contract needs to be signed and sent to the vendor. Emily said that the missing contracts may be in the now-inaccessible church office, so we may need Quinn Evans – and the camera vendor, whose contract also is missing – to resend a copy to us for signing. Who signs depends on the contract: usually the senior warden, but even if it calls for Emily’s signature, she prefers to have a church office such as the Senior Warden sign also.

On a related matter, Desmond asked if anyone in the church has a copy of the church’s title. Emily: We hold it in trust for the diocese. We don’t own anything. Desmond: It comes up with the stormwater project. Every time, a question arises about whether we own any of the property on the other side of the parking lot. Christine: we don’t own it, but the city thinks we do.

Not within the budget: \*Bell Tower. There’s a question as to whether we should start or wait. Ram Construction said that when he came to the church to check, he saw the “closed until May” notice. On an interim basis, he could provide two persons, who would maintain the necessary 6’ distance from each other.

But funding for that project and others (East/West foundation and walls; stormwater; and a master plan in the second half of the year) is a major concern. Can the church fund them, or should we decide to do this but not that, or what? The B&G Committee is looking for a decision from Vestry. The total amount needed this year for those projects is $555K.

George: I spoke with Diocesan Treasurer Mark Miliotto this morning, at the request of the Finance Committee, and learned that for loans from diocese, terms can be very flexible, possibly even 20 years. The procedures for applying are very similar to applying for a grant. I got a feeling that we’d be looked on very favorably by the diocese if we asked for a loan, but I think we’d need to raise at least half of the initial needs. It doesn’t make sense to wait much longer.

In the ensuing discussion, there was a strong consensus that it’s time to do the work, and to seek a loan, whether from the diocese or from other sources. Interest rates are low: perhaps 2.5% or 2.75% from the diocese. George also noted that when Christ Church Grosse Pointe needed funds for an expansion, their Vestry borrowed not from the diocese, but from its own unrestricted endowment, and set its own rates. There were other issues with doing that, including the loss of short-term income, but the example shows, he said, “There’s more than one way to skin this cat.” This led into a discussion of, and voting on, the Finance Committee’s requests of Vestry.

**Finance**  Christine Galli, Jim Treece

Christine: We need to have funds, but we need to vote to move forward.

**Motion: Vestry authorizes the Church (i.e., the Buildings & Grounds Committee) to submit applications for loans and grants of up to $400,000 to the Diocese of Michigan and other governmental or nonprofit sources for purposes of paying costs associated with the installation of security cameras and a storm water management system, a Quinn Evans survey of building needs, and repairs to the bell tower, sanctuary floor, and roof.  Action would not, at this time, authorize actual borrowings or contracts for building work not previously approved by the Vestry.**

**Approved.** Patrick Warner and George Port were asked to pursue this.

Patrick noted that he had provided Emily with a summary of loans that other parishes have received over the past 3 years, which shows that the diocese can be very generous.

After a quick time-check, we turned to the other Finance Committee requests of Vestry.

First, staff payments. Christine suggested we set a policy to pay a portion of their salary, and that the HR professionals among us work out such a policy. Emily: Staff singers who would be paid in April, need to know if/what they’re going to be paid for services rendered starting April 1. Payroll invoices for March were already submitted for the choir and nursery. George: This is a church, not a business. We should be able to pay people for services potentially rendered, as long as we possibly can. Jim: In our Partners for Sacred Places meetings, we’ve repeatedly said that this church values music. Now’s the time to show that. I suggest we pay our choir soloists to record and post solos on our website/Facebook page, while they cannot sing in the sanctuary. Denise: Let’s be a model of acting out of a sense of abundance – and communicate this to the parishioners. Lisa: Do we know what we can afford to do, and for how long? Denise: How do we know that the abundance shrinks? We haven’t put it out there to members what we need. Let’s revisit this periodically. Jim: I’d suggest we try to agree on payments for next month, rather than into the indefinite future.

We agreed to vote on this at a short meeting next week.

Next, mobile banking and online giving.

**Motion: That Vestry approves allowing staffer Sarah Tribelhorn to set up mobile banking so that she can deposit in the church’s bank account any pledge or other checks, now that the church’s mail is going to her house. Approved.**

**Motion: To authorize the Church to enter into one or more agreements to facilitate electronic giving through its website or by other means at a cost or fee not to exceed 4% of the amounts being given.**

**Approved.**

Regarding Holy Week & Easter offerings, Emily noted that on Maundy Thursday last year, we brought in socks (a nod to the tradition of foot-washing), which were donated to the Pope Francis Center. We also have a long-standing practice of offering Good Friday offering to the Holy Land. The Easter offering is traditionally for music and flowers, but the latter won’t be needed this year. No vote was taken, but comments showed support for continuing the Good Friday tradition, and for directing the Easter offering towards Outreach efforts related to Covid-19.

At Christine’s suggestion, we agreed that by next Monday, March 30, each of us would communicate by email, saying I vote yes or no for the remaining Finance Committee requests, noted below, or raising any questions about specific requests. The emails are to be sent to George and Jim.

Items to be voted on by email, phrased as motions:

**Item 3. Motion: Vestry approves the 2018 Financial Review and authorizes the relevant parties to sign it and submit it to the diocese. (That’s required to release the diocese’s Tretheway grant of $10,000 for work on the sanctuary foundation.)**

**Item 4. Motion: Vestry approves the 2019 parochial report.**

We agreed to meet next Thursday at 6 p.m., preferably for just one hour, and every Thursday after that as needed while the crisis continues, with the option of voting on urgent matters by email before then.

Future regularly scheduled Vestry meetings: April 23, May 28, and June 25.

The following items were noted in the agenda but not acted upon:

**175th Anniversary Planning** Emily Williams Guffey

* May 31, 2020: Day of Pentecost and Actual 175th Birthday
  + In-person celebration probably on hold
* September/October 2020: Festival Evensong, Reception, Dinner
  + Date still TBD
* November 1, 2020 evening: Verdi Requiem
  + *Review & Motion:* $10,000 for orchestra
* Communications:
  + Reaching out to former or lapsed members, choir members
  + Daughter, granddaughter, and other related congregations
  + City and civic relationships (Partners for Sacred Places)
* Fundraising for Capital Projects:
  + Anniversary Campaign a kick-off for Capital Campaign?

We closed at 8:00, with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Treece, secretary