

Christ Church Detroit Vestry Minutes

Thursday, May 28, 2020

Highlights:

*Vestry discussed ways to welcome new members who will join the church on Pentecost. We have packets prepared for them, but need to find ways to track their integration into the life of the church.

*We discussed at length the eventual reopening of the church. Expectations that in-person worship will happen soon and immediately will look like it did before are misguided. As Emily said, “We need to prepare for a longer period of exile, for everyone’s safety.” Even if people can attend, will they come to church if they’re still reluctant to go to a movie or football game? We probably won’t have any singing, due in part to our ventilation system. These were a few of the issues facing us in a new future.

*The Pentecost service and coffee hour will include a video tease/trailer of our celebration of Christ Church’s 175th anniversary. Work on the full celebration planned for the fall continues.

Present: Lisa Jones, Emily Williams Guffey, George Port, Christine Galli, Howard Matthews, Carolyn Maher, Betty Warner, Anthony Estes, Denise Crenshaw, Desmond Jones, Roger Basse.
Absent/Excused: Chuck Atwater, Phil Brown.

Action items underlined. Report received: Buildings & Grounds.

Opened with a prayer from the Presiding Bishop’s office by Emily Williams Guffey. Followed by our **African Bible Study** of Acts 2:1-21, the passage on Pentecost.

The **Minutes** of the May 21, 2020, meeting were **approved**.

Follow up to the May 21 action items:

Roger and Sarah have put together a packet for **new members**; they’ll be at the office tomorrow to round up the last items. There are 11 new members joining on Sunday! Of those 11, about two-thirds have already worshiped in person with us. Three or four are choir members or joining the choir. All are drawn to what the music stands for, the warm community, and the message of justice—all combined in our congregation.

Emily: This underscores the need to develop, in these circumstances, how we make sure that people who find us are then connected and offered ways to get involved. How do we do this, so as to make sure everyone who joins has the same experience? Through contact management, we need to develop some tracking process for what sort of contact a person has had. I developed something like this for All Saints’, and it has continued there. Often there’s an initial contact -- say it’s a friend of a friend, or they contact me. Then we want to make sure they receive the emails and other forms of contact from the church. There’s a second contact at some point. If they reached out to me, I might pass the name along to an existing member. Some of this used to happen at coffee hour, but we need to be more intentional in the current circumstances, by using our contact database. We’ll host our first newcomers’ gathering tomorrow, with the new

members telling their stories and meeting those vestry members who can attend. This will happen, we hope, at least twice a year. A newcomer transitions to more like regular-member status when they participate in some form of ministry.

Roger: They get a brochure as part of their welcome gifts. We have a ministries list, but we need to update it. You want to guide them until they're comfortable, interacting and involved. After a point, they drop off the new-persons list, and go onto a shepherd's list.

Other action items: Lisa hasn't had a chance to look into **Amazon Smile** yet. Carolyn talked to Kevin (about ideas for **getting worship services onto local television broadcasts**), but he had no ideas other than DPTV. (Clarke has a connection there.) George hopes to connect with one of his contacts about demand for our **parking** lot this week. Lisa will add action items from the prior meeting to the agenda as "Old Business," per a suggestion from Betty.

Emily opened a lengthy discussion about **planning for our future**. When she sent out the agenda for the meeting, she asked the Vestry to review the Michigan Bishops' directive, [Plan for Re-Entry for Great Lakes Episcopalians](#), especially the sections on Phase I [Hiatus], Phase II [Re-opening], and Appendix A [Questions for the Vestry], including the question, "How will we communicate our safety plan and best practices to the congregation?"

In some conversations, Emily said, there's often an expectation that we'll be back to in-person worship soon, and it will look like what we had before. But we need to prepare for a longer period of exile, for everyone's safety. We need to wait on the Bishop's directive for Phase II. We've heard nothing as of today, so we're at least two weeks away. And worship in Phase II will be very different from how we worshipped before Covid-19.

Emily: I want to be clear that we might be in Phase I for several more months, or we might go to Phase II and then back to Phase I, depending on how the pandemic plays out. I'd like to look at Phase II, and plan for that.

Bishops can give us permission, but we as Christ Church Detroit then have to decide whether it's right for us to move to Phase II, and what modifications we'd need to make to be safe in Phase II. It's important for us to keep this on the forefront of our minds, and be clear in our communications with parishioners that we may be in this mode for quite a while.

We could be in this phase for quite a period of time – maybe the whole year. Emily: That's what it's sounding like more and more to me, just watching how other organizations, like schools, are making decisions. What are our values when it comes to gathering? Would 50 people in the sanctuary be appropriate, or too many? It's up to us to make sure entry to the building is staggered.

George: Under the guidelines, people need to stay six feet apart. That's three people, every other row. We'd have to tell some people they cannot come, because they'd push the total attendees over 50. It's almost prohibitive to do that.

Jim: Just before this meeting, I was reading an article about churches reopening, and what misconceptions they had about it. For instance, repeating something George had said in a previous Vestry meeting, we need to check with our insurance company to see what our liability is. Many churches that opened, found attendance was only 20 percent of what it had been pre-pandemic, because members, particularly older ones, decided not to put themselves at risk. Some churches used an online sign-up form to limit attendance to a safe number, and still had no-shows among the people who signed up to attend. And if only 20 percent of parishioners are

attending, does it make sense for a church to devote enormous time and resources to the in-person worship service—effectively redirecting those resources away from the online service? Jim will circulate the article about reopening churches to the Vestry.

Christine: When questioned, “Would you attend an event after your state allows a mass gathering?”, 75 percent of survey respondents said no. They aren’t willing to go to a sports arena, cinema, or church, even if they legally can. There are apps that allow people to sign up for a seat, but this is a case where access to technology, or lack of access, can be restrictive.

Emily: As we imagine what we might be coming back to, it won’t include singing, not even a soloist. Our sanctuary doesn’t have swift ventilation. I’d be concerned that with even one singer, the virus could be in the air for some time. Speaking in unison is less risky, but hence the guideline to be six feet apart. Outdoors is an option, because air circulates more freely then. That’s why the bishops urge churches to think about using all of their assets, including outdoor spaces. Christine: We could set up a big screen and sit outdoors in the parking lot.

Q: What about office staff re-entry? Emily: We’ll maintain work-from-home to minimize any work in the building. I went in Tuesday for the first time since we closed. I knew I’d be there an hour to finish what I wanted to do, so I took it outside to the Sibley porch. I’d encourage doing as much as possible outside, in the courtyard. As a vestry, we need to think about Building and Grounds projects, as well. As of now, even tuckpointing the Bell Tower is out, because of the need to give workers access to restrooms, which would likely require a staffer to be on site to let them in; a port-o-potty is an even bigger problem, due to security concerns.

This led to a wide-ranging discussion about the **Bell Tower work.**

We have a contractual obligation to begin the work this year, but should we postpone it, because we don’t have all of the financing in hand? If we delay the start, will we lose our spot at the front of contractors’ queues, which might mean they can’t finish what we had hoped to finish before the winter? The fact that the contractor called us back to double-check whether they might be allowed to start work, suggests that we’re not the only project being delayed. Maybe our spot in the queue isn’t at great risk, but we can’t be certain. And would a locked port-o-potty negate the problem of access to the building’s restrooms?

The consensus gelled around two ideas. First, Treasurer George Port, with B&G Vestry representative Desmond Jones’ assistance, will begin the process, previously approved in principle by Vestry, of applying to the diocese for a loan of up to \$400,000 for the Bell Tower project. Second, Emily will ask the Bishop’s office whether work could begin using a locked port-o-potty to ensure construction workers don’t enter the building.

Emily wrapped up the discussion of re-opening the church in Phase II by stressing that we need to review how we communicate about this. We will talk about this in future meetings so we have a consistent message.

May 31, Pentecost, is the actual **175th Anniversary** of the founding of Christ Church Detroit. Events that day will be a teaser for future celebrations. Roger: The Heritage group has several plans of how to tell our story. Clarke Mason is compiling interviews of past and current members – some done previously, some more recently. All of the interviews aren’t ready, but we’ll have a Heritage “trailer” video, with a script by Seth Lloyd and Beth Ann Tesluk, ready for coffee hour on Pentecost. Donna Gloff has plans for a magazine, to incorporate visuals. Roger is creating a timeline, with storyboards as to what was happening internationally, nationally, in Detroit, and at our church each decade. Emily: Shoutout to Anthony, who is

creating the video for this Sunday. He used the interviews to get to know some of our parishioners.

The Pentecost worship service will feature special music and readings by attendees at Wednesday's Bible study, a welcoming of new members, and a coffee hour where attendees are being encouraged to wear red, bring a festive beverage, and try a Zoom background such as a photo of the sanctuary interior.

Emily reviewed other 175th anniversary plans. The gift list idea is on hold for now. The Verdi requiem, previously planned for November 2020, involves 50-60 musicians (choir and orchestra), so it's not a good fit for our current circumstances and has been postponed until 2021. The original plan for our Fall 2020 Homecoming was for Festival Evensong, reception, dinner, and tours. Now we assume it will be mostly virtual.

On **Finance**, Christine Galli reported "a little hiccup" with no access to the bank for a couple of weeks. We are keeping track of payroll for the PPP loan, and will have to learn more about utilities. By next week, we'll have updated May numbers.

George: The Diocese's Investment committee met this morning and has recommended no change in the dividend, so that should stay as we budgeted. I don't expect any change in September, either.

When the Finance Committee meets next week, they'll talk about following up on giving, preparing an updated budget, and planning for third-quarter cash needs. We're going to stop forwarding the mail, because it now makes things slower rather than faster. All mail will go to the church, and Sarah will pick it up. She can process whatever checks she receives on the same day. Also, next week we'll work on updating our signatories and users on our bank account.

Desmond reported that **Buildings & Grounds** now is leaning more towards repairing, rather than replacing, the water heater because we were able to get it to start. We may need to trim some trees, also. See the Facilities Manager's Report for status of smaller projects

In **other business**, Christine will reactivate the Google doc form for Vestry members to sign up to be Vestry rep at the online service. Each person was asked to sign up for one date over the summer, and to submit our video by Friday evening.

The J2A Tech Support crew has had three callers so far. Elizabeth Maher, for example, helped a woman put Zoom on her phone. Carolyn will have Elizabeth call a member who has been able to join the worship service but not the coffee hour.

Jim reported good success with the Crossroads collection bins at members' homes; several loads of donations have already been taken to Crossroads. It looks like we'll be getting a Blessing Box in a week or two. We want to have it as visible as possible. The Blessing Box people say there are so many people eager to help stock it with food and hygiene items that the parish doesn't need to worry about doing so. Food items should be ones that can be eaten easily outside, without access to a kitchen. Christine: Can we put this on our marquee, alerting people that we're doing that?

Lisa will reach out to Phil Brown to see how he is.

Adjourned at 7:43.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Treece, secretary