

*St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Vestry Meeting
2023 - monthly meeting # 5
Date: May 30, 2023*

Present (virtually by Zoom):

Rev. Nina Pooley, Rector
Craig Reynolds, Co-Warden
Josephine Ellis, Co-Warden
Suzanne White, Treasurer
William O'Neill, Assistant Treasurer
Dr. J. Christopher Perry, Clerk
James Alden
John Culver
David Nevin

Regrets:

Wendy Webster-Coakley
John Garinther
Christopher Plankey

Meeting began at 7:03 P.M.

I. Opening Prayer offered by Rev. Pooley

6:45pm: Check-In

7:00pm: Welcome, call to order with opening prayer - Nina+

Luke 24: 13-17

Now on that same day two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"

10 verses later, as they walk to Emmaus:

Luke 24:27-33

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

Meditation

As we walk together: Where might we meet Jesus along the way?

What might Jesus open our eyes to see and understand?

Where is God already present and at work in the neighborhoods around us?

Prayer

Risen Lord, be present with us in all that we do; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of the bread.

Now, send us forth into the world to live the good news we proclaim; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer from Pentacost

A Jan Richardson blessing. First text of Acts. "When we breathe together." This is a blessing... when we breathe together at at last.

Opening Comments by Warden Josie Ellis

Next steps:

Walk and See 2023 - 20 minute walk report of findings

Summer Refresh

Mutual Ministry Review

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Walk and See:

Rev. Nina: observation, not assuming that we know what is out there. Instead experiencing what is there. Be surprised, put our assumptions aside.

Craig Reynolds; Chris Plankey did quite awrite-up. Listed all the businesses, did homework, follow-up. I add to his report, it was a different perspective, walking instead of driving. Helpful aspect of the exercise. Even in a compact city, it is hard not to have a car. We saw 2 convenience stores, paltry selection of fruits and vegetables.. It is a long walk for people to walk to a grocery store. Third thing, in that corridor, the city is trying to make infrastructure livable, useful. Sidewalks are in good shape, The Common was done nicely, and was well utilized when we saw it. Also signs of neglect, building maintenance issues, neighborhood amenities.

Jim Alden + Josie Ellis: we walked Fenn St. For an hour. 10 AM. There are two bars, one of which is shuttered. Not a lot of people out and about. We saw 3 street people.

Walked down to East St. Fenn seems like a corridor. Infrastructure so-so. Brien Center buildings, and some group homes in the area. Felt pretty run down.

Chris Perry, though not on the walk, added to the walk describing the Italian Catholic Immigrant's church with hand painted religious frescoes inside, all of the hard labor

and beauty clearly done out of love. I wonder how the Brien Center that now owns the church has treated it.

John Culver and Wendy Coakly went up North St. On Sunday. New brewery in there, and restaurant space nearby. Liked the parks, court house, Eagle St. Up to the YMCA, newly renovated. Some lovely art public murals on Melville St. Saw that Methusalah bar was closed, whereas Dotties open, nice jazz there sometimes. Some outside tables in the area. Stopped at the imaging Center at BMC. A large apartment building, a bit run down. We crossed the street, saw Carr hardware, saw a number of parishioners. North St is about 3 different neighborhoods. The block with (former) Jim's House of Shoes is a bit decrepit. The Boweling alley is up and running. Saw a lot of bikers using the bike lanes (nice day, Sunday).

Bill O'Neill and David Nevin: out walk was supposed to be East St, but we went down to second St. Then around.. No stores other than Cumberland Farms, there were a lot of multi-family homes. No one was outside at 4:30 on a sunny afternoon. No kids out playing, riding bikes anything. Like a ghost town. What kind of life do people have there. We met people back when on East St. The area is a food desert. Interesting day.

Suzanne Whitw and Rev. Nina: We observed our walk that there were people on front porches. Down South St. And some side streets over Clinton Avenue, then up George St. There were many multi-family homes. We saw a guy cleaning up his yard, saw families hanging out down by Berkshire Place (nursing home), then went to the Veteran's Memorial. A meditative place. We noticed at the memorial that there is an Honor Roll there. Gee we have Honor Rolls here at St. Stephens, a big framed one in the Sears Room, our Veterans. Is there a better place for them (the Honor Roll)? Near Park Sq. We passed the old Atheneum, a plaque on the building noted that it has an Honor Roll Room there.

Josie Ellis: I used to be the HR manager for Allegrone (building contractor).

Rev. Nina. Given all the multi-family homes, there should have been more people around. Maybe it was the time of day, a Friday. The neighborhood was really quiet.

Suzanne White: a neighbor then said that it (the neighborhood) isn't like when she grew up. Now she didn't feel safe having their kids run around, ride their bikes, etc. What we are lacking, are safe areas for children. There are parks, basketball courts, a skate park. There should have been more children out.

John Culver. Dorthy Amos Park and Clapp Park are busy

Jim Alden: No one knows everyone in their neighborhood anymore.

Josie Ellis: not a huge population area.

Chris Perry gave a pre-walk description of West St. Which begins right where his office is and has a number of businesses in its early blocks going westward before reaching populated blocks.

Rev. Nina noted the South Community Food Pantry at South Church. The numbers of people visiting for food have gone up from 500 to 1000 people a month in recent years. Downtown Pittsfield feels like a community desert, a food desert, and neighborhoods without community infrastructure. It feels desolate.

Thank you all walkers. Keep attentive.

Josie Ellis noted "summer refresh" and the "mutual ministry review." Thank you all for attending.

Mutual Ministry review. Canon Rich Simpson summarized and identified us as a "paraclete parish", meaning that we are a stable parish and engaged in social issues. The power of us connecting as a group was palpable in the in-person meeting. We were more connected.

Craig Reynolds added that it felt good to be there.

Chris Perry: paraclete. This observation seems like the beginning of a process, not a finished product.

Craig Reynolds. It is useful to give us some vocabulary. The energy issue, there are constraints on our efforts. To balance that is the job of leadership, going forward the next few years. We can take small bites of the apple, not get out beyond our resources with our enthusiasm. This leads to next topic.

Rev. Nina: Paraclete; the holy spirit: to be inspired with the Holy Spirit.

Chris Perry, seeing the typology was like taking a personality test and learning how others see us: Oh, NO!

Josie Ellis: brought up "Summer Refresh". Leadership was feeling a bit of stuck in the mud. We asked some people to join our team and they said no. We had a rush of enthusiasm, then I went away and we haven't gained traction, despite trying. Rev. Nina said, "if it isn't there, don't force it. Set a meeting date for those who do want to participate June 7": Chris Plankey, Jim Alden, Craig and I will."

Rev. Nina. Our physical space needs help, e.g. the kitchen. How will we be using this space in the future? That should inform the decisions on the renovations. E.g., our

Feeding Ministry.

People are using the dining room all the time. There are requests every week. Some we can accommodate. The dining room is abysmal. Here are 12-step groups. Some other groups want to meet there. We can refresh it now, the floor replaced, walls need to be painted, we need new, more comfortable chairs and tables. That was the idea behind the refresh. Also the first floor offices and bathrooms are stuck in the 1950's, and the hallway. We need to refresh these as we did with the Sears Room.

Chris Perry: We should ask the leadership of the 12 step programs what they would find helpful in the refresh. And maybe they have people contractors who would be interested in bidding, wanting to improve the room. Maybe a 2- for one deal could occur, someone who uses the with a motivation to do a loving job.

David Nevin: the lighting in the dining room is harsh.

Rev. Nina. Here is one crazy idea, not cheap. Could we have a vestibule behind the doors two sets of door, so we can close behind the entry door. Keep heat in. City would have to allow it.

Chris Perry. Are we a Historic Building? I know that is a complication for any renovations.

Craig Reynolds: brainstorming is helpful, but we need to think of a process for moving forward on the Summer Refresh. We can't put it all on the Property Committee. Maybe an ad hoc Committee?

Chris Perry: Craig, why don't you talk with John Garinther and design an ad hoc Summer Refresh committee?

Josie Ellis: (Canon) Rich Simpson was pleased with our method of putting reports on line to give us more time to discuss strategic thinking.

II. Minutes from previous meeting

a. corrections

1. None

b. Minutes approved (as corrected).

Motion by: Josie Ellis approve as written

Seconded by: Jim Alden

approved unanimously

III. Old Business

Action Items from Prior Meeting

1. Do Prayer walks in pairs, as assigned.
2. Do a physical tour of the church/parish building
Craig: the Property Committee is prepping less accessible parts of the building for anyone to be able to see, the undercroft, and the Belfrey. Make them safer. That is close to being a go.

IV. Committee Reports and New Business

Financial report (Suzanne White)

Questions?

Suzanne highlights. Property Committee report on updating the church insurance. Last time the Stained Glass Windows were evaluated, all the Windows together were valued at \$ 200,000. Down the road, we should have all our property re-evaluated. It is not a pressing issue, however.

Josie Ellis: the impetus is from replacing and protecting the Windows, then later get a valuation. Protective plexiglass. It'll cost less to insure them now that they are protected. Bill helped reading the insurance document.

Bill O'Neill. We are probably under-insured given things that we don't see. We only have 2 million in fine art coverage.

Suzanne White: that's about it.

Bill O'Neill. We are having the audit tomorrow, on zoom with the auditor.

Suzanne White:, Sarah (office manager) knows most of what the auditor needs.

Property Committee (John Garinther, Chris Plankey)

Both sent their regrets.

Josie Ellis: Any questions?

None

Stewardship (Wendy Coakley)

No report

Wardens' Report (Craig Reynolds, Josie Ellis),

Craig: we need a new VPOD (Verstery Person on Duty) schedule, stretch it through next February, overlap with the next Vestry. Sign up for 3 slots each in the 2023 Vestry folder.

Jim Alden: The Berkshire Pride Festival is on Saturday. Is the booth covered for 5 hours? I will be there at the Parade with David DeSmith.

Craig Reynolds and Rev. Nina will be there most of the day. From 10 to 15 people may show at different points.

Rev. Nina: We are super excited about our booth. Josie Ellis designed a self-framed

portrait-like thing for taking pictures. Also some temporary tatoos.

Jim Alden: just important for us to have visibility, quiet, but seen.

Rectors Report (Rev. Nina Pooley)

Rev. Nina: there is stuff in the report on the Summer Refresh.

We need to tell our story better, something I'd like us to do.

I met with my clergy coach and talked about additional services. Saturday night may not provide many more people. My idea is a Celtic Worship plan.

It has been very busy, as we had 2 deaths in the same week. Then 5 baptisms on Sunday, fun party afterward.

Suzanne White: It was great to see such a diverse group being baptized, from age 5 months on up!

This meeting's Action Items (recounted by clerk Chris Perry):

1. Craig Reynolds, Rev. Nina and Josie Ellis will talk with the Property Committee to form an ad hoc Summer Refresh committee. Craig noted that maybe that Chris Perry was pushing us to make this an Action item.

2. Craig Reynolds: please sign up for VPOD slots through February

Next Meeting scheduled:

Josie Ellis: Chris Perry and I talked about whether we should we start to meet in person? Convenience and driving are issues.

Chris Perry asked: who is far away: Rev. Nina 20 minutes, Bill O'Neill 30 minutes.

Rev. Nina. Maybe alternate zoom vs in person meetings?

Craig Reynolds: we could have different times or days for the in-person meeting.

Suzanne White: if we do meet in person, is it feasible to start early, like 6:30 at the Church. Bring some light fare? Could bring a light repast.

Rev. Nina that might work. If the vestry meetings are after church, it wouldn't matter, but I need a buffer since people talk to me, sometimes really big issues arise. That would work well. I have to be there on Sundays. Not everyone is there every Sunday.

Josie Ellis: meeting earlier in the evening is difficult for Wendy because of her job/commute.

The next Vestry meetings are:

1. Vestry Meeting June 27, 2023 (Zoom or in-person, or hybrid?)

2. Vestry Meeting: July 27, 2023

V. Closing Prayer offered by Rev. Pooley

VI. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned by unanimous consent at 8:40 P.M.