

*St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Vestry Meeting
2023 - monthly meeting #6
Date: June 27, 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
John Culver
John Garinther
David Nevin
Christopher Plankey
Wendy Webster-Coakley

Regrets:

James Alden
Meeting began at 7:04 P.M.

I. Opening Prayer offered by Rev. Pooley

Opening:

As Jesus went to the highways and byways, he sends us beyond our circles and comfort to witness to the love, justice, and truth of God with our lips and with our lives. We go to listen with humility and to join God in healing a hurting world. We go to become Beloved Community, a people reconciled in love with God and one another.

Let us pray:

Keep, O Lord, your household, the Church, in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Josie Ellis: Next steps:

1. Latest Update

Group has had one meeting, a great one with the Go-and-see group.

Craig: It really was an orientation meeting, who are we, what are we going to do. No epiphanies, no major agenda set. Key foci: narrowing down the scope of the work to

focus on food programs, feeding seems to be part of St. Stephen's DNA. A lot going on in the downtown area with impacts. There are changes needed and coming in downtown food programs, so that is where we are going to look first. A spreadsheet of 20 organizations: churches that serve meals, and food bank/pantry efforts within a 12 mile radius. Second, what questions do we want to ask. Third, we are starting to pick partners, pairs, to make contact and chat with them. Maybe start with an email conversation.

We put together an introductory email to make first contact. Chris, Josie, Nina?
Josie: the list is in the Go-and-See folder. E.g. Chris Perry with 18 degrees. Look at that and put your name in.

Nina, Jim, Craig?

Chris Plankey: which programs are redundant, what needs to be different? We threw around some ideas. We focused on a feeding ministry. We also examined other ideas outside of food. Some people come in cars, not by foot.

Nina: Chris Plankey had some of those good, wild ideas. We need a scope that we can manage. Maybe we will stumble on something else. Craig did all the organizational work.

Josie: Summer refresh. We are in touch with Leo, contractors. We will discuss during "Property" how to move things forward.

Suzanne White: there is asbestos in the flooring in the dining room? Did we have an asbestos remediation 20 years ago?

David Nevin: the annex was completely remediated. Don will know about what to do.

Josie Ellis: we need feedback if there is asbestos: take it out vs seal it?

Craig Reynolds: we need firmer information about the asbestos content and potential remediation costs. John Garinter is on top of it.

II. Clerk Report

Minutes from previous meeting

a. corrections

none.

b. Minutes approved.

Motion by: John Culver

Seconded by: Wendy Coakley

unanimous.

III. Old Business

Action Items from Previous Meeting

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 Chris

Perry was pushing us to make this an Action item (i.e. Chris wrote it down as an action item, even if it was unclear at the end of last meeting).

2. Craig Reynolds: please sign up for VPOD slots through February
Craig noted that we followed through on the Summer Refresh. Also many have signed up for VPOD/

IV. Committee Reports and New Business

Financial report (Suzanne White)

Josie: questions about the Finance Meeting.

John Garinther: question about cleaning crew, significantly under budget, why only 23% of yearly budget?

Suzanne White: I can ask Sarah. They were short staffed so we didn't pay them as much.

Rev. Nina: they were visibly short-staffed.

John Garinther: I will talk to Sarah about it.

Craig Reynolds: speculating, in 2021-2022, we discussed whether to use a different service, Berkshire County ARC made some adjustments after talking with us.

Josie Ellis: maybe February numbers came in late, doubled up in March.

Suzanne White: our audit was done last month by Steve Hasbrooke from the Diocese. Completed, and he made a suggestion, that we have a recovery plan, to back up computer systems. Sarah is working on that. The audit went really well this year, pleased with that.

Josie Ellis, after getting the draft document, we'll vote on that. Thank you Suzanne and Bill and your team. First parochial report as a new treasurer: definitely trial by fire.

Property Committee (John Garinther, Chris Plankey)

John Garninter: things not in the report. There are a rash of hypodermic needles in the back alley in the past few weeks. We talked with the BHS (Berkshire Health Systems) harm reduction team. They'll supply a needle box, and a naloxone box. I came around to that.

[Topic: harm reduction for drug users & current health hazards around church property]

Rev. Nina: Harm Reduction was asking churches each to post a NaloxBox. I talked to them at the Juneteenth meeting. I said that we were surprised at the needles, and they said they' be happy to pick them up. They said they were encouraging people to be in public.

Chris Perry: discussed safe injection sites in the US and around the world.

Rev. Nina: a NaloxBox. We have some Naloxone spray bottles.

David Nevin: it has been going on for years, using the outside as a bathroom, alcohol

drinking.

Wendy Coakley, lot of biological waste in the area. It is bad these days.

Suzanne White: it is to the right-hand side of the church, people sleep there, lot of human waste.

Bill O'Neill: a guy is helping cleaning up. We are concerned and will take some steps to remediate.

John Garinther: we could consider signs, lights, cameras

Chris Perry: there are no public restrooms, which drives the problem.

Rev. Nina: downtown churches are talking about this problem, public restrooms, Mike Denton at South Church is talking about this. May get some cooperation from downtown businesses. A urologist at BHS thinks this is important. Public restrooms that are monitored and maintained. Anyone can use them. John what do you need from us?

John Garinther: Bill and I are going to start with signage to keep people out.

There was a general discussion about how to keep people out, given our memorial garden in that area.

Rev. Nina wonders if we should have a pet memorial site.

A general discussion about public restrooms ensued.

Chris Perry: someone needs to spearhead this and make it a public issue then to City Council. Health and human dignity are equally involved.

Rev. Nina said that she will bring this back to city clergy.

Chris Perry: need to make this a public issue, in the papers before it goes to city council. It needs a campaign to engage the public on the issue.

Rev. Nina: Mike (South Church) wants us to have some answers, showers and bathrooms.

[Topic: Summer Refresh and possible asbestos mitigation]

John Garinther: asbestos. Property Committee met with Josie and Craig about refresh. When we did Nina's office, we found some asbestos, so we know it is there. Seal or remediate? Tomorrow A.M. John is meeting with a company about testing and taking it out in the foyer and the dining room tile. We'll get an estimate in a couple weeks.

Craig Reynolds: shouldn't we check the kitchen floor down there, too?

John Garinther: That floor is in terrible shape

Craig Reynolds: we should know what we are dealing with, test it and then get an estimate.

David Nevin: a big effort to move everything in the kitchen.

Rev. Nina: lets find out how much of the floor has asbestos in it, then make a decision. Everyone agreed.

Wardens' Report (Craig Reynolds, Josie Ellis),

Josie Ellis: thoughts about the "First Order" newsletter.

Craig: the newsletter is adrift, difficult to pull together in a timely fashion, find unique content for and appropriate. So instead of struggling each month, Nina, Josie and I thought we would think about the bigger question as to what to do with it. We are writing that up and possible solutions.

John Garinther and Chris Plankey: there is nothing in the newsletter that we don't already know. On the Profile Committee, it was hard to have up-to-date information, seems about the past, not looking forward.

Rev. Nina: biggest issue: the lag of when the material comes in and when it is published. It isn't useful to me, not musings. It'll be a month out of date by the time it comes out.

Suzanne White: yes the time lag is a problem, always behind, e.g. publishing last month's numbers. Should we put the monthly numbers into the weekly email. I agree that it should just be electronic.

Rev. Nina: I mentioned this to Sarah that we were examining this. She might have some input. She likes building the e-blast. She enjoys it. She manages the information and calendar of First Order as it is.

Wendy Coakley: I think that Sarah would definitely prefer just doing one publication.

Josie Ellis: we are the decision-making body. We have to revisit Craig's write-up, and examine the options.

Rev. Nina: There are two viable options. 1) stop doing it, then 2) if there is a need that bubbles up, we do it to meet that need. Otherwise, just do it quarterly.

Craig Reynolds: there are probably more than 3 options.

Wendy Coakley, why even quarterly? Or maybe just timely updates about some of the things like the Go and See campaign, stories, photos.

Josie Ellis: stewardship, peaceful planning, special events. We would still have a deadline, even quarterly.

Rev. Nina: what if we did the four seasons, a rough window to do them, not an impending definite deadline. We want one in the fall, we will have Stewardship.

Craig Reynolds: Chris Plankey noted that we take some for granted, e.g. vestry reports digested into it.

Chris Perry: make it a forum, invite submissions.

Craig Reynolds: great idea, but no takers. If we offer and tap someone on the shoulders, maybe yes, they will respond.

Chris Perry: discussed his presentation at the announcements during Stewardship. I found it personally meaningful to put in the time to consider and write about my spiritual journey, and especially to deliver it, but never would have thought to do it, except Wendy asked me.

David Nevin. Ask people to write things, little blurbs: who am I and why am I here? Introduce everyone to each other in a simple way.

Craig: Yes, we need someone to put it together. Maybe quarterly we can have Sarah take on some of that...more manageable.

Rev. Nina: can we rename it? Show that it is a different thing. Launched as something

new.

Josie: think of a new name for next meeting.

Stewardship (Wendy Coakley)

Previous discussion encompassed this.

Rectors Report (Rev. Nina Pooley)

I don't have much. We will launch Peaceful Planning in the fall.

We are looking the Adult Ed morning slot of 9 AM, maybe on the first and third Sundays, because 2nd and 4th are Sunday School and coffee hour.

I got an email from Louise Penney. She would like to schedule some Adult Ed in that time slot with Mark Britton: 5 or 6 sessions of what I am doing, then they could do something.

Last Saturday I did a service and we had 3, who had to be there, plus 10 = 13 total. They were happy. They wanted me every Saturday, but I mentioned that Saturday is my family day off.

Suzanne White: [topic shift]: I liked the T-shirt idea that you showed in the Rector's Report.

Rev. Nina: I pulled up images that weren't too churchy.

General talk: some churches have t-shirts.

Wendy Coakley: how many pictures did we take at Pride with our "frame"?

Rev. Nina: hundreds.

Josie Ellis: we are working on how we present ourselves in and outside the building.

Like, how many "Love tatoos" did people walk away with at Pride.

John Culver: information like this is good to put out and feed people's enthusiasm about our effect.

Wendy Coakley, not everyone can volunteer at the level that some do. The pictures present to people what we, what our fellow parishioners are doing. I am happy to think about that, how people can feel proud of what we do.

Rev. Nina: telling our stories to ourselves matters, but to other people, and the groups that we welcome and letting them know that we are genuinely glad that they are there matters. We need to be better known.

Suzanne White: it would be cool if we could do something in church in media form, maybe during announcements? A 30 second slide show, here is what we did on Pride Day, show pictures what we are involved in.

Rev. Nina: cool idea, I don't know how to make it happen.

I bought for us a camera and speaker unit to make hybrid meetings to work better. Any of our groups can use it: some in-person, some virtual. I haven't tried it yet.

Josie: we can think of it for Adult Ed.

Action Items from this Meeting:

(Rev. Nina to Property Committee): lets find out how much of the floor has asbestos in it, then make a decision.

Everyone agreed.

(Josie to all) Think of a new name for “the First Order” quarterly newsletter for next meeting. Everyone: let’s re-imagine the newsletter purpose and content.

V. Closing Prayer offered by Rev. Pooley

May the God who formed all things in Love, draw us near to God’s own heart, empower us by the power of the Spirit to live the Way of Love with fellow travelers, and send us to participate in the resurrection and healing of God’s world. And may the blessing of our Lord – loving, liberating, and life-giving – be with us and remain with us forever and ever. Amen.

Next Meeting scheduled:

1. Vestry Meeting in person July 25, 2023

VI. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned by unanimous consent: *8:38 P.M..