

Draft for Discussion
Vestry Minutes
Grace and St. Peter's Episcopal Church
November 16, 2021

Present in person: Rev. Bob Bergner, Susan Stanley (Senior Warden) Kelly Mattox (Junior Warden), Linda Simmons (Treasurer), Arnie Pritchard (clerk), Whitney Batson, John Cerritelli, Chris Grant, Brian Gray, Will Hart, Bernadette Jackson, Sue O'Connell, Cindy Turner, Robin Zenobi

Present via Zoom: None

Excused Absences: Joy Wildman

Unexcused Absences: Jenneifer Campbell,

Also Present: The Rev Robert Clement, diocesan consultant

Bob offered an opening prayer.

The agenda was approved.

The minutes of the October 19 meeting were approved.

Status of request for support in ordination process

Bob reported that George Black participated in the diocesan discernment weekend, and has been invited to go to the next stage of the ordination process.

Transition from priest in charge to rector

Rob Clement reported that there has been some reorganization at the diocese, and a new person is now in charge of parish transitions. There is now a requirement that the diocesan consultant lead us in discussing certain questions before we can call a rector. Rob explained that we will discuss some of these questions, then Bob will leave, and we will discuss some more, after which we could invite Bob back into the meeting.

Rob offered a prayer, and there was a brief time of silent reflection.

Rob asked us to reflect on how God had worked in the PIC process. Sue Stanley said that she believes that God sent us the right priest for this time. She commended Bob's openness to change.

There were several positive comments on Bob's work, especially in developing constructive relationships between our parish and the wider community.

Rob asked if there are signs that calling Bob as rector is not yet an option. The answer was no.

Rob asked where God has shown up in conversations about the transition since Bob joined us.

Sue Stanley said that being senior warden has been a pleasure.

Will said that he perceives God's presence in our worship.

Rob asked if get a lot of "bureaucratic work" done at coffee hour. The predominant response was no.

Coffee hour was described as welcoming in a generally unstructured way.

We have not had many new people join us since Covid began, and some people have become much less visible. Rob said that based on his experience he believes that there is more need than he originally expected to figure out how to do post-Covid evangelism.

Bob said that he thinks we have navigated things strongly – for example, in responding to the letter on our financial status which came from the diocese early in his time as PIC.

Sue Stanley said that she plans to raise with the diocese the issue of burdens being placed on the laity.

At his point Rob asked Bob to leave the meeting, which he did. Sue Stanley assumed the chair.

Sue Stanley and Rob had whittled a diocesan list of ten questions down to three.

1. What work lies before us now?
 - Financial sustainability remains our greatest challenge.
 - Sue O’Connell expressed relief that Bob will have greater job security. She said that he has strengthened the bonds of the parish and connected us to the larger community of Hamden. She mentioned that some people help with our ministries are not parishioners, which she wants to continue.
 - Cindy hoped that we can draw in more deeply some people who have been afraid of serious involvement because they think the current situation may be temporary.
 - Rob stressed the importance of having someone in the leader role in a parish.
2. What are we most excited about, thinking about our future as a parish?

Several points were mentioned:

- The importance of lay leadership, including that of the wardens and Allison with Dinner for a Dollar
- Our habit of working together
- Lack of ego
- People have the opportunity to be fully heard, and we try to use the gifts of all
- The difficult decision to close down in March of 2020
- While we appreciate Bob’s leadership, the parish could go on apart from him. We did go nine months with no priest and things kept moving.
- We drop things when necessary – for example, chimes.
- Some people have fallen away because of Covid. Others have moved on line.
- Sue Stanley said that she believes we are doing more evangelism through outreach than we did before by other methods.
- One problem is that doing a better job with ministry does not necessarily do anything to solve financial problems.

- Kelly and Whitney both believe that the ideas of pledging and membership are problematic for millennial and subsequent generations.
- In contrast to the pledge situation, we have no problem raising funds for outreach projects. Some churches are now essentially community centers with a chapel.

3. What is the elephant in the room that we have not spoken of?

- This question has already been answered -the “elephant” is financial sustainability.
- Common mission support, i.e. diocesan dues, is a lot.
- Rob urged us to get involved in the bishop selection process.

Rob is required to tell the diocese that we have had this discussion, but not required to describe the content.

Kelly thanked Rob for advocating on our behalf and for moving along the transition to a rector.

Rob suggested that Sue ask for a motion to call Bob as rector. Sue complied, Kelly made the motion, Cindy seconded it, and it was approved on a voice vote.

Bob officially becomes rector when a letter of agreement among the parish, the bishop, and Bob is signed by all three parties. Tim Hodapp is the diocesan contact.

Candidates for officer and vestry slots

Arnie went over the offices for which we have to elect people. See the October minutes for this.

Whitney said that she would be willing to serve a second term.

Sue Stanley pointed out that if we merge with St. John the Evangelist our governance would probably have to be reset. Since we do not know whether we will be merging or what the timing would be, we will go about our business unless and until we know we will be merging.

Sue O’Connell said that we should warn potential candidates of the need to take safe church training while letting them know it can be done on Zoom.

Several possible candidates were suggested; the names will not be included in the minutes unless they agree to become candidates. Arnie will put the names and the names of the vestry members who agreed to contact them in a separate document, which he will circulate to the vestry.

People should consider whether they feel called to be junior warden or clerk.

Will and Chris each said that they would be willing to continue as delegates to the diocesan annual convention.

Administration

There is a card to sign for Kim Clarke, who is leaving soon as our parish administrator. Holly Schrader will take over most of the job. Gretchen Pritchard will do the enews and some other communications tasks. Kelly said that Mark Mahaffy would be good at some building management tasks.

There was some discussion of whether we want to do some meetings entirely on Zoom. There seemed to be agreement that we should offer Zoom as an option for all meetings.

Neighboring parishes

We have a meeting scheduled for Saturday November 20 with the vestry of Saint John the Evangelist, Yalesville, and Bishop Ahrens, to discuss the possibility of merging. They will also be meeting with one other parish that is still in the running as a potential merger partner.

St John's North Haven is largely occupied with their own transition.

We have had great contacts with Christ the Good Sheperd Lutheran Church. They were happy to have us attend their service on October 31. Bob covered one service for Josh Sullivan, their pastor. We plan for joint worship on fifth Sundays to become a regular thing.

200th anniversary fund

Bob reported that the turkey drive is going well. Donations to the drive will be counted as donations to the 200th anniversary fund and matched from the endowment. John Anderson got a donation from a warehouse. If the purported turkey shortage means that we cannot spend all the donations on turkeys, we will give grocery gift cards.

The United Way out of the blue decided to give us \$15,000 towards the purchase of a food truck. Kelly made the point that we should not stop fundraising. She thinks that we need more of a governance and financial administration structure for Dinner for a Dollar than we have now. We will need to fundraise for operations for the food truck.

Our understanding is that there is no special license required to drive the truck, but anyone working with the truck would probably be required to do safe church training. Creating a separate organization may avoid this requirement. Also, there will have to be one person on board who is food certified. The truck will be kept in the parking lot, which may affect snow plowing

Treasurer's report

Linda had emailed financial reports through October 31 before the meeting. She reported that we have not taken the draw from the investment fund that was authorized at the October meeting; she thinks that we have enough cash that we can postpone the decision on the draw until early December.

In line with the plan for this meeting Linda did not make a detailed Treasurer's report.

Stewardship –

Linda reported that we had sent thirty-eight letters to current pledgers, twenty have been returned so far. We also sent nineteen letters to others, of which two have been returned. The amount pledged so far is about \$82,000 about 23% less than was pledged for 2021. A reminder email will go out on this.

Kelly asked if we can get donations from people who watch our services on line. Linda will ask a friend at another congregation how they do this.

It was agreed that we should post in the Brewster Room and put in the enews the name of those who have pledged for 2022.

Buildings and Grounds

Someone recommended by Sue O'Connell did a great job painting the front doors, for a very reasonable price of \$500

Linda said that we should not put anything on the door. Even a wreath would scratch it.

Bill Menosky has talked to a possible contractor for our carpet issue, nothing definite yet. He has also called someone about our dry well who is scheduled to look at it on Friday.

Bob said that we need a special plug for the convection oven.

Sue O'Connell mentioned that the chair lift is being used most Fridays. She asked about safety and insurance issues, and whether it needs to be inspected. Linda will ask Bill about this.

Bob asked everyone to arrive at 8:45 on Saturday for the meeting with the vestry of St. John the Evangelist, since they have a funeral at 11 A.M.

Because the third Tuesday in December is close to Christmas Day, we will move the December meeting forward a week, to December 14.

The vestry adjourned and said the Lord's Prayer

(Minutes submitted by Arnold Pritchard, parish clerk)