 

St Margaret’s Episcopal Church Vestry

Subject: Minutes for 21 February 2023

Attending: Peter Mayer+ (Rector), Patti Sachs (Associate Rector) Z, Kristen Berthelotte (Senior Warden), Paul Shurke (Junior Warden), Katherine Wiernicki (Treasurer), Elizabeth Radley (Director of Operations) Z, Dave Boyce, Austin Canuel Z, Matt Chasse, Mary Holstine, Alden Gross, Janice John, Kathy Lang, Chris Prender, Susan Roberts, Dan Tootle, Ernie Tucker, Carol Williams, and Jim Barnett (Clerk).

Also in attendance: Charlotte Gross

Not Attending: Lana Keelty

This meeting was conducted in the Hybrid format. Zoom attendees are noted by a “Z” after their name.

A Quorum was present.

**1. Opening prayer was given at 7:05 pm by Alden Gross.**

**2. The meeting was called to order by the Rector. The January 2023 Vestry minutes were approved as amended.**

**3. The Rector proposed that the Vestry discuss a few thoughts (from Facebook posts) from a colleague of his in California as well as a PDF he provided from Ken Howard titled Does the Future Have a Church.** Both are posted to vestry. Discussion will follow.

**4. Submitted reports:**

**A. The Rector’s Report (posted):**

**B. Treasurers Report (posted):**

January was a slow month as we kicked off the New Year. Operating results for January 2023 report revenues in excess of expenses of $52,367. This amount is ahead of the year-to-date budget through the end of January by $17,668. Pledges are currently ahead of budget by $3,674 at the end of January, Donations and Use of Facilities are also slightly ahead of budget by $602 and $550, respectively. For the month of January, total expenses are running behind budget by $(12,839). There were no withdrawals from any of the Endowment Accounts during January 2023. $44,744 was transferred from the Organ Designated Account to the General Endowment during January as partial repayment of the $69,000 initial deposit for the new organ that was drawn from the endowment during 2022. There is still about $15,000 in outstanding pledges against the organ campaign, but they will probably not be realized. The old organ was donated to a local church.

$40,000 was transferred from the Operating Account to the Cemetery Checking Account on January 4th, related to the special contribution received to install gravel walkways in the St. Margaret’s Cemetery. The donor wrote a check for $43,000 as 50% of the anticipated cost. The rest was covered from the Cemetery Designated Account. Construction of the walkways will begin when the weather is warmer.

The Rector will engage the SMDS school board at their 23 February meeting. The monthly contribution from the school is currently $1,250 per month. This will be negotiated over the next few months to a higher number. The SMDS budget will be voted by the school board in March and we will have a final number at that time. The new agreed contribution will be incremental balanced into the budget for SMC. The Director of Operations has been working the numbers and usage very diligently to bring the allocation in line with what we are thinking.

A question was asked about the meaning of “Special Music.” These are the funds allocated to the music director to pay for special program music during the liturgical year. For example, strings at Christmas and other instrumentally appropriate music at specific events, like All Saints Day. We don’t like cutting this category because it changes what we look like but it is necessary when income is not adequate to fund everything we want to do.

Could “snow removal” funds be reallocated to other areas where funding is needed? Although this year we have seen no requirement to remove snow, this budget runs through 31 December 2023 and future snowstorms might occur. That said, these funds will not be reallocated.

While our energy usage has been lower this year, we can expect our actual charges to be higher because BG&E will be raising their rates. The current solar panels and additional solar panels will not appreciably offset this increase. This is a place in the budget that might hurt us this year. The way the solar system works is that BG&E will pay us for energy we don’t use that goes back into the grid. Generally, the BG&E payback is $2,000 per year. The panels we now have were donated. Leasing panels does not really result in any benefit for the church. We have looked at increasing the number of panels in our footprint, but it is not economically viable at this time.

How are the plate donations working to offset the decrease pledging? We do not want to over emphasize raising funds on a constant basis. We need to look at creative ways to generate income and if you think of anything, let the Rector know. Every church is experiencing the same financial realities as we are seeing.

**C. Day School Report (posted):**

There will be a meeting this Thursday to discuss the current offset that the Day School pays to the church.  Attendees will include the Day School Board Director, The Day School Treasurer, St Margaret’s Chief of Operations, St Margaret’s rector, St Margaret’s Treasurer and the Vestry liaison to the Day School. The negotiations for a new monthly rate will not be a surprise to the board, they have seen this coming. We need to be honest with each other but not hurt the dynamic between the two organizations that is so import to both.

Does the school provide any kind of offset in either fees or wait list preferential treatment for parishioners? This is a complex issue and might represent a paradigm shift in that relationship. One of the issues is what actually constitutes a “member of St Margaret’s”? If you want to use a pledge number what would that be and how accountable would that be to substantiate. This will also be discussed with SMDS management. Right now, we do not have a problem to solve.

**B. Junior Warden (posted):**

February saw the kickoff of year 2 of the Caring for Creation project, now a lynchpin in the ongoing maintenance and congregational involvement with our 9-acre campus.

Most major building improvement projects are on hold this year, with hopes that they will not force our hands.

Thermostats:  I am researching an integrated thermostat system that can hopefully unify campus temperature control and improve monitoring and energy efficiency.  Initial estimate is ~$3500 to install and about $200/year for the monitoring/integration service.  This may quickly pay for itself with reduced energy consumption.

Sanctuary pointing: Seeking quotes to re-point exterior masonry work around the Sanctuary. Internally, we received from a friend of Jim Douglas, a complete concept plan for work from painting to paneling for the entire sanctuary.

**C. Senior Warden’s Report (posted):**

Most of the report reflects the Senior Warden's focus on outreach and the formation of a Council to address this problem.  The Outreach Council, as we have named ourselves, currently consists of Janice John, Emily DelSordo, Molly Owens and myself.  Our current idea is a masquerade ball, to be held at the church on October 14th, 2023. We have discussed having a silent auction, heavy hors d’oeuvres (buffet and some passed), drinks, dancing, and babysitting offered down the hall in the classrooms. We have discussed charging $50 per ticket and raising money for the “missions and grants” of St. Margaret’s.

Long-range planning: The Outreach Council has a Pastor-designated goal of increasing membership and revenue. In support of this, the Council has developed three objectives that we are focused on:

* **Objectives:** Attract new Newcomers/Outside Fundraisers. Convert Newcomers into Members.Increase Congregant Participation/Inside Fundraisers.

Janice John is working with Patti and JoEllyn Fountain on ways to better use Realm to measure outreach and engagement. Specifically, we hope to use Realm to better understand parishioners skills, interest and goals;, as well as target communications and measure engagement. For example, Realm integrates with Constant Contact which is used for Dragon Tales and could be used for other communication. From this we can see which parishioners open and read it, and which do not. And potentially create a list of disengaged parishioners to follow up with.

Over the coming months, the Council will be preparing a survey that will update and expand the Profile information in Realm. In addition to information on children and skills/profession, we are interested in knowing what non-profit activities are important to parishioners so that St. Margarets can potentially support them through our grants, facilities and/or volunteer recruitment capabilities. In this way we can help fulfill parishioner passion projects, which will help bond them to the Church, as well as gain positive visibility at their events which could help in attracting new members.

I think it would be helpful for us as a vestry to organize goals and aspirations that have been suggested in vestry meetings. I would like to explore the idea of creating a five-year plan and have asked Lana Keelty to assist.

 There was significant discussion about charging fees at events, specifically a higher fee for nonmembers at events where there is a charge, such as Monday night dinner or the Masquerade Ball. One person noted that we need to be careful of going too far and see a negative impact.  If we talk too much about money we will turn people off.  It is about spirituality.

The long-range plan will look 3 to 5 years out and will need a planning document behind the long-range plan.  While a vision will show us where we want to go, a long-range plan will show us how to get there. The plan should be updated annually with the new Vestry but reviewed quarterly.    We need to measure our progress and keep tracking results.  The long-range planning work should start in May.

**5. The Rectors lead a discussion of his two inputs from above.**

We need to look at how parishioners are engaging online - What are we missing in this engagement and how can we maximize the potential? How do we reach these people for pledging? We need to make sure we engage to ensure they feel like they are part of our community. There may be a way to reach out to online participants to understand better what they like and what isn’t working for them. We need to find peoples passions, what do they volunteer to do outside SMC and how can we cultivate the passion. Perhaps we can send out a link, get inputs, and then track responses.

There has been a great deal of work done on worship habits over the past several years. The Pew Research Center (<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/modeling-the-future-of-religion-in-america/> ) has been tracking these kinds of metrics and then analyzing observed changes. Gen X is different in this regard and we need to understand how they engage. It was opined that “Peace and Joy” are the fundamentals and we need to teach people how to find Peace and Joy through God. People under 30 engage online in ways that some of us cannot conceive. We need to reach these people and find out how to make them receptive. We need to remember that our church needs to reflect our community. Younger people seem to have shorter attention spans. But fundamentally, it’s about belonging, and the Pandemic has taught people how to not belong. How can we get back to belonging? We do not want to be a place where people do not feel they belong. People have gotten out of the habit of going to church on a regular basis. In short, we need to be attuned to good ideas and try some of them. We may need to survey SMC parishioners to see why they come to church and specifically, SMC. Church should be a home for spiritual growth.

Love God, love your neighbor, that’s a true community. It’s not a path, it’s a goal. Kind of like an airport terminal, you go there to get to your objective. People’s perception of spiritual goals change. Everyone is in a different place. We need to meet the people where they are and provide them the tools to proceed toward spirituality. When laity steps up and leads, we might make some progress. SMC’s foundation is uncommon, and we should feel good about where we are. We need to keep the young people in church. 2020 changed things quite a bit.

**The Senior Warden reminded the Vestry that they needed to nominate and elect Austin for another year as a Young Adult Voting Member of the Vestry. The nomination was proposed, questioned, and approved by acclimation.**

**5. For the Good of the Order.**

On the 4th Saturday of the month from 9-11 am folks shall hereby gather to tend to their garden plots and generally titivate the campus. March 25th is the next such event.

There has been some press enquiry regarding Black History Month and positive events in our area. Specifically, SMC will be called out for community engagement and the work of the TRRTF in the area of racial equity and justice on the Broadneck Peninsula. Please keep a look out for an article in the Baltimore Banner in this regard.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 PM.