

Bethesda Episcopal Church
Saratoga Springs NY

Minutes: Vestry Meeting
Wednesday, March 25, 2015

Vestry	Clergy
Mark Claverie	Dean Marshall J. Vang, Interim Rector
Darren Miller	Peter Sweeney, Deacon
Paul Ruzicka	
Mary Withington	
Geoff Delbridge	
Gordon Boyd	
Catherine Berheide (excused)	Treasurer
Mark Griffin	
Jane Agee	Anne Van Acker
Geneva Henderson	
Sara Manny	

Call to order: Dean Vang called to order the regular meeting of the Bethesda Episcopal Church Vestry at 7:00 PM on March 25, 2015 at the Parish Hall on 41 Washington Avenue

Devotions: Mr. Boyd began the meeting with devotions.

Previous meeting minutes: Mr. Boyd moved that minutes from the previous meeting be accepted, seconded by Mr. Miller, unanimously approved. Ms. Henderson announced that, in the future, she will make a point to get minutes out for review at least a week before the next month's meeting and would appreciate if vestry members could be timely in providing her with editing suggestions, which she will accept until 7 PM on the day before the meeting. In the future, edits to the minutes will not be accepted by Ms. Henderson on the day of the meeting without accompanying bribes.

Administrative Assistant Search: Dean Vang reported that we have received over 80 applications (some very qualified) for the advertised position of administrative assistant. He expects to have these narrowed down to five applicants by Saturday and we will begin the interview process after Holy Week. None of the applicants are members of the parish, which is preferable as it avoids possible conflict of interest.

Anonymous Letter: Dean Vang reported that the bishop received an anonymous letter on January 19th criticizing Bethesda. The bishop is not taking any action because the letter was unsigned and, in any case, the criticisms leveled against Bethesda were addressed and remedied during the annual meeting, which occurred a couple of weeks after the letter had been written. The bishop is going to meet with Dean Vang and the wardens for a breakfast meeting in April.

Deacon's Report: Deacon Sweeney reported that we are now four weeks into the confirmation class and it is going well. He and Dean Vang are still visiting Sister Mary Angela and Mary Eddy. The teens are looking forward to the Maundy Thursday lock-in and Bethesda will be hosting a blood drive on April 25th.

Home of the Good Shepherd: Ms. Withington updated the vestry regarding current litigation involving the Home of the Good Shepherd (HGS). The Town of Malta had determined HGS property at High Pointe is not exempt from paying property taxes. HGS filed what is called an Article 78 proceeding to challenge this determination. Thereafter, the towns of Moreau and Wilton also placed the HGS properties located in each town on the real property tax roll and HGS filed additional legal proceedings to challenge those efforts. In the Town of Malta proceeding, started first, both sides filed motions for summary judgment, meaning there is no dispute concerning the facts and a decision on the law was being requested. Supreme Court Justice Thomas Nolan, who has been assigned to the case, issued a decision on the motions in which he felt there were issues of fact centering on whether HGS is a “charitable” organization. This decision on the motions was appealed to the Appellate Division who agreed with Judge Nolan and has sent the case back to be scheduled for trial. The litigation with Wilton and Moreau was assigned to another Supreme Court Justice, Robert Chauvin, and it is likely that nothing will happen with those actions until the litigation with Malta goes forward. HGS was incorporated in 1870 as a not for profit corporation under New York law and operated for years under the umbrella of the Church. As a result of the efforts to tax HGS properties, HGS sought and was granted 501(c)(3) status by the IRS. By the original incorporation documents, HGS must run as a not for profit and has been able to charge well under market rates. As the Homes look nice, people often doubt that HGS is truly a not-for-profit organization. The average two-year stay does not generally completely deplete residents’ assets, meaning most of the residents are not considered to be “poor.” HGS will need to hire a financial expert to testify in court. It is important that HGS prevail in this litigation because the Homes are both more affordable and give a better level of care than many other assisted living providers in the area.

Treasurer’s Report: Ms. VanAcker reported that pledge and plate is down \$12,000.00 compared to this time last year, which is likely a result of the terrible weather in January and March affecting attendance. She believes that sending out a quarterly statement will help remind parishioners to keep up with their pledges. (Mr. Delbridge reported that quarterly statements will go out in April.) Total expenses are down about \$22,000.00, mainly because of the lower payroll costs and the reduced diocesan assessment. Other income is also down compared with last year, largely because of market conditions. Regarding budget vs. actual, we are currently operating at about a \$21,000.00 deficit but are about \$14,000.00 under budget. It would be useful to have a daily (or weekly) figure for what it costs to run Bethesda now and for what it will cost when we have a full-time rector so parishioners know, in more concrete terms, how much is needed. Ms. VanAcker emphasized the importance of moving into the 21st century with online giving options and/or direct withdrawals for pledges. Mr. Griffin moved to accept the treasurer’s report, seconded by Ms. Manny. Unanimous approval.

Building Projects: Mr. Boyd reported that we are now under contract with the Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF). The Building Committee (BC) will be considering leasing and banking arrangements in the next month or so. Bank of America is not interested; M&T might be. Adirondack Trust emailed a short proposal but so far Saratoga National seems to be putting the most effort into answering the BC’s questions. The BC will further consider these proposals in April. The CR engineers report that the sewer system for the church bathrooms is in danger of “imminent collapse”. Mr. Boyd will be holding ministry meetings on Saturday to get feedback from various church groups on the building plans. The ECF will come up with a list of people to interview (based on giving information) to determine giving potential. Contractors and the architect will be paid out of the endowment and donations for the building project will go into the endowment. Certain church members have expressed skepticism regarding the business model for building the NPH and renovating the church. Mr. Boyd would be pleased to sit down in his office with anybody to explain the model, but considers it to be unwise to distribute it as it is in constant flux.

Dean Vang reported that he's had a second meeting with a prospective renter for the retail space in the NPH: a Christian bookseller. He's also been talking to the racetrack chaplain about providing space for ESL classes for children of backstretch workers.

Parish History: Funding for the parish history book should be available by the end of April. Some chapters are still outstanding. Members of the vestry who have promised chapters were urged to complete and submit them. Mr. Boyd suggested making the book part of the endowment, with expenses paid from the endowment and proceeds reinvested in the endowment.

Building Maintenance: Mr. Claverie reported that the waste pipes in the parish house kitchen are not draining. Jeff Ward will need to bring in equipment to excavate, but this will be an expense for our landlord. Mr. Claverie wished to commend the Service League for pulling off the Lenten Soup and Salad supper despite the water problems.

Commissions: Dean Vang circulated a list of commissions for the coming year and asked that no one sign up for the Worship Commission at this point, though in the future we will need to discuss possibly switching to the newer hymnal. The Search Committee is also not currently relevant as we need to make progress on other matters before we can begin searching for a new rector. Ms. Henderson has agreed to chair the communications committee. Ms. Berheide has agreed to chair the personnel committee.

Corporate attorney: It is becoming apparent that we will need to have a corporate attorney on retainer, something that had been initially suggested by Attorney Ann Casey when we first began the process of selling real properties (Attny Casey was retained to represent us in the sale of these properties, but there is need for someone on-call for more general matters.) Ms. Henderson urged caution in considering retaining a member of our parish as this might lead to unforeseen conflicts of interest. Ms. Withington suggested putting it out for bids. Mr. Boyd urged using a local attorney. Mr. Boyd, Mr. Claverie and Mr. Miller volunteered to be a search committee for an attorney.

Expenses: Mr. Claverie moved that Dean Vang's expenses for the month be approved. Mr. Griffin seconded the motion. Unanimous approval.

Closing: Mr. Ruzicka moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Boyd seconded the motion which passed unanimously.