

Good morning. With the church to be decorated later this morning, and perhaps some last-minute Christmas shopping to do, this morning's Vestry updates will be brief.

1. Albany Diocese Standing Committee Approval:

On December 9th, the Standing Committee unanimously approved Bethesda's New Parish House and Community Center project and master lease between Bethesda and Mercy House of Saratoga to operate the upper three floors of the new building. Standing Committee approval is required for major construction on church property and for leases of church space exceeding five years.

Bishop Love and the Standing Committee members, comprised of both clergy and lay persons, listened to a small contingent from Bethesda describe our project for over two hours. Questions were asked and answered throughout the meeting. After receiving their approval, Bishop Love and the Standing Committee complimented Bethesda on its preparation and, moreover, on the religious mission uses of the new building to serve those in need in our community. With Standing Committee approval, Bethesda can proceed with this project.

2. Selection of a Construction Firm to Build the New Parish House:

On December 18, the Vestry approved the selection of Sano-Rubin's bid to construct Bethesda's New Parish House, also known as "Mercy House." Sano-Rubin is an Albany-based construction firm that has been in business since 1912. Sano-Rubin's guiding principles are, and I quote them: "Strong ethical collaborations, hard work, and pro-active thinking" and a "client-focused approach to building."

We received two competitive bids that were extremely close. Both bids were over \$11 million. The anonymous donor has pledged to cover the construction costs above the funds already pledged and collected by Bethesda. The bid review team was impressed by Sano-Rubin's keen enthusiasm for Bethesda's project, its acute attention to detail, and continuous efforts to find cost savings through value engineering.

Sano-Rubin was notified of this selection on Thursday, and the firm promptly went to work on applying to the City of Saratoga Springs for a building permit. Our goal remains to break ground and start constructing Mercy House in January or February of 2020.

3. The Rector Search:

The Vestry has identified a candidate to call to serve Bethesda as a Priest-in-Charge for at least one year. Because the candidate is currently not a canonical resident of the Albany Diocese, the official title is Priest-in-Charge until residency is officially granted. We await the priest's decision on the Vestry's offer to join us in May of 2020. While a puff of white smoke will not be emitted from our church's chimney, the Vestry will notify you as soon as we know whether we will have a new priest.

4. Annual Meeting Preparations:

Bethesda's Annual Meeting will be on the evening of January 28, 2020. The Treasurer and Vestry are developing a budget for next year, which will be shared with the congregation in advance of the meeting. Additionally, Vestry elections will take place at the Annual Meeting. If you are interested in serving on the Vestry, please speak with Father Vang or me before the year's end.

5. Bethesda's Mission Committee Work:

Our gratitude goes out to all who donated gift cards the last few weeks. These gift cards were provided to Transitional Services Association, TSA, which is one of our partners in Mercy House. TSA distributed the gift cards to local families to purchase Christmas presents and help make their Christmas holidays more joyful.

In conclusion, we must all remember that the magic of Christmas is not in the presents but in our Savior's presence. May you all have a blessed Christmas.