

Bethesda Episcopal Church Vestry Meeting
August 18, 2021
Beacon Hill Drive, Saratoga Springs

Attendance: Fr. Charles Wallace, Priest in Charge
Darren Miller, Senior Warden
Karen Finkbeiner, Treasurer
Field Horne
Pam Houde
Laura Kszan
Marcia MacDonald
Sara Manny
Steven Rucker
John Van der Veer
David Wilder

Absent: Kate Berheide, Junior Warden
Ann Bullock, Clerk

Opening Prayer

The regular meeting of the Bethesda Episcopal Church Vestry was called to order at 7:15pm on August 18, 2021, at the home of Marcia MacDonald, by Fr. Wallace.

Devotions:

Fr. Wallace offered devotions.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of July 21, 2021, were unanimously approved as corrected. (K Finkbeiner, movant; J Van der Veer, second)

Priest-in-Charge Remarks:

Parish Education and Fellowship: Fr Wallace reported on initiatives for the upcoming Autumn season. He wants to encourage more homegrown programming of this sort. Bethesda is blessed with many talented parishioners:

1. Book Group – Mary Sander Shartle will lead the next book group discussion on October 28. The book is *The Nine Tailors*, by Dorothy Sayers. In Advent, the group will read Milton's *Paradise Lost*.
2. Bible Study – Jeff Wentling will lead a bible study group for 7 weeks beginning on Tuesday September 14. The group will meet at the church office. The topic is Jesus' 7 great "I am" statements.

3. Legs Miserable Walking Group – The group will begin meeting again in October to take the opportunity to view Autumn colors.

Senior Care Homes Report:

1. Fr Wallace will be conducting worship services at the two Saratoga Springs locations of Home of the Good Shepherd Senior Care Homes. These services take place on Saturday afternoons.

2. Fr Russo has begun working full time at the Wesley Community in Saratoga Springs in a spiritual director role. K Finkbeiner noted that there are 5 or 6 parishioners living at Wesley. The Wesley administrator contacted Fr Wallace about leading worship services there on Saturday afternoons, on a rotating basis with other Protestant churches. He has agreed to participate in this effort.

3. We need additional lay visitors to visit local Senior Care Homes.

Annual Leave: Fr Wallace will be on vacation for two weeks from August 23 into early September. Fr Beck will cover these services.

Altar Guild: Following Fr Wallace's 'altar call' for more Altar Guild volunteers, 5 new members have agreed to serve, including S Rucker. Noted that old vestments have been found in the undercroft, and due to their age and decayed condition, will have to be appropriately discarded.

Children's Classes: S Manny will begin Sunday School classes on September 26.

Music & Choir: The choir will return on All Saints' Sunday (Oct 31). The Christmas pageant will take place on the second Sunday in Advent (Dec 5). On the Sunday before Christmas (Dec 19) we will have singing of Christmas and Advent carols. K Finkbeiner asked when we will be decorating for Advent this year. The date is still to be determined and should be chosen in concert with S Rucker and Sharon Boyd. K Finkbeiner will send out an email blast via Constant Contact in the beginning of September to all parishioners to outline the upcoming plans for Advent, and to advise all parishioners of our current financial status with the goal of eliciting an increase in giving to meet our current fiscal year budget.

Ecclesiastical Oversight Diocese of Albany: The Standing Committee is the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese. They have called Bishop Michael Smith to serve as Assisting Bishop during the interim period before a new Bishop is elected. Bishop Smith will focus on Sacramental and Pastoral duties, including confirmations. This is good news for us, because we have some new members who would like to be baptized and confirmed. Father Wallace will invite Bishop Smith to Bethesda.

Treasurer's Financial Report: K Finkbeiner

The historical revenue increases of June and July did not happen this year. Pledge and plate giving is not meeting our budget. The PPP loan has been forgiven, so it is appearing on the books as income. The church has also recorded \$8,800 in income from weddings and funerals. This shows up on the financial report as a surplus of over \$5,000, however this is all due to the

PPP funds. We have a budget plate deficit of \$36,000 as of the end of July, and if there is no uptick in giving, by the end of August we may see an additional \$10,000 shortfall. M MacDonald suggested that we begin to pass the plate again. J Van der Veer will put the plates in place on Sunday.

As discussed, K Finkbeiner will prepare a financial report and forecast for distribution to the parish in September. In October, a simple statement will be sent to each pledger thanking them for their giving so far and showing where they stand in their giving vs their pledge. This is to ensure that each person meets their 2021 pledge goal, and we close the budget gap. K Finkbeiner noted that it is important to consider timing of 2021 giving-vs-pledge emails so that the 2022 Pledge Drive is not negatively impacted.

Fr Wallace noted that a year-end tax statement and letter of thanks is required for all people who have made donations to Bethesda. Further, he suggested quarterly statements should be sent to all. J Van der Veer noted that quarterly statements had been reduced to twice-yearly statements due to mailing costs. K Finkbeiner will instruct Elaine to send out the statements and a year-end tax statement.

The financial report was received unanimously.

Churchwardens' Report:

Senior Warden: D. Miller

Boiler: Expanded range of bids for the new boiler were received today in response to our RFP of August 2. With winter coming, the boiler must be replaced right away. Vestry must select a plumbing contractor by September 1. Bids are based on the same specs: two new Lochinvar hot water boilers model FTX500.

- Postler & Jaeckle Corp.: \$113, 038.00
- Boyce & Drake Co. Inc.: \$89, 210.00 – Recommend replacing the existing domestic water heater with a 50-gallon, natural gas power vent model at an additional cost of \$2,943.00 (\$92,153 total)
- B&B Plumbing Inc.: \$79,150.00 – Excludes prevailing wage rates, \$4,385.00 material tax and performance bond
- Bourque Mechanical Systems Inc.: \$66,400.00
- Mulholland's On Call LLC: \$37,500.00 – This bid does not meet RFP specs.

In the ensuing discussion, K Finkbeiner noted that church requires a commercial boiler. The existing residential-grade boiler is not robust enough. The two-boiler system ensures that a single boiler will not have to run at full capacity for extended periods, and offers redundancy in case of boiler failure. S Rucker asked whether we need two boilers, and if it would be less expensive to have a single boiler system. J Van der Veer noted that the boilers are not a primary with 'back-up,' but are a system that will run in parallel. Redundancy is important. D Miller and K Finkbeiner will follow up on the questions raised. Once the answers are sent out by email,

then the Vestry will vote by email. Fr Wallace added that we will need to restrict access to the boiler upon installation.

Michael Dubb Meeting: Fr Wallace, D Miller and G Boyd met with Michael Dubb of the Adelphi Hotel. Discussed Mercy House project and Adelphi construction project. Good news for Bethesda is that we will not be in danger of structural damage from their construction. Adelphi will not be blasting. Bedrock will be removed by chemical process.

Mercy House: There is no update on the donor gift. Building permit is with the city for approval. L Kszan asked if we have an updated construction budget, reported that developer Rick Higgins suggested using a general estimate of 20% increase in building costs post-pandemic. D Miller explained that getting an updated construction budget will incur additional costs. Noted that pre-pandemic budget was at \$11.5M. D Wilder wondered why, if we have stopped activity, are we still spending on the building permit, and how often are we following up on donor? D Miller responded that follow up occurs every two weeks. Building permit is in process, not a new item. M MacDonald expressed concern that the project has gone on for 8 years without coming to fruition. So much time has gone by that more and more people are asking what has become of their donations.

Railing: P Houde asked about the railing. D Miller reiterated that the railing repair to be done during roof work; roof to be completed by November 2021.

Stewardship/2022 Pledge Drive: The 2022 Stewardship Committee will be: D Miller, S Manny, J Van der Veer, K Finkbeiner, and Fr Wallace plus Bob Bullock and two additional members at large from the parish. Dates of the drive are October 3, 10 and 17. The committee will meet on September 8 at 7pm at the church office.

Commission Reports:

Plan B Committee:

53 Spring Update: L Kszan

The building at 53 Spring Street is still for sale. City Hall confirms the property (tax ID 165.68-1-51) is located within the Architectural and Historic District and within the T-5 District. To renovate the building to include a church hall/reception space, kitchen, offices, and an apartment, we would need to get a Site Plan Approval as well as a Special Use Permit from the Planning Board. The proposed uses would not require a variance. The city requires a 2-story minimum and allows a 50-ft max height for a building in the T-5 District. Any changes to this building will require historical and architectural review. Parking requirements for the building may pose a problem. Without funds in place, and without Vestry agreement, Parish involvement or Standing Committee approval, this option is on hold.

Undercroft and Further Recommendations: S Rucker

As members of the Vestry, we have a responsibility to be prudent stewards of the resources of Bethesda, and to make decisions which will help to ensure its future for the long-term. As

demonstrated by the recent endowment report, Bethesda has very little money. We don't have the money right now to buy another building, or to renovate the undercroft. We can continue to explore our options, but it would be imprudent and irresponsible to commit to anything without a definite funding source.

In searching for new options, the committee was led to an extraordinary realization. Bethesda is on the verge of receiving one of the most important donations in its history, yet the Vestry has never had a debate about what to do with the funds. That money was nearly spent without us even considering any other possibility other than to fully dedicate it to the Mercy House project. We must exercise our duties as stewards of Bethesda. We recommend that the Vestry consider setting aside some of the funds to endow Bethesda's future. Similarly, examination of the interior and exterior of Bethesda Church reveals several generations of deferred maintenance. Prior vestries could plead lack of funds, but what of us if we receive a multimillion-dollar donation, but choose not to ensure the stability of the building for the next few generations? We recommend that we fulfill our responsibility to ensure that Bethesda enters its third century with no deferred maintenance.

Discussion: D Miller noted that over the years the Vestry has approved each step of the Mercy House project. Doesn't want to throw out years of work, but acknowledges that the passage of time has had an impact on the project costs. Fr Wallace asked if previous Vestries had discussed how donor funds might be used, and whether any money was to be allocated to Bethesda. D Miller said proposed operating income of Mercy House at \$30-50K per year would have been used for church maintenance. Some people thought that the whole donation was intended for Mercy House. D Wilder asked if there are any restrictions on how donor funds may be allocated, and expressed concern that after repairs and endowment there will not be enough money to cover the construction of Mercy House as it is currently configured. K Finkbeiner suggested creating a punch list of deferred maintenance items with costs attached.

Fr Wallace expressed concern that the initial Parish House project has changed into a project that is grasping for money. This is having an unintended effect: people are withholding donations to Bethesda out of concern about how Mercy House funds are being administered. Giving will not increase until Mercy House is settled. Fr Wallace began his work at Bethesda committed to Mercy House, however he is now concerned about its effect upon the parish. P Houde stated we need to act, take a vote, because if we do nothing, we risk losing the church altogether. F Horne stated we need to take a broad look at the overall needs of the parish and take our responsibility seriously. J Van der Veer stated we must communicate information to the parish. Fr Wallace responded that he finds no desire in the parish to proceed with Mercy House. He is concerned about the bell tower, the crypt and the endowment having been spent. Growth in this parish will come from young families, not rich people. Would prefer to focus on Christian outreach rather than money. D Wilder noted that after the conditions report of 2016 there has been a lot of time to fix those items, yet most are not done. P Houde confirms that president of donor company told her personally that he wants Bethesda to set up an endowment.

Motion One: I move that the Vestry: a) allocate sufficient funds from the prospective donation to cover the remaining deferred maintenance in the Bethesda church building including but not limited to interior repairs, the windows project, the tower, the undercroft, and boiler, and: b) allocate funds for Bethesda's endowment with a goal of setting aside at least \$3 million. Any remaining funds are to be allocated to the creation of new parish space.

Steve Rucker, movant; Karen Finkbeiner, second; Vote: all in favor, except D Miller abstained

Motion Two: I move that the Vestry suspend the incurring of any additional New Parish House commitments and request an exit plan from the Mercy House board of directors for information purposes, with a goal of having the information available to the Vestry by the September 21 Vestry meeting.

Field Horne, movant; Steve Rucker, second; Vote: all in favor, except D Miller abstained

J Van der Veer stated that Gordon Boyd should be informed immediately. Fr Wallace and D Miller will speak with Gordon.

D Miller stated an email blast must go out to the congregation informing them of the Vestry's decision to reprioritize and laying out the reasons.

Fr Wallace wants to have a congregational meeting on Sunday September 12. There will be one service at 9:15am followed by a meeting. There will be many questions from the congregation, and we must be prepared for some angry responses.

D Miller added that he has an addition to Plan B. There is a possibility that the Adelphi Hotel will sell the former Parish House back to Bethesda. Plan B committee to follow up.

Next meeting: Tuesday September 21

Blessing and Adjournment

Blessing by Fr. Wallace

Meeting was adjourned at 9:57pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Laura Kszan, on behalf of Ann C. Bullock, Clerk