

St. Mary of the Hills  
Vestry Meeting Minutes  
Via Video Conference (Due to inclement weather)  
January 16, 2024

Vestry Members Present: Mike Austell (Senior Warden), Bob Finney (Junior Warden), Joe Doswell, Buddy Fore, Sue Sweeting, Leslie Billingsley, Burt Mulford, Michelle Curry, Jim Snow, Jill Storelli, Marshall Culp, Lynn Searfoss

Others Present: Fr. Andrew Hege (Rector), Elizabeth Sudderth (Clerk), Fr. Sam Tallman (Priest Associate), Amanda White (Treasurer)

Fr. Andrew called the meeting to order.

Fr. Andrew requested acceptance of the meeting agenda.  
Lynn Searfoss made a motion with a second from Leslie Billingsley to accept the meeting agenda.  
The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew requested approval of the December meeting minutes.  
Sue Sweeting made a motion to approve the December minutes as presented.  
Bob Finney seconded the motion.  
All members of the Vestry who were present for the December meeting approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew led a devotion for Early Evening.

Amanda White shared the Treasurer's report.  
The parish has a very healthy cash balance on hand. For comparison, last year at this time, cash on hand was \$397,349 and at this time it is \$435,171. Also, the balance in the trust and endowments is currently \$1,036,937 as compared with \$960,708 at this time last year. As Amanda detailed in her report, the parish is in a very, very good cash position. Fr. Andrew noted one reason for this is that a few unexpected contributions came in late in December. Andrew reported that as Allen Wealth Management completes financial documents in the coming weeks, they will be distributed to the Vestry, rather than waiting until the next Vestry meeting.

Fr. Andrew reflected on taking some time to pause and review our roles in the parish and our work. Andrew posted the following documents for the Vestry to review, especially our new Vestry members:

- Vestry Handbook from the Diocese
- Vestry Covenant developed by Fr. Andrew
- Culture of Courtesy

Andrew spent time highlighting areas of particular importance in helping parish leadership work well together and with the congregation. He reviewed the Chart of Roles, both for Clergy and Vestry, in the Vestry Handbook. He noted his belief that Vestry service is a call to be “wise elders” of the congregation. He also reviewed qualifications for Vestry service. Regarding attendance at worship, Andrew asked that all members of the Vestry, at least a couple of times a year, attend the Sunday service that is not their “usual”. If you normally attend the 8AM service, attend the 10:10 and vice versa. It is good for all of us to feel the differences in worship between the two services.

First and foremost, Andrew asks that all Vestry members be **intentional** in prayer, both for each other and our parish. Andrew reminded everyone that, as part of his daily routine, he prays in particular for one Vestry member each day. Other responsibilities of parish leaders are to demonstrate a positive attitude, model direct and Christ-like communication, and, of particular importance, to practice confidentiality. Andrew encouraged Vestry members to always be willing to both speak up, and to listen to one another, and have a sense of risk.

A comment was made by a Vestry member that when parish members raise concerns with them, the Vestry member should make sure they know the concern will be discussed with Fr. Andrew. He stresses strong communication.

When discussing elements of the Vestry Covenant, Fr. Andrew commented that he is planning to get documents for our meetings to the Vestry no later than the Friday prior to the Vestry meeting, and he requests that others who have documents to share for our meetings please also adhere to that deadline.

Andrew discussed the importance of supporting decisions made by the Vestry as a whole once a decision has been reached. Going forward as one body after decisions are made, even at times we do not agree, is so important.

Andrew intends to respect our plan to stick to a duration of 90 minutes for Vestry meetings. At times when a particular topic seems to need more time, Andrew will ask Vestry members if the issue can be tabled until the next meeting, or if the group is willing to extend the meeting by a few minutes. When he prepares our meeting agenda, he allots an amount of time for each item. Going forward, he is planning to be more intentional about adhering to those time allotments. He asked Elizabeth to help keep us on track with that. A Vestry member suggested that we set aside a few minutes to wrap up topics and gauge what we accomplished near the end of our meetings. Fr. Andrew agreed this is a good idea. He will build this into our agendas going forward.

A question was asked about how best to balance confidentiality versus transparency. Andrew reflected on a few questions to ask ourselves when evaluating this issue.

What is the goal?

What is the intent?

Does it build up the community rather than do harm?

These are good questions to reflect upon.

Bob Finney shared the Junior Warden's report.

Bell Tower: The repair work should begin at the end of January and be completed in mid-March. The crew doing the work is scheduled to arrive each workday at 7:30am. Since that is before staff members typically arrive at the church, Bob asked for volunteers from Vestry to take occasional turns unlocking the church for the work crew so that the responsibility is not his every day. A few Vestry members volunteered to help with this. The work crew will end their work days Monday-Friday at 4:30pm.

We will lose one parking space in our lot for the duration of the project. The contractor will place a storage shed on that space to store tools and material.

Frontal Cabinets in Sacristy: We have a bid from Precision Cabinets in the amount of \$4,700. Bob contacted five companies for bids, but only Precision submitted a design and bid. The Altar Guild has approved the design. To save money, we will have to remove the old cabinet. Bob will ask for volunteers from the Building and Grounds committee.

Bob made a proposal that the Vestry approve the contract with Precision Cabinets for the purchase of the new frontal storage cabinet in the amount of \$4,700. The funds would come from the Capital Endowment account.

Floor in Sacristy: Bob is still waiting for a quote from Midway Carpet on replacing the floor in the Sacristy.

Bell Tower-New Issue: During the heavy rains this past week we discovered the bell tower roof was leaking. JDS Roofing and Seamless Gutters investigated and discovered the rubber roof had improper glue holding the rubber panels together. This allows for separation and leaking through the seams. They fixed the problem. Bob will monitor to make sure the repair holds.

While climbing the stairs in the bell tower to get access to the roof, Bob discovered that the stairs were defective, creating a safety hazard. Bob talked to VPC Contracting, the contractor for the bell tower repair, and the stairs can be repaired by them for a minimal cost and can be included in their scheduled work.

HVAC Systems: Bill Devereux and Bob discovered that our HVAC systems have not had preventive maintenance checks in over a year. They are also in agreement that our current service provider, B&R Heating and Air, has not been satisfactory. They are exploring using a different contractor for future work. They are planning to use Edmisten Heating and Air this week to perform preventive maintenance checks. Bob would appreciate recommendations from Vestry members on a new company to contact for future needs. Bob would like to try 2 or 3 companies to find the best service provider before we enter into a service contract.

Jim Snow made a motion with a second from Jill Storelli to approve the hiring of Precision Cabinets to build the new cabinet for frontal storage in the Sacristy at a cost of \$4,700.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Mike Austell shared the Senior Warden's report.

Mike expressed his thanks to Fr. Andrew and the Vestry for trusting him with this position. He is looking forward to closer involvement with the parish and notes our year is starting out well.

Fr. Andrew shared the Rector's report.

He noted our recent winter weather, which is just a part of our lives here in the mountains. He reminded the Vestry it will always be his intention to hold scheduled services at St. Mary's. If no announcement is made, services will be held, as planned. If Fr. Andrew is unable to get to the Church, and a service needs to be cancelled, notice will be sent out at least an hour ahead of the scheduled start time. No one should feel pressured to put themselves in danger when scheduled to serve in some way—we will always find a way to adapt and cover.

Greta Wilson is set to retire at the beginning of February. Her last day in the office will be Friday, February 2. A festive "Coffee Minute" in her honor will take place following the 10:10 service on Sunday, February 4.

Lindsey Herring is shifting into her full-time role as Director of Christian Formation and Communication. She is in the process of taking over communication duties from Greta, to ensure a continuation of what has been happening, before making any significant changes.

Lindsey will be away some of next week to attend the annual Forma Conference at Kanuga in Hendersonville. This is one of the largest annual conferences in Christian Formation and connects leaders from across the Episcopal Church.

Andrew noted that while Lindsey will spend most of her work hours in the office, she will work remotely some as well. Her hours will be nailed down as she takes over her new role.

Following up from last month's Vestry meeting, the parish engaged Elk River Recruiting to assist in the search and hiring process for our new Director of Administration and Finance. Regarding questions about retention, Elk River's payment schedule is stretched over three months following any hire; if the employee were to leave at any point during that period, or in the following month, Elk River would once again assist in the search and hire process, without additional cost. The Executive Committee reviewed this proposal and approved moving forward with Elk River Recruiting.

Andrew has completed initial interviews for the Director of Administration and Finance position. A finalist candidate will be coming in this week to interview with Andrew, Amanda White, and Lindsey, before an offer is made to join the team.

A Vestry member noted how important communication is as new and current staff members live into their new duties; she stressed the need for communication to the parish as to who they should contact for various needs. Who is responsible for what? Fr. Andrew met with Lindsey today on this issue.

Regular Sunday morning Christian Formation offerings resumed after Epiphany, on Sunday, January 7.

Godly Play is offered each Sunday morning at 9:00am in the St. Luke Room.

The Rector's Forum is currently in the midst of a five-week series on the First Letter to the Corinthians, appointed for us to read from the Lectionary in these weeks following Epiphany.

Plans are being made for Lenten formation offerings, beginning mid-February.

**Important Dates Upcoming:**

Thurs., January 18 @12noon: Eucharist for The Feast of the Confession of St. Peter

Thurs., January 25@7:30am: Eucharist for The Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul

Men's Breakfast follows in the Parish Hall

Fri., February 2 @ 9:00am: Eucharist for The Feast of the Presentation

Wed., February 14: Ash Wednesday (Holy Eucharist and Imposition at 7:00am, 12:00noon, and 6:00pm)

Sun., February 18: A Concert in Honor of Black History Month (Time TBD)

Sun., June 9: Bishop McLoughlin's Rescheduled Visitation

**Some Figures from 2023:**

Average Sunday Attendance: 143

Holy Eucharists Offered: 212

Daily Offices Offered: 239

Baptisms: 6

Weddings: 4

Burials: 6

**Wrap Up Time:**

It was noted that it is great to have all Vestry members present for the meeting.

A Vestry member commented that it is good to know ahead of time what some of the agenda items will be at next month's meeting.

Fr. Andrew noted that Elizabeth will be helping us to stay on track with the times allotted for the agenda items.

Joe Doswell made a motion to adjourn with a second from Bob Finney at 7:01pm.

Fr. Andrew closed with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,  
Elizabeth Sudderth, Clerk of the Vestry

