

St. Mary of the Hills
Vestry Meeting Minutes
January 17, 2023

Vestry Members Present (In person): Chip Monroe (Senior Warden), Bob Finney (Junior Warden), Sue Sweeting, Leslie Billingsley, Marjory Holder, Patty Patella; (Via Zoom): Faith Jones, Mike Austell, Burt Mulford, Joe Doswell, Buddy Fore

Vestry Member Absent: Michelle Curry

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

Fr. Andrew called the meeting to order at 5:33pm.

Fr. Andrew requested acceptance of the meeting agenda.
Sue Sweeting made a motion with a second from Marjory Holder to accept the meeting agenda.
The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew requested approval of the December meeting minutes as submitted.
Marjory Holder made a motion to approve the December meeting minutes.
Leslie Billingsley seconded the motion.

Amanda White shared the Treasurer's report.
Last month expenses exceeded income but YTD the parish is in a very healthy financial position.
Contributions are still coming in for the Heifer Project. We have not raised enough money for an Ark yet, but Amanda noted that in past years enough is usually raised once all funds come in.
Amanda encouraged anyone interested to feel free to join the Finance committee.
Leslie Billingsley made a motion to accept the Treasurer's report.
Bob Finney seconded the motion.
The Vestry approved the motion.

Amanda also shared the possibility of changing the bank the church uses. We currently bank with First Citizens. They are in the process of raising some transaction fees including an increase in wire transfers from \$25 to \$100. This is the method we use for various charitable donations, especially international ones. Also, service at First Citizens has not always been good. Amanda has reached out to other banks to compare fees and

services. The Finance committee will meet on January 24 and will review this issue. Amanda will report to Vestry next month on any possible action to consider.

Fr. Andrew shared a stewardship update. As of January 10, a total of 124 pledges have been received totaling \$466,959. Forty-three households increased the amount they pledged over last year. Thirteen pledges have been received from households which have not pledged before. Andrew noted this is a sign of health, life, and vitality in the parish. Four households which normally pledge have not done so yet; if they do pledge the amount they pledged last year, approximately an additional \$12,500 may still come in. Andrew noted that 100% of Vestry members have submitted their pledges. Andrew asked that each Vestry member write 10 to 12 notes expressing the church's appreciation to all those who have pledged. The church is supplying note cards and stamps and a list of names to each Vestry member.

Fr. Andrew reviewed the Vestry covenant so that Vestry members can give feedback on the document. Andrew asked what stands out to Vestry members and how Vestry members feel about the covenant. Examples of comments were: maybe we can do a better job of speaking up in Vestry meetings, the goal of striving toward consensus is a positive one, supporting decisions made by the Vestry is very important. Andrew will review the Vestry covenant every 3 months and suggest changes as he feels appropriate. Fr. Andrew spoke on the issue of delineating between confidentiality vs. secrecy. Andrew noted that secrecy builds up the individual rather than the entire body. He also stressed the importance of our meetings happening at our meetings-not at coffee minute, in the parking lot, etc. so that all can participate and no one misses an opportunity to express their views. Andrew also shared that he feels particularly led to be available to Vestry members for counsel and nurturing of our spiritual lives. An idea has been brought to Fr. Andrew to start our meetings a little later. This was discussed and was noted as being helpful to those on Vestry who work late or drive a good distance. Andrew suggested we try starting our meetings at 5:45 rather than 5:30 for a couple of months and see how that goes. Andrew will make sure the Vestry minutes are posted on a bulletin board in the Parish Hall as well as on the church website. A suggestion was made to return to the practice of Andrew allotting a particular amount of time to each item on the agenda and listing it on the agenda. Andrew agreed and asked Vestry members to review the agenda when distributed prior to the meetings and take note of the suggestion of how much time to devote to each agenda item.

Marjory Holder shared an update on the proposed sound enhancement project. She noted that several months ago the Vestry stated their intention to make this project a top priority for consideration in 2023.

Fr. Andrew has identified improving sound in the Nave as a pastoral need. This issue was also identified 4 years ago during our interim period and is a topic of increasing

discussion among Episcopal churches around the country. There are multiple goals for such a proposed system:

- To improve the clergy's ability to get their message across while preaching
- To make lectors clear and intelligible all the way to the back of the church
- To increase congregational participation in the service-both in singing and in corporate prayer. This makes our church more welcoming when folks in the pews can hear each other and feel supported by them and by the organ when lifting their voices together.

The Technology committee began looking into our options in the Fall of 2021. They received 7 proposals from 5 vendors, ranging in price from \$65,000 to \$730,000 and interviewed 4 of them. The systems fall into two categories:

Sound amplification: Placing microphones and speakers throughout the Nave to make the sound louder everywhere. This system works well in a "live" acoustic in a large space where the room does the work of spreading the sound around naturally, but where the volume is lost as the sound waves travel.

Sound enhancement: This system places several microphones and runs the signals through a digital processor to multiple speakers throughout the Nave.

The processor mimics a good natural acoustic by making speech more intelligible (as if the walls around the chancel were more reflective), and spreading natural sound around the Nave so those in the church can hear each other and feel as if they are not alone and singing or praying too loudly as well as making sure that low frequencies from the organ, which currently fade significantly before reaching the front, actually make it all the way forward. This system is best for a small, "dry" or "dead" acoustic like St. Mary's.

Using a sound amplification system in a small space like St. Mary's will raise sound volume to an uncomfortable level in areas of the Nave that can already hear, in order to raise it to an acceptable level in "trouble spots". The committee made it clear to the vendors that our church is looking for a warm, natural sound and the system must be aesthetically unobtrusive. The system the Vestry would approve would be connected to the laptop for livestreaming so we would have clear audio to match the video quality of the stream. We currently get lots of complaints about the poor audio quality of our stream.

The proposal for a sound enhancement system from CIAV would cost \$177,150 plus around \$10,000 for electrical work. This is an impressive system using a d&b digital sound processor made in Germany. Fr. Andrew and members of the committee had a thorough demonstration of the system in Asheville. They propose using 8 microphones, 6 column speakers along the sides of the Nave, 16 small cube speakers in front of the corbels, and 3 subwoofers in the apex of the roof, all color-matched to our wood. We had a second proposal using the d&b processor for about \$30,000 more.

However, the Technology committee recommends the sound enhancement system proposed by WAVE. Some people may remember Ron Aldridge from a demonstration

he facilitated during our Interim period. Sound systems have advanced greatly since then.

The proposal for a sound enhancement system from WAVE would cost \$115,000 plus electrical work (\$60,000 less than the CIAv proposal) using a Dante/Venueflex processor, Dell amplifiers, and speakers made in Concord, NC and controlled through an iPad. They propose 8 microphones and 24 small cube speakers up on the front side of the beams so they and their cables are the least visible. WAVE also has a PhD Acoustician who will be active in designing our system.

Both proposals have similar guarantees and warranties. Speakers usually last the longest in such a system, up to 15 years.

These were the prices as of last August. At that time, there was consensus among the Vestry on the need for a sound enhancement system, and action was postponed until completion of the Reserve Study (capital needs vs. the Capital Endowment reserves), which Bob Finney presented late last year. That study shows that there are ample Capital Endowment funds available for this system and lists it as a top priority for those funds this year. There is a concern that putting off this project further will result in a price increase that we will be unable to absorb.

Leslie Billingsley made a motion to approve the proposal of the Technology committee to move forward with purchase and installation of a sound enhancement system from WAVE as detailed above.

Bob Finney seconded the motion.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Vestry members discussed the process which led to the committee's recommendation of the WAVE system. It was noted that the demonstration that Fr. Andrew and several Technology committee members attended in Asheville was installed in a space similar to our Nave. Bob Finney commented that the system there showed distinct quality enhancement in the space and demonstrated the same sound quality in different areas of the space. A question was asked of Marjory as to the estimated time until the system could be installed. Marjory guessed it would be six months or so. In response to another question Marjory noted that if our needs change in the next few years, the system itself won't have to be changed but the components may need updating. She noted it will help lengthen the life of the system if it is used only when needed.

Fr. Andrew asked Marjory to confirm the current pricing and to request a contract for the Vestry to review line by line. Then a time will be set aside for discussion with the congregation regarding the project.

Fr. Andrew appointed a group to shepherd the project going forward of Marjory, Sue Sweeting, and Bob Finney.

Patty Patella shared the allocation approved by the Outreach committee this month.

Andy Bryant and Holly Whitesides, a local couple \$1,000

To help with renovating their home and going through the remediation process of red mold removal

Sue Sweeting made a motion with a second from Chip Monroe to endorse this allocation.

The Vestry approved the motion.

The Outreach committee will determine the most appropriate way to get the funds to the family, perhaps by paying the contractor directly. The family has a GoFundMe active at this time, but we want all of the funds to go to the family without a fee going to someone else.

Fr. Andrew reminded the Vestry of the opportunity to volunteer on Wednesday, February 15 at F.A.R. M. Café in Boone at Buy Boone Lunch. There are 3 shifts open for volunteering. Andrew will send details to the Vestry.

Bob Finney shared the Junior Warden's report.

Work is progressing on the play space as weather permits. The footer is in place along with the French drain at the bottom of the footer. The next step is to build the rock veneer that will be the visible outer barrier of the play area. It has been determined that town code requires shrubbery/trees between the southern wall of the play space and the parking lot/driveway of the Village Green Condos. Thanks to the efforts of Carmen Patella, a contractor, David Aldridge, has been found to install the required plant screen for FREE. He will install twelve 6-7 foot tall Emerald Green Arborvitae. These plants will grow to a height of about 15 feet, are hardy, and require very low maintenance. Mr. Aldridge is licensed and insured. We will also have to get approval from the town's planning department before work can start (probably in April).

Mr. Aldridge has also offered to redo the flower bed in front of the church for FREE. This would include several boulders in front where the Sugar Maple died and building a small edge defining the bed. New plants in the bed would be rhododendrons or mountain laurels along with bulbs and possibly other perennials to add splashes of color. The ferns would be removed.

Bob proposes the Vestry authorize the expenditure of \$500-\$1,000 to reimburse him for the gas for his trucks and equipment. All the work he is offering to donate would have cost the church between \$7,000 and \$8,000.

Work is complete on the storeroom. We are waiting on Creekside Electronics to install the heat sensor inside the storeroom. This heat sensor will be connected to the church fire alarm system. The Grounds committee has installed shelves inside the storeroom using shelving that was found inside the church. The committee plans to do some earth moving outside the storeroom to make it easier to reach. They will also put down gravel to permit access to the storeroom without stepping in mud. The area around the storeroom has been cleaned up.

The heat sensor in the Bell Tower is not working. We are waiting on Creekside Electronics to obtain the part and install it.

The mortar in the rock steps on Chestnut Drive and the walkway between the Parish Hall and the Mary Garden has deteriorated leaving only sand in many areas. Bob is looking for a stone mason to repair the mortar. It has been determined that a large part of the reason for the deterioration is the use of Ice Melt. We will switch to using creek sand. It will not melt the ice but will leave a coarse surface to add some traction. Bob will

call the contractor who does the grounds maintenance and snow removal to instruct him not to use any Ice Melt.

Despite attempts to save the hemlock tree on the NW corner of the building it appears to be dying. An arborist looked at the tree a few days ago and submitted an estimate of \$2,100 to take out the tree and grind out the stump. The Landscape committee will decide what to replace the tree with.

Chip Monroe shared the Senior Warden's report.

There are 2 areas that Chip would like the Vestry to spend some time thinking about. Regarding the written reports that are being submitted prior to Vestry meetings-would it be possible to have the presenter hit the high points and give any updated information since the reports were already available for Vestry to read and mull over? Then time could be used for questions and further discussion if needed. Also, does the entire Vestry need to meet each month? Something to discuss and consider.

Regarding the Tour of Homes-would it be a good idea to have a specific (or a few specific) organizations that we could direct the Tour proceeds towards? Or do we want to continue as we have with using an application process for many organizations to share the wealth? Something to consider and discuss.

Fr. Andrew shared the Rector's report.

Tim Silver sent a report to Andrew on the information he gathered on the feasibility of solar panels being added to a portion of the church roof.

Eagle Solar determined that the cost of solar panels, even accounting for a federal rebate, would not be justified. The panels would NOT produce enough power for the setup to pay for itself over 25 years. We just do not get enough sun to make it work. The woman from Eagle Solar did tell Tim that there are churches in the Eastern part of the state which could benefit from solar power but need funding. She suggested if the Vestry were interested in this in the future, we could donate the \$40,000 we would have spent on the project here to two of those churches to make it possible for them to get solar panels installed.

She also put Tim in touch with someone who could do an energy audit of our facility to see if there are any ways we can conserve energy and reduce our carbon footprint. Tim can contact them to find out the cost if the Vestry decides they are interested.

Andrew shared the Vestry will get the Parochial report soon which details all services and programs of the parish last year.

Our average Sunday attendance in 2022 was 107.

Our average Sunday attendance in 2021 was 81.

He noted that in the Episcopal Church as a whole the average Sunday attendance in 2021 was 26.

Andrew shared that representatives from Rumble Presbyterian met with him last week to explore ways to collaborate on Children and Youth Christian Formation. A Vacation Bible School partnership is one idea being discussed.

Andrew expressed gratitude from himself and his family for the Christmas bonus he received. He also passed along the thanks of the church staff for their bonuses.

He also expressed gratitude for everyone who worked so hard to make Christmas happen in our church including Buddy Fore and his crew who handled the greening of the church, Patty Patella and her crew who did the flowers, Sue and the rest of the Altar Guild for their work, and the acolytes and lectors. He noted all this work was done in a COLD church as the furnace was out!

He shared today is the 8th anniversary of his priestly ordination and he could not be more grateful to be here in our parish.

Patty Patella shared the Outreach committee is planning a luncheon or breakfast highlighting Outreach projects soon.

Fr. Andrew adjourned the meeting at 7:12pm

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Sudderth, Clerk of the Vestry.