

St. Mary of the Hills  
Vestry Meeting Minutes  
October 15, 2024

Vestry Members Present: (In Person) Mike Austell (Senior Warden), Marshall Culp (Junior Warden), Sue Sweeting, Joe Doswell, Jill Storelli, Leslie Billingsley, Buddy Fore  
(Via Zoom) Michelle Curry, Jim Snow, Lynn Searfoss

Vestry Member Absent: Burt Mulford

Others Present: Fr. Andrew Hege (Rector), Elizabeth Sudderth (Clerk), Bob Amos (Vestry-Elect), Mike Matthews (Vestry-Elect)

Fr. Andrew called the meeting to order at 5:46pm.

Fr. Andrew requested acceptance of the meeting agenda.

Leslie Billingsley made a motion with a second from Joe Doswell to accept the agenda as presented.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew requested approval of the September meeting minutes.

Sue Sweeting made a motion with a second from Leslie Billingsley to approve the September meeting minutes as presented.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew led a devotion for the early evening.

Fr. Andrew reviewed the Treasurer's report in Amanda White's absence.

The written report was shared with the Vestry.

Andrew noted that many checks were written from the Tour of Homes account in September to fulfill approved grant requests.

Jill Storelli made a motion with a second from Leslie Billingsley to approve the Treasurer's report.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew noted that the audit report is not complete but should be ready next month.

The delay could not be avoided. The CPA who is working on the audit, Misty Watson, recently had COVID. Misty also does quite a bit of work for Watauga County and has spent much time recently on FEMA documents, etc. for the County in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

Andrew noted the CD at First Horizon matured at the end of September. Andrew reviewed the options the Finance committee has considered for the next option for those

funds. The Finance committee recommends the Vestry approve entering into another CD at First Horizon for a 6-month term at 4.25%.

Sue Sweeting made a motion with a second from Joe Doswell to approve entering into another CD at First Horizon as described above.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew gave an update on the annual giving campaign. The letter to kick off the campaign was ready to be sent out on September 30; then Hurricane Helene swept through our area. The letter was redone and will go out to the parish shortly. In-gathering Sunday is November 3. Parishioners may fill out a pledge card online or use the pledge cards they will receive in the letter. Pledge cards will also be in the pew racks.

Mike Austell shared the allocations endorsed by the Outreach committee this month:

Episcopal Relief and Development	\$3,000
Wine To Water	\$2,000
Total	\$5,000

Mike reported that the Rise To Hunger event will be postponed until April; therefore the previously allocated \$4,000 that the committee had planned to donate to that effort will not be spent this calendar year. The committee feels it is crucial to hold those funds as the need for flood relief in the Western part of our state will be ongoing and massive. Sue Sweeting made a motion with a second from Leslie Billingsley to approve the \$5,000 in donations endorsed by the Outreach committee this month.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew led a lengthy discussion on the emotional life cycle of disasters and our ongoing response to Hurricane Helene.

Andrew shared a handout of a graphic created by Episcopal Relief and Development which illustrates this process of how we move through a disaster and its aftermath from an emotional standpoint. ERD has more than 80 years of disaster relief experience. They have long-lasting relationships in many areas and communities which have experienced various types of disasters. For example, ERD was on the ground in Louisiana for 7 years after Hurricane Katrina. They are already in our Diocese post Helene. One small but vital example of their practical work is obtaining a working cell phone for Bishop Jose in the immediate aftermath of the storm so that he could reach out to account for all clergy in the Diocese, a process that took 8 days due to the spotty, and in some areas, almost non-existent cell service. Andrew also noted that many of our own parishioners pitched in to help in so many ways to do hands-on work all over the area. Many area churches banded together, including those who did not necessarily see eye to eye on doctrine, but who put their differences aside to show incredible community cohesion in this time of crisis. Andrew reminded us that as large organizations leave the area, the needs will remain and change. As we move forward, he asked us to consider how we fix what was broken before the disaster. Issues such as the

lack of affordable housing in our area are large, long-term problems which are especially highlighted in times of disaster and its aftermath. He noted this is the time to check in on those we know with mental health challenges or addiction history. Andrew noted that triggering events such as wind and helicopter sounds will be issues for many people for a long time to come. Also, anniversaries of the hurricane will continue to be triggering for many.

The hope is that in most communities post-disaster, the situations are better and healthier than before the disaster. Andrew noted that three clergy colleagues have called him in the past few days asking what we need; he asked them to check in with him in a few weeks.

A Vestry member commented that survivor guilt and PTSD are real issues now.

Andrew noted that Boone United Methodist Church is planning a communal service soon (date TBA). Andrew will share the date when it is announced.

He noted that we are also in the midst of a very divisive election season which pits people against one another. Disillusionment is very normal right now. We need to show each other grace; we don't know where others are in this journey. It was suggested that perhaps small group gatherings might be held to check in on one another as the disaster recovery continues. It was also noted that it is very important to give kids space to share their feelings, as well as adults. We need to utilize the talents in our parish to gather folks together.

Andrew shared that he has been given financial gifts to share as he sees needs arise in our area.

Both Mike Austell, Senior Warden, and Marshall Culp, Junior Warden, submitted their written reports to the Vestry and those reports are available for review.

Mike's report addressed the Hurricane Helene disaster and its aftermath.

Marshall's report addressed:

- Update to the work in the Sacristy

- Installation of handrail down the steps in the attic is planned

- Hooks to be placed on outside of louver of Bell Tower for Christmas wreath

- Fireplace repairs in Parish Hall

- Delay in minor tree removal and limbing of branches alongside Nursery

- Delay in discussions with landscapers re: retaining wall on SE corner of building

- The great news that the building and grounds sustained no damage due to the

  - Hurricane and only minor water leakage occurred in the Bell Tower; the church does have \$5M in flood insurance but no claim will need to be submitted

Fr. Andrew noted he has been deeply moved by our parish response to other traumatic events such as hosting more than 300 people for Adam Hill's funeral service on the eve of the hurricane.

Andrew shared that the Diocesan Convention will not be held in person due to the hurricane. The 2025 Convention will be held in Cherokee.

Friday evening the work of the Convention will take place virtually. Bishop Jose is calling for a Diocesan-wide day of service and hurricane relief work on the Saturday of Convention weekend. Andrew reported that the Cathedral in Asheville sustained major damage and may not be used again for as much as 2 years.

Andrew reported that the Valle Crucis Conference Center will be hosting the kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students from Valle Crucis Elementary School as the school sustained devastating damage from flooding due to the hurricane. He noted that our support of the Conference Center has helped make this possible.

Wrap-Up time:

What did we accomplish?

Approved the funding of outreach allocations

Shared our feelings as a community; many noted this was exactly what we needed

Mike Austell made a motion with a second from Sue Sweeting to adjourn the meeting at 7:04pm.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew closed with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,  
Elizabeth Sudderth, Clerk of the Vestry