

St. Mary of the Hills  
Vestry Meeting Minutes, September 21, 2021  
Via Video Conference

Members Present: Tim Silver (Senior Warden), Doug Galke (Junior Warden), Faith Jones, Marjory Holder, Jim West, Sterling Hutcheson, E.B. Springs, Roy McCraw, Patty Patella, Gigi Poole, Lisa Kaufmann, Chip Monroe

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

Incoming Vestry Members: Leslie Billingsley, Joe Doswell, Bob Finney

Fr. Andrew called the meeting to order at 5:32pm.

Fr. Andrew welcomed the 3 incoming Vestry members who are attending the meeting. Fr. Andrew explained to these incoming members that they are welcome at Vestry meetings and may voice their opinions and thoughts, but will not have voting privileges until January 1, 2022.

Marjory Holder made a motion to affirm this policy.

Sterling Hutcheson seconded the motion.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew shared the agenda for the meeting.

E.B. Springs made a motion to accept the agenda as presented.

Patty Patella seconded the motion.

The Vestry approved the motion.

The minutes of the prior meeting were shared.

Sterling Hutcheson made a motion with a second from Gigi Poole to approve the minutes as presented.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew led a devotion for early evening.

Fr. Andrew led a Leadership Check-In. He asked when we have experienced grace unbidden recently. Some examples shared were feeling the presence of God during a friend's health crisis, a visit with a father living independently in his nineties and being able to still experience his stories of an amazing life which included serving our country through military service, and the joy of a granddaughters third birthday party. Fr. Andrew shared that his daughter Eleanor, age 4, recently asked "Where is Jesus and where is God?" after saying the Lord's Prayer with him at bedtime. That served as a reminder to him that experiencing the grace and wonder of God is a lifelong learning process.

Amanda White shared the Treasurers report.

Amanda reported the parish continues to be in a very healthy cash position. She reported that year to date the parish income is up by \$55,073.00. The trust and endowments also continue to do well. She shared that so far this year 73% of pledges have been collected.

Jim West made a motion to approve the Treasurers report.

Faith Jones seconded the motion.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew shared thoughts on regathering in a time of COVID-19.

Bishop Jose has not sent out revised guidelines for parishes to follow regarding worship practices during this time. He is seeking to trust local faith communities to follow guidelines based upon data from their specific area while following Diocesan directives. Fr. Andrew shared there is currently no restriction on the number of attendees in our worship services. Masking is asked of everyone inside the building and masks are readily available to all. At this time, only worship services and support group meetings are held in person. The support groups sometimes meet outside when weather permits.

Doug Galke shared an update on the ad-hoc Grounds work group. This group is comprised of Doug, Tim Silver, Marjory Holder, and Jim West with input from many other parish members.

Doug gave a brief explanation to the incoming Vestry members of the task this group is working on to review the condition of all outside areas of our parish and to make recommendations of possible needs for improvement or repair. The process of reviewing and seeking advice from parish members

continues. When the review is complete, the group will report to the Vestry their findings and suggestions. The report will probably be divided into a timeline based on priority of need. Doug reported the proposed playground area would require a fair amount of site preparation. The group has met so far with one company for a proposal. This is the company who redid the town park/playground.

Fr. Andrew shared the need for a new trustee to be appointed to help oversee the Charitable Trust. Marjory Holder is completing her 3-year term. The other trustees are Bob Miller and John Carlson. The chief duty of the trustees is to meet yearly and review the rolling average of the performance of the trust during the previous 12 quarters. Fr. Andrew notes that between 3 and 6% of the trust proceeds are pulled out and used for outreach purposes each year.

Marjory Holder nominated Chip Myers to serve as trustee for the Charitable Trust for a 3-year term.

Roy McCraw made a motion with a second from Sterling Hutcheson to approve Chip Myers as trustee for the Charitable Trust.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew asked Roy McCraw to share information on a proposed Planned Giving program for the parish.

Roy shared that he, Bill Furr, and Fr. Sam Tallman have been discussing for the past few years a program which would provide a more organized approach to planned giving at St. Mary's. This is seen as a long-range endeavor. The next step in this process would be to communicate any structured planned giving process to the congregation. The plan would be to share information on planned giving a couple of times a year independent of the yearly stewardship campaign. The planned giving program would be handled by the Episcopal Foundation.

Roy suggested to the Vestry that this group be empowered to move forward with this effort in 3 steps: Communicate, Educate, and Facilitate.

Roy stressed this effort would in no way be presented as being in competition with the annual stewardship effort.

Fr. Andrew noted any planned giving program would be set up with Vestry direction and guidelines.

Marjory Holder made a motion to endorse this effort to develop a Planned Giving program.

Patty Patella seconded the motion.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew shared the grant allocations of Tour of Homes proceeds proposed by the Tour of Homes executive committee and the Outreach Committee:

	Blue Ridge Conservancy-Middle Fork Greenway	\$1000.00
	Blowing Rock Cares	\$2080.00
	Blowing Rock Library	\$ 620.00
	Blowing Rock Parks and Recreation	\$
500.00		
	Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture	\$3000.00
	Blowing Rock School	\$4000.00
	BRAHM	\$
500.00		
	Casting Bread Ministry	\$1500.00
	Watauga Children's Council	\$3000.00
	Club 12	\$
500.00		
	Community Care Clinic	\$6200.00
	Crossnore School Inc.	\$
800.00		
	Habitat for Humanity	\$5000.00
	High Country Caregivers	\$1500.00
	Hospitality House We Can	\$4600.00
	Hospitality House Shelter	\$6600.00
	Hunger and Health Coalition	\$6000.00
	LIFE Village	\$3000.00
	Mountain Alliance	\$2000.00
	OASIS, Inc.	\$2000.00
	WAMY Community Action	\$5000.00
	Western Youth Network	\$4000.00
	Women's Fund of the Blue Ridge	\$
600.00		

TOTAL

\$64,000.00

A document showing the total amount requested by each organization in their grant application and the amount given to that group in 2020 if applicable was distributed to the Vestry members prior to this meeting. The total amount requested by all groups this year was \$103,200.00. The total funds available for distribution is \$64,000.00. This results in a total of 62% of grant requests being funded.

Questions were asked regarding a few of the groups requesting funds. Patty Patella, Vestry liaison on the Outreach committee, gave information as requested. Examples were: funds donated to Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture will go to efforts such as the “Double Up Bucks” program which doubles the EBT dollars applicants may use at venues such as the local Farmers Markets, the donation to Blowing Rock School will go to help fund tutoring programs not paid for by the state, and the donation to Mountain Alliance goes to help fund programs for high school students such as field trips and community service projects. A comment was made that in the future something to consider would be donating to more groups that are faith-oriented.

Jim West made a motion to approve the \$64,000.00 in Tour of Homes 2021 proceeds be donated as listed above.

Roy McCraw seconded the motion.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Fr. Andrew shared the proposed monthly allocations approved by the Outreach committee:

Episcopal Relief and Development for Earthquake Disaster relief in Haiti \$1000.00

Compassion International for their work with children in Haiti \$1000.00

Episcopal Migration Ministries Afghan Refugee Relief \$1000.00

Episcopal Relief and Development Hurricane Relief \$1000.00

TOTAL        \$4000.00

Sterling Hutcheson made a motion to endorse these Outreach committee allocations.

Patty Patella seconded the motion.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Doug Galke shared the Junior Wardens report.

Drew Critcher completed the repair of the steps on the Chestnut Street entrance at no charge. The ramp still needs repair. It has been hard to find someone available and willing to do this job. Doug will follow up with another person this week.

There has been no new leak in the Bell Tower after the recent repair.

Tim Silver shared the Senior Wardens report.

Tim stated he does not need to share anything pressing at this meeting; in the interest of time, he will forgo his report until next month.

He did want to offer thanks to all those who are contributing their thought and effort in evaluating the condition of the grounds and outside spaces.

Fr. Andrew shared the Rectors report.

Rev. Anna Shine who leads the Presbyterian Episcopal Campus Ministry at ASU will be preaching here at both worship services this coming Sunday.

The blessing of the animals will be offered this coming Sunday afternoon on the front lawn at 3pm in partnership with Rumble Memorial Presbyterian Church.

Fr. Andrew is beginning to plan our observances of All Souls, All Saints, Advent and Christmas. He is following a “Plan Big, Stay Flexible” outlook on these plans!

During the month of October, written or spoken reflections will be offered from various parish members on the impact St. Mary’s has had on their lives and their faith as part of the stewardship effort.

The revision of the worship bulletin will continue for a few more weeks. Fr. Andrew is asking for feedback to determine the best format for the bulletin.

The Diocesan Convention will be held in November. Tim Silver and Patty Patella are the delegates from our parish and E.B. Springs and Faith Jones are alternate delegates. Fr. Andrew reminded the Vestry that a draft of the

Constitution and Canons revision is available to view on the Diocesan website. There will be an up or down vote on adoption of the Constitution and Canons at the Convention; no amendments will be done at the Convention. Fr. Andrew will send out the final draft of these documents when it is available.

The Diocesan budget will soon be available for those involved in the Convention to review online.

The Bishop suggested during his visit with us this summer that we might be interested in appointing a Vestry “person of the week” to take the lead in greeting visitors, etc. A “job description” of what responsibilities would be involved in this effort is being developed.

Fr. Andrew shared prior to this meeting an article for Vestry to review entitled “They’re Not Coming Back” addressing the drop in worship attendance since the pandemic. He asked Vestry members to review the article prior to the meeting. While Fr. Andrew stressed that attendance is not the only measurement of health and vitality in a parish, we have to remain attentive to attendance. Fr. Andrew shared some attendance statistics to provide context for this discussion:

Since resuming the policy of no limits on numbers of persons attending worship services starting on May 23, 2021, the average attendance at all services has been 108 persons.

In the 52 Sundays in 2019 the average Sunday service attendance was 149 persons.

These figures show we are averaging attendance levels of 72-73% of where we were pre-pandemic.

These figures are on par or better than other Episcopal parishes in the Diocese.

Since August 15, 2021, the average attendance at Sunday services is 97 persons.

The outdoor services offered on several Sunday afternoons this summer had no more than 8 persons attend any service.

The online services on Zoom are averaging 8 persons logging in to view; the average number of persons logging in to view the services on

YouTube has been 7. There are an average of 47 views to watch the recorded services on YouTube for an average of 5 minutes.

Fr. Andrew asked for reactions to the article and to this topic in general. One Vestry member commented they were reminded of the Serenity Prayer-to

accept what we cannot change-it is what it is. Some thought the numbers would actually be worse. One person commented that the pandemic is not over; we don't yet know what a "post-pandemic" world will look like for worship. It was noted this is not just about COVID; that the trend for many young people is away from attending church on a regular basis. The question was asked as to when we can get back to offering Christian Formation and other activities in person for children again, at least those who are old enough for masking. It was noted that the playground would be seen as a sign to young families that we value them and want them here. The revival of children's Christian Formation was something the parish had recommitted to just before the pandemic started.

Fr. Andrew shared in response to the comments these parts of the article grabbed his attention: that "super volunteers" who used to carry the load by filling multiple positions in the church are looking to cut back, and that regular attendees in some cases are becoming semi-regular attendees.

Fr. Andrew noted that there are those people who may have lost the "muscle memory" of regular church attendance but that anything is possible since we as a people follow Jesus! Committing ourselves to a "new church launch" moving forward is an exciting, challenging opportunity for growth.

Fr. Andrew shared he will be out of town for a few days beginning tomorrow (Wednesday) but will be back for church on Sunday.

Patty Patella made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:15pm.

Lisa Kaufmann seconded the motion.

The Vestry approved the motion.

Respectfully submitted,  
Elizabeth Sudderth, Clerk of the Vestry



