

Episcopal Church of the Ascension
Vestry Minutes
February 26, 2017

PRESENT: The Rev. Randy Lord-Wilkinson, Betsy Hasegawa, Janet King, Rose Buck, Avin Lalmansingh, Denise Lionetti, Gary McLaughlin, Zadinga Ogada, John Pruessner, Berenice Rodriguez, Najma Stubblefield and Paul Whitmore. **Guests:** Joey Rick/Canon for Congregational Vitality in the Diocese, Bob Waters and Roy Bevington from the Reshaping Ascension Committee, Howard Holland/Treasurer, The Rev. Javier Garcia Ocampo, Jason Cutshall/Seminarian, and Meredith Horan and Gordon Donnelly/Vestry Candidates.

The meeting opened at 1:30 with a Lambeth Bible Study, concluding at 2:07.

CONSENT AGENDA: At 2:10 Avin moved that the consent agenda be adopted as presented; Denise seconded the motion, and it passed.

Reshaping Ascension. With Joey Rick present for a limited time, the first topic addressed was Ascension's future. She, Howard, and Bob and Roy from the Committee to Reshape Ascension, led the discussion. Our situation is that continuing depleting our Endowment to pay our bills will put us out of business in about 18 months. The deficit is significant - for 2017 it's projected at just under \$116,000. The committee presented three potential ways to lower the rate at which we deplete the endowment; one was immediately eliminated, and the other two didn't come close to making a difference. Joey mentioned that there were ways we could lower our costs through using some available diocesan processes, but again, not enough could be saved.

Joey then told the meeting that, based on her wide experience in this area, we are not looking at the big picture. First, it's very highly unlikely that we can find any way to significantly increase our income. Secondly, we need to stop looking for ways to save a bit here and there – that approach will not be enough to make a difference in the long run. We would need to make drastic reductions to save enough. She said that other than praying for a miracle, we really have only three options:

1. Decide to live within our means.
2. Create enough in savings; see her two thoughts below.
3. Agree to continue as is and prepare to shut down within the next year or so when the endowment runs out.

Option 1 would mean drastic cutbacks in virtually every area. In Option 2, the only areas where it would be significant enough are (a) selling property (for instance, Ascension House would bring in around \$400,000), but this only postpones the close-down date (and we'd lose our parking lot), and (b) salaries. As a possibility, Joey said that we could replace Randy and Javier with a young bi-lingual priest and also reduce the number of services. Randy suggested that he could become a bi-vocational priest – being at Ascension half-time only, at half the salary, and spending the other half of his working time as a teacher, speaker, or something along those lines. Option 3 needs no explanation.

Joey ended the discussion by recommending that the Vestry think about what we want to do, and to present the situation to the congregation at the Annual Meeting for a decision.

OLD BUSINESS

Sanctuary church issue. Janet attended a meeting of the Sanctuary church committee. The committee would like Ascension to join the network of churches in the Sanctuary movement, but the first requirement would be that the full congregation supports our joining. In order to get feedback, information will be placed in the Ascendant and the weekly colored bulletin requesting input as to what level of engagement, if any, respondents support. Janet will also be available in the narthex weekly to inform congregants about the movement. Gary suggested that we tell people that the Vestry supports this. An online survey will ultimately decide where we stand. John made a motion that the Vestry go forward with the survey to gauge congregational support. Gary seconded the motion and it passed.

Annual Giving Campaign/Facilities Reserve Fund. Avin thanked all Vestry members for help given, especially to those who wrote letters, made phone calls, and provided the stickers. The Pledgers' lunch will take place later in the spring.

Cookbook report. Zadinga reported that two meetings of the committee have been held. The cookbook request for recipes has been and will continue to be in the colored bulletin each Sunday. The deadline for submitting them has been extended by two weeks, and recipes can now be submitted online as well as by using the recipe box. More recipes are needed.

Tee shirts. Berenice brought samples in each size. The logistics of sales and money collection were discussed. The Vestry agreed to have order forms available at the Shrove Tuesday dinner.

New Vestry discernment update. Three excellent candidates for the three open positions on the Vestry were discerned – Gordon Donnelly, Meredith Horan, and Luis Pedron; they all accepted the call. The three Convention Delegates affected all agreed to run again, and Janet had been elected to a full term as Junior Warden at the January meeting.

Javier's status. Randy reported that Javier's attorney has requested a statement on church letterhead stating that we will support him for the next year (7/1/17-6/30/18). To qualify for renewal of the diocesan grant that supports Javier, Ascension must increase our diocesan pledge by 1%, or about \$5,000. Janet made a motion that we increase our diocesan pledge by 1% for the coming year. Paul seconded and the motion passed

NEW BUSINESS

Request for Use of Parking Lot by City of Gaithersburg for July 4. Randy got a request from the City of Gaithersburg to make our parking lot available to them on Independence Day. The Vestry agreed to the request and Gary made the motion that we authorize use of the parking lot to the City of Gaithersburg for 7/4/17. The motion was seconded by John and passed unanimously.

Annual Meeting. The meeting is scheduled for Sunday, March 12th. It will include a presentation and discussion on the future of Ascension.

OPEN MIC:

Reports from the Diocesan Workshops.

- **Gary** went to the Administrative session, led by Paul Cooney and Kathleen Hall. Half of the session was spent on HR issues relating specifically to DC and Montgomery County, such as employees leave, paid and unpaid time off, and more; the other half day covered a variety of admin topics. Among things discussed was training for Vestries; the Diocese might be willing to take this on.
- **Betsy** took the Diocesan Grants seminar, which touched on how to apply for grants, not just from and within the Diocese, but also from other sources.
- **Najma** went to the Social Media and Marketing seminar. The need for a great and inviting website was stressed, especially to draw in church searchers who may not be familiar with Episcopal theology. It's also important to keep the website updated.

Berenice was recently in AZ where she met with Laura Kennedy of the Sanctuary movement. Laura gave her information about deportations, including that although 60% of those deported are considered criminals, many of them have committed very minor offenses. Putting those who have been stopped for speeding in the same "criminal" category as those who have committed serious felonies leads to erroneous conclusions. She also related that the backup of Visas being issued is so severe that Mexicans who applied in 1996 are just now getting them.

As Senior Warden, **Betsy** thanked the three outgoing members of the Vestry, Denise Lionetti, Najma Stubblefield and Paul Whitmore, for their service, and they were roundly applauded.

ADJOURNMENT: At 4:43, Paul made a motion that the meeting be adjourned; Denise seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Sari Stoddard
Clerk of the Vestry