

**St. Stephen's Vestry Minutes**  
**March 14, 2023**

**Present:** Fr. Ashton Sims, Fr. Howard Hess, Jim Anderson (treasurer), Leah Bailey, Adam Cavender, Tom Clary, Emily Doane, Betsy Ellis (Secretary), Cleon Hartman, Rachel Kirk, Courtney Manrod, Jim Rousey, Barbara Steele

**Absent:** Fr. Bailey Norman, Ashley Hillis, Cyril Meredith III

**Guests:** Rt. Rev. Brian Cole

**Call to Order:** Fr. Hess

Fr. Hess (Vicar) called the meeting to order at 6:33 pm. Every Vestry member introduced themselves to the Bishop.

**Opening Devotional:** Bishop Brain Cole

Bishop Brain began by stating that practicing our faith is a group project. Paul talked about being the body and bearing each other's burdens. When we are presented with challenges, we are better when we work together to get through them. We can be stretched until we burn out or we can be better. As a Bishop, he hopes that we are stretched as we move through the situation with Bailey. The Bishop offered a prayer.

**Approval of the Agenda:** Fr. Hess

Fr Hess requested the following changes to the agenda:

- Insert XI.e. and move XI.d Date for April 2023 Vestry meeting to XI.e
- move X.d. Safeguarding/Annual adoption of DIOET policies regarding sexual misconduct to XI.d
- add "Adhoc committee for the UK trip" to Items for Action;
- change 2023 to 2022 for XI.c. 2023 Parochial Report.

The revised agenda was approved unanimously. (Rousey/Bailey)

**Approval of the Consent Agenda:** Fr. Hess

The Minutes of the February 14, 2023, meeting were unanimously approved as submitted. (Steele/Clary)

**Discussion: Preparing for the future:** Rt. Rev. Brian Cole

The Bishop cares about all parties. Christianity is a group project with the aim of leaving things better than you find them. The Bishop was really delighted that Bailey chose to come here and was looking forward to him being at St Stephens for a long tenure. Just as we were going through the transition from priest in charge to rector, Bailey began to develop symptoms. He wants to hold the space for Bailey and Ashton until the path forward is clear. When Bailey is given medical permission to return to work, the Bishop wants to make sure Bailey is up to the demands of being a rector and able to lead the congregation in all aspects of parish ministry.

In the meantime, the Bishop wants to show up and be with us especially in this period of uncertainty. The Bishop and his team are fully engaged in this matter and are walking the journey with us. -How he comes back must safeguard his physical, spiritual and emotional wellbeing. But we still don't know when he will return.

In the dialogue between the Bishop and the Vestry, the following themes emerged:

- We feel that we are a 2-priest parish. The bishop affirmed this through his appointing a vicar to assist us in Bailey's absence.
- Actions may be needed to support Bailey so that he does not overextend himself when he returns.
- When we asked Bailey what he wanted the Vestry to do in his absence, he said he wanted us to keep moving forward. But it is hard to move forward when it isn't clear what the end game is. We have ideas about what we want to do, but it isn't clear with whom to discuss these ideas. We don't want to flounder while we wait for resolution. The Bishop suggested we work with Ashton to move forward. The roles need to be clear. He suggests we ask "who do we want to be" and then ask "who do we want to lead us?" Part of what we are modeling now is "how do we care for people?" which is a big part of being Christians.
- What the Vestry is responsible for and what its role is as clergy change through time. The Bishop stated that the Senior Warden is in charge of the Vestry and the buck stops with the Vestry. Clergy responsibilities should be outlined in the letter of agreement. Supporting St. Stephen's through current challenges is a priority for the Diocese.
- The Bishop suggests working through how to support each other. This includes working within limits of authority. The Bishop has confidence in Bailey, Ashton and the Vestry that we can do this. His hope is that it doesn't stretch us to thin but stretches us to strengthen the parish.

## **LEADERSHIP REPORTS**

**Vicar's Report:** Fr. Howard Hess

Fr. Hess feels the Bishop's visit was very good for us but also gave the Bishop things to think about. The strategy for rest of meeting is to address the important items and defer the rest. Fr. Hess has been musing that early church made the church work and it is the same today. He would like to make a motion that we acknowledge the effort of Roni Boyd and Judith Delaney for their extraordinary effort to carry us forward.

**Assistant to the Priest in Charge:** Fr. Sims

Currently there are 7 confirmands and 1 or 2 baptisms for the the Bishop's visit on March 26. He will be on vacation the week after Holy Week. Something he homed in on while Fr. Fels was here was the importance of a devotional. Last year's Good Friday service on the Seven Last Words was the first one he had attended and was impressed by the depth of the lay reflections. He gave the opportunity to Vestry members first to volunteer for this service. Beth Reed, Jim Anderson, Courtney Manrod, Barbara Steele volunteered.

**Senior Warden:** Courtney Manrod

Vestry review of the Property and Liability insurance will occur in the near future.

**Jr Warden:** Leah Bailey

The Member > Committees tab on the website is being updated. Leah will be reaching out to Vestry members for information to complete this update.

## **Items for Action**

**Approval of February 2023 financial statement:** Tom Clary

The finances at the end of February are in good shape with Income ahead and expenses in line with the budget. Tom pointed out that Curate support from the Diocese stops in

August. Disability for Fr. Norman stopped in December, but efforts to extend it are ongoing. Approval of finance report was unanimous.

**Approval of expenditure for Piano tuning:** Tom Clary

Vestry approval is required because the contract is over \$1000. The cost is the same as last year. Approved unanimously. (Clary/Bailey)

**Extension of Fr. Hess' Letter of Agreement:** Courtney Manrod

Fr. Hess' letter agreement needs to be extended through April 18. The difference from his previous letter is a reduction in hours from 24 hrs/week to 20 hrs/week reduced. Finance committee review indicates the funds are available. Approved unanimously. (Clary/Steele)

**Tree removal:** Cleon Hartman

Cleon is getting 4 bids for removal of magnolia and pine trees near the church facing Tulane Avenue because of sewer issues. He has received one estimate of \$3500 from Blanks Tree Service to cut down the trees, remove the stumps and haul away the debris. He asked for approval of a maximum of \$3500. (Hartman/Clary) Discussion on the motion included a request for an estimate to remove the stump of the tree that fell at edge of parking lot and for information to the parish about the reason for removal to the 2 trees. The motion was amended and approved unanimously.

**Approval for adhoc committee for upcoming London choir trip:** Leah Bailey

Simon requested this committee starting today for guidance, assistance and oversight of trip. The committee members are Leah Bailey and Judith Delaney. Approved unanimously. (Bailey/Clary)

**Items for Discussion**

**Seminarian support:** Tom Clary

There is a Parish tradition and Diocesan expectation that a Parish that raises up a seminarian provide financial support to that individual. The Finance Committee will discuss this need with Adam Ballintoy.

**Quiet Room proposal:** Rachel Kirk

Rachel provided additional thoughts on the idea of the quiet room to accommodate the immediate need for care for infants because the nursery worker resigned. Infants cannot be put in the toddler room because there is no trained infant worker in that room. By adding a changing table and small microwave to the quiet room, parents of infants will have all that is needed for their infants and be responsible for their care. Courtney received feedback on this idea. If we are trying to be family friendly, we need a paid worker. She has concern that a space is available when we have an infant. She is looking at recruiting a nursery worker from local community colleges. She will bring a proposal to the next meeting. A quiet room is an important expansion of what we offer to anyone who needs a quiet place.

**2022 Parochial Report:** Courtney Manrod

This parochial report is a request from the national church not diocese. It is more expansive than previous requests from the diocese. While completing this report, it was found that the parish records are out of date. Courtney will send out the report to Vestry members so they can see what data are needed.

**Safeguarding/Annual adoption of DIOET policies regarding sexual misconduct:** Courtney Manrod

The Diocese asks that the Vestry adopt the policy and post a certificate stating that this has been adopted by the parish. It is due April 1, 2023. Courtney will send out the material to the Vestry to review.

**Date for April 2023 Vestry meeting**

Courtney Manrod

The next Vestry meeting will be pushed out to April 18 because Ashton will be on vacation the week of the normally scheduled Vestry meeting.

**Reports**

No additions to submitted reports

**Old Business**

None

**New Business**

None

The meeting closed with prayer by Fr Sims. The meeting adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Elizabeth Ellis  
Secretary

*Next meeting April 18, 2023*