SAINT PAUL’S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Minutes of the Vestry Meeting
June 29, 2020

There was a Zoom meeting of the Vestry of Saint Paul’s Episcopal Church, Chestnut Hill, on the above date at 7 p.m.

There were present Ruth Desiderio, Rector’s Warden, presiding; also Interim Rector Albert J. Ogle, and Vestry members Lisa Budd, Chip Butler, Steve Camp-Landis, Cheyenne DeMulder, Mark Duckett, Clark Groome, John Kimberly, George McNeely, Steve Pearson, Kristen Poole, Louise Thompson, and Hugh Williamson. The Rev. Barbara Abbott, St. Paul’s consultant, and the Rev. Canon Carrie Schofield-Broadbent, canon for transition and church development in the diocese of Central New York, were also present.

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m.

I. After Rector’s Warden Ruth Desiderio introduced the Vestry to Canon Carrie Schofield-Broadbent, Carrie assumed the chair and opened the meeting with a prayer.

II. The Listening Hearts Guidelines were read.

III. The minutes of the June 22, 2020 Vestry meeting were approved unanimously.

IV. Carrie asked Ruth and Search Consultant Barbara Abbott to bring the Vestry up to date on the search process.

V. Ruth reported that John Rollins had been appointed chairman of the Profile Committee and we developed a two-pronged plan.

There was a survey, developed by two small representative parish groups (including some who might have “drifted away a little bit”). The survey was sent to the parish. Two hundred and eleven were returned (10% of them from those who attend the 8 a.m. service; 25% from those who attend at 9; and 65% from those who identify the 10:30 service as their principal time for worship).

Two groups were formed to process the quantitative and qualitative data contained in the responses to the survey. A summation of that was shared with the parish.

What was evident, Ruth said, was that people were unaware of the parish’s finances so four financial education Zoom meetings were held to help parishioners understand our finances.

We also planned a series of community conversations to define, explain, and take a deeper dive into the issues, even where there have been differing views or where there is agreement.
We have some conflict to deal with. We don’t yet have a collective sense of how significant it is and what kind of an impact it’ll have on the search.

VI. Barbara said that now having financial transparency was very significant. She said that survey has done part of its job it that it did lift up the need for that financial transparency. “I wish we could do the survey over again with that financial information incorporated.”

VII. After the Vestry agreed that the evening’s conversation should be “on the record,” Carrie asked the Vestry what questions or comments come up for them when we think about where the search is and after hearing from Ruth and Barbara.

The following questions and comments followed (comments from Carrie and Barbara are in italics):

• When does the conflict get resolved so we can get back to the search?

  • In conversation with Canon Arlette Benoit Joseph and the bishop I don’t think we need to stop the search. We can find a way to do both conflict resolution and the search.

• There’s a lot up in the air right now: the pandemic, the capital campaign construction, the organ work, the clergy search.

• It’s OK if a parish profile says “Here are some things we’re working on, here are areas where we like to grow, and here are some sticking points for us; We’d really like to have someone come on board to partner with us to do this work,” As a parish priest who works in transitions I just want a parish that can say “Something smells weird. Help us.” You don’t have to be perfect to enter the search. The ultimate question is “Where is God calling us right now?”

• It has been a full year since we’ve been in an interim period. I feel the parish may be diminishing or, perhaps, decaying.

• The upcoming Town Halls have to be well structured. We haven’t had the conversations about what’s kept us together as a church for 165 years so these conversations have to well designed. Perhaps the Zoom meetings can be broken into small groups so they don’t become free-for-alls.

• It would be interesting to see if those who go to different services have differing points of view about what are the three best things and the three biggest challenges at St. Paul’s. In smaller groups those conversations are much less likely to be contentious.
• Many on the Vestry understand what we need to deal with as a Vestry but there’s the rest of the parish that by and large may not know all that’s going on behind the scenes. Some are troubled by the fact that we haven’t kept up to what we originally thought would be our sequence of events. We need to bring everyone along with us.

• We owe it to the parish to make sure that they understand why we are where we are, where we’re headed, and as reasonable a guess as we can make what the time frame is.

• We’re unsure exactly what/where our center is.

• Part of the anxiety is that this has not been a smooth transition to an interim period at all. We just allowed things to sort of happen and then it became a collection of missions without a center. When Albert came in with management and administrative skills and expectations that we as a parish be managed well it has bumped up against all those constituents who don’t have a center around them. There are lots of strengths but no center.

• We have a lot of areas of strength but we can’t clearly identify our center. We know it’s there but we don’t know what it is.

• Focusing on core values would be the avenue toward the center, a center that holds.

• Are we really willing to be led?

• There’s a mistrust of leadership (particularly clergy).

• One of the good things to come out of COVID-19 is we’re seeing another side of who we are.

• We’re on the cusp of a rethink about what it means to be St. Paul’s.

• For the past 13 years Cliff Cutler said “You guys run it.” We ended up with very good and very dedicated people who stepped up and who did it. They took on leadership of the Parents Exchange, the Music Guild, and the Finance Committee, to name a few. We are now going to have to prepare for a new mode of leadership.

• How do we keep the energy of those leaders with a connection to the center?

• There have been quite a few transitions: Associate Rector Manny Mercer’s departure; the search for and hiring of Andy Kotylo as our new music director; Cliff Cutler’s retirement; Andy Carella’s firing; Joseph Wolyniak’s departure for a new post in Denver when many hoped he would be Cliff’s successor.
• We do a lot of stuff well but our weakness is we don’t articulate or share together an appreciation for things that aren’t our ministries.

• What it boils down to is what is the identity of this church? That’s a fundamental question. A big part of the answer is The Book of Common Prayer. We’re here because we believe something and we find that the words in our liturgy express what we believe in a very powerful way.

• As members of St. Paul’s we should support each other,

• Carrie said that she feels the Vestry is not a conflicted group. No one who has experience as a rector would expect perfection. I think we do ourselves a disservice by thinking we have to get the house completely in order before we go ahead with the search. We ought to do a “both/and” and move ahead with the search with all deliberate speed and be mindful of the work we need to do both as a Vestry and with the rest of the parish.

VIII. The next meeting of the Vestry will be at a time to be determined.

IX. Following Carrie’s closing prayer* and blessing, the meeting adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Clark Groome
Secretary

*May God give you grace never to sell yourself short, grace to risk something big for something good, and grace to remember that the world is too dangerous for anything but truth and too small for anything but love. May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet and may everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you.