

Minutes from 2/5/23 Annual Parish Meeting (on Zoom)

Mtr. Tracy welcomed all, put the agenda in the chat, and told everyone where to find the supporting documents on the website. She called the meeting to order at 9:05 am, began the recording, and said the opening prayer. Mtr. Tracy introduced Debra Spencer as temporary Clerk (just to take minutes of this meeting) but verified that Alliee DeArmond is the official Clerk of the Vestry. The minutes of the 2022 Parish Meeting were shared on screen. Bart Coddington moved to approve them and Win Fernald seconded. They were unanimously approved. Win Fernald was announced as Senior Warden, Debra Spencer as Junior Warden, Alliee DeArmond as Clerk, and Nelson Crandall as Treasurer.

Delegates to Diocesan Convention, elected last year, are Sherrie DeWitt, Robin Gaither, Susan von Schmach and Barb Raney. Alternates up for election this year are Mary Jane Chambers, Nelson Crandall, Lise Crowley, and Sarah Simms. After the Zoom poll did not function as expected, Win moved and Anne Baker seconded to accept all the nominees. This motion passed.

Win, Senior Warden, summarized his report. Here is the full text: Next Steps -- Campus Discernment Process: The Discernment Steering Committee, also called “Lift Every Voice” (LEV) has finished its work. They interviewed 89 parishioners and were very careful to accurately report parishioners’ wishes. Some of their information you can find on our website, and you can read their final report starting on page 23 of the Annual Report. Their most important request to the Vestry: “Don’t waste our work.”

What did their report tell us? The overwhelming conclusion from these interviews is that St. John’s needs to build for the future. The choices most favored include building classrooms and meeting rooms, new office space, buying a rectory, creating a dedicated worship space, and replacing the trailer with a house that has a garage and storage. At the bottom of the list of nine items was “doing nothing”!

How we move forward is now back in the hands of the Vestry. We believe what LEV said, and we plan to work from their results. That means talking more specifically about spaces for office, meeting rooms, and classrooms, and will likely involve sketches and layouts. We are asking for your help to develop an outline of the best ways to move forward. We will be having a few parish meetings to develop this information as we better understand our needs. How a rectory fits into these plans will also be part of that work.

Many of you have strong feelings about what we do next, and those feelings are real. We all need to listen carefully to each other and come to agreements we can support. You will hear more about these meetings following our next Vestry meeting. The Vestry goals for 2023 are as follows:

1. By September, have congregational affirmation of a concept proposal for campus development. In the fall, move into developing a “solid proposal” (as defined by Linda Buskirk’s steps in the Discernment Process).
2. Develop conversations and collect ideas for the use of the Community Project Fund.
3. Create a Newcomer Team to facilitate newcomer integration into the congregation.

Treasurer, Nelson Crandall, stated that the Vestry has included a Faith Fund in the 2023 budget. He reported that pledges are down \$3,000 due to many circumstances and that expenses have risen because of inflation. The staff have received a 4% increase (with some exceptions), utility costs are up, and there have been expenses for COVID precautions and hybrid meetings. The office trailer rental rose 25% and will rise again in two years. All this results in a budget deficit of approximately \$20,000. So, the Vestry had to decide: do we budget from abundance or scarcity? Do we cut now or later? The Vestry decided to budget from abundance, and so instituted the Faith Fund line item.

Kathy and Tom Butler, whose previous parish, St. Francis in Simi Valley, used a Faith Fund for over 30 years, explained how a Faith Fund works. The Vestry would keep track of the monthly budget and adjust the Faith Fund depending on the parish’s income and expenses. Sometimes more contributions than budgeted would come in. Sometimes they had fundraisers. Sometimes, at mid-year, they had to make cuts. But they had faith that they would have enough. St. John’s Vestry will do the same: check each month to see how the budget is doing. Mtr. Tracy pointed out that last year, the Vestry cut the outreach budget (including COPA, the AFC, the organist, and others), and then further along in the year were able to reinstate some of them. This year, the Vestry decided not to make those cuts but to have a Faith Fund and see what happens. Nelson screen-shared his report, inviting people to read it and give feedback. Discussion ensued.

Win: How do people give to the Faith Fund? Mtr. Tracy: The FF is a placeholder. Just give to the general fund and the FF will diminish.

Tom B.: Yes--it’s not an account, it’s a balancing figure.

Sherrie said she loves the idea of putting faith in ourselves and thanked the Butlers, Nelson (for a great report), and the Vestry.

Pat P. said she writes checks and puts “where needed” in the memo line. Mtr. Tracy said that amounts to the same thing--it goes in the General Fund.

Anne B.: The Vestry majority voted for the FF but Anne dissented and invited people to talk to her about that.

Sally L.: The FF should be separate so people could add to it, so it has its own being. Loves the idea, but we don’t have enough to run the church, yet we talk of building. The FF should have its own entity. Pat P. concurred with this.

Karen G. totally supports the FF. Go by abundance. Have it as a line item so we can see how the parish supports it.

Nelson: You can put Faith Fund in the memo line of a check, but you don’t have to. Every monthly finance report will reflect a revised Faith Fund amount.

Jack S.: It's necessary to have that line item so the vestry and the parish can know how much is there. Agreed with the FF idea.

Mtr. Tracy reminded us that the Faith Fund IS a line item.

Sherrie: If you have a FF you lose track of other line items that go over expected intake. We should have a specific slush fund. Or we could just contribute more to the General Fund.

Mtr. Tracy: If people put FF in the memo line, we can keep track of it and of other funds also.

Nelson: Give us a couple of months to report it and I'm confident all concerns can be addressed, and if not, give us feedback.

Jack: A line item gives more transparency. It needs to be a line item.

Sally: If it's a line item, the FF has more power. I like what Jack said.

Alliee: Name the ministries to be cut if the budget requires cuts, so people can contribute to particular ministries. Alliee moved that this be done. Michael DeA. seconded.

Nelson screen-shared a spreadsheet of the budget and explained the variables. People can change the variables for themselves to see what effect they have on the budget. This already complies with Alliee's motion. People can see what was considered for cutting.

Alliee still wanted to make the motion. Wants the list of proposed cuts in English, not in numbers.

Karen G.: I applaud Nelson for a spreadsheet I can understand. I consider it poor stewardship to do a pick and choose among budget items in the church. My understanding of stewardship is that one gives to the church in gratitude for all one has received and trusts the elected vestry to determine where the money is best spent. I see pick and choose as divisive.

Kathy B.: The December Vestry minutes outline what was going to be cut.

Mtr. Tracy stated the motion.

Alliee said that part of faith is being able to give to specific things. It should be a possibility.

We voted. Mtr. Tracy counted 5 yes, 12 no, 2 abstentions. The motion was not carried.

Anne B.: True faith giving happens during the pledge drive. It signifies you believe in St. John's and has more power for spiritual health. We give to the body so the body can use it. Faithful giving is during the pledge drive. It exhibits faith in the Vestry. If the Vestry then makes up numbers to balance the budget... The job of the Vestry is to pay attention to the bottom line. It seems irresponsible to spend money we don't have. Don't bribe the congregation to give more after that.

Win: We have a good plan and we should go with it.

Pat P.: We make our pledge faithfully but the church might do something that inspires us. Then we can give to the FF.

Jack S.: Transparency and communication: tell us frequently where the money goes. Hope the parish will raise the question of transparency.

Sally wrote in the chat that she disagrees with cutting funds for Godly Play.

Mtr. Tracy clarified that Godly Play is not cut from the budget. She reminded people that they can come to Vestry meetings. Also, come to the parish dinner tonight at 4 and wear a mask. If people haven't RSVP'd they can still come. We want to see everyone there and at church at 10:30. Mtr. Tracy adjourned the meeting at 9:59am and said a closing prayer.

Faithfully submitted,

Debra Spencer