

**MINUTES OF THE VESTRY  
ST. MATTHEW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, HILLSBOROUGH, NC  
Special Called Meeting to Discuss Reopening the Parish  
June 11, 2020**

**Present:** The Rev. Robert Fruehwirth, Rector; The Rev. Lisa Frost-Phillips, Associate Rector; Jehanne Gheith, Senior Warden; Jim Charton, Junior Warden; Maria Costello; Conrad Fulkerson; Elizabeth Hays; Steve Hutson; Vera Shanley; Blythe Thompson; Sonja Tilley; Susan Alden, Clerk of the Vestry

**Absent:** Dorothy Wood, excused

The Rev. Fruehwirth called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm. We met remotely by Zoom due to diocesan and governmental recommendations for social distancing to slow the spread of Covid-19. The Rev. Frost-Phillips offered an opening prayer.

**I. Rector Report – The Rev. Robert Fruehwirth**

- The Parish Reopening Committee is comprised of the Rev. Fruehwirth, the Rev. Frost-Phillips, Maryann Plambeck, Mary Rocap, Jehanne Gheith, and Jim Charton. The Rev. Fruehwirth noted that they have spent significant time developing this draft of the Parish Reopening Plan. Vestry members were asked to read the document in advance of this meeting. Tonight, they will have the opportunity to give input and ask questions. The Rev. Fruehwirth noted that most metrics for Covid-19 are currently worsening, making it doubtful that the Diocese will move to its next phase on July 1 as it had tentatively planned.
- Since our last vestry meeting, racial turbulence in our country has intensified dramatically. Hopefully this tension will ultimately lead to major change, healing, and reconciliation. Our bishops have exhorted us to address racial violence and inequality, and now these issues are at the forefront of our consciousness. St. Matthew's has already begun to work on racial justice and reconciliation, and now we will have the opportunity to go even deeper in this endeavor. The primary concern of the Rev. Fruehwirth in this work is our process as a parish, how we will work to grow in compassion and understanding for each other even when we disagree. He has been meeting with African-American clergy colleagues in northern Orange County. He noted that although public protests in Hillsborough have been peaceful, there is nevertheless considerable righteous anger in the community. Our Racial Justice & Reconciliation Committee intends to submit a proposal soon regarding renaming the Ruffin House. The Rev. Fruehwirth proposes that the vestry form a working group to begin to develop a process for addressing this issue and others relative to our history.
- The Rev. Fruehwirth will soon be starting the training he plans to lead to develop lay leadership. If you think of good potential candidates for this training, please submit names to him.
- A primary concern right now is better internet speed and coverage throughout the church campus. If you know of anyone who could help with this issue, please let the Rev. Fruehwirth know.
- At our regular vestry meeting next week we will talk about how to engage members who are not participating online. We will also learn about our new interns and the work they have already begun.

**II. Concerns and Questions About the Parish Reopening Report – Jehanne Gheith and ALL**

Dr. Gheith noted her gratefulness for the work of the vestry during these important days in our life as a parish. She invited each vestry member to briefly share any concerns or questions they had about the reopening document.

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**III. Discussion and Reflection on Reopening Report – ALL**

After the period of sharing, there was discussion about several different items that came up as the vestry asked questions and offered input.

- Several people proposed changing the name of the reopening committee and document to better reflect that it addresses our path forward through the coming months regardless of our ability to meet in person at church.
- There were several questions about committees and how the liaison structure might change. In the past month the clergy and staff have begun reaching out to committees to work towards re-energizing their work, resulting in questions about how to proceed. Committees will need to become more autonomous, with initial additional support from vestry liaisons. It would be helpful to have brief monthly reports on committee progress moving forward, which could be added to the monthly packet prepared for vestry meetings. Initially, this strategy of monthly updates could be implemented in a few committees, e.g. Racial Justice & Reconciliation, Pastoral Care (an umbrella that might cover several smaller committees), Social Ministries, the Newcomer's Committee, the Fellowship Committee and the Worship Committee, including the Digital Altar Guild. It was noted that it might help to have additional participants on the Worship Committee who are adept and creative with technology. Other committees will be encouraged to continue working as able, but we could focus on these committees to try out new procedures. Liaisons will reach out to committees as necessary with new information.
- The refitting of the Hayden Building came up and will be discussed at the vestry meeting on June 16<sup>th</sup>.
- Where the document specifies "not meeting together", this means that Sunday worship will continue online until the majority of us can meet together safely. It is possible that other in person meetings could happen on a smaller scale, once the diocese moves to Phase Two. This could potentially include meetings not on the church property.
- The Bishop has decreed that we cannot participate in Holy Eucharist virtually. It is possible, though, that there could be some type of symbolic communion that is not a sacrament but includes prayers and the virtual sharing of wine and bread. Language around this needs to be clarified.
- There was input about the layout of the document. The Rev. Fruehwirth would like to include the background information, but following that we can be more specific about our goals for the next several months. Four goals for the imminent future are: online worship formation, reengaging committees, pastoral care for the parish community, and social outreach including Racial Justice & Reconciliation.
- There were several questions about the Lay Leadership Formation that the Rev. Fruehwirth plans to facilitate this summer. He intends to lead an 8-10 session course with up to 12 participants. The participants would have the opportunity to clarify their faith and spirituality while deepening facilitation and listening skills. They would be encouraged to discern how their skills might be used in diverse areas of the parish, covenanting to continue meeting monthly after training.
- There were questions about ministry to parishioners not participating on zoom. Mary Rocap, the Rev. Fruehwirth, and the Rev. Frost-Phillips have compared a printout of people attending zoom to the church directory. There are about 65 people who normally attend church services but do not come to zoom. The interns are going to call those people to check in as a first step. Also, Mr. Charton is developing a survey that parishioners can complete online with feedback about current church offerings.
- As committees begin to meet again, they are encouraged to use the church zoom meeting room since parishioners are familiar with it. Any committees who could use additional members are encouraged to reach out and publicize meetings through the Rev. Fruehwirth's weekly message. Perhaps more people could feel connected by participating in committees. In the fall, we could hold a virtual ministry fair with breakout rooms for different ministry opportunities. It was noted that some committees may not need any more people right now and they should have the option of not reaching out for additional members.

- The food pantry noted in the draft was discussed. Given that in person meetings are very limited and OCIM is overburdened with new needs and could use additional support, it was decided to put this idea on hold for now.
- Small groups were discussed. The Rev. Fruehwirth suggested that those interested in small group leadership should get involved with the lay leadership initiative. Dr. Fulkerson noted that we do have some groups that are cohesive and effective even now through virtual meetings.

#### **IV. Forming of Subcommittees – All**

Three working groups were formed to continue developing ideas.

- **Writing Committee:** Sonja Tilley, Vera Shanley, and Conrad Fulkerson. Considering recommendations from tonight's meeting, this group is charged with adjusting the draft version of the Reopening Document so that it will be ready to present to the parish. Parts of it just need to be tweaked, and the four main areas of focus need to be clearly added. This should be submitted to the Rev. Fruehwirth by midday on Monday so vestry members will have time to read the new draft before our meeting Tuesday evening.
- **Stage Two Committee:** Blythe Thompson, Elizabeth Hayes, Maryann Plambeck (if available). The Rev. Fruehwirth will be happy to consult as well. Looking at the Diocesan Guidelines for Stage Two, this group will develop strategy around how they will apply to St. Matthew's. For Tuesday this group will discuss whether individuals will be welcomed onto church property during Stage Two. For the July vestry meeting, they will provide more detail and begin to consider how small groups might begin meeting in-person. Mary Rocap, Jim Charton and Pelham Jacobs are considering cleaning issues that will arise when our buildings open.
- **Racial Reconciliation Group:** Elizabeth Hayes, Jehanne Gheith, Maria Costello. The Rev. Frost-Phillips is willing to consult. This group will begin to work on the process we will use as we continue to move forward with work needed in our parish to address our racial heritage. They will work alongside the standing committee for Racial Justice & Reconciliation.

#### **V. Items for the June 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting**

Email any agenda items for the vestry meeting next Tuesday to Dr. Gheith.

#### **IX. Closing Prayer**

Dr. Gheith offered a Quote from David Whyte:

“The ability to ask beautiful questions, often in very unbeautiful moments, is one of the great disciplines of a human life. And a beautiful question starts to shape your identity as much by asking it, as it does by having it answered. You just have to keep asking. And before you know it, you will find yourself actually shaping a different life, meeting different people, finding conversations that are leading you in those directions that you wouldn't even have seen before.”

As well as a quotation from Theophan the Recluse.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Susan Alden

Clerk of the Vestry

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