

Feeding God's People from the Abundance of God's Grace

**MINUTES OF THE VESTRY
ST. MATTHEW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, HILLSBOROUGH, NC
June 15, 2021**

Present:

In Person: The Rev. Robert Fruehwirth, Rector; The Rev. Lisa Frost-Phillips, Associate Rector; Kim Powell, Director of Christian Formation; Elizabeth Hays, Senior Warden; Blythe Thompson, Junior Warden; Lindsay Efland; Steve Hutson; Madeline Liddicoat; Vera Shanley; Sonja Tilley; Edward Wright; Dorothy Wood, Treasurer; Mary Ann Plambeck, Clerk of the Vestry

Absent: Maria Costello (excused)

The Rev. Fruehwirth called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm. The meeting was held in person adhering to diocesan and governmental recommendations for social distancing and wearing of face mask following Covid-19 precautions for meeting in person.

Ms. Elizabeth Hays opened the meeting with a prayer.

Mr. Edward Wright shared a short vignette on his life and his life as a child of God.

The Rev. Fruehwirth led the group in a discussion on his essay, Thoughts About Vestry Discernment. Conversations about the essay were that all individual thoughts contribute to the group's dynamic. What is the difference between discernment and humility? Discernment is a spiritual journey. Listening, sharing, involving, changing. The Rev Fruewirth and Ms. Hays will make clear to the Vestry when we are involved in simple decision making and when we are involved in discernment.

I. Approval of May Minutes – All

No corrections to the minutes.

ACTION: Dr. Shanley motioned to approve the May vestry minutes. Ms. Blythe Thompson seconded the motion, and the Vestry voted unanimously to approve the May minutes.

Ms. Hays mentioned that at another church the submitted vestry reports are also approved during approval of the minutes. The Vestry are given the opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the submitted reports. They found this process improves the efficiency of the meeting. A decision to adopt this process will occur at the next meeting.

II. Associate Rector Report – The Rev. Lisa Frost-Phillips

The Associate Rector's Report is attached

A few highlights:

- Sacred Ground conversation with Emily Eidener was impactful.
- Heaven and Hell book discussion has been lively.
- The following experiences were meaningful.
 - Sunday morning service and coffee hour; connecting with people again.
 - Seeing the removal of the stain glass window.
 - Katherine Nelson's circle of remembrance was a celebration of her life and people left feeling good. Katherine's daughter decorated with her quilts and stories were shared.

III. Rector Report with Updates – The Rev. Robert Fruehwirth

The Rector's Report is attached

A few highlights and updates:

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- Scheduling and conducting funerals delayed by the pandemic.
- Ramping up newcomers and creating offerings for several new families joining the church.
- Rev. Fruehwirth hopes to canvas the neighborhood to meet new families and share what St. Matthew's has to offer.

IV. Senior Warden Report – Ms. Elizabeth Hays

The Senior Warden Report is attached.

- Ms. Hays has been spending the last couple of weeks understanding the duties of the senior warden and getting task completed.
 - Vestry call list
 - Convention planning
- Attended the finance committee meeting.

V. Junior Warden Report- Ms. Blythe Thompson

The Junior Warden's Report is attached.

- Verville will be holding a training class on July 31st on monument cleaning.
- The stained glass window was removed and hopefully will be returned by October or November.
- Fine Arts & Furnishings is looking for someone to build a three-shelf bookcase for the Graebner Room. Possible builders are Jerry Workman and Domenic Tiani
- The lawn mower has been repaired.
- Screens for the Choir Room windows were found and installed.

VI. Vestry Liaison Report

The Vestry Liaison Report is Attached

- Steve Hutson- Service to Others/Social Outreach
- Social Ministries everything has continued but scaled down.
- Alamance-Orange Prison Ministry are ready to move back to full services when able.
- Patrick Cumming has agreed to chair Newcomers.
- Mr. Hutson will resubmit his report with corrections made regarding FeSt co-chairs and Food for All.

There was discussion about holding a Ministry Fair after Labor Day to help with recruitment of members to the various committees.

VII. Fellowship Regathering Updates

Ms. Madeline Liddicoat reported that the event she held at her house was super easy to host. People came and stayed for exactly two hours.

The goal is to host three fellowship events a month.

Dr. Dorothy Wood, Rev. Fruehwirth and Mr. Edward Wright will host events in July. Ms. Mary Ann Plambeck volunteered to host an event in August.

Parish Life estimated that approximately 70 people attended last weekend's parish picnic.

VIII. Worship Fellowship Updates

Ms. Hays shared some of the results of the parish reopening poll. Respondents representing over 200 parishioners responded

- 63% of the people responded for themselves.
- 11% responded for themselves and their family/children.

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- For inside worship, 30% would feel safe without any precautions, an additional 47% would like to see masks worn inside, and an additional 12% would like masks and social distancing inside.
- 55% felt comfortable with vaccinated people sitting in pods.
- Families are leading the concerns about wearing masks for the protection of their kids.
- Consensus is that people want to come back and follow safety guidelines such as wearing masks to sing.

It was decided to start offering two in person services with some form of virtual offering. Virtual offerings will continue to be offered until a vast majority of the parish vulnerable members are able to attend or permanently at the discernment of the vestry. Vulnerable Populations include the children who are currently not eligible to get vaccinated. Will continue to explore outside service options where masks will not be required.

In-Person:

- 0800 service will be Rite 1, no music.
- 0900 Coffee Hour
 - Will be held outdoors weather permitting.
 - Looking for people to host coffee hour.
- 1000 service will be Rite 2 with music/singing and all masked.

Virtual Service:

- Will continue using Zoom since its social gathering platform is better, but will be livestreaming the later service through Zoom thus having the online and in person offerings synchronously.
- Will begin Zooming the 1000 Service on June 27th and try it for the next 5 weeks.
 - Austin (intern) will help with the implementation. Start with an iPhone and then ramp up to more cameras and video feed. The video feed will be spotlighted on Zoom.

IX. Fundraising: Stain Glass Window, Rectory

There was an anonymous donation of \$9,500 dollars given that will cover the cost of the restoration of the stain glass window. The vestry has decided that fundraising efforts should focus on raising money in the winter and spring of 2022 to cover the multiple repairs that are needed to be completed on the rectory. These repairs include but are not limited to installation of new windows, repairs to the porch, foundation, and water damage. During the recent meeting of the Society of Junior Wardens the estimated cost of all repairs will be in the range of \$150,000 -\$200,000. These capital repairs to the rectory are slated to begin in 2022.

Action: Ms. Sonja Tilley motioned to fundraise for money to cover the cost of the repairs to the rectory. Mr. Lindsay Efland seconded the motion and the Vestry voted unanimously to move forward with fundraising for money to repair the rectory.

X. Delegates for Conventions

We have dropped from 4 delegates to 3. We will need to submit the names of 3 alternate delegates. Names due by July.

XI. Sexton

Prior to COVID Pelham cared for the grounds and performed custodial work that included cleaning the bathrooms. During the closing of the church Pelham spent his allotted 30 hours outside

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performing work on the grounds. Conversations are continuing between parties and the options of expanding the scope of a cleaning agency being reviewed by the finance and personnel committee.

XII. Warren-Hay Proposal

Ms. Blythe Thompson reviewed the Diocesan COVID guideline recommendation for bi-polar ionization air filtration. Ms. Thompson met with Warren Hay Heating and Air. The proposal to cover all the buildings on the church campus would include the installation of 12 iWaves. The iWaves require no maintenance and have a 15-year life expectancy. Ms. Thompson met with Dr. Wood and the parish has the funds to cover the cost of installation. Mr. Efland recommended that Ms. Thompson inquire from Warren Hay what virus protection our current system has. Ms. Thompson will make the inquiry and communicate this to the Vestry via email. The proposal is good until the end of June an email vote will take place to determine whether to proceed with the installation of the iWaves.

Action: The Vestry voted unanimously to approve the Warren Hay proposal to install the iWave units in all the church buildings for \$9958 plus tax. This vote was conducted electronically.

XIII. Financial Report- Dr. Dorothy Wood

The May Monthly Financial Summary is attached

A few highlights:

Total budget Income is at 52%

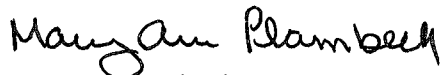
Total Budget Expenses is at 41%

A good month for investments.

Dr. Wood put out a call for people to help with money counting after church. Has only gotten one person willing to count and that was Rick Brewer. Dr. Wood reminded the vestry that one of their duties included counting money. For the moment no formal counting schedule is in place. There is an informal schedule of whoever is there after the 10:30 service. There has to be two people counting. Starting in July.

Ms. Elizabeth Hays offered a closing prayer in closing. The meeting was adjourned at 8:14

Respectfully submitted,



Mary Ann Plambeck
Clerk of the Vestry

1. Worship

Preaching- Sunday am (5/23, 6/13)/ Wednesday (5/25, 6/9), Officiate/
Celebrate- Wednesday (5/26, 6/9); Sunday (FFF 5/23, 6/6), Memorial Service
and Memory Circle- Katherine Nelson (6/11)

2. Teach/ Learn

RJRC meeting- E Eidenier- Sacred Ground
Cont Ed- Bowen Family Systems Theory
Heaven and Hell book group (6/4)
reading Jesus and Disinherited; St. Columba

3. Social Ministries

Need for a treasurer for social ministries committee
JU-meet with Julia (6/16); small group follow up with Ran and Kate
RJRC meeting (6/1)
Habitat- June Habitat work days scheduled for 6/5, 6/12, 6/26)
Email/ phone correspondence with Ellen, Eileen, Jane

3. Children and Youth

Pentecost Family Faith Formation (5/23)- prep, set up, service
Kim on Vac
Nursery cleared out

4. Pastoral

in person meetings (1); t/c (2); emails (numerous); home visit (2)
Arranging for Garden visit (JS)- picking up flowers
Trello check in

5. Admin

Staff meeting (5/25); newsletter review; final disbursement of funds, Social Ministries;
booklist review- RJRC; Associate Rector Report; various calls/ emails; Bulletin meetings/
communication for Nelson service; planning for new clergy residency

5. Diocese

New Clergy Residency- 6/10 at St. Matthew's- involvement of shawl ministry,
Mary Rocap, Phyllis Wright

Highlights include Sacred Ground conversation with Emily Eidener and RJRC; Heaven and Hell
book discussion; visit to the garden with Jan; Sunday morning snd coffee hour at St. Matthew's,
stained glass window removal; memorial service planning

RECTOR'S REPORT TO VESTRY

FOR VESTRY MEETING: JUNE 15, 2021

Reflecting on the Month Past

The past month has seen an unexpected need for administration. This was due to 1) the welcoming of three interns, integrating them into the parish staff and system, 2) addressing the varied parish concerns around re-gathering 3) building up a technology around hybrid meeting and 4) managing the return to Sunday worship in person in the church, with a doubling of liturgical preparation for each Sunday. At the same time, I have been more active than usual in my role as the Chair of the Diocesan Pastoral Response Team. This heightened activity is not coincidental: the pandemic has exacerbated existing parish tensions across the diocese.

Pastorally, it has been a joy to return to in-person pastoral contacts even as I feel unable to make even a fraction of the visits I would like to make because of administrative concerns. Funerals delayed by the pandemic are now being scheduled again. I am heartened by several newcomers exploring St. Matthew's and I have tried my best to initiate personal contact with them, including home and church visits. If any aspects of my calling are being given less time than I would like, they are pastoral care and study.

One administrative and communication task I have not fulfilled in the past month is reaching out to those who have not attended zoom meetings but who are faithful parishioners. This can be a focus for the second half of June.

Looking to the Month(s) Ahead

Across the diocese and across denominations, in every church I am aware of (except for the Roman Catholic parish in town) the response to regathering has been slower and more tepid than we thought it would be. There is a lot playing into this — generalized exhaustion, the chance to do non-church things we haven't done for 14 months, a sense of disconnection, the ease of online worship, continued anxiety around the virus — and there are two ways of understanding this slow start. One is that there is going to be a gradual ramping up to pre-pandemic participation. The other understanding, more grim, is that many people have discovered that church is less essential to them, thus accelerating mainline denominational decline by 10 or 20 years in 1 year. St. Matthew's is strong, and I believe we are going to gradually ramp back up to fuller attendance, but it's going to be messy, incomplete, and not without some losses. I expect that the post-pandemic St. Matthew's will be shaped in the long-term by the question of how we invite the rapidly emerging new Hillsborough into our parish. In the short term, we have the past of engaging our existing parish while planning new ways of reaching out.

More practically, although I go on vacation for the first two weeks of July, I'd like by mid-July to have reached out to people who have not or are not attending. Another goal is to have 2 in-person services up and running on Sunday with the background technology working to transfer the sermon into the remaining Zoom worship service. By the end of July I expect us to be experimenting with live video cast through Zoom of the Eucharistic service in place of Zoom Morning Prayer. Serious thought must be given to maintaining zoom fellowship and formation for the foreseeable future.

A final initiative for June-July is my reaching out to people who might feel disenfranchised by the parish following the Parish House renaming and who are concerned about politics being too present in the church. My aim is to organize an informal meeting with them all and one or two Vestry members.

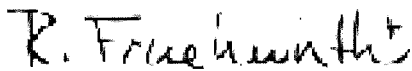
Items to note

- Parish Life is hosting two more parish-wide events: July 18 and August 15 following Sunday service. Please attend if you are able; hold these dates.
- The Vestry Offerings for regathering are filling up quickly! Thank you Vera, Madeline, and Sonja.
- The new Women's Spirituality Group continues in the formation of its leadership development under the direction of Kate Wisz
- Safe Harbor for Caregivers with The Rev. Para Drake and David McDuffie has launched. If you know of someone who who benefit from this program, please refer them to Para.
- A new Men's Group is being organized by Rick Brewer. He expects to have a couple of events for the men of the parish by August. Men: stay tuned!
- Christian Yoga: Kate Wisz is also working with Anne Kenyon to organize a Christian yoga class in our new education building.
- AA has resumed using our fellowship hall 3 nights a week.
- Means and Ends: I continue to talk with John Oxaal about the best way to take this initiative forward with a special attention to charter schools.
- Hybrid Meeting space With the help of an OWL video camera, cabling, a tech cart, and a display, we are gradually piecing together a mobile, tech unit for Hybrid Meetings. Presently we are using a 27" display, which might need, in time, to be replaced with a larger unit. I would like us to explore fitting out the large room in the education building to be a zoom room with a projection display.
- Our Duke Interns are thinking of offering some light evening seminars, mixing theology, history, and fellowship in July...stay tuned

And personally...

The kids are now home for the summer, but they also start summer camps in a week, which they will attend periodically, allowing Jane and I to devote working hours to...work! And my physical health is improving rapidly as I gain mobility (thanks be to God). My family and I will be away from July 2 through July 16.

Faithfully,



The Rev. Robert Fruehwirth

Senior Warden Report
St Matthew's Hillsborough
June 15, 2021

- Vestry Call list
 - Met with Sonja Tilley to create a conversation guide
 - Redistributed parishioner contacts to vestry members
- Created "God Present in Our Lives" schedule for Vestry Formation
- Attended first Finance Committee meeting
- Set up meeting with Bill Kodros of Personnel Committee to review how St Matthew's has used rector and self reviews in the past, make plan to use in future
- Beginning plans for Convention
 - Conversations with Robert, Lisa, Mary, and Mary Ann
 - Preparing for delegate selection
- Met with Robert to prepare for Vestry meeting
- Thinking about Vestry gathering, building our community
 - "Soft" social, post 6/15 meeting at church

Respectfully Submitted,

Elizabeth Hays

Junior Warden's Report

June 15, 2021

Recently Completed:

- Verville Interiors and Preservation on site to repair two 2 monuments.
- Verville training class scheduled for Sat., July, 31 from 8am-Noon.
- Gutters cleaned at the rectory and the church building. YAC also checked downspouts to make sure they were flowing freely.
- Met with Warren-Hay to look at air filtration.
- Met with Society of Junior Wardens
- Cleaning services with Anago amended to increase the cleaning of the Sanctuary and Hayden building (all areas) to 1 day every other week. (Education bldg remains 1x per month and Parish House 1x every other week).
- Property management meeting rescheduled for June 14th.

Currently In Progress:

- Society of Junior Wardens recommends getting bids for rectory renovation and then focusing on funds for renovation.
- Stained glass window removed to Virginia for repair. Should be reinstalled by November. Second window to be repaired on site in November.
- Churchyard committee had 3 boxwoods tested for blight (1 positive)
- Fine Arts & Furnishings to begin chair reupholstery in the Graebner Room. Also updated the book that documents gifts to the buildings-last updated in 2012.
- Fine Arts & Furnishings looking for someone to build a 3 shelf bookcase to fit under a window in the Graebner Room.
- Choir room windows sealed shut. Windows need screens so they can be opened.
- Air filtration proposal from Warren-Hay.

Service to Others/Social Outreach

Vestry – Steve Hutson 6/5/21

(Corrected)

Alamance-Orange Prison Ministry: This nonprofit hires and pays a full-time chaplain to minister to the needs of inmates in the local prison. Its board maintains a building for use on the grounds of the facility. Things are just starting to slowly open back up from the COVID lockdown. Bible study is resuming, as well as movie nights for a limited number of men at a time. All volunteer activity is still on hold for the foreseeable future, however, which also includes the popular Yokefellows program. There is some activity, though, like an art show in late July at Margaret Lane Gallery featuring art from several of the incarcerated men. Once the volunteer lockdown is lifted, we will be looking for more opportunities for St. Matthews parishioners who may be interested to get involved.

Chair: Rob Smylie

FeSt: Plans will be revised as needed for the upcoming season.

Contact: Lisa Frost Phillips

Food for All: Discontinued for now while the community explores different options for responding to these needs.

Contact: Hugh Tilson

Habitat for Humanity: Currently there is not an active committee. Ellen is continuing by coordinating with clergy. She is recruiting for summer build dates on June 5, 12 and 26 for a house in Hillsborough.

Facilitator: Ellen Mcraeke

Orange Congregations in Mission (OCIM): Our goal is to provide 175 cans of stew each month, with the church serving as our collection point. For several months St. Matthew's has been meeting and sometimes exceeding our goal. Some parishioners have also been providing additional funds directly to OCIM. Dedicated volunteers in masks are regularly on-site to unpack and stock newly received items, keeping the shelves full.

Chair: Carolyn Parsley

RJR Committee: March 23 - Discussion of Caste, April 25 - Discussion of 42 (youth did not join, but Kim Powell did), April 27 - second part - Discussion of Caste. Our section of the webpage is being revised and updated. A lending library is being developed for the Graebner Room.

Chair: Jane Clunie

Social Ministry Committee: The Committee maintains its relationship with Anathoth Farm which is scaling back its work to farm the garden, seek inter-farm partnerships to coordinate excess food and to focus more on Cedar Grove. They are filling the finance chair with a new volunteer. The committee also maintains a relationship with Fairview Community Garden and offers related volunteer opportunities to members of our parish. Funding: Compass Center - \$500, Durham Tech Scholarship - \$1,850, Fairview Garden - \$800, OCIM - \$2,000, Meals on Wheels Orange County - \$2,000.

Chair: Eileen Camp

ST. MATTHEW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
MONTHLY FINANCIAL SUMMARY FOR MAY 2021

GENERAL FUND BUDGET

BUDGET INCOME SUMMARY ITEMS:		2021 BUDGET	MONTH OF May	YR 2021 TOTAL	% of Budget	NOTES/COMMENTS
1	PLATE/GIFT OFFERINGS	40,000	4,472	23,198	58%	
2	LATE 2020 PLEDGES	0	0	4,510		
3	CURRENT YR PLEDGES	443,140	21,486	215,624	49%	
4	FEES & MISC INCOME	1,600	225	450	28%	
5	CARRYOVER CASH FROM 2020	20,000		20,000	100%	
6	Total Budget Income:	504,740	26,183	263,782	52% -	
7						
8						
9	OUTREACH EXPENSES:					
10	DIOCESAN ASKING	56,450	4,704	23,521	42%	
11	FOOD FOR ALL	300	0	21	7%	
12	OUTREACH PLEDGES	5,500	0	7,750	141%	Vestry designates
13	DISCRETIONARY OUTREACH	0	5,650	(2,991)	0%	
14	INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH	3,500	0	0	0%	Social Ministries Committee designates
15	Total Outreach:	65,750	10,354	28,301	43%	
16						
17	MAINTENANCE & IMPROVEMENT:					
18	SEXTON & CUSTODIAN	34,946	2,829	14,144	40%	
19	REPAIRS/MAINT/SUPPLIES	10,150	772	4,209	41%	
20	CHURCH UTILITIES	14,750	603	5,642	38%	
21	RECTORY UTILITIES	4,500	382	2,285	51%	
22	PROPERTY INSURANCE	9,348	0	4,347	47%	
23	INSURANCE CLAIMS		0	0		
24	Total Maint & Improv:	73,694	4,586	30,627	42%	
25						
26	CLERGY SUPPORT EXPENSES:					
27	RECTOR	99,441	7,984	39,490	40%	Sal, Prof Exp, Trv, Pens, Med Ins, CE, Sab
28	ASST. RECTOR	54,136	4,319	21,972	41%	Salary, Prof Exp, Trvl, Pension, CE
29	SUPPLY PRIESTS	1,400	0	0	0%	
30	Total Clergy Support:	154,977	12,303	61,463	40%	
31						
32	ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES:					
33	WORKERS COMP	2,650	54	277	10%	
34	SECRETARY	28,974	2,505	12,504	43%	Salary + Pension
35	FINANCIAL SECRETARY	9,739	812	4,058	42%	
36	SUPPORT PERSONNEL	2,500	153	660	26%	
37	STAFF SS/TRAVEL/HEALTH IS SUPPORT	20,560	1,809	8,529	41%	
38	AUDITOR	2,800	0	0	0%	
39	COMMUNICATION	24,450	1,381	10,294	42%	Phone, Postage, Off Exp., Off Supl, Misc
40	Total Admin. Expenses:	91,673	6,713	36,321	40%	
41						
42	CHRISTIAN ED. PROGRAM EXPENSES:					
43	NURSERY PROGRAM	6,600	900	2,600	39%	
44	EDUCATION PROGRAMS	46,396	1,673	21,504	46%	
45	DIOCESAN CONVENTION	750	0	0	0%	
46	Total CE Program Expenses:	53,746	2,573	24,104	45%	
47						
48	WORSHIP EXPENSES:					
49	MUSIC PROGRAM	44,487	3,241	17,868	40%	Choir Dir, Orgnst, Spcl Musions, Supl, misc
50	ALTAR GUILD'S EXPENSES	1,500	0	0	0%	
51	WORSHIP SUPPLIES	600	0	0	0%	
52	FELLOWSHIP & SPECIAL EVENTS:	2,500	25	124	5%	Fellowship, Spcl Events, Pstrl Receptions
53	Total Worship Expenses:	49,087	3,266	17,992	37%	
54						
55	Total Budget Expenses	488,927	39,795	198,809	41%	
56						
57	NON-BUDGETED DISCRETIONARY FUNDS					
58						
59	NET BUDGET INCOME (Income - Expense)	15,813	(13,612)	64,973		

ST. MATTHEW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
NON-BUDGET FINANCIAL INFORMATION FOR MAY 2021

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 Created 6/10/21

NON-BUDGET FINANCIAL STATUS INFORMATION AT MONTH-END

			NOTES/COMMENTS
1	FIRST HORIZON CHECKING ACCOUNT BALANCE (Operating + Custodial account balance)	\$260,439	
2	OPERATING ACCOUNT BALANCE	\$88,075	
3	CUSTODIAL ACCOUNT BALANCE (Pass-through funds and Reserve funds)	\$172,364	
6	CD'S:	\$8,169	
	CD (Outreach endowment) \$8,169		
7	DIOCESE-MANAGED ENDOWMENT VALUE:	\$935,610	(Churchyard + Murphy + Undesignated)
8	VALUE CHANGE SINCE LAST MONTH	\$0	
9	VALUE CHANGE SINCE START OF YR	\$107,364	

God at Work in Each of Our Lives: Sharing Our Journeys
2021-2022 Vestry Schedule

June	Edward
July	Vera
August	Sonja
September	Lindsay
October	Elizabeth
November	Steve
January	Maria
February	Blythe
March	Madeline

THOUGHTS ABOUT VESTRY DISCERNMENT The Rev.

Robert Fruehwirth, June 2021 | Draft 4

This essay is written out of frustration with existing material on vestry discernment. We use the word *discernment* as a kind of talisman, hoping that just by speaking this word we will somehow connect what we do with God and God's will, but without knowing how to engage discernment properly, prayerfully, as disciples of Jesus. No-one is fooled into believing that by beginning our meetings with a 1-minute prayer we will insure that the meeting itself will be an act of prayer and discernment, deeply connected with our faith, our lives and the holy and mysterious, unpredictable movement of God. And yet, insisting on praying before a meeting, or at best insisting on ongoing discipleship (but there again, offering little assistance as to how one does that) seems to be the best we can do.

At its heart the word *discernment* symbolizes our desire to make decisions and commitments with a connection to our deepest values, to God, as God is moving in response to local, dynamic, particular circumstances. With discernment we desire to locate how we are to surrender ourselves to the movement of God here and now. This is a laudable aspiration, but aspirations without practical formation tend to have no effect. This essay intends to provide a start to that formation, first with scriptural quotes, then addressing the nature of vestry discernment in its leadership of a parish, and finally suggesting what is helpful, practically, for a disciplined and intentional practice of group discernment. Questions for personal and group reflection conclude the essay.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. [Romans 12:2]

The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. [James 3:17-18]

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. [1 John 4:1]

Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are discerned spiritually. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ. [1 Corinthians 2:14-16]

Vestry Discernment, p. 2

As often as anything important is to be done in the monastery, the prioress or abbot shall call the whole community together and explain what the business is;

and after hearing the advice of the members, let them ponder it and follow what they judge to be the wiser course. The reason why we have said all should be called for counsel is that the Spirit often reveals what is better to the younger. The community members, for their part, are to express their opinions with all humility, and not presume to defend their own views obstinately. [Rule of St. Benedict, Ch. 3.]

A primary responsibility of the Vestry is to engage in discerning God's desire for the parish. The Vestry is not simply a representational body of the parish, making decisions through debate and majority vote. The Vestry is rather a body of disciples that places itself in the mysterious presence of God and in humility questions what God's desire for the parish might be. What is to be the next step in this chapter of the parish's life? How do we respond to unforeseen crisis?

Grounding this idea of discernment is the assumption that as disciples gathered in the name of Jesus, the Spirit of Jesus can in fact move us in unexpected ways to direct the organism of the Vestry and the parish. God is Holy Mystery, elusive, free, and unpredictable, yet urgently engaged in the historical unfolding of the community. The mystery of discernment is that by coming together in a certain way — we might say with qualities of humility, prayerfulness, honesty and care — we can discern, however imperfectly, the desire of God for us now, for the next step in our common life.

Such discernment is always provisional, improvisational, and related to the concrete specifics of the parish and local community. Discernment is being still enough in the presence of one another, and attentive enough to the halting words of one another, that we begin to hear the melody of God's life, and then gather together a sense of how the parish might move with this divine life.

A great case study of discernment is found in Acts 15, when the apostles faced the unprecedented and highly charged question of how much of the Law Gentile converts should be asked to observe. It is curious, and instructive to note that the discussion proceeds primarily through *testimony*, not argumentation from timeless religious principles. That is, the apostles did not seek to argue out a solution based on scripture or tradition or metaphysics or practicality. These influences are all present in the background of the discernment. In the foreground however is personal testimony, the apostles witnessing to how they have experienced the Holy Spirit act in their communities. In the discussion, Peter describes how God was giving Holy Spirit to Gentiles and he reminds his Jewish friends their own difficulty in keeping a Law they want to impose on others. This is his testimony. Following this,

...the whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the

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Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, 'My brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from

among them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets... [Acts 15]

Testimony to how God is being experienced comes first, then scripture and tradition. The apostles conclude their discussion with a clear decision communicated in a letter to the Gentile converts that contains this striking line:

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...

When we come together as a Vestry, there are many decisions we will make together that will not require prolonged or disciplined discernment. We will make some decisions rapidly, relying on the advice of a person or committee. That we delegate many matters and trust the work and decisions of others is critical because only so will we have time and energy for discerning what seems good and holy and whole-making to us and the Holy Spirit.

Many situations could call for disciplined discernment. Perhaps there is a painful issue with personnel that is hard to resolve. Perhaps there is a hotly contested question in the parish's life. Perhaps the vestry has come together to establish priorities for the coming year, or is reviewing entrepreneurial ministries launched in the previous year. In such cases, the leadership of the Vestry — usually the Rector and the Senior Warden, sometimes with Diocesan assistance — has the responsibility of framing a process where discernment of God's will can happen in the Vestry. The Vestry should understand the difference between decision making and discernment as these are different modes of action and discussion. They should be alerted by their leaders when the meeting shifts between these different modes.

How does such discernment work? What discipline is required? How is it different from simple decision making? Following below are six thoughts.

1. Every Vestry member comes to a meeting where discernment is to happen around some issue understanding that there is almost certainly a difference between their perspective and God's desire. The discipline here is two-fold: knowing where you stand, what you think and feel, yet 2) not presupposing that your perspective is identical with God's. In other words, you come with the clear awareness that, while your point of view is important and essential for the groups' discernment, you are but one part of a greater whole, and that the discernment emerges out of the sharing of different perspectives and different testimonies in the group.
2. Each member thus comes prepared to *bear witness* to their perspective and their experience in prayer and reflection as well as to their conclusions. By "experience" I mean the process or journey by which they came to their conclusions, not just the hardened conclusions or perspectives. By sharing with others the journey by which

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we have come to a perspective, we soften our conversation, create more chance for

understanding, and also broaden the range and possibilities of the discussion. More is taken into account, a finer sense of how God might be working can arise. More detail comes into the picture. This is testimony rather than argument. Knowing and stating your process is also an act of humility because it acknowledges that your perspective is not timeless, not argued with from a timeless truth, but something that has emerged through limited, lived experience. It involves each member consciously owning their limitations in approaching the question at hand.

3. In the process of the meeting, the conversation is structured to allow for each member to have a space to share their perspective and the process by which they came to it. Each member is given an equal amount of time and space and each is listened to with equal respect. This giving to each person equal dignity is not only a sign of God's Kingdom and part of our baptismal covenant, but broadens the discernment experience and adds greater sensitivity and detail. Scientists tell us that something becomes important and exciting to us *as a result* of our paying attention to it, not the other way around. If part of our job is to bear witness to our experience and perspective, another part of our job is to listen to all the others speaking, and to listen with our hearts open, ready to be moved and changed by what we receive. When we do this, empathy opens, new perspectives and values touch and move us, we discern new possibilities. The primary job of the facilitator of the meeting is to insure the possibility for structured sharing and careful listening.
4. An image that captures what this discernment looks like is that of the vestry gathered in a ring, a hub without spokes, with only God as Holy and Unpredictable Mystery at the center. Each individual cedes the central space of power and control, understanding they are but one voice, willing to move to the outer circumference of the ring to create with the others a space where God can be known. Every person is thus marginalized, but no person is marginalized. All wait on God together and wait on God's desire to come out of the process of the group.
5. The expectation is that with prayerful and reflective testimony and acceptant listening, the perspectives of the individuals, and the testimonies they make can blend and sift until something emerges, around which the group can begin to congeal, something that seems right, something that fits. There is an almost alchemical nature to this. The group discovers something that organizes the concerns, that seems holy and good and right and practicable: "It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us..."
6. The process does not need to be efficient, and should not be rushed. At first, the sharing and listening might only create more complexity and appear to threaten

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clarity or unity. The various threads in the rope of parish life need to be unwound and laid flat on the table. The leadership has the role of discerning when the group is ready to move forward into a decision, when it is time to rewind the rope. Part of

our faithfulness to God, and humility, is attending on a matter until the communal energy seems to congeal around a single, coherent resolve.

Humility is absolutely everywhere in this process: humility in claiming your own voice and your place in the process, and humility in knowing your perspective is not God's and not the discernment. Humility is present in the acceptance of other viewpoints as valid and listening for the meanings, feelings, and values underneath.

But the whole process is also a function of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. It is out of love for our neighbor, ourselves and God that we seek God's desire for us, knowing that God has planned for us 'more than we either desire or deserve.' And along with such loving desire, there is Christian faith, faith in the presence of the Risen Lord who desires to share more of his life with us and has given us the Holy Spirit to lead us, baby step by baby step out of where we are now into something new. And with the love and faith there is hope, the living hope that leaps up in the joy at being a part of God's working in our small corner of the Kingdom today.

Questions for Reflection

Think about an argument you had with a close friend or your partner/spouse. Did you take the time to share with one another how you came to your point of view, that is, to offer testimony? Or did you just jump to sharing hardened opinions and viewpoints? How might the discussion have changed if you had started the conversation with both sides offering how the process by which they came to their position or feelings?

Are you personally more inclined to give in to others, eliding over your experience and perspective? Are you inclined to remain silent? Or, oppositely, are you inclined to expect people to fall in with your perspective? Are you inclined to dominate a conversation, to speak with authority, and not to listen so well to others? Which tendency do you have, to be timid and acquiescing or very vocal and domineering? Do you like to make decisions quickly or prefer to wait for more information? What is the challenge of humility for you in entering this time of discernment? Are you being asked to be less timid, or less authoritative? To trust more in the group, or to trust in the validity of your own perspective?

Think back to a recent vestry or committee discussion — think of a time when someone shared an opposing point of view. Was any process offered, or just the conclusions? If just conclusions, might you have inquired curiously into their process, about how they came to that point of view? What stopped you?

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In the same scenario as the previous question: what happened inside of you when another person presents something opposite to your perspective? Was there fear, anxiety, anger, unease, judgementalism, tuning out, a marshaling of more arguments in your favor? If this were to happen again, how might you care for yourself in the meeting so that you can stay

open to the other persons' perspective as real and valid and deserving dignity? Can you attend on another when what they are saying causes unease in you? Why would you want to take on such difficult listening? Where is God in this?