

Church of the Nativity
Minutes of the Vestry
January 19, 2021

Attending: Stephanie Allen, Carrie Mash, Rene Garces, Cheryl Waechter, Robert Joines, Stephanie Sumner, Josh Booth, John Oldham, Kim Stoke, Beth Crow, Anne Krouse, Viola Baldwin, Bill Sena, and Gail Christensen.

The meeting convened with prayer at 7:05 pm via Zoom video-conferencing due to all meetings being suspended because of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Approval of the December 2020 minutes:

The minutes of the December Vestry meeting were submitted for approval. Cheryl moved to accept the minutes as written; Robert seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

Rector's Report: Stephanie Allen

Our pastoral care has been stretched with 5 deaths in less than a month: The Rev. Diane Corlett, the former Rector of Nativity who served for 17 years; her husband Fred Corlett; Bob McQueen; Ed Entrup; and Liz Mahoney. Since we cannot meet in person, funerals will be delayed or recorded, because of the pandemic. People have been wonderful about taking meals to the sick and bereaved, sending cards, and making calls. (In comparison, Nativity had 7 deaths in all of 2020, but 5 in just this last month alone, a concerning state of affairs.)

The Bishops have encouraged all churches to pull back from in-person services, making online services primary through Easter. They have also said that all trips in 2021 (mission trips and international trips, etc.) be canceled. The Youth's pilgrimage to Ireland will therefore be postponed until 2022. Stephanie also decided that the annual Vestry Retreat should be online; the topic will be the future of Nativity after Covid.

Wardens Election: Stephanie Allen

Carrie Mash has stepped down as Senior Warden, so Stephanie chose John Oldham as Senior Warden; Rene Garces has offered to continue as Junior Warden, and the Vestry voted unanimously that he remain in that post in 2021. Stephanie thanked Carrie and Rene for their service.

Four new Vestry members were welcomed to the meeting: Viola Baldwin, Beth Crow, Anne Krouse, and Bill Sena. Stephanie asked all the members to give her their top three liaison assignments. She thinks that we'll probably need more than one Vestry liaison to Pastoral Care.

Junior Wardens' Report: Rene Garces

Rene outlined the buildings and grounds activities in the last month: installing floodlights in the parking lot; providing a list of contractors to our neighbors who complained about our trees dropping branches, etc. on their properties; stopping the lawn service until March or April; and replacing a thermostat in Estill House that appears to have gone bad.

2020 Financial Report and 2021 Preliminary Budget: John Oldham

Nativity is doing well financially, despite the challenges - better than many other churches. We ended the year with about a \$5,000 deficit, which we can take out of the reserve. Revenue was

down about \$20K, but regular givers gave \$10K more than budgeted; rental income was down, but so were expenses - the Teams were good stewards in their spending.

The government loan of \$45,000 is not shown as income, but as a debt held in reserve. We are applying for forgiveness of the loan, since we met all the criteria for forgiveness. We did not spend any of that money in 2020, but may need some in 2021 if the budget is not met.

The 2021 draft budget will be based on what is pledged. So far, 138 pledges were received for a total of \$391,901, but we are hoping to reach out to some households that pledged in 2020 but have not yet pledged for 2021. We are planning for \$90K from regular givers, and \$16K from rental income, for a total 2021 budget of \$498,421, which is less than the 2020 budget.

The expected revenue is still \$47K less than expected expenses, so there will have to be cuts somewhere. We have kept salaries the same as last year, but there are some fixed expenses that cannot be touched. For example, our Diocesan assessment in 2021 is \$55,081. We pay \$44K/year towards the mortgage, which will be significantly reduced when we refinance thanks to paying towards the principal with donations from the Capital Campaign. We hope to keep the Outreach line item at \$14K. We may have to defer long-term maintenance projects. The Youth trips will be postponed, which may help the budget somewhat.

Convention Delegate Approval: Stephanie Allen

We are prevented by the canons from meeting in person at the annual Diocesan convention, so it was canceled in 2020. A special drive-thru "convention" will be held in March to vote to change the canons to allow online conventions. Stephanie nominated the same people as last year to be this year's delegates from Nativity: Cuyler O'Connor, Lori Special, Alicia Lester-Bodford, and Jeremy Clos. Cheryl moved that the Vestry approve the nominations; Robert seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Rector Housing Allowance Resolution:

Cheryl moved that the Vestry approve Stephanie's housing allowance up to \$30,900, in accordance with the tax laws. Robert seconded. The vote was unanimous.

2020 Parochial Report Questions:

Because there is no way to track attendance at Sunday services since March, the Parochial Report will include attendance figures only January-February 2020. Instead, three questions will be asked of all Vestries in the Diocese of North Carolina:

1. What were the primary opportunities, innovations, and challenges in conducting worship during the pandemic? What did you learn?

Opportunities:

- We learned how to live stream services, which will come in handy when we return to in-person services
- We learned to be flexible. We can now watch services when WE want, since they are now online, not on a schedule set by the church.
- We were able to reach out to non-members via online services, expanding our congregation.
- The pandemic forced us to accelerate the opportunities that were there but we had no chance/time to accept them before.

- We learned that the building is not "the church" - the people are.
- Because lots of churches' services were online, we could see other churches' services.
- We had "watch parties" so that we could share the services with friends.

Innovations:

- Rene built the dollies for the outdoor services, which will serve us for years to come.
- We learned how to do outdoor services.
- We learned how to record/live stream using cell phones and iPads.
- We learned how to speak/sing with masks on.

Challenges:

- Hard to preach to a cell phone in an empty church.
- Trying to maintain a sense of community when we cannot meet.
- Hard to welcome new members.
- The order of the liturgy gives comfort/ritual but it is lost when we recorded the service in pieces.
- Getting/keeping the Youth involved and engaged is particularly challenging, not only for the priest/staff but for parents.

2. What are the primary opportunities and challenges your church is facing as it plans for the future?

Opportunities:

- We have learned how to live stream services, which we will continue even after we can meet again in person.
- We have learned how to do outdoor services, which were well received and will continue even after we can meet again in person.
- We learned that the Day of Giving event worked even better as the Week of Giving, and we will do both in the future.

Challenges:

- How can we prevent a split between the online and in-person congregations, as we have experienced between the 8:30 and 10:30 congregations?
- How can we rebuild the sense of community after we return in person?
- How can we re-engage the Youth?
- How can we really mean "All are Welcome" if we have to restrict attendance only to those in masks or only to those who have been vaccinated?
- Making accessibility (via live streaming) a possibility to more people (giving them permission?).
- How can we deal with the conflict between the nature of church (community) and the nature of the pandemic (separation/isolation)?

3. What three things have changed the most in how the church conducts its ministry?

1. Conducting the way we do funerals. We urge people to get closure by doing a funeral soon after the death, but now we are delaying funerals until we may gather again.

People need to share their grief, and they cannot if we cannot hug, shake hands, be together in support of the bereaved.

2. Moving education online.

This is not "formation", but just a placeholder for the variety of ways we are "formed" into God's people.

3. Doing Pastoral Care.

We have brought meals, made phone calls, sent cards, but we have not been able to visit the dying in hospitals or at home to give last rites. We cannot visit members of the congregation to be present in their grief.

People crave/need connection, hugs, touching without gloves, ability to look in others' eyes, our presence at times of grief as well as joy.

We need the "sacred space" of the buildings again. Watching from home isn't the same as being present in the building.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:12 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Gail Christensen

Clerk of the Vestry