

Report from the Vestry September 9, 2008

Following Eucharist, Father Howard called the meeting to order with the Prayer of Bishop Clay Matthews.

Attending:

Fr. Howard, Fr. Robert Travis, Rev. Brett Backus, George Arrants, Louise Conrad, Ben Davidson, Rick Deaderick, Tom Hale, Les Hargrove, Julie Hembree, Anne Kaminsky, Robin Kell, Jim Phillips, Scott Poland, Babs Richardson, Vaiden Taylor, Courtney Zirkle, Bob Wadley, Larry Jones.

Vestry Minutes from August 12, 2008, which had been distributed by email to the Vestry members prior to the meeting, were presented for discussion and approval. Motion was made by George Arrants to approve the minutes as written. Approval was unanimous. Father Howard asked that each of the Vestry members introduce themselves around the table to Father Rob and Deacon Brett.

Treasurer's Report

Vaiden Taylor distributed the financial numbers for August for discussion. Income in August exceeded expectations by \$29,745 while expenditures were less than expected by \$7,125. August has traditionally been a low month for collections, but it was a good month this year. Collections in August of 2008 were double that collected in August 2007, although some of this may be income that won't be collected later in the year. It was noted that due to recent staff additions we can expect to operate much closer to the budget for the remainder of the year. No major expense items are due in the remaining months of 2008, other than the quarterly health insurance payments in October. Motion was made by Jim Phillips to accept the Treasurer's Report as presented. Approval was unanimous.

Finance Committee's Report

Rick Deaderick reported that the Finance Committee met to discuss the budget process for 2009. The Committee expects to spend more effort on planning for 2009. A more intentional process of budget building will be implemented with more emphasis placed on strategic planning. The budgeting process will also include an analysis of actual income and expenses in 2008. Initial budget discussions will use the format of essential items first, followed by discretionary items.

Examples of fixed items include building debt service, term loan debt service and copier lease payments. Then we have necessary items including utilities, property and liability insurance, workman's compensation insurance, telephone, audit, and property taxes on church-owned houses and lots. Next we have personnel costs (our largest expense area) including clergy and staff salaries, clergy housing allowance, clergy and staff automobile allowances and reimbursements, clergy and staff pensions, clergy and staff medical, dental and life insurance premiums, and payroll taxes.

This year we have committed 10% of pledge income to Outreach. In addition, we will be giving 13% of unrestricted pledges, unpledged income and plate to support the Diocese of East Tennessee in 2009. What funds remain are available for the Vestry to use to support worship, office operation and expenses (e.g., computers for new clergy), paper communications, the music program, Christian formation for adults, youth and children, pastoral care, building and grounds maintenance, and all other programs or ministries.

Each of the Commissions at Ascension is asked to submit their budget proposals for consideration to Bob Wadley no later than October 20. Father Hess and Bob Wadley will consult with the Staff and prepare a proposed budget using the format described above for presentation to the Finance Committee at the beginning of November, with the goal of having a consensus budget in time for presentation at the Vestry meeting on November 11, 2008. Once the results of the 2009 Stewardship Campaign are known, a final budget will be prepared for adoption in January. If we continue to receive pledges into February, it may be necessary to revise the budget in April.

Priest-in-Charge's Report

Father Howard reported on integration of our new clergy, the 2009 stewardship campaign, the status of Christian formation, plans for the upcoming confirmation at Ascension, and sponsorship for a stained-glass "Martha Window".

Father Howard, Father Rob and Deacon Brett have begun a planning process to clarify roles and procedures. Brett is assuming primary responsibility for youth programs, supported by Molly and David Smelser. Brett will also be taking the lead in helping form a young adult/young couples group. Father Rob is initiating his work with areas related to the Great Commission, including outreach to visitors, working with the Greeter's program and assisting Vestry persons in furthering the work of the Great Commission Commission. Father Harry is continuing in place at his present level of activity. Amy will continue to supervise the Stephen Ministry program. Mary Lee will be present at Ascension on Wednesdays and Sundays, participating in the liturgy and developing our healing ministry. Pastoral care will be shared primarily by Father Howard, Father Harry, Father Rob and Rev. Brett.

Father Howard asked Rev. Brett and Father Rob to express their feelings about being at Church of the Ascension. Rev. Brett commented that he felt very welcome at Ascension. It seems the right place for him and his family. He has been impressed by the creative energy he has observed and is excited to be with us. Father Rob expressed his excitement about the Great Commission Commission at Ascension. Our interest in the Great Commission was something he noticed that set our church apart from the others he visited. Only Ascension seems to have taken a serious interest in that area and he is looking forward to seeing how things develop. Father Rob mentioned that he is looking forward to his family's arrival in the near future.

John Robertson, Dana Teagarden, and Leslie and Leo Beale are providing vigorous leadership in the 2008-2009 Stewardship Campaign. Stewardship will be discussed in the new neighborhood group meetings, which are beginning after the 10:30 service on September 14th.

The Adult Education Commission has designed a new format for Sunday mornings which includes joint sessions focused on the theme of Christian Love. There will be four classes, including the Book of Exodus (Father Howard), Social Justice and God's Love (Amy), Marriage (Father Rob), and Aging (Father Harry and Dick Strehlow). A teaching series led by the Rev. Larry Gipson is also planned for November 16 through November 19. There will also be two classes on Wednesday evenings, one on healing taught by the Rev. Mary Lee Bergeron, and another on the Book of First John, taught by Dick Strehlow. The contemplative prayer group will continue to be led by Father Harry along with two Bible studies during the week, a Women's Group led by Caroline Vogel, focusing on the work of Barbara Brown Taylor, and a Men's Bible Study Group led by Father Howard on The Book of Mark.

The Bishop will confirm a group of seven youth and seventeen adults on Sunday evening, September 14 at 5:00 pm. The Confirmation will be held upstairs, with a reception downstairs afterward. This will make a total of 50 who have been confirmed at Ascension during this cycle.

There is a campaign underway to purchase a stained-glass "Martha Window", sponsored by Dorothy Stair and Mildred Wright. \$6,500 is already in place for this purchase. An artist's concept of the "Martha Window" was passed around for the Vestry to see. The actual window will contain a bronze plaque listing the "Martha's" at Church of the Ascension. Father Howard noted that both Dorothy and Mildred have been widely recognized as "Martha's" at Ascension for many years.

Senior Warden's Report

Tom Hale reported on Tom Ladd's efforts to analyze the data from the Search Committee Survey. He is expected to present the results in the near future. However, all looks good for Father Howard to be accepted as the Rector at Ascension. Our Senior Warden expressed his intent to try and accelerate the approval process with the Bishop, rather than wait until the full two years has expired in March 2009.

Randy Nichols has been in contact with the county about emergency planning for Ascension. As a result we may expect some assistance from the Sheriff's Department on this effort. Tom also thanked everyone for their support of Rally Day this year.

Junior Warden's Report

Babs Richardson reported on the success of Rally Day. The original planning was for 230 attendees, 175 adults and 65 children. Estimates of actual attendance exceeded those numbers, including at least three families who are not currently members of Church of the Ascension, but were invited by friends who are members. This compares

with attendance of about 130 in 2007. Babs took the opportunity to thank the Brotherhood of St. Andrews and all the other people who helped with the set up and take down activities. The only problem with Rally Day this year was that the waterslide was taken down before all the adults who wanted to ride it had an opportunity.

In-Reach Commission Report

Babs Richardson reported that the In-Reach Commission has been very active and widely utilized. However, going forward some rethinking of this commission may be necessary. This commission needs to be more involved in programmatic related issues, i.e., identifying certain needs and programs for the various groups. It has been viewed as a parish life commission or just a party planner. There is significant overlap between the Great Commission Commission and Inreach.

Because people are hungry for community and fellowship with other people who really care and are concerned for them, we need to foster and promote a warm, friendly, at home atmosphere at Ascension and encourage parishioners to practice the gift of hospitality with others. Ongoing activities that have exemplified this hospitality include Epiphany, Lunch Bunch, Baptisms, Funerals, Confirmation Receptions, Rally Day, Lemonade under the Cyprus, Pig Roast and Advent Lessons and Carols.

There is energy present and renewed interests in various activities. We need to continue to offer these activities, but we need to avoid over-using some events. New events need to be planned and old events need to take a rest and be revisited at another time. A Parish Life Hospitality coordinator is something that should be considered in the future. The current staff is stretched and not able to take on this vital element of serving others. By implementing this coordinator position, the In-Reach Commission, working together with the Great Commission Commission, could begin to develop and help implement programs that meet the needs of our various parish groups and the wider community.

Babs also reminded the Vestry members that they need to linger after church services and wear their name tags.

Father Howard thanked Babs for all the extra hours spent on the In-Reach Commission.

Vestry Recommendation for Ordination of Brett Backus

January 17, 2009 has been tentatively set for the ordination of Deacon Brett Backus to the priesthood, based on six months of service as Deacon at Ascension. Father Howard instructed the Vestry on the details of this process, which requires that the Vestry formally endorse the candidate (Brett Backus) for ordination. The Vestry must consider the performance of the candidate, but must also agree to provide the candidate with the proper environment and opportunities to gain the experience needed in preparation for the priesthood.

Babs Richardson made a motion that the Vestry endorse Rev. Brett Backus for ordination to the priesthood. Specifically the Vestry was asked to certify that, after due inquiry, they are well assured and believe that the Reverend Brett P. Backus, Deacon since the 31st day of May in the year 2008, being the date of ordination to the Diaconate, has lived a sober, honest and godly life, and has not written, taught, or held anything contrary to the Doctrine, Discipline, or Worship of this Church; and therefore is a person worthy to be admitted to the Sacred Order of Priests.

The motion to endorse Rev. Brett Backus for ordination was unanimously approved, with all Vestry members attaching their signatures to the Vestry Recommendation document (two copies) provided by Father Howard. A question was raised about how Rev. Backus' ordination might affect his continuing assignment at Church of the Ascension. Father Howard answered that Brett's two-year assignment at Ascension would continue as planned.

Vestry Elections for 2009

Father Howard announced that Randy Nichols has agreed to chair the nominating committee for elections this fall to fill the seats of five Vestry members whose terms expire this year. Serving on the nominating committee will be Babs Richardson, Les Hargrove, George Arrants, Rick Deaderick and Anne Kaminsky. Babs Richardson asked all the Vestry members to actively seek out members of Ascension who are qualified and interested in running for a seat on the Vestry.

Other Business

Bob Wadley asked the Vestry to approve a 30% housing allowance for the clergy. The request was unanimously approved.

There being no further business, Rick Deaderick made a motion that the meeting be adjourned. Babs Richardson seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

The closing prayer was lead by Les Hargrove.