

REPORT FROM THE VESTRY  
March 18, 2007

The regular Vestry meeting of the Church of the Ascension was held Tuesday evening, March 13, 2007. Thirteen of fifteen members, along with our Clerk, Treasurer, and Priest in Charge were present. We began at 6:00 with Holy Eucharist led by Fr. Howard, followed by our typical pizza meal.

Following approval of our February minutes, Fr. Howard provided his first report. He complemented our parish for its enthusiasm and energy. He also complemented the 50th Anniversary Committee for their creative planning and enthusiasm. He noted that our parish life is changing quite rapidly. He spoke of his plans for Holy Week, and invited Vestry members to assist with our Good Friday liturgy by providing meditations on the last words of Christ.

The Senior Warden's report reflected on the rapid change noted by Fr. Howard. Attendance on both Sundays and Wednesdays has demonstrated the positive change we had all hoped for. One business repercussion of this change is, however, a real lack of forecasting efficiency. Our budget and many other activities may well need to be revised as we come to understand this change and focus on the many ways this change will be reflected in our parish life.

The focus of this meeting was on Finance, with points of emphasis on the Audit Report, Budget, and Building Fund. First, as announced at the February meeting, the Finance Commission accepted the Audit. A number of issues were addressed in the report, and the commission reported the actions taken to remedy any deficiencies. On balance the deficiencies were minor. Consistent with the report, the accounting program used by our church was changed to QuickBooks. The system of counting and depositing Sunday offerings was revised, with the Treasurer leading a team to accomplish this task with sufficient internal control. The method of dealing with Clergy Discretionary Funds was also revised. Further, the Treasurer now serves as a backup for the Parish Administrator when dealing with most things financial.

Along with a listing of its underlying assumptions, a copy of the 2007 Budget was distributed and approved. It was noted that the budget is very "tight." It is hoped that our recent surge in attendance will translate into an increase in pledges. We will revise the budget as our financial situation dictates or allows. A copy of the budget will be placed in the library with the Vestry minutes. It was noted that the current budget reflects a 1% increase in our pledge to the diocese.

At the 2006 Parish Meeting, it was promised to the parish that we would consider how to deal with \$300K+ building fund. Several parishioners had inquired regarding what was going to be done with the accumulated funds. It was hoped that the Vestry could make a decision regarding how to deal with this issue at this meeting. Numerous options are being considered, but research on this matter has not yet reached the point where we would be willing to go before the parish with a suggested solution. Accordingly, this matter was deferred until more information could be gathered.

The Treasurer's report reflected expenses exceeding income for February. However, all bills have been paid, and the loan on the Church Van has been retired. Early March receipts have been better than February's.

The Stewardship Commission indicated that approximately 80 households, who have pledged in the past, have not yet pledged this year. Many of these have continued to give to Ascension

consistent with their previous pledges, but have simply not completed a pledge card this year. The associated uncertainty presents a planning problem for the Vestry. Possible reasons for the lack of pledges were discussed including clergy and leadership changes, and general uncertainty regarding the direction of the parish. The Commission would like to ascertain the reasons these families have not pledged, but acknowledged the possible need for pastoral care in some cases. Accordingly, the Commission will proceed carefully in contacting these individuals and will listen to and seek to address the concerns of these parishioners. This will be a topic at our Vestry retreat in April.

The Outreach Commission presented its \$25K budget, which was a part of the budget adopted earlier in the meeting. The budget featured 23 items common with previous outreach budgets, but added two new items, the FISH Building Campaign and scholarships for the Episcopal School of Knoxville.

Reports were received from most of the other commissions. Much is being accomplished across the various commissions, and information from these commissions is regularly provided in the Parish Paper and in our Sunday program inserts.

Three new items of business were addressed. First, the Vestry authorized Fr. Howard and Wardens to enter into an employment agreement with Caroline Vogel, a postulant for Holy Orders, for lay ministry leading to and through ordination. Caroline is finishing her divinity degree from Harvard in May, and will join our staff shortly thereafter. She has already been helping our Education Commission with its work. The Vestry also agreed to assume Vestry oversight of Caroline as she prepares for ordination to the Diaconate and Priesthood.

The Finance Commission referred the matter of recovery of moving expenses for Chris Cairns to the Vestry. Ascension paid moving expenses for Chris when he moved here in June. Since he left after only two months on our staff, the question was raised as to whether we should attempt to recover some portion of those expenses. This matter sparked considerable discussion. It was clear that various members had very differing views regarding what, if any, action was appropriate. In the end, we passed two resolutions. The first resolution, not to legally pursue the debt was passed unanimously; the second resolution, to forgive the debt, was passed with no objections, but with several abstentions.

Finally, previous Vestry action had prohibited business (commission/committee) meetings on Sunday's. This prohibition was not known to a number of Vestry members, and accordingly had been ignored in recent months. The Vestry elected to change the policy to specify that meetings should not occur before the end of the principal service of worship on Sundays.

For the Vestry,  
Tom Ladd and Mary LeMense, Wardens