

Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church Vestry Meeting Minutes

May 21, 2024

Vestry Members Present:

The Rev'd Neil Willard, Rector
Abigail Follmar, Senior Warden
Tom Van Arsdel, Junior Warden
Sheeba Thomas, Clerk
Jeanine Baker
Betty Key
Ken Alexander
John Wallace
Dick Viebig
Kip Krause
Michael Massey
Pam Harvey
David Madrigal
Rosine Hall
Margie Dieter

Vestry Members Absent:

David Candler

Assisting Clergy Present:

The Rev'd Ryan Hawthorne, Associate Rector

Assisting Clergy Absent:

N/A

The hybrid in-person + Zoom meeting started at 5:30 PM.

1. **Check-in and Opening Prayer.** Neil invited personal updates and opened the meeting with prayer.
2. **Dwelling in the Word.** Ryan invited Tom Van Arsdale and Sheeba Thomas to repeat a reading of Romans 8:22-27 after her, after which she invited vestry members to find phrases eliciting hope within these verses.
3. **Review and Approval of Consensus Items.** Minutes from the March 19, 2024 vestry meeting as well as reports from the Worship Council, Stewardship Council, Finance Council, Buildings and Grounds Council, Senior Warden, and Rector, were unanimously approved. All written reports, including consensus items, are attached to these minutes for the May meeting.
4. **Stewardship Council (Presenter: Ken Alexander)**
Total pledged amount exceeds the expected pledge total by a small amount. However, this is in the setting of program budget cuts and a lack of raises for clergy and staff. Most of the pledge dollars come from a limited number of households, so there is a need to both expand the total number of pledging households and to have a broader distribution of higher contributors. For these changes to occur, parishioners need to feel strongly connected to the Palmer community. Both vestry and clergy need to make an effort to get to know all church members, and church records need to be updated to reflect who has been baptized and/or confirmed, who is a newcomer etc. A motion was made for the vestry to meet in the 1st 2 weeks of June to gain a better understanding of households making up church membership.

Ken did note that sufficient pledges to match the \$50K Building Fund Challenge given in memory of Kirk Waldron have been received.

5. Finance Council (Presenters: Pam Harvey and Dick Viebig)

As of the end of April 2024, Palmer has a budget deficit of \$77K. The importance of all committees and programs adhering strictly to the budget was emphasized. To offset the budget deficit, security and custodial hours will need to be reduced.

Unexpected AC unit repairs have cost \$25K. The Buildings and Grounds Council will check whether AC unit repairs are covered by building insurance. In the event that they are not, a motion was made and unanimously approved, to use the Buildings and Grounds fund given in Kirk Waldron's memory, to cover these expenses.

6. Building and Grounds Council Report (Presenter: Kip Krause)

The council plans to work with Gerry Sandoval (Buildings and Grounds manager) to assemble a list of maintenance projects. Cost estimates will be obtained for those needing to be completed within the next 2 years, and these projects will be prioritized according to importance and fund availability.

7. Senior Warden's Reports (Presenter: Abigail Follmar)

a. Nominations Committee

- i. This is made up of all 3rd year vestry members + 1 representative each from 1st and 2nd year vestry members
- ii. To be nominated to lay leadership positions, parishioners should be a confirmed Episcopalian and must have contributed at least \$1 to Palmer.
- iii. The nominating committee will accept nominations from the parish in August 2024. A notice detailing what is to be included in the nomination submission will be placed in The Palmer bulletin insert.

b. Code of Procedures Proposed Revisions

- i. In conjunction with the June 2024 meeting to review church membership, proposed Code of Procedures revisions will be discussed.
- ii. Once agreed upon by Vestry, the revised Code of Procedures will be sent to the Episcopal Diocese of Texas for review. Following diocesan approval, the proposed revisions will be brought to the parish for a vote.

8. Clergy Reports

a. Director of Parish Life position

- i. Neil, Abigail and Tom will finalize the position description by the end of May, and will share this job description with the vestry once complete. Fundraising goals for the individual hired to this role need to be outlined; this individual will need to be able to cover their own salary/benefits after the 3 year timeframe during which their salary is being covered by donations from a family foundation. It is preferred for the Director of Parish Life to start working before September 1, 2024.

b. Impact of Hermann Park

Over the summer 2024, the impact of park visitors on parking will need to be assessed. It was noted that it would be helpful to have a systematic way of assessing this. Parking is available at Rice University; this availability will be publicized in The Palmer bulletin insert, and on the church website. At some point, the

Park Service is planning to expand the Main Street parking lot, but at present this timeframe is not known.

Roger Hutchison is looking into how the church may be able to use the proximity of the park – e.g. hosting an event for families with young children or holding an outdoor worship service there.

A suggestion was made to put signage on the side of the church by the Main Street parking lot letting park visitors know about Palmer.

9. **Gratitude Reflection.** Abigail Follmar offered thanksgiving for the success of the musical collaboration between David Ashley White and Brady Knapp that was performed at Pentecost. She also expressed gratitude for the success of the potluck lunch that followed that 10AM service.
10. **Closing Prayer.** Neil closed the meeting in prayer.

Worship Council Report

The Council met April 4th. Minutes are attached.

Not included in the report:

Bell Tower updates – Allen Nunley is coordinating with three other Houston churches with active bell ringing programs to bring a maintenance worker over from England. We will split the cost of his flight three ways. Housing is being provided by one of the other churches, so there will be some small additional cost for local transportation and meals.

Palmer's portion of the expenses will be about \$460 for the flight, and less than \$200 for meals. These expenses will come out of the bell ringing restricted fund.

Allen also is trying to coordinate with the Funeral Guild and the Wedding Guild to see if there is interest in offering bell ringing to those clients.

Another bell question – Palmer has a carillon (which may or may not be working) which can play tunes. We used to use this, but it seems to have fallen out of use. **Is there interest in using the carillon again?** The maintenance fellow will take a look at it while he is here, just in case.

Hearing assistance – After the email from Michelle Lynn on April 14, Victor recommended that we work with Dustin on moving forward. Dustin was out of town at the time, but hopefully we can find some quick resolution. Michelle said that she has already spoken with Dustin about the system they are interested in, and as it sounds like there are people willing to contribute towards the cost of the system, it seems like this is something we should be able to resolve soon. I have not heard back from Dustin yet, but will follow up prior to the Vestry meeting.

Lector Training – Sarah Breckbill should have contacted Carol Streatfeild about conducting lector trainings while Sarah is away.

The Worship Council will not meet again until August.

Palmer Worship Council Meeting Minutes

April 4, 2024

Attendees: Rev. Neil Willard, Margie Dieter, Lesley Douthwaite, Danna Kurtin, Victor Lamas, David Madrigal, Allen Nunley and Libby Spoede

Opening Prayer – Victor opened the meeting with prayer.

Upcoming Activities -

- April 6 – Libby and David's wedding at 5:00 pm in the Nave
- May 19 – Pentecost Sunday, Summer Schedule begins with services at 8:00 am and 10:00 am

Review of Holy Week and Easter Services –

There were positive comments and good feedback concerning these services, including the reading of the Gospel Passion on Palm Sunday and the lighting of the candles in the chancel and globe/track lights in the Nave prior to the declaration of the Risen Christ at the Easter Vigil. One thing to consider at Palm Sunday – whether choir should process with parishioners on walk to the Nave or continue with current set up. There was good attendance for all the services.

Clergy Updates -

There will be two guest preachers from Jerusalem Peacebuilders on April 7th and mid-May. Summer schedule starts May 19th with services at 8:00 am and 10:00 am. For the 8:00 am services it will be Rite I, and for 10:00 am, Rite I will be from May 19 thru July 7, and Rite II from July 14 thru Sept. 1st. Neil would like for the Worship Council to possibly meet every other month and/or specific months where immediate action is needed. Victor and Neil will further discuss. Other ministries are evaluating future meeting dates as well.

Music Updates -

Nothing to report

Service Updates –

Nothing to report

Verger Updates -

James Westin, the new Junior Verger will begin Chalice bearer training in April.

Acolyte Updates -

Margie Dieter will coordinate acolyte training (for youth and adults) soon. Chalice bearer training will be separate. Request for Ryan to work with Dustin to look at previous recorded acolyte video training to see what may be needed for completion and production release.

Lectors Updates -

Sarah is checking to see who could assist with providing training while she is away. Margie will send Sarah information on a possible candidate.

Usher Updates –

Danna Kurtin met with Lesley and Ryan to discuss upcoming changes for the ushers. The 11:15 Usher team is currently being reorganized.

Bell Ringers Updates –

Allen is working with Margie Dieter to prepare information needed from Vestry on upcoming bell ringing repairs.

Other Business / Next Scheduled Meeting – To be announced

Stewardship Council Report to the Vestry

As of May 6, 2024

1. Meetings

- a. The Stewardship Council met by Zoom on April 30, 2024. Attending: Ken Alexander, Jeanine Baker, Abigail Follmar, Rosine Hall, and Betty Key.

2. Requests to selected donors in support of 2024 budget.

- a. Following the discussion at the Vestry Retreat, the Stewardship Council reached out to about 47 potential donors, including the 21 Vestry persons from 2023 and 2024, seeking to balance the anticipated 2024 budget (which the Vestry adopted March 19, 2024). This list was developed taking into account giving history and input from Neil and Stewardship Council members. A few of these efforts are ongoing.
- b. The Stewardship Council also reached out to selected parishioners who had pledged for 2023, but not 2024.
- c. Results:
 - i. 17 of the 21 Vestry persons from 2023 and 2024 collectively increased their pledges over their 2023 pledges by more than \$80,000.
 - ii. Total 2024 pledges now exceed the level assumed by the 2024 budget adopted by the Vestry on March 19, 2024. (See chart below.) This is a significant accomplishment. The success of the effort to meet the budgeted pledge level is largely the result of work and contributions by the current Vestry, and especially by Jeanine Baker, Betty Key, and Margie Dieter.
 - iii. There has also been significant progress toward the "50/50" building fund match in memory of Kirk Waldron. (See chart below.)

Pledge and Budget Analysis				
		Percent change vs. 2023	No. of Pledges	Notes
Total 2023 Stewardship Pledges made	\$ 1,506,321		217	
Total 2024 Stewardship Pledges				
As of Feb. 29, 2024	\$ 1,518,313	0.8%		Prior to special appeals
Increase between 2/29/24 and 4/4/24	\$ 54,010			After appeals to Vestry
As of April 4, 2024	\$ 1,572,323	4.4%		
Increase between 4/4/24 and 5/2/24	\$ 34,725			
Total 2024 Stewardship Pledges as of 5/2/24 (224 pledges)	\$ 1,607,048	6.7%	224	Includes \$10,000 not yet on Palmer books
2024 Budget Assumptions for 2024 Stewardship Pledges				
401001 - PLEDGES CURRENT-PREPAID	\$ 276,375			
401100 - PLEDGES-CURRENT YEAR	\$ 1,254,938			
Total 2024 Pledges net of 4% shrinkage	\$ 1,531,313			
Estimated 4% shrinkage	\$ 63,805			
Budgeted 2024 Pledges before shrinkage	\$ 1,595,118	5.9%		
Excess (Shortfall) of 2024 Pledges vs. Budget Assumptions	\$ 11,930			
2023 Budget Assumptions for 2024 collection on 2023 Pledges				
401200 - PLEDGES-PRIOR YEAR	\$ 20,000			
Total 2024 collections on 2023 Pledges as of 5/2/24	\$ 7,184			
Excess (Shortfall)	\$ (12,816)			
\$50K Building Challenge "Match"				
Received as of 5/2/24	\$ 38,300			
Pledged	\$ 7,500			
Total Received + Pledged	\$ 45,800			
Balance to meet \$50K challenge	\$ (4,200)			

3. Communications with all Palmer donors

- a. In mid-April, Palmer mailed statements of giving for 2023 and 2024 to all donors, showing among other things the amounts of 2023 and 2024 pledges and outstanding balances on 2023 pledges. These statements were accompanied by individually addressed letters to donors from the Stewardship Council that thanked them for their contributions and provided information regarding the 2024 budget adopted by the Vestry, and the recent 50/50 gift for our building and campus and underwriting for 3 years of the addition of a Director of Parish Life. You should have received a statement and letter. In the

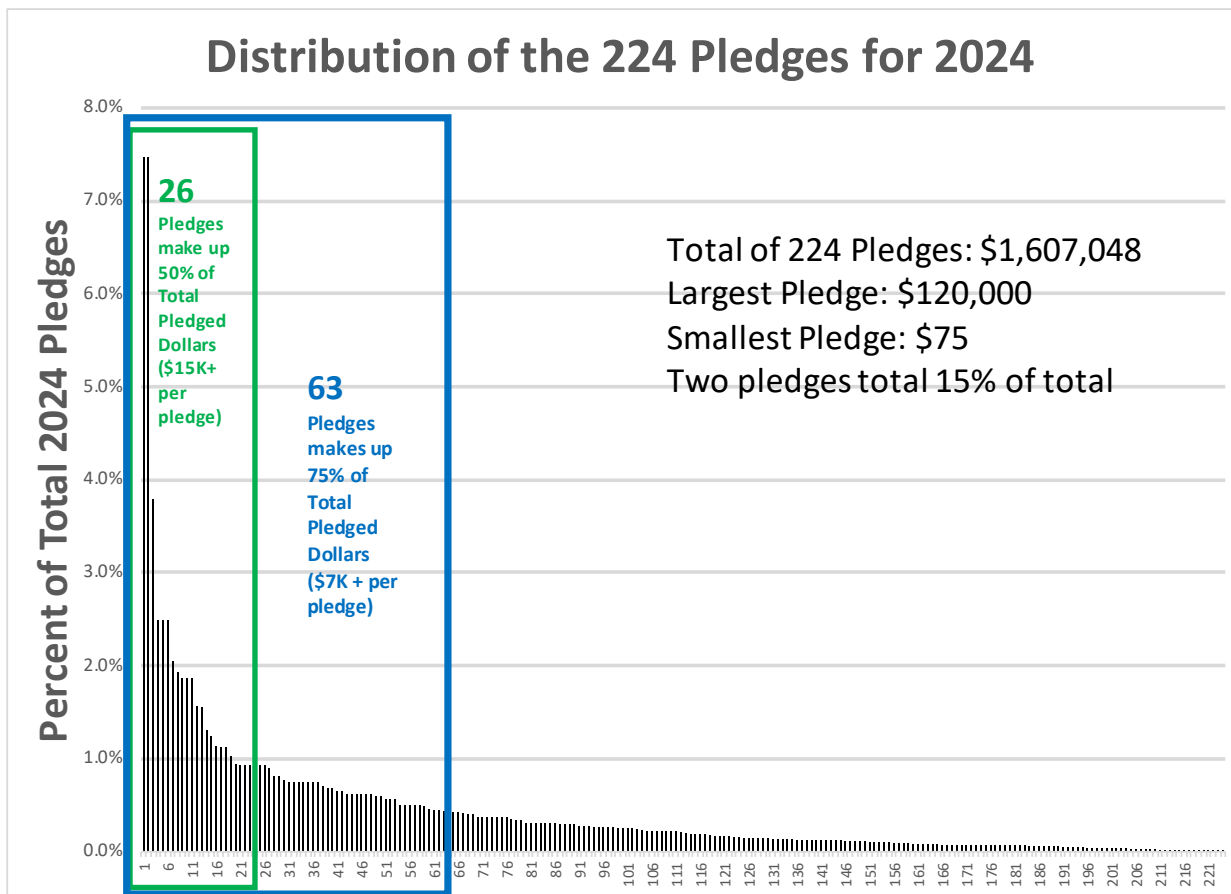
case of donors who had not pledged for 2024, the letter provided information on how they may give on-line.

- b. We plan to include letters with the quarterly statements that will be sent out in July.
- c. **Uncollected 2023 pledges.** 46 out of 218 pledges for 2023 have unpaid balances totaling \$59,920. As shown in the chart above, Palmer has collected \$7,184 in 2024 on 2023 pledges. The 2024 budget assumes collection of \$20,000, leaving a budget shortfall of (\$12,816). It seems unlikely we will reach the \$20,000 goal of the 2024 budget.

4. Stewardship Education – May, 2024.

- a. We updated in the last few days the Palmer website pages re giving and stewardship, which were out-of-date, still reporting 2023 activities.
- b. The Vestry and the Palmer Endowment presented a program, “Make Your Charitable Dollars Go Farther – Best Practices for Efficient Giving,” on May 5th at the Education Hour. The program covered best practices for how to make and send dollar contributions, securities, distributions from retirement accounts, and estate gifts to charities, as well as managing contribution records and tax savings. It also explained the advantages of scheduling monthly or quarterly donations in support of the Finance Council’s concerns about Palmer’s cash flow. Ken Alexander covered best practices for how to make and send dollars contributions. Mike Soika, chair of the Endowment Board, explained the role of the Palmer Endowment. Dick Viebig discussed donations from an IRA. Materials from the presentation are now available on the Palmer website. Several attendees thought it worthwhile to make a similar presentation this fall, or at least annually.

5. Data on 2024 Stewardship Pledges



- a. This data informs our plans for 2025 Stewardship. In our judgment, to stabilize and increase our budget and program, Palmer needs to (1) materially increase the number of parishioners who pledge, and (2) broaden the base of parishioners who supply most of our pledged dollars. The concentration of the source of our pledged dollars makes Palmer vulnerable to the loss of just a few parishioners, which is certain to occur. This requires attentiveness to our significant current pledgers and also efforts to expand pledging among all who consider Palmer their church.

6. Plans for 2025 Stewardship – Fall, 2024

- a. Our experience this spring reinforces our observation that transparency about Palmer's finances is essential for better stewardship outcomes and much-desired by parishioners. To that end, we feel it would be helpful if the Palmer website

contained links to (1) a summary of Palmer's current budget and up-to-date income and expense statements, and (2) Vestry minutes within 30 days following Vestry meetings. **As the Vestry has regularly scheduled meetings every other month, this would require circulation and approval of Vestry minutes between Vestry meetings.**

- b. We have also observed that two very important impacts on stewardship outcomes are (1) **who** asks a parishioner to pledge and (2) **how** the request is communicated (e.g. personal conversation, phone call, text, email).
- c. Based on these observations, we contemplate these steps:
 - i. Establish, with the cooperation of the Finance Council, specific goals for Stewardship giving for 2025 tied to (1) matching 2024 expenditures adjusted for 2025 costs, and (2) higher goals needed to expand specific expenditures, especially program and building and campus expenditures.
 - ii. Identify specific goals for increased number of pledges.
 - iii. Arrange for members of the Vestry, the Stewardship Council, and the clergy to communicate directly with individual parishioners about 2025 Stewardship pledges. **Who** asks a parishioner to pledge has a significant impact.
 - 1. **There are several important ways in which the Vestry can help.** An important first step is knowing more about the contributors on Palmer's rolls. There are a great many about whom the staff knows little. We need in a systematic way to learn more about our contributors, and **one initial step is for the Vestry to review the list of people about whom we have little information.** This would be best done in a Vestry workshop for that purpose as soon as practical.
 - 2. We also need to **expand the number of people working with the Stewardship Council to assist in contacting contributors, making sure we have representation from every service, ministry, and group at Palmer.** (For example, we are actively

seeking volunteers who are regular attendees at the 11:15 am service.)

3. We have begun data analysis of our membership rolls so we can target efforts in this regard. For example, there are over 90 Confirmed Members of Palmer who are active and donate to Palmer, but who have not pledged. There are many more people who are active with Palmer and who donate (but are not Confirmed Members), yet do not pledge.
 4. With this information, we can individually address letters to parishioners, customized based on their stewardship and giving history, that will go out in September. These letters will include a discussion of the goals mentioned above, and a transparent discussion of Palmer's financial needs and the importance of stewardship pledges to meet those needs.
- iv. Prepare a calendar of events for September – December, 2024 concerning 2025 Stewardship.
 - v. Prepare written materials on the importance of stewardship pledges (also on the Palmer website) that are not confined to the current year.
- d. Challenges ahead include that Palmer will need more money for programming supported by a new Director of Parish Life, support for that position once the 3-year grant expires, and the likely loss of support in 2025 and 2026 from some of our most generous stewardship supporters who we expect will be moving from Houston. Broadening the base of our giving will be vital.

Respectfully submitted,

Palmer Stewardship Council
Ken Alexander, Chair,
ken.alexander@mac.com
713-240-4314 (cell)

Finance committee meeting 18 April 2024 – Vestry review

The Finance Committee met to discuss the March 2024 financials.

The finances of Palmer continue to be under stress as we progress into 2024. Pledges are at a reasonable level, and since February have increased by \$65k. The main issue now is getting those pledges paid into the bank.

There were some timing issues (copier costs, building and maintenance items, Council expenses) that are timing differences between budget and actual expenses.

The Finance Committee would like to stress two points for the Vestry to focus on;

- Budget control.
 - Jessica is going to send the budget around to the staff – again – to make sure they know their numbers.
 - Larry is going to review invoices once a week to ensure he sees all expenses.
 - Larry will issue an email with Abigail as an instruction to all that spend funds that anything over \$250 needs go past Jessica to make sure it's in the budget before it's spent.
 - Overall the Finance Committee don't see out-of-line spending, the feeling is this is not an expense problem, it's an incoming cash problem.
- Pledges.
 - Thanks to the Stewardship committee and their hard work pledges have risen \$65k in the last two months.
 - March *current year pledges* were \$23k vs \$69k in the monthly budget – this cash shortfall is causing the cash surplus to be eaten up in monthly expenses putting Palmer in a precarious cash position.
 - The Committee strongly recommends a communication specifically on this matter. Suggestions;
 - 'Did you know you can pay your pledge month with a bank draft?' leaflet in the Sunday bulletin/special Palmer email alongside a summary of the financials. This could go hand-in-hand with the Stewardship communication on May 5th.
 - Breezeway signup with signage/how-to leaflets helping folk get through on MyPalmer monthly bill set up.
 - A notification of the payment option, noting the preferred month installments, on the giving statements.
 - A 'before we get to summer please keep your pledge up-to-date' communication in the announcements on Sunday.

Other matters discussed were, the Finance Committee encourage transparency and would like the monthly minutes and financial statements to go on the website. It was noted that used to happen and they would like to do that again but who would handle that?

The Committee discussed moving some funds from the Origin's bank to Texas Gulf Coast bank to shore up the relationship there ahead of a request to re-finance the Rectory to a lower rate.

Bet Hunter and Pam Harvey will work on a multi-year budget in line with the Pay pillar of the strategic plan and to give Texas Gulf Coast bank an outlook ahead of the re-finance request.

Communication from the Buildings and Grounds Committee was encouraged to let the community know where the foundation match fund in Kirk's name stands financially. Currently \$20k has been received or pledged to this cause with a \$20k match from the foundation. Dick confirmed the foundation would match even if the community did not reach the \$50k goal. Bet is going to make a Sunday announcement on this topic.

Palmer Building and Grounds Council Meeting

May 10, 2024, 12pm

Invitee	Attendance
Abigail Follmar – Sr. Warden	Present
Gerry Sandoval	Present
Johnna Kincaid	Present
Ric Tharpe	Not present
David Candler – Vestry - Chair	Present
Tom Van Arsdell – Jr. Warden	Not present
Michael Massey – Vestry	Present
Kip Krause - Vestry	Present

Discussion notes

1. Priority items / urgent decisions needed

- a. Chill water valve on top of choir room - leaking
 - i. Approval needed to proceed
 - ii. Quote is in the works; rough expectation for valve repair is \$5k (plus minor ceiling cleanup)
 - iii. Bucket in place for now (empty daily)
 - iv. Can shut off water, but would impact choir room and Archway MCUs
 - v. Repair will take full day
 - vi. Choir can move to nave for practice
 - vii. Expectation is that we won't get quote and be able to proceed for a couple of weeks; Archway students expected to be gone
 - viii. Next step – Gerry to share quote once he receives; Jessica to approve as appropriate
- b. Playground items (GISH requested)
 - i. Requested approval for:
 1. Hang chalk board on fence
 - a. Gerry checked with Roger; no exception as long as not eyesore
 2. Build a deck by south side of play surface
 3. Extend garden box (made with railroad ties)
 4. Small play house on north side of playground
 - ii. Expectation is that any work done would be done under Gerry's supervision, with contractors we're comfortable, etc.
 - iii. GISH would be expected to fund any changes

- iv. Consider scope of proposed changes and if intent of playground is shifting
- v. Need more details from GISH to consider aesthetic, potential playground scope shift, etc.
- vi. Next step – Gerry to talk to Bianca and request that GISH consolidate requests into one document/package, include pictures, plans, etc.
 - 1. Also set expectations that any work being done would be supervised by Gerry
- c. Playground repairs (GISH requested)
 - i. Gaps in playground surface (sponge membrane)
 - 1. Options
 - a. Replace – GISH has provided ~\$15k estimate
 - b. Interim repair - Potential interim repair with rubber mulch and liquid tool grip coating; expect it would resolve tripping hazard inspection challenge
 - c. Next step – Gerry to proceed with interim repair – test in small area first
 - ii. Replacement of rubber mulch on west and north sides of playground with wood mulch
 - 1. Mulch should be playground certified; St. Paul's has this if we want to take a look
 - 2. Flagstones will be removed and mulch put in their place
 - 3. Could put flagstones under benches or along sidewalk by nave
 - 4. Next step: awaiting estimate
- d. MAN lift battery maintenance/inspection/replacement
 - i. Estimate is \$3.8k
 - ii. Hydraulic pumps on it that include filters; replacement recommended to preserve pump
 - iii. Includes replacement of rubber wheels

2. Updates on regular priority items

- a. Rectory
 - i. Dryer repair successful – moisture sensor/motherboard replacement
 - ii. Dishwasher repair successful – motor/pump assembly (was noisy, but continues to function)
- b. Chiller
 - i. Waiting for 4th (or 5th) final inspection of compressors
 - ii. Previous inspections have been excellent
 - iii. On inspection, will pay special attention to amperage/phases; at this point, don't believe it's an electrical issue
 - iv. Currently at 100% chiller capacity
- c. Boy Scout gear in all 4 places they store items (basement mechanical room, columbarium closet, work room on corner of patio (old pantry storage), youth room closet)
 - i. Will start reorganizing and cleaning weekend of 5/11

- ii. Will get rid of items that are old/unused; some items are owned by Palmer, and Boy Scouts will go through the proper channels to address those items
 - iii. Next step: Gerry to discuss/negotiate closure target date with Brandon from Boy Scouts
- d. Last week, Johnna, Catherine Bebe, Christine Manca oiled chancel railing, pulpit
 - i. Had considerable water damage from poinsettias and water lilies
 - ii. Consider the addition of plexiglass
 - iii. Johnna to share with Margie Dieter, too

Senior Warden Report
For the May 21, 2024 Vestry Meeting

1. Code of Procedures

- a. The Code of Procedures draft is ready to be reviewed with the Vestry and submitted to the Diocese for their review and concurrence.
- b. The next steps will include presentation to the parish through a forum in the early Fall, then taken to the parish for a vote. The timing is with a goal to have new voting procedures in place prior to the 2025 Annual Meeting.

2. Nominations Committee

- a. The schedule for the 2024 Vestry Nominations Committee will be further developed and share with the vestry in coming weeks.
- b. First steps are for the Year 1 and Year 2 classes select a representative for the process
 - i. Note that all Year 3 Vestry members are automatically included

3. Database Conversion

- a. The People and Giving module of the database conversion is set for June 6. This will include membership records and getting familiar with the new features.
 - i. Sue Howard is responsible for this work.
- b. The Financial module will follow with transition of financial records.
 - i. Jessica Evans is responsible for this work. Kip Krause will provide support as needed.
- c. All of the transition will occur with the assistance of the Ministry Brands account managers and trainers.
- d. This work is tedious and requires focus. All are requested to respect the staff's time during this process, both on inquiries and offers of assistance during the process, as well as, requests for non-urgent information.

4. Strategic Plan Updates

- a. Working Groups statuses are noted below
 - i. People Strategy
 - 1. Processes for Personnel related Objectives also in review.
 - 2. Membership of Parish Councils has been in review. These councils include Membership, Parish Life (aka Congressional / Community Engagement), Christian Formation and Outreach.
 - a. Once confirmed, Strategic Plan initiatives with these groups will be launched.

- b. These are related to the Program strategies

ii. Place Strategy

1. Campus Improvements (Master Plan)
 - a. Initial Draft report has been received and is in review
2. Deferred Maintenance
 - a. Kick-off meeting was held April 29
 - b. Kip Krause and David Candler are reviewing the existing deferred maintenance lists to develop priorities and set tasks with the working group
3. Parking Plan
 - a. The working group needs to be reformed.
 - b. Next steps include monitoring the new patterns throughout the summer.
4. Safety
 - a. The security and safety report draft has been completed and is in review with the committee.

iii. Program Strategy

1. Membership of Parish Councils has been in review. These councils include Membership, Parish Life (aka Congressional / Community Engagement), Christian Formation and Outreach.
 - a. Once confirmed, Strategic Plan initiatives with these groups will be launched.
2. These are related to the People strategies

iv. Pay Strategy

1. The formal objectives of this strategy are to be launched with the Finance and Stewardship Councils
 - a. These objectives are a part of their regular discussion
2. Earned Revenue
3. Donated Revenue
 - a. Abigail has noted with Ken Alexander that the Stewardship related portion of this Objective needs to be discussed after the current committee efforts have been confirmed.
 - b. Many of the tactics noted are already in the prevue of this committee.

4. Increase Operating Reserves

- a. This Objective includes Year 2 tactics, so will not be addressed until Earned Revenue and Donated Revenue Objectives are established

The Rector's Report, May 7, 2024, from the Rev'd Neil Alan Willard

1. The household that made an anonymous commitment of a financial gift to the building fund in the amount of \$50,000 in thanksgiving for the life and witness of the late Kirk Waldron, with the challenge to the congregation that this generous gift had to be matched within six months, is thrilled to know that Palmer is very close to having met this challenge before summer begins. On the Day of Pentecost, Sunday, May 19, I'll share this update with the congregation and encourage those who have not yet made a matching contribution to do so in order to push us over the line.

This is something to celebrate.

2. The job description for the position of Director of Parish Life and Membership is being polished and will be posted by the end of this month. As you will recall, this is the most critical new staff position recommended in the infrastructure report that was prepared for the Vestry as part of our strategic planning process ("the hub of the wheel," as described by our strategic planning facilitator, Dr. Tucker Branham).

Canonically, in the Episcopal Church, the Rector is solely responsible not only for the supervision of the church staff but also for the hiring of church staff. As part of the search process for a Director of Parish Life and Membership, I'm inviting others to assist me in this work. Up to this point, I have already been working closely with the Wardens and a few members of the church staff. When the time comes for interviews, we'll have a search committee to help with those interviews that will be comprised of me, the Senior Warden, the Junior Warden, one person from the congregation appointed by me, and one person from the congregation appointed by the Wardens. The goal will be to have someone in place before the fall.

As a reminder, we are able to move forward with this because of an anonymous commitment from a family foundation to cover for three years 100% of the cost of the total compensation package, plus built-in cost of living adjustments, for the position of Director of Parish Life and Membership. It's an incredible opportunity.

This is something to celebrate.

3. The Rt. Rev'd Andy Doyle was kind enough to reschedule, at my request, his most recent visitation with our congregation from the first weekend of HISD's spring break in March in the season of Lent to Wednesday, May 8, during the season of Easter. That was especially important for us this year since we had 15 youth being confirmed, making a mature public affirmation of their Christian faith, together with several adults also being confirmed, received into the fellowship of the Anglican Communion, or reaffirming their Christian faith. As the parent of one of the youth being confirmed, I want to say how wonderful that liturgy was, especially the final

words in the Bishop's sermon about how much we have been loved and how much love we have given away being the only thing that will matter when all is said and done. As the Rector, I want to thank the several members of the Vestry who were there supporting these youth not only with your prayers but also with your presence.

This is something to celebrate.

4. I received and accepted an invitation to attend an all-day conference on Friday, April 26, at the Baker Institute on the campus of Rice University. The subject of the conference was "Christian Nationalism and Public Policy in the US" and included five panel discussions, with a moderator and three speakers on each panel.

While defining terms, one panelist noted the difference between nationalism (a nostalgia for a past when the "right" people were in charge, an offensive posture) and patriotism (a love of home, love of neighbors, a defensive posture). There's a difference between a Christian who is a nationalist (the union of bad history and bad theology) and being a Christian who is a patriot. Importantly, as we have seen in recent years, one need not actually believe in Christian Nationalism in order to use it for political purposes. For example, a politician can speak of using public policy related to immigration for the specific purpose of protecting "our religion."

Another panelist made a contrast between a Christian Just War view that would use violence and war when necessary within a larger scheme to work toward peace and justice in the world (e.g., World War II) and the Christian Nationalist view that uses violence to get rid of enemies and then immediately goes back home. Another point in this area that caught my attention was that teaching patriotism is important (i.e., teaching people to love their country rightly). If we don't, some will run directly to nationalism. Others will not love their country enough to defend it from nationalism.

There were also reflections on how Christian Nationalism becomes intertwined with white supremacist ideology, further distorting both Christ and Christianity.

You can watch all of the panel discussions on YouTube at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/8bxKq7EFKeQ?si=s62mxtlvSp70-clD>

5. Our worship services from our feast day on Palm Sunday, March 24, through Easter Day, March 31, were excellent thanks to the hard work of the church staff and our many volunteers. It was a special joy to be able to have an adult baptism during the Great Vigil of Easter on Saturday, March 30. Attendance was good, like at Christmas.

Bishop Doyle has been anticipating that Christmas and Easter would both make a good recovery this year with respect to attendance in the churches of the diocese. He also has been anticipating a shift in attendance patterns during the weeks outside of those major festivals, a post-peak COVID return to the experience of

churches before World War II in contrast to the high-water mark of church attendance in the mid to late 20th century. In other words, there are people who came to church weekly before the pandemic and now come to church less frequently than weekly (but still consider themselves core members), and there are people who came to church monthly before the pandemic who now come to church less frequently than monthly (but still consider themselves connected). This is a challenge affecting all churches, including Palmer, and will not be going away.

6. The Wardens and clergy together have begun the process of finding leadership for the already-existing Outreach Parish Council and what will be the newly created Christian Education Parish Council, Membership Parish Council, and Congregational Life Parish Council (which is the same as the proposed Congregational and Community Engagement Parish Council referenced in the infrastructure report that was prepared for the Vestry as part of our strategic planning process). Those latter two parish councils would, of course, work directly with the new Director of Parish Life and Membership.
7. The Feast of Pentecost will be observed on Sunday, May 19. That is also the day when we will switch to our summer worship schedule, with a spoken service of Holy Eucharist at 8:00 AM and Choral Eucharist at 10:00 AM. The switch to the summer worship schedule is happening one week earlier than it normally would so that we can enjoy a potluck lunch together after the 10:00 AM Choral Eucharist.
8. This coming summer, as we did last summer, there will also be parish potlucks on the last Sundays of June, July, and August. Additionally, we will offer Christian education for adults from 9:00 to 9:45 AM each Sunday morning. There will also be opportunities for families with young children to gather together on the playground or in the park across the street and to enjoy activities in Holy Cross Children's Room on a few Saturday mornings. There might also be some extra activities for seniors.
9. As members of the Vestry already know, we will have a guest preacher on Sunday, May 12, who is Miroslav Volf, Henry B. Wright Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of the Yale Center for Faith & Culture at Yale Divinity School. Dr. Volf was born in the former Communist Yugoslavia, the son of a pacifist Pentecostal minister. He is a member of the Episcopal Church and writes extensively about forgiveness, reconciliation, and what it means to live as a Christian in the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. The power of his writing comes partly from the fact that he grew up in a world in which he witnessed both ethnic and religious hatred, violence, and warfare, between Christians and others, and among Christians themselves.

I think what he will say will be meaningful to Palmers, and it will be meaningful to me personally as we, on that day, celebrate a little early (before everyone starts

going away on summer vacations) the tenth anniversary of my tenure as the Rector of Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church. I'm grateful to members of the church staff who thought it was important to mark this occasion, and I'm especially grateful to my wife Carrie who reached out to Dr. Volf and worked out the details that made it possible for him to be with this weekend. I'm thankful he was available to come.

As I reflect on the past decade, I'm grateful for our life together, not only through the ordinary chapters of births, baptisms, marriages, daily life, and deaths and funerals but also through the extraordinary chapters of a major hurricane and a global pandemic. We also completed the process to receive permission from Bishop Doyle to perform same-gender marriages, affirming and celebrating the inclusion of our LGBTQ+ members in all areas of our parish life, provided space on our campus for the Houston office of Jerusalem Peacebuilders, bringing together Jewish, Christian, and Muslim youth from the Holy Land to become global citizens and witnesses to peace, were invited to [re]join the International Community of the Cross of Nails based at Coventry Cathedral in England because of our support for Jerusalem Peacebuilders and other reconciliation efforts, and completed a robust strategic planning process on this side of the pandemic that invited every member of our congregation to participate. Because of our location adjacent to the Texas Medical Center, I felt honored to be able to serve two terms as a board member of the Episcopal Health Foundation. We've rebuilt bridges to Rice University across the street, reconnected our parish to diocesan institutions such as Camp Allen, which is constantly noted to me by diocesan employees, and increased the size of our endowment from \$2.1 million in 2014 to \$4.9 million as of last month.

God of grace and glory, you are faithful from one generation to another: Grant to us, as Palmers, the courage to know and boldly share the love of Jesus Christ, that our own hearts and the world around us may be changed and reflect more and more your great mercy and compassion; through our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I. Usher Ministry

- A. The usher ministry has been removed from Ministry Scheduler Pro and will continue to schedule separately from the other Sunday morning ministries.
- B. I will keep working with them on the goal of bringing them into alignment with the other Sunday morning ministry

II. Adult Formation

- A. *Can I Get a Witness?* Adult formation offering was well received and we will plan a repeat of this offering sometime in the fall/spring.
- B. Summer formation
 - 1. *Back to Basics*— June
 - 2. *God Save Texas*—a three week documentary discussion —July
 - 3. *Philadelphia Eleven* movie and discussion—July

III. Serve Sunday

- A. Serve Sunday, June 2, 2024—Marie Wehrung and Jen Macia, coordinating

IV. Pride Parade

- A. We will join with other parishes in the diocese to march in the parade on Saturday, June 28, 2024