

Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church Vestry Meeting Minutes

February 20, 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
David Candler
Margie Dieter

Vestry Members Absent:

N/A

Assisting Clergy Present:

The Rev'd Ryan Hawthorne

Assisting Clergy Absent:

N/A

For the record, Neil sent an email to the vestry on February 7, 2024, noting that he had invited Abigail Follmar to serve as the Senior Warden and that Abigail had appointed Michael Chambers to continue serving in the role of Chancellor. He also informed the vestry that he and the Senior Warden had jointly invited the following persons to serve as officers of the vestry: Tom Van Arsdel as Junior Warden, Sheeba Thomas as Clerk, and Larry Wood as Treasurer. Neil asked vestry members to vote electronically on a motion made by Abigail and seconded by Tom to have the vestry affirm the appointment of Tom Van Arsdel as Junior Warden, Sheeba Thomas as Clerk, and Larry Wood as Treasurer. Twelve members of the vestry followed the instructions and voted in favor of the motion. No one voted against the motion.

For the record, Neil sent an email to the vestry on February 8, 2024, noting that the Episcopal Diocese of Texas requires the annual parochial report for the Episcopal Church to be filed early in order for us to be able to vote at the Annual Council of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. Sue Howard files this report online, "signing" it electronically on behalf of the Clerk, the Treasurer, and the Rector and dating its approval by the vestry on behalf of the Senior Warden. Neil asked vestry members to vote electronically on a motion made by Abigail and seconded by Tom to have the vestry approve the 2023 Parochial Report, which was attached to the email. Eleven members of the vestry followed the instructions and voted in favor of the motion. No one voted against the motion.

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

1. **Check-in and Opening Prayer.** Neil invited personal updates and opened the meeting with prayer.
2. **Dwelling in the Word.** Ryan read Psalm 22:22-30 and led a conversation about those verses.
3. **Review and Approval of Minutes.** The minutes from January 16 were unanimously approved with two corrections: the spelling of Neil's name in Item 7 and Danna's name in Item 8.
4. **Stewardship Council** (Margie Dieter and Ken Alexander) The number of 2024 stewardship pledges are flat compared to 2023 but the total slightly exceeds 2023. 40.4% of all pledgers increased their pledges this year, 24.3% of pledgers reduced their pledge or did not pledge, and the 20 largest pledgers of the 218 total made up 46.6% of pledge dollars. Discussion ensued with suggestions for 2025 including more education on how dollars are budgeted/spent and the impact to our community; personally reaching out to fellow parishioners; a one-page summary report after the annual report to increase parishioner understanding of finances, the potential future addition of a director of parish giving to the staff; reaching out to young people who may not think in terms of stewardship; engaging non-pledgers through programming; differentiate messaging to reach different people; and involvement of laity. It was suggested that the 2024 stewardship council provide a list of five recommended actions with desired outcomes for vestry consideration.
5. **Finance Council** (Pam Harvey, Kip Krause, and Dick Viebig). Positives for 2024 include the German pre-school (+\$7,800) and Seminarian reimbursement from Neil's discretionary fund (+\$1,400). Other influences include a possible loss of the Employee Retention Tax Credit (ERTC) (-\$30K), cost of an audit (-\$18K) and shortfall on pledge collection, which is usually 4-5% (-\$60K). It was noted we would need diocesan approval to not do the audit and it could negatively impact the church's ability get outside grant funding. A motion was approved to add one hour to the upcoming retreat to discuss the budget and to defer the vestry vote on the budget to the March vestry meeting. Possible ways to improve finances were discussed, including a request for a temporary assessment reduction from the diocese or some alternative to a full audit. Concern was expressed that there is currently no cash reserve. It was noted the vestry should recommend the filling of two Endowment Board seats in March.
6. **Warden Reports**
 - a. Vestry Retreat March 2, 9 AM to 2 PM, including an additional hour for budget discussion.
 - b. Phone System. Abigail will provide an update at the vestry retreat. It was suggested that the phone malfunction be explained to the parish.
 - c. Database. The church is moving toward a more streamlined database that includes modules for directory, calendar, financial, giving and resource scheduling. Training will be provided to designated clergy, staff and laity. The financial module will not be implemented until the 2023 audit is complete.
 - d. Project Management software. Funded by a family foundation grant, the software will be cloud-based with goal-setting and time-setting capabilities.
7. **Clergy Reports**
 - a. Episcopal Parish Network 2024 Annual Conference in Houston March 6-9. Palmer is a member of this organization led by both laity and clergy that looks at how different churches tackle problems, and vestry members are encouraged to attend. Ryan Hawthorne and Dustin Jesudason will lead pre-conference meetings.
 - b. Memorial Plaques. There was discussion about vestry plaques inside the sanctuary and whether any new plaques should be considered. It was noted that a past vestry had voted not to add new plaques and that few to no women are recognized in this manner, and some questioned whether plaques are the best way to honor service to the church.
 - c. Class offerings. Classes include Sunday adult confirmation/newcomers and a series in March on vocational life outside Palmer: March 3 led by Carrie Willard; March 10 by adults who work in our youth ministry; and March 17 by Arlene Price and Ruth Davies. An April

- testimonial class entitled “Can I Get A Witness” is planned in April. It was recommended that the class offerings be displayed more prominently in the Sunday inserts.
- d. The next Serve Sunday, when Palmers worship together before serving the community in groups, will be February 25.
 - e. In addition to our Ash Wednesday liturgies, Ashes To Go reached about 400 people, including Rice students, on Ash Wednesday on the sidewalks around and across the street from the church and in vehicles stopped on Fannin and Cambridge Streets.
8. **Gratitude Reflection.** For vestry members new and old; for Sue Howard for her dedication and superb organizational skills for Annual Meeting preparation and voting; for the work of the Finance Committee, especially our Treasurer Larry Wood; and for the Wedding Guild.
9. **Other Business**
- a. Ken Alexander asked about the number of voters in the vestry/lay delegate election. 160 people voted (2 votes were rejected for improper ballot completion).
 - b. Ryan noted a wedding at Palmer February 17 (Andrew Warren, Archway Academy Counselor and his bride) and the baptism of two children February 25.
10. **Closing Prayer.** Neil closed the meeting in prayer.