

St. James' Annual Meeting Minutes
Sunday, January 24, 2021

Annual Meeting Agenda

1. Meeting called to order
2. Staff introductions
3. Opening Prayer
4. Approval of 2020 Annual Meeting Minutes
5. Introduction of Vestry Members and Deanery Representatives
6. Financial Report – Lynn Locher, Treasurer
7. Endowment Report – written by Mary Casas, chairperson, and read by Monique Manjarrez
8. Senior Warden's Report – Sylvia Ma
9. Appreciations
10. Comments and questions from the floor
11. Acceptance of the 2020 Annual Report
12. Elections of Vestry and Deanery Members
13. Conclusion

The St. James' annual meeting was held via Zoom online conferencing due to the Shelter-in-Place order because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Lori Walton called the meeting to order.

Staff Introductions

Lori Walton introduced the St. James' staff:

- Assisting priest Bill Hale
- Children and Teen Minister Jan Scrutton
- Music Director Jennifer Ravera
- Parish Administrator Ron Cook

Bill Hale led the opening prayer.

Approval of 2020 Annual Meeting Minutes

- Motion was made to approve the January 26, 2020 annual meeting minutes as submitted. Moved by Greg Miller, seconded by Bruce Roberts. Motion approved.

Introduction of Vestry Members

- Lori introduced the vestry members.
 - The continuing vestry members are Bob Bynum, Bob Doherty, Janet Fischer, Tim Fortescue, Mary Frances Leopold, Sylvia Ma, and Jim McConnell.
 - The retiring vestry members are Monique Manjarrez (junior warden in 2020, and senior warden in 2019), Sally Morgan, and Laura Winter.
- Lori introduced the Deanery representatives.

- The continuing Deanery representatives are Jim McConnell, Ken Trant, and Scott Whitaker.
- The retiring representatives are John Amouroux and Meg Amouroux.

Senior Warden

- Sylvia Ma is continuing as senior warden for 2021.

Financial Reports – Lynn Locher

Gratitude has gotten me through 2020.

Gratitude for:

- Clergy that stepped up to adapt to streaming services, Zoom classes and Zoom meetings.
- A Music Director who coordinated outside singers to give us good steaming music for our services and took on leading Zoom coffee hours and Thursday get together.
- A Children and Youth Minister who keep our children and youth engaged in the teachings of the church.
- Mike Scrutton and family who provided technical support for our services.
- For the donation that allowed us to purchase video equipment.
- Ron Cook who does accounts payable and Jan Brandt who does accounts receivable.
- The members of the parish who completed their pledges and then gave more.
- The members of the parish who supported the work of the church with unpledged donations.

It was these donations that made up for the loss of income from plate collection and use of the church. These donations also covered our cost of hiring additional help.

I learned that it is less expensive to run an online church than an in-person church. Using the 2020 budget compared to the 2020 actual indicates that the value of meeting in person compared to online exceeds \$10,000. That is about \$1,000 a month to give your friends hugs, pass the peace, sing and pray together and chat in person.

At the end of the year, we had a surplus of \$3,858 that the Vestry voted to move into the Covid Reserve Fund in our Special Interest Account. At this time, we wait for Heritage Bank to ask for the paperwork so that our Paycheck Protection Program Loan can be forgiven. We will then have \$54,895 for the Vestry to earmark.

Thank you for allowing me to be your treasurer for the last 9 years.

—Lynn E. Locher

- Lori added that the process to apply for forgiveness for our Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loan is now underway. We are positive that the PPP loan will be forgiven. The treasurer's report was recorded before that news broke.

Endowment Report – written by Mary Casas, chairperson, and read by Monique Manjarrez

In 2004 the St James Endowment Fund was established when parishioners indicated they had included St James in their estate planning. In 2006 the Memorial Garden Endowment was established followed by the Little Church Endowment in 2007. In addition

to estate planning gifts are given to the funds as celebrations, memorials or to honor friends and those who serve at St James.

The funds are presently invested with the Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF) and is overseen by the Endowment Board. The Endowment Board currently includes Mary Casas, Jino Joseph, John Butterfield, Ralph Locher, Craig Gentner and St. James' Treasurer, Lynn Locher, who is an ex officio member of the Board.

While protecting the principle, distributions are made annually and reflect the growth of the fund. The Principal Value is \$189,499 and the Market Value is \$246,549.

Due to the recent pandemic the Endowment Board were only able to meet 3 times in 2020. The last meeting was in August. The Board has decided to not make distributions to the three funds (Vestry, LC, MG) at this time.

—Mary Casas, chairperson

- The decision was made to not distribute funds because at the time the board met there was so much uncertainty with the market and what was happening with the economy.

Senior Warden's Report – Sylvia Ma

I am very thankful and blessed to have the opportunity to serve as your senior warden in 2020. When I accepted our rector Lori's call, I was looking forward to an uneventful year, and thought that the toughest decision I had to make was whether to purchase a vanilla or chocolate cake for Volunteer Appreciation Day. Little did I know...

The pandemic happened. We have been in shut-down mode: no in person worship or get togethers or meetings. We are extremely fortunate to have a very capable team of staff and volunteers, with Lori's excellent leadership, to keep our worships going online and to tend to our spiritual and pastoral needs.

The Vestry switched to monthly meeting via online platform Zoom. I must say I had never heard of Zoom before last March, but now Zoom is an integral part of my life. Since March, besides Vestry meetings, I have been attending watch parties on Sundays for worship on Zoom; weekday Morning Prayers on Zoom; and Ante Communion service on Wednesday mornings on Zoom. I am incredibly grateful to be able to participate in Sacred Ground study on Racism and Advent study on Prayers, both on Zoom. During these months, even with the Regional Stay Home order, I am blessed to be able to connect with you through this Zoom technology.

The Vestry had not been idle in this pandemic. Realizing that we are missing incomes from plate offerings and facilities rentals, we worked on adding an online giving platform. With the help of our treasurer Lynn Locher, very capable volunteers Jan Brandt and Mike Scrutton, the Vanco online giving platform was installed. With the help and persistency of Lynn Locher, we also secured a Payroll Protection Plan forgivable loan to help with our financial situation. The money was used for salaries and utility bills.

With the help of the Disaster Preparedness Team, we set up an Emergency phone tree with 79 households participating.

I think I could speak for all the Vestry members that we also had great fun helping with drive through Volunteer Appreciation Day distribution of yummy ice cream and juice bars; with Advent bag deliveries; with Stewardship deliveries, with drive through pledge and gratitude ingathering and with 2021 Vestry recruitments.

In 2020, each Vestry members wrote an article in Window on their thoughts on Being Bold. We all spent a year adjusting to the pandemic's new normal. I give thanks to God for leading us to be bold.

—Sylvia Ma, Senior Warden

Appreciations

Lori thanked the following people:

- Jan Brandt—Jan has continued to come into the office once or twice a week. She collects our income, posts it into our computer, goes to the bank, and other financial duties.
- Gail Blalock—Gail has helped Jan Brandt to help with some of the financial administrative tasks.
- Alison Saichek—Alison has prepared our financial reports and our bank reconciliations every month.
- Our Altar Guild has had to be reduced to a minimum. Mary Casas came in once a week to replace the Sanctus candle for quite a while. Katie Cunningham, our Altar Guild directress, and Ruth Poole picked up that role, as well as other Altar Guild roles that had to be done. Katie and Ruth have been diligent about coming to St. James' once a week to take care of the matters of the sacristy.
- Technology – Needed for online virtual gatherings and worship. It has been a lot of work, a huge time investment, a financial investment, and a huge investment of knowledge. Thanks to the Scrutton family – Mike Scrutton, Jan Scrutton, Beth Scrutton, and Tom Scrutton – who have come in and turned the sanctuary into a recording studio. Beth has been putting together the videos we have been enjoying.
- Supporting the Scrutton family in learning the technology ropes and to assist in the setup are John and Meg Amouroux. Meg and John have also been staffing the communion on Saturday allowing people to pick up their consecrated host for Holy Communion.
- Jennifer Ravera—Jennifer has served as a capable leader on Zoom, making sure everyone has an opportunity to check in and share, and be in fellowship. Jennifer, as music director, has also been doing the music. For a while we had people coming in to do recording sessions, but as the pandemic worsened it was decided that was not safe. Jennifer has been singing the hymns in more than one part and blending them together. She also been coordinating with the choir for the anthems.
- Pastoral care has gotten heavier and more complicated in Covid time. Bill Hale, our assisting priest, has stepped in to provide pastoral care and to create environments for people to connect. Bill has been doing our Home Alone group, the Wednesday service every other week, and reaching out and doing pastoral care to those who need it.
- Ron Cook—Lori praised Ron's skill and knowledge and willingness to step in and to step up, making sure that everything that needs to happen happens even working from home three days a week and only in the office one day a week. Lori has come to rely on him tremendously.
- Our flower angel, Sally Morgan, has delivered the Sunday flowers to someone's home after the services.

- Porch angels – vestry, staff, and others – have delivered gifts to parishioners’ porches.
- Sylvia Ma—Sylvia has been a phenomenal leader, unflappable and competent. Lori also thanked Sylvia for agreeing to be senior warden for another year.
- Lynn Locher—Lynn has been committed and loyal to St. James’, and always looking out for the best interests of the church financially. Lori also let everyone know that Lynn has submitted her resignation as treasurer and will be leaving mid-March.
- Bruce Roberts also mentioned Dave Nelsen. Dave continues to manage the buildings and grounds and fix things that are broken.

Comments and Questions from the Floor

- Marilyn Rose wanted to say thank you. She appreciates St. James’ and everything it has done for all of us to remain connected through the difficult times of the pandemic. Marilyn thanked Lori for being such a good leader for all of us.
- Jennifer Ravera said thank you to everyone who joins her on Zoom. It has been great to get to know many of the parishioners.
- Brian Cochran thanked George Siegmann for his work in coordinating the lectors.
- Jim McLeod thanked everyone who provides the Sunday worship online. He is deeply impressed with the technology, the commitment, the inventiveness that has taken place.
- Bruce Roberts wished happy birthday (almost) to Lori.
- Jim McConnell gave a big shout out to the Scruttons, especially for setting up our live church services.

Acceptance of the 2020 Annual Report

- The annual report is a record of what has happened at St. James’ in 2020.
- Motion was made to accept the 2020 Annual Report as submitted. Moved by Jim McConnell, seconded by Dave Nelsen. Motion approved.

Election of Vestry Members

- Five people are needed for vestry, four 3-year terms and one 1-year term.
- The people nominated for vestry are Meg Amouroux, John Butterfield (for the 1-year term), Samir Kalitta, Greg Miller, and Bev Mosier.
- Motion was made to accept Meg Amouroux, John Butterfield (for the 1-year term), Samir Kalitta, Greg Miller, and Bev Mosier as vestry members for 2020 by acclamation. Moved by E.J. Hillard, seconded by Sylvia Ma. Motion approved.

Election of Deanery Representatives

- Deanery representatives serve a 2-year term.
- Motion was made to accept Elaine Miller and Greg Miller as our Deanery representatives by acclamation. Moved by E.J. Hilliard, seconded by Bev Mosier. Motion approved.

Additional Comments

- The 2021 St. James' budget was approved by the vestry at the January vestry meeting. A copy of the budget is available online.
- Elaine Miller is representing the Southern Alameda County Deanery on Executive Council. Elaine is also the leader of the Disaster Preparedness Team and helps coordinate disaster preparedness Deanery wide.

Rector's Address – Lori Walton

This sermon serves as both the Annual Meeting Rector's Address and the Sermon for virtual worship service.

Almost a year ago, we shut our doors. We didn't do it in stages or by degrees. It was immediate and it was fully. Those of us working on how to make church happen without having regular church went into overdrive to imagine a reality that just a month before would have been unimaginable. Unimaginable because we are church. We are an institution defined by community, by interaction with one another, by our common worship of God. I used to joke that there was no such thing as a "stay-at-home" Christian. Well, the joke is on me, it seems, because now we are all stay-at-home Christians.

Back in March and April, I had a song that kept ringing in my ears. The song was American Pie by Don Mclean. I'm sure you know it. It was the very last verse that stayed in my mind and it goes like this:

And in the streets the children screamed
The lovers cried, and the poets dreamed
But not a word was spoken
The church bells all were broken
And the three men I admire most
The Father, Son and the Holy Ghost
They caught the last train for the coast
The day the music died

That's how it felt, this closing down, like the church bells were broken, the Trinity hopped on a train out of here, and as the doors closed, the music died. But of course, that's not what happened. The music keeps playing because nothing can stop us from singing. God is still with us, and we ring those bells every Sunday morning, calling the faithful to worship.

There's a story I heard once about an old vicar in a small English village. Every morning he'd open the cold drafty church for Morning Prayer. He'd go outside and ring the church bells and then sit in a pew and wait. And nobody showed up. So, he'd start his morning prayer on his own, by himself. This went on for a long time, and the man aged and got tired, and then he decided that since nobody was coming to church for Morning Prayer, he'd just stop ringing the bell and do his prayers alone in the warmth of his own house. So he stopped.

Weeks later he was at the market and a village person ran up to him distressed. "Vicar, I don't hear the church bells in the morning anymore", she said. "Why did you stop praying for us?" You see, even though the building was empty, the church served as a witness to

prayer, stood as a symbol of God's presence, and reminded the villagers that there was something bigger than their every-day lives going on.

When I was doing chaplaincy work at St. Mary's hospital in San Francisco, I'd get on their loudspeaker in the evenings, the one that piped my voice into every corner of the hospital, and I'd say the beloved prayer from our Compline service "keep watch, Dear Lord, over those who work, or watch, or weep this night..." I never knew who heard me or if it made a difference, but I did know that for a moment in the life of that hospital, where people were born and where people died, where there was joy and sorrow and fear, our prayer stood as a witness to God's presence and the reality of something bigger than the individual lives being lived there.

Church. A reminder to the world that God exists. A reality that will never die.

Today is our annual meeting, and this sermon serves as both my homily and my annual address. The annual address is meant to tell you about the state of the church and to look ahead into the future. I can tell you about the state of the church. Looking ahead into the future is a little more challenging because, really, who knows what's ahead?

Let me begin by saying a few things about this past year. There is no denying that this has been a year of loss. Seven members of our community died and many more moved away, including several of our children. Now that's not unusual in a church with an older demographic and situated in a transient part of the country. What is unusual is our inability to say goodbye in the method we are accustomed to. No funerals or memorials to talk and laugh and remember and celebrate the wonderful lives that were lived. No getting up at announcement for a prayer of Godspeed and appreciation before moving away. And while we've done our best to communicate these leavings, there are some things that cannot be done adequately on the computer. There are some things that call for an in-person gathering, filled with long hugs and deep conversations.

We have also lost those new members that would normally show up on a Sunday, curious because they've seen us from Thornton or heard about the Episcopal Church. An in-person visit lets us greet new people, let's us welcome them into the space and get to know them. I have no idea who is watching church outside of our watch parties, so I don't know if there are new people or not. To be honest, it makes me sad to not be able to build these relationships. We've lost income because outside groups cannot use our facilities and because we cannot physically pass the plate. More importantly, though, is the loss of our common celebration of God's abundance when that collection plate comes to the altar, filled with the symbols of our commitment to God, and we lift that plate up as if to say to God, "hey, God! Look what we have to offer!". I find that to be one of the most powerful moments in the service.

So, we've lost and it is important to acknowledge that. It has been a very difficult year. But let me tell you what we've gained, because we have gained so, so much. First, we've all gained a lot of technical knowledge. I know more about virtual meeting spaces than I ever thought I would, and our a/v closet now looks like a recording studio. Along with knowledge, we've gained an increased appreciation for this technology. It has allowed us to connect in ways we couldn't otherwise do. It is literally keeping us together.

Further, we have members of the church who were not able to come to worship pre-covid, who can now engage and check-in throughout the week. We have bible studies and social gatherings that probably wouldn't have happened were it not for the lock-down.

We have also gained opportunities to serve and be together in new and creative ways - driving through the parking lot to wave and drop something off or pick something up (I never thought I'd be so grateful for our parking lot), or becoming a porch angel and dropping off bags of goods that connect people to church, or reading the prayers of the people when you might not otherwise do so. So many new ways of showing up.

But perhaps the most important blessing of this past year is a renewed awareness of the importance of church, of a spiritual community and of religion and ritual in our lives. In a year when the sun literally became obscured, when death - lots of death - colored our news, when the scab of racial tension was ripped off, when knowing what was true and not true became almost impossible, in a year when so much seemed to be unraveling, the church came together. The church came together, not as a witness to itself, but as a witness to God, to the reality of a power so great, so magnificent, so constant, it supersedes the darkness. The church bells are not broken and the music plays.

Do you know what the rarest color in nature is? Can you guess? It is blue. Think about it for a minute and try to imagine something from nature that is naturally blue. In fact, there is no naturally occurring true blue pigment in nature. The rare blues that we sometimes see, say on a blue jay or on blue morpho butterflies, are actually a trick of the eye. Each feather on the blue jay and on the scales of the butterfly wings are covered with tiny light-reflecting beads that are arranged to cancel out every wavelength of light except for blue, so when we look at it with our human eye, we see blue, only it isn't really the color blue that we are seeing but instead, we see reflected light.

We, church, are like the rarest of colors. We are like the blue jay or butterfly wing that reflects the light, the reminder that there is something bigger and greater than everything else. This is our purpose, to witness to and reflect the light.

But here's my question for us moving forward. How can you, each one of you, be the color blue? How can you reflect the light?

As a church, here's how I think we can reflect the light. We can start by looking at this broken world with compassion and empathy. Now I don't mean just having compassion and empathy for the marginalized, the disenfranchised, those we've always cared for, though that's important. What I mean is having compassion and empathy for the less desirable, for the ones spewing hate, the ones we passionately disagree with, and yes, even the ones who are seeking to hurt us.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying we need to excuse them or give them a pass. People who hurt others need to be held accountable. People who are so opposite from our own values and beliefs bring up strong feelings. But we can both despise their actions and have empathy and compassion at the same time. This is what it means to love our enemy. We don't have to make them a friend. We don't have to excuse their actions. We do need to soften our hearts towards them. I heard the bishop of Atlanta once say, "if you have contempt in your heart, you cannot preach Jesus."

For the last couple of years, we've been talking about being bold. I think the boldest thing we can do at this time in history is to be the kind of church that prays for those who are so broken they feel like they have to break others.

I don't know what this upcoming year will look like. I don't know if we will be virtual for the next three, six, or twelve months. But I do know the church bells are not broken, the music still plays, the Trinity is alive and well wherever we find ourselves, our prayer

spoken into the void does not go unheard, and the light that we reflect has the ability to touch the most damaged human being. There is no limit to God's transforming power.

So let us meditate on this. Rather than eradicating people, let's eradicate our own temptation for contempt. Let us instead, cultivate hearts of love, not towards the easiest person to love, but towards the most difficult. As the poet Amanda Gorman said last week, "There is always light. If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we are brave enough to be it."

Amen.

The slideshow of the events of 2020 was presented at the end of the worship service.

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Hart
Clerk of the Vestry