St. James' Annual Meeting Minutes
Sunday, January 22, 2023

Annual Meeting Agenda

1. Meeting called to order – Reverend Lori Walton
2. Opening Prayer – Jan Scrutton
3. Approval of 2022 Annual Meeting Minutes
4. Introduction of Vestry Members, Deanery representatives, and the new Senior Warden
5. Financial Report – Bruce Roberts, Treasurer
6. Endowment Report – Craig Gentner, chair
7. Retiring Senior Warden's Address – Jim McConnell
8. Comments from the floor
9. Acceptance of the 2022 Annual Report
10. Elections of Vestry and Deanery Members
    a. Vestry nominations
    b. Election of Vestry members
    c. Convention delegate (Deanery) nominations
    d. Election of convention delegates

Lori Walton called the meeting to order at 9:15 am.

Jan Scrutton led the opening prayer.

Approval of the 2022 Annual Meeting Minutes

- Motion was made to accept the January 23, 2022, annual meeting minutes as submitted. Moved by E.J. Hilliard, seconded by Dave Nelsen. Motion approved.

Introduction of Vestry Members and Deanery Representatives

- Continuing vestry members – Greg Miller, Bev Mosier, Peter Maina (absent), Samir Kalitta, Nancy Castaneda (out of town), Vivienne Paratore, and our new senior warden Meg Amouroux.
- Retiring vestry members – Bob Bynum, Sally Morgan, Mary Frances Leopold, and our retiring senior warden Jim McConnell.
- Every year the vestry is a hard-working group, but it is also a group that comes together in fellowship and mutual respect and love. Those who have served on vestry will tell you their experience has been positive, affirming, and fun, as well as being a ministry that deepens one's spirituality, one's connection to God, and connection to church. Thank you to vestry.
- Continuing Deanery representatives – Scott Whitaker (absent), Ken Trant, and Jim McConnell.
- Retiring Deanery representatives – Greg Miller and Elaine Miller.
- Thank you to the Deanery representatives/delegates to convention.

Financial Report – Bruce Roberts, Treasurer

2022 has been a struggle from the standpoint getting donations in to equal the pledges made to support the Operating Fund.

Thanks to all who have managed to complete their pledge!

The Vestry and each of the people or groups responsible for spending the Operating Fund's monies have managed to hold expenses down about 3%, even with increased utilities expense. At the end of the year, although pledges fell almost 3% short of our 2022 Budget, Plate and Unpledged monies brought our income to nearly 4% above budgeted income.

For 2022 the Vestry passed a $13K negative Budget, meaning that we expected to wind up with more expenses than income. Because Expenses were held down, and Income managed to end up above expectations, St. James' had slight surplus income of nearly $12K for 2022.

2023 appears to be more challenging. Even though we have been as restrained as possible with Expenses, Pledges have materialized lower than expected. We expect a $34K deficit Budget, meaning that we expect our expenses for 2023 will exceed our expected income. St. James' does have reserve funds from the Future Staff, Covid relief, and other funds to make up the difference if needed.

Endowment Report – Craig Gentner, chair

- There is still $277,000 in the Endowment fund at the end of the year.
- Unfortunately, the fund is down $37,000 from the end of last year.
- Half of our investments are in cash, and half are in equities.
- We still have approximately $30,000 over the donations in the fund, and there is approximately $13,000 available for distribution.
- However, the market is still going down, so there will be no distribution this year. If there is a request, they may be able to do a small distribution.
- The general endowment distributions are supposed to go towards new ministry, outreach, or capital improvements. There is also an endowment for the little church, and an endowment for the memorial garden.

Retiring Senior Warden's Address – Jim McConnell

I am honored, to be your Senior Warden in 2022. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you. As I began my tenure as your Sr. Warden, our beloved Rev. Lori embarked on a well-deserved 4-month Sabbatical, I am so grateful for the support of the vestry and the entire congregation during her absence, Thank you. I am very fortunate to be able to work with a group of very talented and enthusiastic members of the Vestry to tackle a variety of issues. For outreach, we approved donations to ABODE Services to end homelessness; Ukrainian Relief, support for Deaf Children in Ukraine (Thanks to Bev Mosier and the deaf ministries), and to Maisha Bora, funding two young women, Hope and Miriam, in their college educations. I am grateful that parishioners of St. James' are very generous in donating time and money to specific programs in our communities. All Vestry members did a wonderful job writing articles for the Window titled "Expressions of Love @ St. James'". In the summer of 2022, we were finally able to lift Covid mask requirements for indoor gatherings. Some of us helped in the Congregation Appreciation Day; some helped in the in-person St. James' Day Special Coffee

Hour. I am grateful for Bruce Roberts for being our Treasurer. Thank you to Marilyn Rose for agreeing to be our accounts payables clerk. I am elated that Meg Amouroux will be our Senior Warden. I am confident that 2023 will be a year full of hope and light for St. James'.

Appreciations

- Lori Walton expressed a deep word of gratitude to the vestry, the wardens, and the congregation for allowing her the time for her 4-month sabbatical.
- One of the wonderful things about St. James' is how serious they are about their finances, especially transparency and integrity. We honor the money that is donated to the work of St. James' from the parishioners and to handle it appropriately. Thank you to the team that is in charge of keeping our finances healthy:
    - Jan Brandt – who does our receivables, oversees the counters, and many more things
    - Marilyn Rose – who does our account payables and generates all of our payments/checks
    - Ron Cook, our parish administrator – who does our reconciliations, software training, and helps keep track of a lot of our finances
    - Bruce Roberts, our treasurer – who has been diligent and faithful in keeping the bigger picture in our minds.
- Our online presence will not be changing. Both our website and livestreaming show our face to the outside world. Our livestreaming is very well done, and is accessible, informative, and allows a seamless worship experience. The people who make that work are Mike Scrutton, John Amouroux, and Greg Miller. Others have also stepped in.
- Our building also needs work and attention. The one person who is constantly at St. James' making sure things are taken care of is Dave Nelsen. Dave is supported by Charlie Paratore and Bob Doherty.
- As our congregation ages, there are more people who are homebound, which requires a lot of pastoral presence. Reverend Bill Hale took on some of that until he was no longer able to do so. Lori has regathered the Lay Eucharistic visiting team. These people take the Holy Sacrament to peoples' homes, and spend time with them in prayer, reading Scripture and sharing Holy Communion. These people are Lynn Locher, Marilyn Rose, Elaine Miller, Vivienne Paratore, George Siegmann, Meg Amouroux, and Missy Bontempo.
- Thank you to the St. James' staff
    - Ron Cook, the parish administrator, who, along with the financial duties, answers the phone, prints the bulletin, makes sure worship is set up correctly, etc.
    - Reverend Bill Hale, who is retiring next Sunday, who has been instrumental in keeping our online presence alive, with morning prayer, the Wednesday ante-Communion service, the home alone gathering, a grief group, a Saturday focus on faith group, as well as preaching and celebrating mass for us.
    - Jan Scrutton, our children and youth minister, who also does so many other things – outreach, altar guild, etc.

- Jennifer Ravera, our music director, who is gifted in her teaching, instrumental ability and vocal offerings.

Comments from the Floor

- John Kimber commented about the $34,000 deficit. He suggested that each month we set aside $3000 to be deducted from what we would normally give the Diocese until we are able to resume that. That $3000 could go towards the deficit. According to Lori, there are repercussions for not paying the Diocesan assessment, including no voice or vote at the Diocesan convention.
- E.J. Hilliard gave a special thanks to Janet Fischer, who did a marvelous job over the years producing the *Window* newsletter and our adult faith formation.
- Thank you to Laura Winter for heading up the *Window*.
- Alice Johnson asked about how the search is going for a new bishop and a new presiding bishop.
    - For the new presiding bishop, they are just starting to gather, get search committees, and sending out surveys about what people want in a new presiding bishop.
    - Mike Scrutton has been selected to be on our bishop's search committee (as a member of the Diocese), as part of a group of 19 people who were selected by the Steering Committee of the Diocese of California. It is a complicated process. There have been listening sessions around the Diocese to discuss what the qualities of a new bishop might be. All the feedback is now being collected, and a profile will be published in April 2023. Candidates from around the country will be invited to apply. That will culminate in a slate that will be announced at the annual convention in October, with the election the first Saturday in December. Our Deanery delegates will be casting votes on behalf of St. James. The bishop elect will be consecrated in May 2024.
    - There may be walkabouts of the candidates from Deanery to Deanery.
- Elaine Miller is the south Alameda County Deanery representative. She encourages everyone to register for the DioCal newsletter. Elaine sends out talking points from the Executive Council meeting notes to the entire Deanery. St. James' is well represented in different aspects of the Diocese. Jim McConnell is on the finance committee, and John Wagas will be on the young adult ministry task force.
- Sally Morgan thanked Lori Walton.

Acceptance of the 2022 Annual Report

- The Annual Report is a document of the ministries that happen at St. James'.
- Thank you to Meg Amouroux for compiling the report.
- Motion was made to accept the 2022 Annual Report as submitted. Moved by Patty Lacy, seconded by Bob Bynum. Motion approved.

Additional Thank You

- Thank you to Elizabeth Hart, who records what happens at vestry meetings, annual meetings, and vestry retreats.

Election of Vestry Members

- The St. James' bylaws require we have at least ten vestry members, ideally twelve.
- This year we have four people cycling off, and one spot open due to Janet Fischer moving out of state. There are seven continuing vestry members, so we need a minimum of three, and ideally five people run for vestry.
- Every year the vestry is tasked with asking people to run for vestry. These are people who that vestry thinks would do a good service to the church, people who are faithful and committed to St. James', people who have the best interests of St. James' in their minds. Lori stated that every year we get way too many no thank yous. Often the vestry gets a no thank you without people really thinking about it. One of the conversations Lori and vestry have been having and continue to have is why does serving on vestry seem to be so negative.
- The three people who are standing for election are Charisma Pangilinan, Marcus Pun, and Barbara Vacchieri.
- Next year we will be required to have at least four people run for vestry to have ten vestry members.
- Motion was made to close the nominations for vestry. Moved by E.J. Hilliard, seconded by Tom Blalock. Motion approved, with four opposed.
- Motion was made to elect Charisma Pangilinan, Marcus Pun, and Barbara Vacchieri by acclamation to vestry for 2023. Moved by Sally Morgan, seconded by Jim McConnell. Motion approved.

Election of Convention Delegates/Deanery Representatives

- St. James' has five convention delegates/deanery representatives. They serve a two-year term.
- The continuing deanery representatives are Scott Whitaker, Ken Trant, and Jim McConnell. Greg Miller and Elaine Miller are cycling off, although Elaine is going to stand for deanery representative again. John Wagas is also standing for deanery representative.
- Motion was made to elect Elaine Miller and John Wagas by acclamation as Deanery representatives. Moved by Meg Amouroux, seconded by Bob Bynum.

Last Comments

- Bruce Roberts thanked everyone who pledged last year and paid their pledge. He asked people to please pay their pledges on time.

This portion of the meeting adjourned at 10:10 am.

Rector's Address – Lori Walton

This item served as both the Rector's Annual Meeting Address and Homily for the Holy Eucharist service.

Imagine if you will, two cities that have been devastated by war, occupied by a foreign army, an army that is particularly fierce and cruel. The enemy has come in and bombed everything in sight with no care or concern for the people living in these cities. The point is devastation, and so, without holding back, the army lets loose with every weapon, every instrument of death that they have.

While this may sound a lot like Ukraine, the cities are Zebulun and Naphtali, talked about by Isaiah in our first lesson. It seems nothing is new after all. Zebulun and Naphtali were situated in the northern part of Israel along a trade route, making them exposed and vulnerable to foreign powers. And so, they are the first to be attacked by the Assyrian army, an army so mighty that it was able to not only crush Israel, but was also able to subdue Babylonia and Syria, the two other major forces of the time.

By the time Isaiah puts pen to paper, or quill to parchment, Zebulun and Naphtali have been destroyed and taken over by the Assyrians. Isaiah is telling his people that this great darkness that has descended upon the house of Israel, it is not the end of the story. Rather, this darkness serves as a reminder that in darkness, there shines a great light. When all seems lost, there is hope yet to come. Even though Israel has been destroyed by a foreign enemy, salvation will descend upon God's people. Have faith. The light will shine and there will be a new day, a new Kingdom.

The psalmist knows this truth. His very first lines, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?" affirms his total dependence on God. God is his light. God is his salvation. God is his strength. And this God is not an angry and distant God. This God is one who is life-giving and protective, a God who, like light, drives away the darkness.

When I read this psalm, I thought of a walk in the bird sanctuary during the dark times of March 2020. I was all alone on my walk, not a person in sight. Most people were sheltering at home. The sky was filled with dark clouds, and as I crested a hill of this hallowed space, this sanctuary, my heart was full of worry about our country, about our safety and health. I turned around to look east, and for a brief moment, the sun broke through the clouds, and the light was so bright in contrast to the dark, I bowed my head in worship and gratitude for Almighty God.

I imagine the author of the psalm experiencing the face of God in a similar way. Kneeling in the temple, the sanctuary, the sunlight shines through a window, and reflects off the gold decorations found in holy places. In prayer, the psalmist seeks the face of God and finds the face of God. In darkness, the light shines.

In our Gospel lesson, we have a different setting and a different way of encountering God. Like Naphtali and Zebulun, the regions of Judea are occupied, pressed down by the Romans. John the Baptist, a popular and well-known leader, has been captured and killed. The Jewish people exist to serve an Empire not their own. The hope they have held on to for generations is beginning to fade. Darkness, once again, descends.

And the face of God shows up in the person of Jesus who reaches out to touch the disenfranchised, the lost, the lonely, the hopeless, the ones looking for a better day, a better life.

The light shines in the life of Jesus.

This sermon serves as the rector's annual address. In part, it is meant to cast a vision for the upcoming year, but we all know that the landscape is uncertain and the way ahead is unclear.

We have come to the point in our history when we need to let go of the pre-covid era and look towards a new day. We are never going to look like we did before March of 2020. We have to look forward to a new future and as we look ahead, we need to be honest about the challenges before us. We are still not 100% comfortable gathering together in the manner we are used to. We are still not sharing a common cup, something that is central to our theology of One Body, one community. Our finances are weaker than they've been before and we are faced with trusting everyone to participate in the financial health of our parish. Our attendance is down and the people who have left are not coming back. These challenges are not unique to us. They are being experienced in all churches.

We just don't know what things will look like, and so we are called to look to the Holy Spirit to lead us forward, trusting that wherever God leads us, it will be exactly where we are meant to go.

While the world is topsy turvy, the road is uncertain, there is one thing we can be sure of, one truth we can hang our hat on, and that is that God is as present to us today as God was to the Israelites, to the psalmist, to the early disciples. The light has never, never gone out. Not even for a second. No matter how unstable or how shifting the landscape is, we can rest in the surety of an unchangeable and unshakable God. And we can be sure that we have all that we need to do God's work in the world.

While times are tough, we are starting this year from a good place. Our doors are open, and we are gathering as a faithful people. We have welcomed several new people since the lockdown and there is excitement about being a part of a healthy and inclusive church. We are in the process of searching for a new bishop, someone who will bring a fresh outlook to our diocese, and our current bishop will visit us in April when we hope to have a baptism and several confirmations and receptions. We are beginning a process called Vital and Thriving, an initiative that will guide us in hearing more clearly God's purpose for us. The rain that we prayed for came, in buckets, and the church ended the year with enough and a little more.

God is good, not sometimes and not for some people. God is good, all the time, for all people. I look forward to seeing what God has in store for us this upcoming year. I look forward to that light in the darkness being not just a candle flame, but a burning bush, brightly shining from this place called St. James', shining for the world to see. May it be so.

Amen.

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Hart
Clerk of the Vestry