

Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church Vestry Meeting Minutes October 19, 2021

Vestry present:

The Rev. Neil Willard
David Robinson, Senior Warden
Shannon Westin, Junior Warden
Gretta Boshara
Melanie Fahey
Rand Key
Steven Killworth
Danna Kurtin
Jim Rosenbach
Libby Spoede
Susannah Webb
Kelly Williams
Lam Yu

Vestry absent:

David Candler
Mike Murphy
Posey Saenz

Assisting Clergy present:

The Rev. Ryan Hawthorne
The Rev. Jack Karn

Assisting Clergy absent:

The Rev. Elizabeth Parker

The hybrid in-person and Zoom meeting started at 5:30 PM and ended at 6:50 PM. Roger Hutchinson was present to assist with the hybrid technology.

1. **Opening Prayer.** Neil opened the meeting in prayer.
2. **Community Sharing.** David Robinson encouraged sharing.
3. **Approval of Minutes.** The August 17 minutes were approved with one correction, Susannah asked that the vote reflect her name. Motion by Steve, second by Rand, and the vestry voted to approve the minutes. The September 21 minutes were approved without any corrections. Motion by Gretta, second by Steve, and the vestry voted to approve the minutes.
4. **Council Reports:**
 - a. **Finance Council.** David provided an update for Posey, stating we have received the grant for Ryan. Overall, Palmer is in a good place at this time. David has asked the Finance Council to compile and present a comprehensive evaluation of Palmer's finances that may show pre-COVID trends, membership, status of the note on the building, outstanding/deferred repairs, etc to get an evaluation of our finances. Steve highlighted that one reason we may be in good financial standing is because of deferred maintenance and Neil added that the financial support of the diocese during COVID has also bolstered the current financial picture. The report will include an evaluation of the deficit and ongoing endowment support.

- b. **Worship Council.** Steve reported that we continue to evolve with the pandemic and are incorporating more acolytes and will soon train a junior verger. We also had a live stream of the Evensong.
 - c. **Outreach Council.** Kelly said that Palmer Place will reopen in January and there will be costs associated with that. Angel Tree will be taken on by Men's Bible Study. Palmer hopes to sponsor one refugee family. New Hope Housing is asking for ~150 pies and this will be met by a donation from HEB.
 - d. **Evangelism Council.** Lam reported that the council will be rebranded as the Good News Council. There will be some new members and some people rotating off.
 - e. **Communications Council.** Susannah reported that the focus is on Stewardship which has included videos. The next focus will be updating and refreshing the website, especially to be more user friendly to newcomers.
 - f. **Stewardship Council.** Rand said that communications have been mailed about stewardship and Covenant Sunday will be on October 31st for people to bring their pledges. Neil said there will be one 10am service (both inside and outside) followed by an outdoor picnic.
 - g. **Building and Grounds Council.** Gretta highlighted Laura Van Ness joined their meeting to discuss the endowment distribution. The rectory has a new fence with the cost being split with the neighbors. The outdoor walls of the church will be power washed and the broken windows will be replaced. There will be a few contract changes for waste, pest control and security. There is a new security company. Butch and Clarence will be asked to join the new company. A question was raised about in-house repairs and the insurance coverage for these items which will be investigated by Tara.
5. **Palmer Membership Task Force.** Neil introduced the Membership Task Force which formed to evaluate both the overall membership trends pre-COVID and how Palmer can pivot as the pandemic wanes to focus on membership. Members of the Finance and Endowment Committees were also present to hear the Membership Task Force report (including Kirk Waldron, Dick Viebig, Lynn Morstead, Burdette Keeland, David Palma, Davis Maxey, Mike Soika, Laura Van Ness, Cindi Tharpe, Larry Wood, Kristie Van Arsdel, Bet Hunter and Jim Mercurio). Roger shared the following membership data since 2015: 146 transfers out (71 to another church in town, 75 away from Houston) and 62 transfers in during that same time. Palmer has 450 households that received the 2022 stewardship letter. For 2021, Palmer received 213 pledge cards which is 47% of current congregation (note: national average is 15-25%). Lastly, Roger shared that 22 newcomer cards were collected in 2021 and contact has been made with each person. Neil said that two of the biggest things that we can do include personal invitations and contact with the rector. After these two items have happened, maintaining connection is essential. Other items included physical enhancements of the property and personnel to help. Burdette and David Palma shared their experience on the task force and some of the things they have personally observed that they could do to welcome new members or others that may be interested in being a member. Bet Hunter said that engaging people in small groups and showing up is important. Susannah asked if there has been outreach to those that have left to see what could have been done or what drew them to Palmer in the first place. Kristie said that one item Genevieve emphasized that people feel welcome when it is shared by everyone, no matter their role. Neil asked for feedback on the draft report and David R asked that the metrics that Roger has on membership be added to the report.
6. **Palmer Property Development.** Shannon summarized the two vestry meetings that there was discomfort moving forward without starting with a church visioning process. The process would

include open ended questions which can be provided verbally to the vestry at pop up meetings (or other informal gatherings) or written. David said there were robust questions at the meetings regarding finances, communication to the parish, etc. Covenant Sunday will be the day that the visioning process will be announced and will go through the fall. A concern was raised about how the input from the church during the visioning would be compiled. Another concern was raised that we are being pushed too fast with this process, especially with contracts in place and discussion being held with attorneys, etc.

7. Warden Reports:

- a. Senior Warden. Deferred.
- b. Junior Warden. Deferred.

8. Clergy Reports:

- a. The Rev. Neil Willard – Rector. Neil read a letter that will be sent to the diocese for Ryan’s ordination. Rand abstained from the vote as he has not had a chance to meet Ryan. The remaining vestry members present voted unanimously to approve the letter for Ryan’s ordination.

9. Closing Prayer. Neil closed the meeting in prayer.