

Annual Parish Meeting
January 28, 2024 – 11:49 a.m.

Fr. Hunter Ruffin opened the meeting with prayer then gave his report.

Rector's Report Annual Parish Meeting 2024

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." - Ephesians 5:1-2 (NRSV)

The theme of this year's stewardship campaign is something that we hear often in our worship and comes from the very Bible verse I just read as the opening to this reflection on parish life in the past year. It is an invitation to be disciples in all that we know, in all that we are, and in all that we do. It is nothing less than an invitation into the abundant life that Christ promises in the Gospel according to John. And, I rather think it is a summing up of what we have been working towards for the last many years as we have striven to be the church in a quickly changing world.

This year began with the concluding celebration of 60 years of Epiphany being a place of spiritual growth and development for those seeking a closer relationship with God through Christ. From that day to the present, we have labored to bring back cherished traditions, like the parish auction and dinner, and to put down those things that were no longer life-giving for us or for the community. Some of the ways that we gathered in friendship and fellowship included Shrove Tuesday, Grape Expectations, Easter Brunch, Pentecost parish picnic, American Pie Sunday, the stewardship dinner, small dinner groups, and many, many more. These and other events have fostered a renewed sense of belonging through friendship in our parish, and they continue to be the lifeblood of our community as seek to walk in love with each other.

Renewal Works

As we gathered for friendship and fellowship, our vestry invited us into a pattern of listening sessions last spring. Through those sessions, the vestry presented to the congregation some difficult financial realities our parish continues to face, and they were able to hear a deep hunger for spiritual growth and renewal. Accordingly, our next step is the Renewal Works program from Forward Movement. The first step launched today with the spiritual life inventory. It is a 20-30 minute online survey that will help the Renewal Works team discern where we are today, where God is calling us forward, and how we get from one to the other. The team will meet on four different occasions to complete workshops that will assist them in identifying the component parts in order to draft a spiritual growth strategic plan for our parish. And all of that begins with each one of us completing the spiritual life inventory!

The Renewal Works team is being led by Mary O'Grady who, after serving for 2 years on the vestry as vestry member and then as senior warden, agreed to be the facilitator for this important work. Cynthia Wood has agreed to serve as the administrator for the group and to help us keep things on track, and Janet Wagner will continue to serve as the vestry liaison to the Renewal Works team. Alongside these three leaders, Jerry Adwell, Mary Harthun, Alex Mather-Charles, Steve Veitch, Jude Wickelgren, and Sam Winter have agreed to serve on the team.

But, as I have said twice now, the work begins with each one of us! The first step is for all of us to complete the spiritual life inventory!

Financial Infrastructure

I am also thankful for the work that our Finance Committee accomplished in the past year. For some time, we have needed to move our investments to an investment partner that would be able to meet our needs as a parish. With the assistance of the Finance Committee, the vestry authorized moving our investments to The Episcopal Church Foundation who partners with State Street. In so doing, the vestry adopted new structures for our endowed funds by creating a permanent endowment for those funds permanently endowed by families and a quasi-endowment fund for all other bequests and major gifts left to the vestry's discretion. The creation of these funds provides each one of us an opportunity to prayerfully consider how we will make a final gift to our parish through a planned gift, and they allow the funds to be tracked with gains and losses being recorded on a regular schedule.

All of what the Finance Committee has done and continues to do is a reflection of what it takes for us to faithfully steward the gifts God grants to us, and I am thankful for the dedication of that committee to help our vestry make wise decisions in stewarding the financial gifts of our parish.

And, of course, our parish continues to wrestle with the debt that we are carrying from the expansion of our campus many years ago. Thanks to the matching gift and the response of our parishioners to that gift, we were able to pay an additional \$70,000 on the principal of our debt. In 2023, we paid nearly \$127,000 on the principal, and we are poised to continue the practice of aggressively paying down the debt.

Moving Forward

As we launch a new year together, we are already planning events that encourage us in our spiritual growth. The small group dinners, the men's bible study, the Wednesday discipleship class, and the monthly coffee talks are all adding to the ways that our parish is offering us invitations to grow in our spiritual journeys. Each one of them, in one way or another, creates a space for us to share our spiritual journeys with each other and to celebrate what God is doing in our lives. It cannot be emphasized enough that you are doing the work of building up God's kingdom. Together, we are acting as imitators of God as Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, and we are continuing to create invitations for others to come and see what God is doing here in this place.

I am looking forward to the fruits that the Renewal Works program will yield for our parish, and I am confident that the Holy Spirit will move through that to continue encouraging us in the way of love. I am certain that by focusing on spiritual growth and renewal, we will create new invitations for others to join this community, to become disciples of Jesus Christ who are actively working for the building up of God's kingdom in the present, and who are confronting the injustices of the world with love and with kindness. God is inviting us forward to be imitators of God through Christ and to live in love with each other and with God.

Appointment of Senior Warden

Alex Davis agreed to the appointment as Senior Warden. Fr. Hunter expressed his gratitude to Alex and Michelle Davis for their leadership in various areas of finance, stewardship, small group and marketing.

Election of Junior Warden and Vestry Members

Curtis Wood was nominated as Junior Warden. Other nominations were invited; there were none.

Pat Blackman and Heidi Thomas were nominated to fill two of the three-year terms of 2024-2026. Kathy Carney was nominated to complete the last year of the three-year term of Linda Spencer-Walters. Other nominations were invited; there were none.

Heidi Thomas motioned to elect the nominated individuals, with the Vestry to fill the third position by appointment for one year. B.J. Reed seconded the motion; the motion carried.

2024 Mission Plan

A net loss of \$78,049 was budgeted for 2023, but it was only \$7,625. The planned deficit for 2024 is \$72,260.

Building Rental Income is budgeted at \$23,304 for 2024 due to the loss of the Black Mothers' Forum Micro-School. The Vestry is researching additional avenues of increasing the income from renting space at Epiphany without compromising our own usage.

The 2024 Mission Plan includes budgeting of General Funds to the Councils (Invite, Connect, Disciple and Serve).

Carol Rascon asked about the status of our Mission Share payment. Epiphany is up to date with our Mission Share payments.

Ann Tebo motioned to accept the 2023 Financial Report. Pat Blackman seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Awards/Recognition

Fr. Hunter thanked Diane Spillum and Pam Waterman for their 3 year service on the Vestry. They were presented with crystal Celtic crosses from Ireland. Dylan Westbrook was thanked for his service as Junior Warden and presented a gift of appreciation for his service. Mary O'Grady was thanked for her service of three years as Senior Warden and two on vestry, for leading our children's formation ministry and reviving the nursery care, her involvement in stewardship, and more. In addition to the crystal Celtic cross, Mary was presented with the Parish Cross for her service to the congregation.

Fr Hunter recognized all the church staff and assisting clergy whose dedication and good work support and enable the ministry of Epiphany.

New Business

No other business was raised. B.J. Reed motioned to adjourn the meeting; Lynda Woodson seconded the motion. The motion was carried, and the meeting was adjourned at 12:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Stewart
Clerk of the Vestry