

MINUTES OF THE 158TH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
January 26, 2025

1) Call to Order **The Rev. Dr. Valori Mulvey Sherer**

Following the service at 9:30 am, the congregation gathered in the parish hall or signed in through zoom. 61 were present in the hall and 8 on zoom.

2) Opening Prayer, **The Rev. Sujanna Raj**

Rev Sujanna offered an opening prayer reflecting on the ministry of the church asking God to lead and bless us.

3) Quorum confirmed. Polls declared open

The Rev. Dr. Valori Mulvey Sherer

With over 50 present in person and on zoom, there was a Quorum. Valori noted that as we are still in the process of cleaning up our official rolls, she had requested and received permission from the Bishop that voting would be on the honor system for those who are attending and have a heart in standing with the congregation.

4) Appointment of Secretary *pro tem* and Parliamentarian

The Rev. Dr. Valori Mulvey Sherer

Lynn Stephenson appointed as secretary *pro tem* and Al Ludwig was appointed as parliamentarian

5) Presentation & Approval of 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes

The Rev. Dr. Valori Mulvey Sherer

Charlotte Martin made a motion to accept the minutes as distributed. Tom Smith seconded motion to approve last year's minutes. A showing of hands indicated that the majority approved and the motion was noted as approved.

6) Special presentation **The Rev. Dr. Valori Mulvey Sherer**

In honor of their service, Valori presented a gift of handcrafted art pieces to the three retiring vestry members.

7) Reports:

Senior Warden

Lissa Johnson

Lissa offered the senior warden report. She asked the congregation to listen for the use of the words momentum, abundance, growth, inclusion, connection, and community (MAGIC) in her oral report. Quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Life is a journey, not a destination". Lissa noted that last year's senior warden, Allsion Williams provided a road map for our journey. Lissa reflected on a year of transformation for the parish community including personnel and new technologies that broaden our reach beyond the parish walls. We refreshed office space and reorganized staffing for increased efficiency and effectiveness while also honoring our long-time

retiring staff and volunteers. We have continued to fix our grounds and building. We have collaborated with neighbors, churches, and students at Webster to continue to grow the magic of community connection. We have grown in resources, participation, and outreach. Next year more focus will be on stewardship, time and treasure. The congregation was asked to share dreams and to engage and that engagement is part of stewardship.

Also noted is that we will enter a special discernment this year as our Priest in Charge is in year four of her term. The vestry will seek input regarding Valori's next step on whether to stay or move on.

She closed by asking us to aim for transparency, honesty, hope and unity in these challenging times. And, echoing the recent sermon by Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Washington DC, Mariann Edga Budde, the foundation of unity depends on us. In the coming year, we will continue to focus on MAGIC.

Junior Warden

Charlie Walch

Charlie Walch provided the Jr. Warden report. He announced that we now have a contract for our sign. It will be a digital sign along Lockwood. The project to create a new sign was started in 2005. He reflected on the importance of a sign to show the specialness of being a christian in a world where what being a christian means has been warped. Details of 2024 improvements can be found in the meeting report.

Emmanuel Church Foundation

Elizabeth Kaul

The report on the Emmanuel Church Foundation was shared by Elizabeth Kaul. She noted that the foundation is a powerful tool and vehicle for Parish. Started in 1974 with a thousand dollar gift, gifts to the foundation are now over 3 million and include small to large gifts to the foundation. To date, the foundation has given over 3 million given back to the church. At the time of this annual meeting, the foundation is worth over 5 million dollars. She invited the congregation to consider giving to the foundation. Anyone with questions can reach out to foundation members for information. Martha Lafata commented that the process for having your remains interred in the memorial garden includes a donation for a plaque with part of that donation going to the foundation. Valori noted that there is a page on the Emmanuel webpage about the foundation

Building and Property Report

Dave Pluhar

Dave Pluhar provided the building and property report. He noted that the full report is in the annual report and in the online business attachments for this meeting. Accomplishments in 2024 include updates to the fire monitoring and alarm system. Parts of the system were over 30 years old and were failing. During replacement of the failing panel, it was found that the wiring needed to be replaced as it was not compatible with the new systems. Also, the sanctuary had not previously been included in the fire monitoring system as it was not required by code but the updated system has expanded the coverage to the sanctuary.

A request was also made to the congregation for volunteers for two roles. (1) A memorial garden coordinator to manage organizing volunteers for the general care and upkeep of the garden. This was a role that has not been filled in a couple of years and interested volunteers should reach out to Valori. (2) Volunteers to adopt spots and gardens around parish campus to care for these garden during growing season. Valori noted that this role would be done in coordination with the Earth Love committee as that committee is overseeing the long-term conservation plan for the entirety of the church grounds.

Reports from The Four Pillars of Outreach Ministry:

Before the Pillar reports, Valori began with a brief history of the status of outreach ministry when she arrived 4 years ago. She brought together the ministry leaders to reorganize ministry and the results of their work was the current Four Ministry Pillars.

o Feeding & Caring/Food Center

Laura McLaughlin and Charlotte Martin

Laura presented on behalf of Peg Cooper, ministry lead. Achievements in 2024 included 124 communions to residents of Bethesda at Old Orchard Retirement Community and 49 meals provided to Martha's Meals. The card ministry sent a total of 236 hand-written cards for various events including birthday cards to parishioners over age 70, couples celebrating 25 or 50 year anniversaries, bereavement cards to those who lost loved ones, and thinking of you cards to those in need of a uplifting note. Other achievements were the completion of 25 prayer shawls by Prayer Shawl Ministry, the delivery of 55 spring flowers and 62 Christmas poinsettias to individuals in the parish, and the 50+ wedding anniversary celebration held in October. The ministry also sponsored a community Narcan box, and the annual Rise Against Hunger meal packaging. Rise Against Hunger is done in collaboration with other local faith groups. We also sponsored Webster University Students by providing a food pantry and Wednesday food gathering. We also applied for and received a dioceses New Venture Grant to continue to fund the efforts with Webster Students.

Charlotte Martin, the administrative food coordinator for the Emmanuel Food Center presented the Food Center report. She thanked the congregation for their support of the food center. One main point she noted is that we are up 50% in client visits for food. We also now give people the option of choosing what they want for food so we can better serve dietary needs and restrictions. Last year, the congregation gave over forty three thousand in monetary donations in support of food as well as weekly food donations. With current spending, we are expecting a short fall in 2025 as we are expecting more client growth and a need to purchase more food in 2025. We have seen a huge increase in student participation in food pantry because they do not have enough support. Anyone interested in volunteering should reach out to Valori and Charlotte.

o EarthLove

Lynn Stephenson

Lynn presented the report on behalf of the Earth Love ministry committee. The EL ministry continues to focus on the conservation of the Emmanuel campus by focusing on removing invasives, improving plant diversity, and the long term care of our many mature trees. Achievements in 2024 were the installation of 3 native flower gardens and a bee hotel, the Fall

Stewardship clean-up day, the native flower give-away, and two environmentally focused formation hours. 2025 plans include developing a long-term conservation plan for the entirety of the Emmanuel grounds.

o Justice and Equity

Mimi Shipp

Mimi Shipp provided her report via zoom and noted that full details can be found in the report. A change to the ministry is that Lee Nelsen is retiring and Trica Copeland will be the new co-chair. She remarked that Justice is the Do part and Equity is the advocacy part. The ministry would like to do more "Do" in 2024. Next week they will have a speaker at formation discussing "Do we really need to talk about race". In 2025 they will be doing more activities with ideas such as showing a screening of Wicked. Also noted is that the Emmanuel Justice and Equity ministry echoes what is being done in the Diocese. In March, Joyce Jones from the diocese will be here to discuss how the Emmanuel ministry and the dioceses work together. Also planned are a discussion on gun safety improvements.

o Diocesan Involvement

Mary Jane Kuhn

Mary Jane Kuhn provided the Diocese involvement pillar update. This pillar supports Emmanuel involvement and support of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri. Pillar supports three ministries, Episcopal City Mission (ECM), United Thank Offering (UTO), and Grace Hill. ECM chaplains serve youth in the Juvenile Justice System and parishes are asked to sponsor a monthly birthday party. This year, we will be sponsoring a party in February. A request was made for volunteers for the upcoming ECM party. She noted that potential volunteers need to fill out a form and will have a background check. She asked for continued support of UTO and that boxes can be found in narthex and in the dining hall. Our support of Grace Hill includes the making of snack bags by MOE.

8) Report from the Priest-in-Charge

The Rev. Dr. Valori Mulvey Sherer

Valori began by announcing the birth of her new grandson this week.

She is entering the fourth year as priest-in-charge of Emmanuel. Since this is not an interim appointment, she can be called to continue to serve at Emmanuel. She has personally discerned that she would be happy to stay or go as we discern as a parish. She mentioned that momentum kept coming up in her personal discernment, the momentum in the parish. When she came, we were a church in conflict but we had a momentum that she has never seen at any other church. She noted that friendship and relationship is a cornerstone of our church. We have also hit our first bump in the road and she would like to stay with us through this bump. She noted that Emmanuel is a new and different community than who we were when she came. She thanked the staff and ministry leadership of 2024 and recognized the retiring vestry members Lee Nelsen, Charlie Walsch, Joyce Pluhard and Convention Delegates Bob Ziegler..

9) Treasurer's Report, Presentation of the 2025 Budget

Charlie Walch

Charlie gave the Treasurer's report on behalf of Maryann Vognild. After a low point in 2020, stewardship has increased every year since. Stewardship was up \$42,000 this year. Despite the

increase, we ended 2024 with a deficit of 61 thousand, partially due to an unforecasted dip in unpledged gifts. Unforeseen, significant, and unbudgeted repairs and replacements to the building and equipment depleted designated reserve funds by 30 thousand.

The 2025 budget has 814 thousand in income but expenses are budgeted at 872 thousand resulting in a deficit budget. Opened up to the congregation for questions.

Questions from the congregation:

What is included in admin and finance? Charlie noted that the annual audit is major portion and the rest is postage, printers

Have we thought of exploring grants to support our outreach activities? Valori noted that we are exploring grants/loans to help close the gap. Also noted that we do have money set aside in the designated funds.

Is there still a designated fund set up for capital reserves? Yes, we still do have 65 thousand in this fund. We did not contribute to it this year but we also know that we are looking at a major HVAC replacement within the next couple of years.. David Pluhar commented that in 2016 we replaced equipment to heat and cool the sanctuary. Current issues are the 6 roof top units that are older (15 to 20 years old) that have required continuous repairs, the systems in the Behold addition are now 15 years old and starting to require continued repairs. Our service contractor, ISS, has presented three solutions ranging from low 5 digits to mid six digits to repair and/or replace the system.

Have we considered not moving forward with the sign, it seems an unnecessary extravagance. The cost of the sign is 86 thousand and money has been set aside for this. Vestry looked at this possibility but we are the only church in Webster Groves (out of over 20) that does not have a digital message board. We think it is important that we have a way of communicating to the wider community. It was noted by a couple of attendees that many people in WG think we are part of Webster University and a sign will help establish our identity.

Will we do a bid process for the repair of our HVAC systems? Dave Pluhar noted that we have around a half dozen HVAC systems and that ISS has worked with us for a long time, they know our building and systems, and that they have noted upcoming issues ahead of time saving us money. Bringing in new contractors through bidding has problems because it is hard to get people to bid and new technicians would need to relearn our building. We get a lot of benefits from ISS and we do get a discount for their services. It was noted that there is an importance to continuity when servicing our equipment.

It was asked if the money for the sign is designated and can't be used for other purposes?

Charlie clarified that designated money came from two sources, ~20 thousand parish donations from individuals that were in a restricted fund and the rest is from vestry directing money to this designated fund and vestry could redesignate but that would go against the spirit. It was asked if there were any restrictions in donating to the sign or HVAC. Valori noted that if someone gives to specific things that restricts growth of the church and that giving to the church allows the vestry to use the money thoughtfully for the growth of the church.

Charlie noted that we had the church reappraised for insurance purposes. The previous value of the church was 4 million and the reevaluated value is 15 million.

It was asked why there is no money in investments. Charlie noted that because the church does not hold investments in the reserves, investments are held by the foundation.

Are we looking at reducing expenses? Charlie noted that yes, the vestry is looking at reducing expenses and we have identified some opportunities but that many of the expenses are static. The other option is not paying the Diocesan assessment. Does our budget include our Diocesan pledge? Charlie noted that our budget includes fully funding our pledge to the dioceses.

10) Election of Vestry Members, Convention Delegates and Alternates

The Rev. Dr. Valori Mulvey Sherer

There being no nominations from the floor, Valori declared that the slate of nominations was approved by acclamation. Trica Copeland, May Jane Hotaling, and Dolanimi Okuyemi were elected to the vestry. Donna Erickson was elected as a delegate and Lisa Liss and Margo Smith will continue on as delegates.

Lissa Johnson will continue as Sr. Warden, John Long and Lynn Stephenson were appointed as co-Jr. Wardens with John having oversight of the building and Lynn having oversight of the grounds. The decision to have two Jr Wardens was due to the increasing complexity and needs of the building and grounds. Lynn Stephenson will continue on as clerk of the vestry. Lissa thanked Valori, Steve Sherer, and Sujanna for all their work and dedication

11) Closing prayer

The Rev. Dr. Valori Mulvey Sherer

Valori closed the meeting with a prayer.

12) Blessing

The Rev. Sujanna Raj

Sujanna closed with a blessing.

13) Adjournment

The Rev. Dr. Valori Mulvey Sherer

Valori declared the 158th Annual Meeting adjourned and dismissed the congregation.

Respectfully Submitted,
Lynn Stephenson