

St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church
Vestry Meeting with Bishop Susan Brown Snook

Saturday, February 13, 2021, 2:30 p.m.

Present

Rev. Mark C. McKone-Sweet, *Rector*
Costa Dillon, *Senior Warden*
Susan McCormick-Davis, *Junior Warden*
Polly Getz-Enos, *Chancellor*
Akiko Tamano, *Clerk*
Jerry Blanton
Larry Burgess
Mark Davis
Shinobu Horne
Jim Oakes
Nancy Peterson
Margie Polishuk
Lauren Sleeper
Will Smith

Bishop Susan Brown Snook

Excused/Absent

Rev. Canon Allisyn Thomas, *Associate Rector*
J.D. Cowart, *Vice Chancellor*
Amy Adome, *Treasurer*
Bill Angus, *Assistant Treasurer*
Terry McCune, *Assistant Treasurer*
Rachel Blankenship

1. Gather Together

Fr. Mark opened with a prayer. Vestry members introduced themselves and their primary ministries.

2. Discussion

2.1 Bishop Questionnaire

Vestry members responded to several questions posed by Bishop Susan Brown Snook.

(a) Question 1: How are you feeling about the state of things at St. Bart's right now?

The following comments were made:

- There is excitement and hope about
 - plans for expansion and increased accessibility
 - the return of outdoor worship, and eventually indoor worship, as more people get vaccinated
 - resuming in-person Sunday school; virtual Sunday school has been difficult for children
 - plans to welcome people back to campus (i.e., phone calls to check in with people and prepare them for changes)

- There is concern and uncertainty about how flexible the congregation will be regarding the changes they will see as they return to campus. This whole year has been about change; people have become more separated and will need time to reconnect. Even on a surface level, people will be shy of shaking hands, hugging, and coming out in crowds. Some people may remain committed members but continue to stay away from in-person church.

(b) Question 2: Do you think there are ways that St. Bart's has particular hope to offer as we begin to walk toward what is hopefully the end of the pandemic?

The following points were discussed:

- The depth of leadership during this time has offered great hope. Leaders have had to think and act in new ways and leave their comfort zones.
- The generosity of the parish has been remarkable. During a time when many people are experiencing financial difficulty, giving in general is way up.
- Our message is love; we must be willing to do the hard work of finding different ways of engaging lovingly with a world in isolation. Community, hope, the foundational truth of God's love: that is what people need as they are hitting the pandemic wall.
- The youth offer hope—they have been gathering together as much as possible and doing great things while being careful and following safety protocols. They are an example of living into the values of "All are welcome," holding space for and supporting each other.
- It is critical to restate our values and let the community around us know what we are about.

(c) Question 3: In a very real way, we are a country in grief—so many people have suffered in so many different ways, and they are anxious, divided, and angry. As people begin to emerge from this difficult place, how do St. Bart's strengths enable us to reach out to them with a new message?

Fr. Mark explained the plan laid out to the parish at the annual meeting:

1. Each vestry member will call 20-plus households by phone to invite them to a Zoom meeting during Lent to check in and discuss how God is moving in their hearts.
2. After Easter, have another meeting with the same group of people to talk about how they are called to be in ministry. At the same time, launch an online time and talent survey.
3. Have ministry groups meet once or twice over the summer (via Zoom or in physically distanced in-person groups), so there is a sense of connection and progression to build on in the fall.

(d) Question 4: You have a plan to rebuild community within your own congregation—great. The next step is, have you thought about how to use that rebuilt community to reach out to people outside your doors?

The vestry discussed how community groups are anxious to resume meeting together, and having St. Bart's serve as a community center is an opportunity to reach out and make connections. The "All are welcome, no exceptions" message and the Invite Welcome Connect approach will be the foundation for growth.

(e) **Question 5: What groups of people in the community do you see who would really benefit from the St. Bart's community?**

The vestry discussed the fact that Rancho Bernardo, which has historically been a retirement community, is in transition. The following demographics are moving into the area:

- **Young families:** The preschool and strong youth group could work to St. Bart's advantage to attract these families.
- **Single people living alone:** The pandemic must be a difficult time for singles, and they likely have a deep-felt need for community. How can St. Bart's address their needs? There may be an opportunity to reach singles as they are emerging from the pandemic that won't exist later, when they have returned to their busy lives.

(f) **Question 6: St. Bart's is a congregation with a lot of strengths; what particular challenges do you have right now?**

The following issues were raised:

- Keeping people engaged is difficult right now.
- The St. Bart's mission is not just to increase attendance at services but to serve God's people however we can. Faith is about life transformation and leading people in the way of love, not keeping customers happy. To get parishioners to really embrace that mission is a challenge for many Episcopal churches. This is particularly true for a church in an upper middle class, highly educated area. When people are generally comfortable in life, it is often harder to help people move more deeply into prayer, service, and discerning who God is calling them to become.
- While Poway is a nice area to live in, when St. Bart's was doing Feeding San Diego, many people came to get food. There are still a lot of people in the neighborhood who are seeking help wherever they can get it. The challenge will be reestablishing connections, as the bonds between us have been stretched quite a bit.
- People are grieving the loss of many aspects of their spiritual lives (the Eucharist, community, etc.), but they may not always know why they are grieving. We must be intentional about listening and creating safe places to share what we are feeling and navigating. We must reach out to one another, possibly through periodic phone calls, to help people recognize grief and convey a message of hope.
- Last year, the vestry read *Canoeing the Mountains*, by Tod E. Bolsinger, which offered the analogy of expecting to travel by canoe, only to encounter snow-covered mountains. That is exactly what has happened to the Episcopal Church; it has, in fact, been happening for several decades now, but the pandemic emphasized that it is now or never. We must figure out a whole new way of being the church.

(g) **Question 7: Are there other challenges you want to tell me about, or other ways I can support you in your ministry as you move into another challenging year?**

The following points were discussed:

- The future of outreach is uncertain. Historically the thrift shop funded a lot of outreach, but the shop had to shut down. St. Bart's had just started to brainstorm on ways to replace those funds when the pandemic started.
- Can the "All are welcome, no exceptions" message be expanded to the Episcopal Church and/or the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego? This is a message that speaks deeply to many. A church may say all are welcome and not necessarily mean it, but St. Bart's has done the hard work of figuring out what is meant by "all"—the "no exceptions" component is critical, and broadcasting this message as widely as possible will help draw more people in.
- Bishop Susan indicated that the shield with "The Episcopal Church welcomes you" slogan is problematic, as it is not an especially welcoming emblem and may keep people away. She was interested in the idea of creating messaging for the diocese that is more proactive about inviting people in.

2.2 Pastoral Letter re: Max Lucado

In response to a vestry member's comment that the recent events at the Washington National Cathedral had shaken him, Bishop Susan responded that inviting Max Lucado to preach at the Cathedral seemed somewhat thoughtless; amplifying the voice of someone who opposes the Episcopal Church's official position on LGBTQIA+ issues is hurtful to people who have already been hurt deeply by the church. This is an indication that we all need to think deeply about what we do, what it represents about us, and who we might be hurting by our actions.

Bishop Susan asked if there had been any feedback on the pastoral letter sent by the clergy regarding Max Lucado's invitation to preach at the Cathedral. As the letter had just gone out, it was too soon to gauge the congregation's response, but the vestry agreed that the letter was well-written and heartfelt; it reinforced St. Bart's position as a church that welcomes all, with no exceptions, and struck the right balance between addressing what the church is today (and has been historically) and becoming the church we want to be.

Bishop Susan asked about the possibility that taking this stance might cause St. Bart's to lose members of the congregation.

- Fr. Mark responded that we must be clear about the church's core values, what we will stand up for, and where we will draw a line. Several families left the congregation after the church's decision to do a liturgy on racism and to participate in peaceful Black Lives Matter protests. The challenge going forward is how to love everyone but also affirm our core values—it can get messy.
- It is important on every level to reaffirm people of various sexualities and let them know they are truly embraced. While the St. Bart's leadership is fully welcoming, there are a number of people in the congregation who may not be as accepting.
- As a church, we must always err on the side of love, particularly with those who have been hurt and excluded.
- We like to think St. Bart's is a safe place, but the only people who can make that determination are the people who need that safety. In the past, some people did come, did not feel safe, and left. We need to be careful about patting ourselves on the back; the challenge is to walk the talk.
- The letter may cause some people to question their long-held beliefs; others may decide St. Bart's is not where they belong.

3. Closing Prayer

Bishop Susan offered a closing prayer, and Cathie Roy prayed for Bishop Susan and the work of the diocese.

4. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:31 p.m.

5. Future Meetings/Events/Key Dates

February 23	Vestry meeting
March 16	Vestry meeting
April 4	Easter Sunday
April 20	Vestry meeting
May 18	Vestry meeting
Spring	Camp Stevens (group development/"fun")
June 15	Vestry meeting
July	NO MEETING
August 17	Vestry meeting
September 21	Vestry meeting
October 19	Vestry meeting
November 16	Vestry meeting
December 2–4	Bishop Curry revival visit

Respectfully submitted,

Akiko Tamano
Vestry Clerk