

**CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
SUNDAY, APRIL 28, 2024**

*I am the vine, you are the branches.
John 15:5*

The Annual Parish Meeting of the Church of the Redeemer was called to order by the Reverend David J. Ware, Rector, during the 10:00 a.m. worship service on Sunday, April 28, 2024. He began with a prayer for the Annual Meeting.

Election and Commissioning of the New Vestry - The Vestry Nominating Committee considered all the submitted nominations and developed the Vestry slate from among the many qualified candidates. No additional nominations were received after the slate was published; therefore, according to the Bylaws, the slate as circulated earlier was presented. Keri Frisch, Senior Warden, presented the following 2024-2026 slate of new Vestry Members: David Frisch, Mary Lord, Karen McGee, and Noel Morelli. The congregation voted by acclamation to adopt the slate of new Vestry Members. David led them in reaffirming their commitment to follow Christ, and to committing themselves to carry out the responsibilities of the Vestry and to serve the congregation. He led the congregation in committing to support these leaders with prayers, honest and gracious communication, and the willingness to help them carry out Christ's ministry at Redeemer. The new Vestry Members took the Oath of Office, and David commissioned them for their work with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Finance Update - Doug Riley, Treasurer, reported the financial picture at Redeemer is fine. He presented a written report giving a summary of actual revenue and expenses for 2022 and 2023, the 2023 and 2024 budgets, a summary of pledge income for 2021-2023, budgeted pledge income for 2024, pledge commitments for 2024 as of 4/23/2024, and the balances for the Endowment Fund, the Heritage Trust Fund, and the Covenant Fund for 2021-2024. He began with a discussion of the church's endowment and investments, noting a parishioner had asked the Vestry to consider adopting a resolution to prohibit Redeemer from making investments in any company whose core business involves the production of coal, petroleum, and natural gas. These issues were discussed last week at the Investment Committee meeting, chaired by Katie Gray, with our investment manager Dan Dent of D. F. Dent & Company. Doug reviewed the three endowment accounts: the Endowment Fund, an invested savings account, used for parish outreach and, if necessary, to balance the annual operating budget; the Heritage Trust Fund, used for the care and upkeep of campus buildings and grounds; and the Covenant Fund, started several years ago with a \$1 million gift from an anonymous donor to be used at the Rector's discretion with the consent of the Vestry to address issues of poverty and homelessness in Baltimore. He said the funds are prudently invested in equities, fixed income, and cash reserves and are routinely reviewed and rebalanced by the investment manager in conjunction with the Investment Committee. No investments have been made in energy stocks for many years consistent with the national Episcopal Church's position that we must transition globally to a low carbon economy and its directive to dioceses and parishes not to invest in any company or entity for which the production of coal, petroleum, or natural gas makes up 50% or more of its products or services. Doug noted Redeemer's investment policy states, "No investments will be made in

any companies conducting activities that appear to be inconsistent with the overall ethical standards appropriate for an endowment fund within the Episcopal Church.” The policy also states, “Investments will not be made in any companies that support operations and countries with low regard for ethical and human rights issues. In addition, the Endowment Fund will refrain from investments in companies that appear to support discriminatory measures or oppressive working conditions.” He summarized that the endowment funds are well invested in a socially and environmentally responsible manner consistent with the core values of the parish.

Doug turned to the income and expenses of the Operating Account over the past 2-3 years as outlined in his written report. On the income side, he pointed out the number of people pledging and the total pledge amount have been decreasing while plate income collected during weekly services has been increasing as weekly attendance is increasing and more parishioners are choosing not to pledge. While pledging does make budget planning easier for the staff and the Vestry, Doug said the importance of pledging goes beyond budget practicalities, noting that we are created in the image of a generous God and are made to reflect God’s generosity by partnering and committing to God’s work in the world to help us grow in godliness and discipleship. He said a pledge commitment says, “I am a part of something larger than myself,” standing in solidarity with the Redeemer family of believers in pursuit of the same vision to love God and love people in the name of Jesus Christ. He said when we sign a pledge card, we are saying, “As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord alongside you and your family here at Redeemer.” It says “We believe in what we are doing as a church and in who we are becoming, together, in Christ,” and “We’re all in! We belong here.” Doug said giving in a regular, committed way through pledging turns our giving into a spiritual practice, like prayer or worship, and helps to keep God as a priority in our lives. He concluded with a verse from Matthew 6:21: “Where our treasure lies, there our hearts will be also.”

Facilities Update - Steven Sutor, Junior Warden, thanked the dedicated members of the Buildings and Grounds Committee and Mark Schroeder, Director of Facilities, for all their work in maintaining the church. He discussed the campus projects of the past year. A new west side ramp to St. Paul’s Courtyard matching the original east side ramp was installed to accommodate visitors coming to the church from the north parking lot. The church nave lighting was switched to clearer, energy saving LED lighting with bulbs that will last for 55,000 hours; the second phase will highlight the pulpit, the lectern, and the altar. Soft exterior lighting was added to the Charles Street side of the West Columbarium, maintaining the more intense lighting on the buildings and on the chapel spire. Interior lighting was added to the east window over the altar in the chapel and the south transept window in the church, enhancing these windows for evening services. The speakers in the church have been replaced and an upgraded processor installed to regulate the sound, and stage and hand microphones have been added in the Parish Hall. Several trees on the campus have been lost over the years to disease, age, and storms; six new substantially sized trees have been planted, and a memorial tree was planted in conjunction with Redeemer Youth Group along the horseshoe drive. Two American Chestnut saplings developed by the American Chestnut Society to resist the blight that has killed many chestnut trees on the East Coast have been planted and are being nurtured. Blight resistant boxwoods and perennials have been planted at the chapel entrance. The annual \$10,000 contribution was given to the Parish Day School to support necessary building upgrades. Several deferred maintenance issues have also been addressed, including replacing one of the 25 year old HVAC systems in the

chapel; repointing and cleaning the stone work in the chapel spire; repairing the slate roof and copper flashing over the south transept; repairing the slate roof over the choir room and repairing storm damage to the windows; and repairing the roof in the chapel sacristy and the ambulatory corridor from the Welcome Center to the Cloister meeting room. Additional projects under consideration for the year include repairing bluestones and refreshing the plantings in St. Mary's Courtyard.

The Rector's Address - David began by asking the congregation to take a deep breath with eyes closed and to imagine the vine from the Gospel reading, John 15: 1-8, its size, location, branches, trunk, leaves, fruit, source of nourishment and of life, and to abide there for a minute. He said, "I am the true vine," is one of the many "I am" gospel verses: the bread of life, the door, the gate, the good shepherd, the way, the source of life, the fount of being, the way to strength and solidarity and love in difficult times, and a portal from us to God and back again.

David said organized religion across every demographic in the United States is and has been shrinking for the last five decades, yet Redeemer is growing, with baptisms and confirmations, newcomers to church, and more small group midweek gatherings for conversation, contemplation, study, community organizing, advocacy, recovery, rehearsals, and service. Parishioners are gathering for newly formed House Meetings, to listen to performers and speakers, and to work with neighbors, and the church has invested \$172,000 from the Operating Budget and the Covenant Fund in community partnerships.

David thanked the congregation for their open hearts and minds, seeking the Spirit and the best in others, believing that the Holy One lives and is always running towards us, following the teachings of Jesus here and now in 2024, and especially for hearing the call to build one Baltimore and seek the good of the city. He thanked Keri Frisch for serving as Senior Warden for six years, leading the parish in anti-racism work through the Sacred Ground course and the Redeemer History Committee research with gentle strength, honesty, and courage to help us to know our story more fully. He welcomed Lucy Neale Duke as the new Senior Warden and thanked officers Steven Sutor, Doug Riley, and Fern Riley. He thanked Barbara Hart, Administrative Assistant and Parish and Rector's Secretary, for her nearly 30 years of service, thoughtfully supporting every aspect of the church's liturgical and pastoral work; she will be missed when she retires in October. He thanked Chuan Phan, Assistant Facilities Manager, who joined us as an immigrant from Vietnam over 30 years ago to assist in fixing and caring for the campus buildings and grounds for all these years and who will retire in January. He thanked Katrina Schisler, Bookkeeper, for keeping the financial books in great shape and Mark Schroeder, Director of Facilities, for maintaining the ministry of Buildings and Grounds. He thanked Ellen Chatard, Director of Program, for her invaluable work as a thought partner and director of the myriad programs presented here each year.

David thanked Thomasina Wharton, Director of the Center for Wellbeing, for creating in her first year on the staff a monthly gathering for 80 year olds, hosting a women's healing circle, facilitating the Advent retreat, partnering with the Parish Day School and confirmation class, working with 20 individuals in Spiritual Direction, and showing us how to love in a radically inclusive way. He thanked Robert Chrystal, Director of Music for Faith@Five, for growing a stirring, welcoming service that is a portal to the Spirit's work at Redeemer. He thanked Bert

Landman, Director of Music and Organist, for his tireless commitment to Redeemer's youth and adult musicians, for coordinating concerts that delight and stretch us, and for thoughtfully guiding the liturgy week after week, and he said Bert will take a deserved sabbatical after Easter 2025.

David thanked Freda Marie Brown, Associate for Spirituality, for holding the pastoral ministry of the church with soul and heart, for her gifts as a teacher and prophet, and for consistently calling us to know ourselves and the Holy One, who is. He said day by day, breath by breath, our souls and cells have shaped each other to such an extent that we wouldn't be who we are without having known her. She will be retiring in August. He thanked Rebecca Ogus, Associate for Youth and Young Adult Ministries, for being an old soul wise beyond her years, a pastor, coach, guide, and friend to children, teenagers, parents, young adults, and colleagues. She will be moving with her family to England in September. He thanked Cristina Paglinauan, Associate for Community Engagement, for serving as parish leader during his sabbatical this program year, leading with a steady hand and open heart, holding the center and helping the parish to realize how strong it is with its broadly shared and embodied leadership guided by a deep spirit of mission. He thanked her for showing us what community engagement looks like, that love is access to respect, and that respecting the dignity of each person is how we transform ourselves and the city of Baltimore.

David thanked Mary Knott, Director of the Redeemer Parish Day School, and its faculty. He said the Parish Day School is a central mission of the Church of the Redeemer and has been an integral part of the church, not a separate non-profit entity, for 72 years. Following the advice of former Maryland Superintendent of Schools Nancy Grasmick, the school has expanded in the past three years to become the only Episcopal elementary school in Baltimore with classes from 2 years old through third grade. He said the school embodies what Episcopal schools do so well: balance faith and intellectual rigor within a welcoming and inclusive community where each child is supported and individually valued. PDS offers a unique educational experience in Baltimore, allowing children to grow through the completion of early childhood in one school. Students develop gradually through play, experimentation, and imagination with time to discover their strengths and particular learning styles and opportunities to lead and learn from their mistakes. The school day has grown to accommodate working and single parents and caregivers with early drop off and extended day offerings, increased its financial aid through the Covenant Fund, and strengthened the church's partnership with Govans Elementary School. With tuition that is measurably more affordable than local independent and parochial schools, PDS fills an economic niche not otherwise served in this area. The clergy lead weekly chapel, and the children serve by raising money and awareness for Boots for Baltimore and cancer research through Pedal for Pediatrics. PDS graduates matriculate each year equally to public and independent schools.

David said every church longs to have a thriving school of young families, and PDS is outgrowing its current educational spaces, using Mr. Vu's old house, a trailer on Charles Street, the Hale Auditorium, and the parish nursery for classrooms, and using the multipurpose room for lunch, music, Values classes, extended day sessions, rainy day play, early drop off, and special programs such as zoo visits and yoga. He noted the response to a parish survey to explore potential interest in launching a capital campaign to enlarge the school buildings was

overwhelmingly favorable and said he looks forward to discussing the opportunities and answering questions. The PDS Board and the Vestry will meet in May to discuss a study analyzing demographics, financial capacity, and parish will to consider the way forward.

David highlighted the Redeemer History Committee and its important work discovering the church's relationship to the institutions of slavery and Jim Crow, facilitating learning sessions with parishioners, and leading an experiential walk grounding its findings on Good Friday. Redeemer continues to financially support ReBuild Johnston Square and other community partners and to equip volunteers for Johnston Square Elementary School and Govans Elementary School, the CARES food pantry and GEDCO support services, the Helping Up Mission women's ministry, and Turnaround Tuesday employment readiness along with the other ways parishioners are serving on their own. The church participated in three BUILD actions joining over 1,200 leaders to address the crisis of vacant and abandoned houses in the city and traveled to Annapolis, advocating for legislation now signed by Governor Wes Moore to fund Project C.O.R.E., Creating Opportunities for Revitalization and Equity.

Returning to the Gospel of John reading about the Vine and its branches, David said Jesus is telling us something fundamental about God within us, among us, and beyond us, that the Holy One is the source of water, nutrition, and life for the branches. He said our being is wrapped up in the life of others, and to be connected is to live, as relationship, engagement, and mutuality is our lifeblood. Quoting Karl Jung, he said, "The unrelated human being lacks wholeness, for he can achieve wholeness only through the soul, and the soul cannot exist without its other." David said to be fully human is to love, and without offering and receiving love, we are not fully ourselves. We have a taste of that reality here at Redeemer, he noted, through the ways we serve, teach, listen, help, heal, and hold one another. He said love, like a Vine to its branches, calls us to be the ones we were created to be, bearing fruit and wine for a world often dying of thirst. He concluded with a prayer, the poem, "Touched By an Angel" by Maya Angelou:

We, unaccustomed to courage, exiles from delight, live in coiled shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple and comes into our sight to liberate us into life.
Love arrives, and in its train come ecstasies, old memories of pleasure, ancient histories of pain.
Yet if we are bold, love strikes away the chains of fear from our souls.
We are weaned from our timidity. In the flush of love's light, we dare to be brave.
And suddenly we see that love costs all we are and will ever be.
Yet it is only love which sets us free.

The meeting ended, and the service continued with the Creed.

Fern Riley, Registrar