

Minutes of the 2016 Annual Meeting  
Emmanuel Episcopal Church  
December 11, 2016  
FINAL—Approved by the vestry

Father Robert Salamone called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. He noted that this is a day for us to gather and celebrate our identity as we do God's work together. This will be a light, casual meeting because our parish Christmas luncheon will be next Sunday, December 18, in the Common Room at noon and there will be more substantial fare.

**Nomination and Election of Secretary**

Fr. Robert nominated Sue Boatright to be the recording secretary for the annual meeting. The motion was seconded from the floor and approved.

**Approval of Minutes from 2015 Annual Meeting**

These minutes may be reviewed on the first pages of today's parish meeting booklet. Fr. Robert called for a motion from the floor which was seconded and approved.

**Rector's Reflections**

It has been an interesting year in the history of Emmanuel. We have been blessed to baptize 11 members so far, to witness four marriages, to see 36 folks transfer into the church, and to say 'good bye' to nine.

Sister Death claimed nine last year who have been part of the fabric of our lives for many years: Dorothy Harshman, Bill Baxter, Sara Sanford, Ken Jordan, Bill Steedman, Bernita Aiken, Ashley Block, Louise Wilbur, and Rosemary Magill. We pray that their souls and the souls of all our faithful departed rest in peace.

Bishop Rob Wright will be here on February 26, 2017, when 18-22 members will be confirmed. There will be receptions into the Episcopal Church and reaffirmations.

The church renovation, restoration, and renewal project is almost completed. Some chairs matching the pews will be available for the handicapped access spaces and may be moved as needed. Fr. Robert thanked restoration committee members Shooter Roberts-Chair, Naomi Norman, Cindy Sullivan, Beverly Sligh, Philip Bettendorf, Katie Loyd, Penny McLanahan, Jud Doherty, and Katrina Evans. A few suffered considerable heartburn during the process and we pray that they have convalesced. For all things, to God we give the glory.

Fr. Robert reflected on what we were about this year and how to sum up how the renewal process affected us as a community of faith. He became aware that Matt Humphrey of our parish had already masterfully done so on Facebook. Matt posted a photo with these observations:

“Apparently I didn't bid high enough to win any of the big ticket items at the Emmanuel Episcopal (Sneak Peek) silent auction, but for a modest donation, I did get to bring home a fixture from the building which is no longer needed. This small iron trestle supported one of the old kneelers. The new pews will have retractable kneelers so this piece has been made redundant. It is humbling to have this little relic of my parish church in my possession. It's been there for a long time. It has supported generations of Emmanuelites who've knelt in prayer, young people and old, people from around the world, rich and poor. It has seen service on Christmases and Easters, Good Fridays, and Pentecosts, at baptisms, and weddings, and funerals, and even the most ordinary of

Sundays. It has supported members of this parish in happy times and sad times, in hope and fear, in love and in doubt.”

Then someone wrote back to him saying, “So they dismantled the church and SOLD the things from it. Mammon, much? And, I bet NO taxes were collected from this profitable event. Love the God/Money salad so many fake “c”hristians employ. The hypocrisy so thick, one can use it like butter.”

And Matt wrote back, the way anyone should write back. “No, we rehabilitated and restored the historic church building for continued use by an active parish and the neighborhood that it serves. Every bit that could be conserved or repurposed was kept. New doors were created out of the parts of the old wood floor that managed to escape termite damage.

“These kneeler supports literally serve no purpose now, but they are meaningful to those of us who belong to the parish, and I gladly paid a small donation for one. The money raised from this event, most of which came from ticket sales and donated silent-auction items, goes to the budget of a church that regularly houses and feeds the homeless, helps assimilate immigrant families into our community, builds Habitat for Humanity houses, and a great many other worthy endeavors. Please feel free to visit us and see what we’re all about.”

When people were emailing that exchange back and forth at the diocesan Annual Council, Fr. Robert decided that would be the thought for our annual meeting. That is really who we are, and that is what we do, and some of us have the ability to respond in grace to any manner of talk or incident in which we find ourselves. Fr. Robert thanked Matt for being a wonderful image of God for that person, and may she grow in grace and understanding. That sums up this and many years as a philosophy of who we are as a people of God.

New endeavors are still waiting to be born, some of which are:

- Eight or nine folks have been trained to be supportive care workers for those who do adoption and foster care. The diocese offered resources for this program long after we became involved in it.
- Twelve-step support groups have been expanded.
- There is an orchard plan for the garden with produce to go to the Food Bank and feed the hungry.
- There is discussion of opening a Hispanic ministry in the parish which is a way to bring a spiritual dimension to some very hot political issues. People have unique spiritual needs and need spiritual care.

### **Senior Warden’s Reflections**

Naomi Norman, outgoing senior warden who has served three stints on the vestry and two as senior warden, noted that each experience has been wonderful and unique. Naomi thanked her cohorts for the pleasure of serving with all of them. She provided comments on this unique and wonderful year, noting that there often seems to be a failure of technology when she needs it the most! So, she asked all to imagine a screen behind her with the text that she will now read.

Naomi noted (as Matt so eloquently said in his Facebook post) that we have been busy with mission, outreach, and formation. Our committees and ministries have been active. We have truly been the hands and feet of Jesus inside the walls of Emmanuel and out into the community, both here in Athens and as far as Haiti. We are the church!

Naomi focused on the church restoration campaign that was done for the benefit of those who worship in the sacred space today and for the generations of faithful who will come after us. For many it must have been difficult to keep that in mind as work progressed. Naomi is sure that everyone took a peek into the sanctuary and wondered, what in the world is the vestry up to? With destruction everywhere they wondered what had happened to their beautiful church.

Parishioners were asked to remember that this work was just a continuation of a long history of projects undertaken over the past 115 years to take care of and enhance our beautiful worship space. The cornerstone of the church was laid May 13, 1895, and the first service was held inside our church October 15, 1899. Four years later in 1903 the debt was retired and the bishop came and consecrated our building. That is a pretty remarkable achievement—four years from cornerstone to ceiling and another four to pay off the debt. What a beautiful church our ancestors built for us. Lots of granite from Elberton, GA, was laid, stone upon stone, row upon row, until a magnificent Gothic Revival church stood along Prince Ave.

Then, in 1924 another generation of parishioners dedicated a beautiful marble altar, installing it in the front wall against a beautiful limestone reredos. That is where there was a gaping hole for the past several months. The restoration committee told everyone, “Have Faith! Remember, the church as we know it reflects the dreams and spiritual growth of over a hundred years of a living church.” It is that living church that is so important, evolving and transforming itself over time. It lives, and breathes, and is grounded in faith. Indeed, if faith is at the core of what we do, we will always be standing on firm ground even if all we are looking at is a gaping hole.

Change does shake us. Naomi remembers, as many others do, how unglued her mother was when the 1979 prayer book was introduced. Whatever the nature of the change, it can simultaneously comfort and threaten people, just as the pious people in Jesus’ time must have been unglued by the radical new way he challenged them and us to follow him. When we keep faith at our core we are always standing on firm ground even if all we are looking at is a gaping hole where once a beautiful altar stood.

Faith is what moves our parish now and has for over a hundred years. We were blessed this summer with a unique opportunity to hear a previous generation of Emmanuel faithful speak to us in their own words. On June 23, 2016, the top of the altar was removed and a wine bottle was discovered inside that had lain hidden within the altar for almost 92 years. Inside that bottle were six sheets of paper, hand-written and dated Christmas Eve 1924. That was the date the Emmanuel parishioners dedicated that limestone reredos, marble altar, and mensa (top of the altar). This was a gift given to the Glory of God and in honor of The Reverend Troy Beatty, the figure who was perhaps most responsible for seeing to it that the beautiful church we worshiped in this morning was actually completed.

On these sheets of paper parishioners documented all of the improvements made to the church and all the names of all who gave money for that work. It is that list of names that Naomi finds so compelling. In a very real way those six sheets of paper with all those names and loving contributions make tangible our history, and they speak to the faithful devotion of generations of Emmanuelites who have worshiped together. Their frugality is to be admired. Although they had just spent \$4,638.64 on improvements (about \$63,419.33 today), they wrote on both sides of the papers put into the bottle! Frugality was of utmost importance and nothing was wasted in 2016 either. On page one is written, “On this day, this deposit is made in this altar and the mensa fastened in place in the hope and faith that for many years to come the people of this parish may here find abundant spiritual nourishment for their souls’ life.”

These original framed documents with wonderful handwriting may be viewed today at the meeting and will soon hang in the church.

The parish raised over \$1.6 million to preserve, restore, and renew the sanctuary, a project that represents dreams and growth of a living church. On November 17, 2016, the original bottle with copies of the original documents was returned to the newly refashioned altar. That same evening a hand-crafted wooden box was placed within the altar right next to the bottle. Notes from parishioners expressing their love of Emmanuel in their own words were placed inside that wooden box. Some of these notes were from descendants of parishioners whose names were on the 1924 documents.

Naomi indicated that these two artifacts make tangible to us our history. Our ancestors speak to us and we speak to them in turn. Several generations later when another restoration project is undertaken and the altar is opened again, we will be speaking along with our ancestors to future generations of Emmanuelites. We are all connected in a very real way all of the time, many by faith and blood and others by faith alone. Yet, all of us meet at the altar where we come again and again to refresh ourselves and in the words of our predecessors, “find abundant spiritual nourishment for our souls’ life.” We are grounded in our faith that keeps us whole, keeps us mindful of God’s love, and keeps us together.

Naomi closed by thanking all and saying that it has been a very great pleasure to serve the parishioners of Emmanuel.

### **Emmanuel’s Finances**

Betty Varnadore, Emmanuel’s treasurer, spoke of the church’s finances in Phil Bettendorf’s absence. She gave a brief overview of the budget that was approved by the vestry in January 2016 at the vestry retreat.

Emmanuel is a tithing parish and the budget is based mainly on money received from pledges and contributions received through our stewardship campaign. This year’s budget was based on income of \$910,800 plus additional revenue (not yet reconciled) from the supplemental fund-raising Sneak Peek event. Projected expenses for the year are \$956,500, leaving an operating deficit of \$45,700. The budget projected realistic numbers to better prepare for less-than-favorable conditions.

The summary of actual figures for January through October 2016 (November not yet available) shows YTD (year-to-date) revenue of \$716,500. This figure is slightly less than our YTD budget figures from pledges and plate. Emmanuel typically collects 16-18% of pledges in the last 45 days of the year. Expenses YTD are \$768,200. This is positive because expenses are below the YTD budgeted figure by \$34,400. Expenses have been held in check. The current reconciled financials show a net operating deficit of \$51,784 due to pledges which are expected to increase by the end of the year. During 2016 our parish has continued to meet its obligations.

The 2017 budget will be finalized at the vestry retreat in January. Please send in your pledges so that Emmanuel can continue to function. A hearty ‘thank you’ to those who have already turned in their pledges.

Phase 2 of the capital campaign raised a total pledged amount of \$1,387,074 as of June 7, 2016, and thus far 44% of that pledged amount has been received. The line of credit from Phase 1 was paid off in March from the endowment gift.

For several years our auditor, James Jordan, has recommended implementing changes in procedures to make Emmanuel more financially secure for its parishioners. Mr. Jordan reported at the November vestry meeting that audit results were positive and all of those involved with church finances have made the recommended changes.

Finance committee meetings held once a month are open. Parishioners are welcome to attend. Representatives from Cornerstone, stewardship, and endowment committees are also present at meetings.

No questions were asked.

### **Introduction of Vestry Nominees to serve 2017-2019**

The nominating committee was composed of the outgoing vestry class (Phil Bettendorf, Chair; Weyman Johnson, Diane Wahlers and Naomi Norman) plus two former vestry persons, Butch Bush and Marty Kemp. The committee discerns the gifts people bring to the vestry.

Weyman noted that the November edition of *News from the Narthex* highlighted each individual on the proposed slate and encouraged everyone to read these if they have not. Weyman then introduced the committee's recommendations which have been approved by the vestry: Anna Alexander, LaBau Bryan, Jan Wheeler, and Carter Stanfield.

Fr. Robert presented the slate for parish approval and it was passed unanimously. He congratulated the new vestry class and explained that the first unofficial meeting will be this coming Thursday when they will assume their responsibilities and gather with current and outgoing vestry. This "Hail and Farewell" will be held at the Salamone's house.

### **Recognizing Outgoing Vestry Class**

Fr. Robert noted that people are never replaced on vestries. "Thank You" to Naomi Norman, Weyman Johnson, Diane Wahlers, and Phil Bettendorf who are transitioning off the vestry but are not leaving ministry to the parish.

Outgoing members each have special gifts. Naomi has a heart and passion for the church and everything associated with it. Weyman has a heart for the poor and outreach ministries. Diane has a heart for pastoral care. Phil has a heart for the good of the church and sound fiscal policies with a conscience that keeps our spending in line meeting our fullest potential. They have all striven tirelessly and we thank them very much.

### **Annual Faithful Servant Award**

For at least the past eight years, a parishioner or couple has been recognized for their service over the course of their lives at Emmanuel. They have embodied the passion that vestry members have but have served the Lord in other ways. There is a plaque in the hallway near the office where recipients' names are inscribed and we hold them in our hearts.

This year our Faithful Servant Award is presented to Sylvia and Bobby Gibson.

Peg Wood was honored to be asked to speak of Sylvia and posed the question: How you know a good and faithful servant? Peg could go back 60 years, before Sylvia and Bobby were married, to the early 1950's. Sylvia was chairman of Altar Guild, cooked at Hodgson House for students (before there were Holy Cookers), taught Sunday school, and more. She was an avid gardener, an art connoisseur, a tennis player, and Peg's sailing buddy. Peg compared her longtime friend,

Sylvia, to four characters from the gospel: Mary and her sister Martha, the Maggi, and the anonymous disciple whom Jesus loved from the Book of John. Both Sylvia and Bobby have spent their lives bringing richness into Emmanuel.

Butch Bush related a story about Bobby Gibson from when he served as a lay leader in the church, beginning when Ike Eisenhower was the U.S. President and then John Kennedy. Butch found a letter written to Bobby from Georgia Secretary of State Ben Fortson responding to Bobby's legal inquiry. The letter indicated that when the church was first started in 1843 the legal church name was spelled in the founding documents with one "m".

Bobby was the guiding force for the church acquiring many campus properties which may no longer exist or have been sold: Bell's shopping center, Huddle House, two cottages on Pope, the antebellum Cobb House, insurance building on the corner of Pope and Prince, and the cottage that now houses Emmanuel's Thrift House. Bobby also chaired the endowment fund for many years which started with a very modest sum and, under his supervision, grew to \$8 million. He did this with diligence and with utmost security of the funds.

Bobby's artistic and architectural ability has graced Emmanuel and examples of his talents and contributions may be seen today: All Saints terrace outside the Common Room (1987), brass processional cross created by Bobby, Emmanuel wood doors which go out of the sanctuary onto Pope St. (dedicated to William Erwin), rood screen (dedicated to J. Earl Gilbreath), Founders' Altar, St. Matthew's Altar, and others.

Butch asked Bobby one day who he would have in a foxhole with him if the enemy was coming. Without a doubt, Sylvia, he said. When Butch asked how he was able to do all that he has accomplished, Bobby related that many hands make light work and he was blessed to have a lot of people help do these things. He stated that we all drink from a well we did not dig.

Thank you, Sylvia and Bobby Gibson!

Fr. Robert showed everyone the beautiful rector's cross that Bobby crafted in Father Gilbreath's honor about fifty-five years ago, symbolic of his ministry among us.

Sylvia thanked everyone for the honor wishing that Bobby could have been here to receive it with her. They are very humbled by this acknowledgement.

A copy of a Bradbury print of Emmanuel that Fr. Robert saw hanging at Lanier Gardens was framed and given as a gift to the Gibsons. Fr. Robert thanked Sylvia and Bobby for their many years of service and love for Emmanuel. Well done, good and faithful servants!

Before closing, Fr. Robert reported that Terrie Seward will be the new Senior Warden on the vestry for 2017.

The meeting closed with a prayer by Fr. Robert at 1:05 p.m.

Approved by: Bill Fox, Brian Freese, Rob Hoyt, Weyman Johnson, Roger Lange, Naomi Norman, Crysty Odom, Terrie Seward, Diane Wahlers-James

Abstained, not present: Phil Bettendorf, Ellen Cowne, Brooke Stortz

Respectfully submitted, Sue Boatright, Recording Secretary