

St. Alban's Episcopal Church
Minutes of Vestry Meeting (AS APPROVED)
Monday – June 6, 2016 – 6:30 pm
Nourse Hall

Vestry Officers Present: The Rev. Dr. Deborah A. Meister, Laura Ingersoll (Senior Warden), Rich Turner (Junior Warden).

Vestry Members Present: Adrienne Allison, Julie Clements, Andrea Fraser-Reid, Tom Gustafson, Kristie Hassett, Marcus King, Sandy Kolb, Tomás Montgomery, Ken Patterson, Marty Welch.

Others Present: Music Advisory Group members: Richard Leland, Eliot Edgar, Bruce Barrow, Paul Loether, Marybeth Evans; parishioners Barbara Manard and Jonell Easton.

Call-to-Order: A meeting of the Vestry was called to order at 6:30 pm by the Rev. Dr. Deborah Meister, who offered an opening prayer.

Rev. Meister restated that she had called this Vestry meeting, with the three days' notice as provided for by Article II, Section 2, of the Bylaws, for the purpose of having the new Vestry consider the issue of whether the Rector should extend an offer of permanent full-time employment to the Interim Music Director, Laura Weiss, in view of the fact that Weiss had received an offer of permanent employment by another church in the D.C. area.

By way of background, Rev. Meister explained that the original vision was to hire an Interim Music Director who would serve for something over a year, taking steps to discern what a music program for St. Alban's should be like; once the discernment was sufficiently advanced, a search committee would be convened to conduct a high-level search for a permanent Music Director. The Interim search generated about 20 applicants, from which an offer was extended to Laura Weiss, who was planning to come to the Washington area from Massachusetts because her husband, an immigration attorney, was expecting a government contract. After they moved, that contract fell through, leaving his employment up in the air. So, Laura Weiss chose to remain in a search she had entered prior to accepting the Interim position at St. Alban's

Rev. Meister further explained that last Friday Laura Weiss informed her that she had gotten an offer of permanent employment at another church but did not indicate that she had not accepted that offer. Rev. Meister told Laura that she could not get a counter-offer together before Monday, which was the earliest time Rev. Meister would be able to consult with the new Vestry being elected Sunday. Rev. Meister told the Vestry that if she had a strong sense that Laura Weiss would not be suitable for St. Alban's she would not have asked her to wait.

Rev. Meister reminded the Vestry that hiring is a matter of divided authority, with the Rector hiring and the Vestry authorizing the funding for employees. She stated that she would not want to act alone on this matter, because the Vestry's decision would have serious consequences either way, regarding parishioners' trust in the Parish leadership.

At the Rector's invitation, five of the seven members of the Music Advisory Group (MAG) who were present spoke to the issue of whether a permanent employment offer should be extended to Laura Weiss, and what the implications of doing so would mean to parishioners' expectations about the above-described process for finding a permanent Music Director.

Paul Loether termed Weiss a "diplomat" with excellent musicianship and personal skills, who had performed in an outstanding way in what was in effect a 3-month test period. Loether noted that "process" is important to achieve good outcomes, but that good outcomes can come without process.

Rich Leland, a co-chair of the MAG, noted that the MAG had met only once, so far. He reported that the Canterbury Choir was very happy with Weiss, and he was excellent in directing the adult choir. Her resume is strong on children's program, which is what the parish wants. He noted that she is not a Kennedy Center-level performing artist. Weiss had told the MAG about how church music structures work today, involving a variety of musicians working "gigs" rather than the "Sonya Sutton model" of one full-time Director, which is highly unusual today. Leland expressed the view that it is important to have an actual Music Director, as the clergy are ill-suited to run a music program.

Eliot Edgar reported that Weiss was very committed to listening to what the St. Alban's community wants, and is committed to St. Alban's. She added that Weiss looked at trends in church music programs; for example, there was a trend to involve families in handbell choirs.

Bruce Barrow noted he had 70 years of experience with choral music, and Weiss was "the best of the church musicians I have ever worked under". He stated that "without qualification" he recommended we hire her. He commended her technique and "blend", and stated he could not imagine we could find anyone better.

Marybeth Evans said she was fairly new to St. Alban's having come from the Cathedral when its choir dissolved. She stated she sings with many choirs and Weiss is "fabulous" and up to par with other good choir directors.

At the invitation of the Rector, parishioner Barbara Manard addressed the Vestry on the importance of having a process and sticking with it. She noted so many people had heard "Interim" and "discernment" and needed to trust in what the Parish leadership says it will do. Parishioner Jonell Easton added that the Vestry's role was to lead all of the Parish.

Paul Loether noted that a planned process doesn't anticipate all eventualities, and that we have had an "unintended process" in the form of a 3-month test period for Weiss. He noted that there is an opportunity cost if we don't act, and added that Weiss was good not only with music but with people.

The MAG members present were asked to give the Vestry their sense of the impact of having a second Interim Music Director.

Paul Loether noted Interims are painful, and the Canterbury Choir is happy with Weiss and would prefer her not to go. Marybeth Evans agreed, adding that the Parish doesn't need any more disruption or any more Interim Music Directors. Bruce Barrow agreed, stating he can't imagine a process that would get us a better Music Director. Eliot Edgar added that we'd be heartbroken if Weiss left.

Upon being asked by Adrienne Allison how hiring Weiss as permanent Music Director should be "pitched", Barbara Manard said she didn't know.

Julie Clements commented that, whatever happened, "selling it" would be important.

Ken Patterson reported that he'd received a common theme: even the first time around there was time lost in building a new music program, and if we embrace the discernment and search process fully it would push the timeline further.

Senior Warden Laura Ingersoll noted that a full search process would involve some costs.

In response to a question from the Rector, MAG co-chair Rich Leland stated that the MAG process is really independent of the decision about hiring Weiss as permanent Music Director. Paul Loether noted that Weiss set up the MAG and leads it, so in his view her absence would set it back. He noted she is a leader but inclusive (as in: "independent minds working together").

Regarding the view of the "professional" singers, Junior Warden Rich Turner noted they act from facts, not feelings. He noted Weiss treats the professional singers as professionals, and her interpersonal skills are outstanding. He added that the Alban Singers have been assured their places at St. Alban's next year.

In response to Julie Clements' inquiry about the cost of converting Weiss' employment from interim to permanent, Rev. Meister reported that Weiss fell within the median of the applicable range in the American Guild of Organists guidelines. She added that Treasurer Hollis McLoughlin had estimated the cost of searches for an Interim Music Director, and then a permanent Music Director, to be \$5,000-\$10,000.

Senior Warden Ingersoll summarized the decision before the Vestry as whether to recommend that the Rector extend a permanent employment offer to Weiss. Ingersoll noted there were two possible actions: extend the offer or not. She further noted there were three possible outcomes: Weiss would accept an offer and remain, Weiss would decline an offer and leave, or there would be no offer and she would leave.

The Rector noted that if the Vestry recommended an offer be extended, the Vestry would face a second decision: to authorize funds to support the offer.

The Rector proposed that in order for the Vestry to fully and candidly discuss these issues, particularly with reference to Vestry members' consultations with parishioners during the

previous 24-hour period, the Vestry should go into executive session. At 7:35 pm, the Vestry took a break, and those persons not members of the Vestry departed.

At 7:40, the Vestry voted to move into executive session, coming out of executive session at 9:26 pm. [VESTRY ACTION 2016-06.01]

In open session, the Vestry considered the following resolution: ***“The Vestry recommends that the Rector promptly extend to Laura Weiss an appropriate offer of permanent full-time employment as Director of Music for St. Alban’s Parish.”*** – with supporting language as agreed upon during the executive session to be edited and presented to the Vestry for concurrence before being released. [Attachment A] Sandy Kolb made a MOTION, seconded by Marty Welch, that the resolution be approved. All members present voted in favor, with none in opposition and no abstention. [VESTRY ACTION 2016-06.02]

At approximately 9:30 pm the Vestry voted to return to executive session to consider a financial package to support the employment offer, coming out of executive session at approximately 9:50 pm. [VESTRY ACTION 2016-06.03]

In open session, the Vestry considered a financial package as agreed upon in the executive session. Sandy Kolb made a MOTION, seconded by Julie Clements, that the package be approved, and all present voted in favor, with no opposition or abstention. [VESTRY ACTION 2016-06.04]

The Rector advised the Vestry that if Weiss did not accept the offer, there might be a Vestry conference call to discuss a contingency plan.

Election of Secretary and Treasurer: The Rector informed the Vestry that at this first meeting of the Vestry it needed to elect a Secretary and Treasurer. Because this meeting was occurring so soon after the Annual Meeting, the person invited to stand for election as Secretary was still discerning the matter, but the matter should be ready for a vote at the next meeting. For the position of Treasurer, the Rector proposed that Hollis McLoughlin be re-elected for a second year. Kristie Hassett made a MOTION, seconded by Ken Patterson, that McLoughlin be elected Treasurer. There was no objection, and those present voted unanimously in favor, with no opposition or abstention. [VESTRY ACTION 2016-06.05]

The Rector reminded the Vestry that the retreat would take place on June 17-18 and that the regular July meeting would be on Tuesday, July 26.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at approximately 10:00 pm with prayer led by Rev. Meister.

Respectfully submitted,
Laura Ingersoll, Acting Secretary

The Vestry acknowledges that when Laura Weiss was hired as Interim Director of Music, in February, it was in part to “assist us in discerning what we need and want in a new, permanent Director of Music.” (letter from Rector to Parish, 2/28/16) It was anticipated that she could be an eventual candidate for that permanent position.

It has been brought to the attention of the Vestry that Laura Weiss has received an offer of permanent employment by another church. This was not anticipated at the time that she was hired to serve as our Interim Music Director.

In the past three months, Laura Weiss has deeply impressed the parishioners currently participating in the music program, and the great majority of the Parish, with her musical direction, the excellence of her skill on the organ, and the quality of the sound evoked from the choirs. Under her leadership and guidance, the Music Advisory Group was formed and has begun discerning and shaping the direction of the music program at St. Alban’s. Laura Weiss herself possesses an extraordinarily diverse musical scope and repertoire, and would be able to support the St. Alban’s music program in whatever direction it is eventually determined it should go. Her focus on engaging children, as well as members of the neighborhood community surrounding St. Alban’s Church, is squarely in line with the strategic priorities we have established in the past year.

It is the assessment of the Vestry that Laura Weiss has been revealed to be the right person to be leading the St. Alban’s music program at this important time in the life of the Parish.

It would not be in the best interests of the St. Alban’s community to allow, through inaction, Laura Weiss to leave St. Alban’s for employment elsewhere. The certain result would be disruption of the music program already underway, more challenges for our dedicated singers, and significant difficulty rebuilding the children and youth program for the Fall.

The Vestry has carefully considered the implications of hiring a permanent Music Director without going through a measured process for undertaking a formal Music Director search, and recognizes the uncertainty of being able to find another Interim to match Laura Weiss.

The Vestry recognizes that the Rector has full authority to make hiring decisions on behalf of the Parish, subject to budgetary constraints, and the Vestry appreciates the Rector’s reliance upon the Vestry’s counsel in this matter so that her action may best serve the interests of the people of St. Alban’s.

Accordingly: The Vestry requests that the Rector promptly extend to Laura Weiss an appropriate offer of permanent full-time employment as Director of Music for St. Alban’s Parish.