

An essay from

St. Paul's' Epistle

An unofficial blog about parish life at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Mt. Lebanon, Pa., in the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh

by Lionel Deimel

Monday, January 10, 2011

Executive Committee

"Recently the Rector, Lou Hays, informed all clergy and lay staff that their compensation would be reduced by 5½ percent effective January 1, 2011, and that his compensation would be reduced by 11 percent."

So begins the story "Salary Reductions Announced for 2011" found in *The Messenger* for January 2011. (As of today, I cannot link to the story, since the latest issue of the newsletter to appear on the Web is from September 2010. What newsletters *are* posted can be found here [<http://www.stpaulspgh.org/about/the-messenger/>].) Until now, my thinking about the salary reductions has focused on the wisdom of the action itself and on the cynicism involved in the creation of the Salary Restoration Fund. I have now begun to think about how the decision was made.

The salary decision did not come from the Vestry, but from the so-called Executive Committee, which comprises senior warden John Adams, junior warden Carl Kylander, treasurer Bob Johnston, secretary Pat Stafford, and rector Lou Hays. John Sweeney, who ran the stewardship campaign, was also in on the decision. He, along with Lou and Bob Johnston, apparently were the originators of the salary reduction plan. The Vestry was informed of the decision less than 24 hours before the staff was to be told, but Vestry approval was not sought.

As it happens, St. Paul's' bylaws are silent on the matter of an Executive Committee, though the rector and officers of the church have long met under that title before Vestry meetings. In the past, before Lou came to St. Paul's, this was justified as a way of establishing the agenda for the upcoming Vestry meeting.

Gradually, however, the Executive Committee has transformed itself into the body that actually governs the church. Most important decisions are made by the Executive Committee in secret and brought to the Vestry for pro forma approval. It is within the power of the Vestry to override decisions made by the Executive Committee, but, in practice, this virtually never happens. In the case of the salary cuts, not even pro forma approval by the Vestry was given.

So why do I worry about the operation of the Executive Committee? To begin with, it does not conduct its business in the open. Moreover, since it is very small, it is easier for the rector (or some small number of people) to control the Executive Committee than it is for them to dominate the Vestry as a whole. Since neither the secretary nor the treasurer need be Vestry members, as many as two unelected parishioners can have significant influence, by virtue of their membership on the Executive Committee, over what should be Vestry decisions. At the moment, the secretary of the Vestry *is* a member of the Vestry, but the treasurer, a past senior warden, is not. Of the four lay members of the Committee, two—the current and past senior warden—have strong emotional ties to the rector, who, one imagines, exercises the greatest influence over what the Executive Committee decides.

Clearly, a majority of current Vestry members has been content to see the power of the Vestry eroded, especially its power over the purse, which is its primary responsibility. In three weeks, we will be voting to replace a number of Vestry members. Will the replacements be as compliant as current members? Are parishioners content to see their influence over parish affairs diminished? Will we tolerate the continued abuse of power? Or is St. Paul's being run so well that we are willing to continue looking the other way in order to benefit from the health that has been brought to our parish

by irregular governance?

Postscript. It is curious that one cannot tell who is on the Vestry by reading the parish's Web site. Here is the list one finds on page titled "St. Paul's Vestry":

OFFICERS AND VESTRY

Senior Warden — John Adams
Junior Warden — Carl Kylander
Assistant Junior Warden – Jim Frantz
Treasurer — Bob Johnston
Secretary — Pat Eagon Stafford
Children & Youth – Carol Delfino
Fellowship – Andy Muhl
Outreach – Pat Eagon Stafford
Parish Relations – Karen Viggiano
Pastoral Care – Jeff Dunbar
Spiritual Growth – Mark Vito
Stewardship – John Sweeney
Welcoming – Millie Ryan and Michele Baum
Worship – Chris Phelps

From this listing it is not obvious that neither Jim Frantz nor Bob Johnston is on the Vestry. Nor is it clear what the words to the left of the names mean. "Treasurer" is clearly an office, but "worship," just as clearly, is not. It would also be helpful to know when the term of each Vestry member ends and whether that person is eligible for re-election, since the bylaws specify term limits for Vestry members.

Note: The above essay is reproduced as it appeared on the **St. Paul's' Epistle** blog, with only minor formatting changes made to accommodate its representation on the printed page. URLs that are targets of links in the blog post have been rendered here in brackets. If this document is being read on-line, the URLs themselves function as links.

This essay can be read on the **St. Paul's' Epistle** blog at:
<http://www.stpaulsmtl.org/2011/01/executive-committee.html>