

**Special Meeting:
Cathedral Nave Seating Task Force Recommendations to Vestry**

Held via Zoom, July 29, 2021, 6:30 – 7:30 PM

Attendees: Michael Vente, Helen Richards, Leigh Grinstead, Rebecca Richardson, Greg Movesian, Mark Wherry, Mike Koechner, William McMechen, Audrey Chapman, Richard Lawson, Ilana Poley, Jennifer Allen, Kathleen De Mars, Shirley Traettino, Elizabeth Drummond, Roger Hara, Katies Pearson, Tom Barbour

Absent: Meg Parish

Guests: Ginger O'Neill, David Rote

Call to Order: 6:30pm

Summary of actions taken:

- Accepted the recommendations from the Task Force on new chairs for the nave and to task the Arts & Architecture Committee to come back with a plan and budget for the Vestry to provide final sign-off. The motion passed unanimously.

Opening Prayer: Provided by Richard Lawson

Richard began the meeting with good news on HVAC renovation. The gift agreement with the anonymous donor in the amount of \$4.3 million has been signed by all parties. He noted that the HVAC project was progressing well. He also encouraged Vestry members to keep Georgie in their prayers as she navigates back surgery.

Task Force recommendation on seating options in the Nave

Michael walked through the various aspects of the Task Force's work and recommendations to the Vestry. The Task Force was comprised of Vestry members and Arts & Architecture Committee members. The members of the Task Force included: Michael Vente, Rebecca Richardson, Greg Movesian, Mike Koechner, David Rote, Ginger O'Neill, and Merle Chambers. He noted that Task Force meetings began and ended in prayer, thanks to the contributions of Mike Koechner, which helped ground all discussions.

Task Force members discussed various aspects and topics associated with seating options in the Nave including re-installing the current pews, using new pews, using benches (which are lighter-weight versions of pews with backs), and using chairs. The Task Force also reviewed all information available on the history of the current pews and similar discussions of previous Saint John's Cathedral Vestries related to this topic. The Task Force also received feedback on a wide range of related topics from several other members of the Cathedral's parish



community. The Task Force elicited opinions from these individuals on how the Nave is currently used, how it could be used in the future, and broad thoughts on seating options.

The Task Force's deliberations and the feedback sessions with other parishioners led to important discussions on the future of the Cathedral and the possibilities available. Even through important (and sometimes difficult) discussions, continual prayerful discernment helped guide the work of the group and brought the group closer together.

Through this process, various points arose which informed the Task Force's work.

- The condition of the current pews was worse than many predicted and refurbishing the current pews would be a costly endeavor. Additionally, the dimensions of current pews (likely installed in the Nave in 1911) do not align with current best practices for seating options in the 21st century and may not align with current code requirements.
- Three words continually arose in conversations with all involved when discussing the goals of seating options. These words were flexibility, accessibility, and comfort.
- The spacing between the current pews was too narrow and did not easily allow for movement. In any seating configuration being considered, spacing between pews should be between 36 and 38 inches even if seating capacity in the Nave is slightly reduced.
- Due to the installation of the new HVAC system, various points of access will be put into the new floor. This necessitates seating options that do not hinder access to these points so that the HVAC system can remain in good working order.

Therefore, the Task Force makes these recommendations to the Vestry. The Task Force recommends that Saint John's replace the current pews with chairs. This was a difficult recommendation to reach which weighed various factors, including issues beyond the scope of responsibilities for this task force, such as:

- Availability of convenient storage for the chairs when not in use,
- Staff capability to include reconfigurations of Nave seating in their job responsibilities, facilitating our desire for flexible seating,
- Budgeting for offsite storage if that is the desired option,

Issues such as these notwithstanding, the Task Force believes the replacement of existing pews with chairs is the best recommendation to provide the flexibility, accessibility, and comfort we need to facilitate our mission and ministry in the future.

The Task Force reached out to 6 different vendors to assist with this project. Through those conversations, 2 vendors were the most responsive to our request for a proposal. The Task Force had in-depth conversations with these vendors on their past projects and ideas for seating for the Cathedral's Nave.

The Task Force recommends that the Vestry empower the Arts and Architecture Committee to continue these in-depth conversations with these 2 vendors and additional ones if needed to obtain the best possible product for the Cathedral. We recommend that the Arts and

Architecture Committee presents the Vestry with a final recommendation on a path forward. The Task Force will provide the Arts and Architecture Committee with all the samples, proposed options, and details from past conversations with the 2 vendors and any others it may wish to include. The Task Force does recommend that the final design of the chairs include the following elements:

- Self-storage for prayer book & hymnal
- Solid wood, upholstered kneelers that are attached to the chair
- Hard surface glides to the chair ends to prevent scratches on the floor

The Task Force suggests that the Arts and Architecture Committee consider the following design elements as well:

- Assessing the need for stand-alone seating or connection by ganging system
- If selecting an upholstered seat, choosing fabric that can withstand a wide variety of uses
- High quality construction that facilitates decades of use for the new chairs
- The impact of the new chairs on the acoustics in the nave, and potential design elements for the chairs to ensure the acoustics in the nave remain high quality

The Task Force also feels strongly that the final chair design be in alignment aesthetically with the current design elements of the Nave and the Cathedral.

The Task Force recognizes that this process may take the Arts and Architecture Committee additional time, which may make an installation of the new chairs by Christmas 2021 difficult. Due to the importance of this decision, the Task Force supports this additional time for the Arts and Architecture Committee's work and recommends further discussions on temporary seating options that can be installed in the Nave after the HVAC renovations are complete.

The Task Force also recognizes the sensitivity of this topic and the wide array of reactions that parishioners may have when hearing this news. Additionally, it is important to recognize the impact of this conversation on larger strategic initiatives that the Cathedral will undertake such as annual stewardship campaigns, capital campaigns, and outreach to bring people back to the Cathedral after the pandemic. The Task Force recommends that a robust communications plan be developed on how best to have these conversations with the wider parish. Task Force members would like to assist in the creation of that plan and the messaging used to reduce feelings of ostracization, disenchantment, and/or disapproval among segments of the parish community. The Task Force also recognizes the pastoral element of this communications plan and hopes to include the clergy deeply in the plan's development.

While the Task Force realizes that more conversations will occur involving more voices/opinions, it is the Task Force's hope that those conversations include continual prayerful discernment, and that consensus can be reached on the best path forward. The Task Force also recognizes that the final decision on the best path forward resides with the Vestry.



Michael noted that the recommendation to the Vestry was unanimous by the Task Force. He thanked all the members of the Task Force for their invaluable insights and contributions to the process. He especially thanked Ginger O'Neill for all her support in facilitating conversations with potential vendors.

Several Task Force members also provided comments. Mike said the Task Force considered various aspects of new seating in the nave and measured the area to make sure they had the correct estimate of what is needed especially to be in compliance with the fire code. Ginger said that any potential vendor will perform additional measurements of the nave to help inform the exact specifications used for new chairs. She also noted that whatever design is used for the chair should be in alignment with a potential new baptismal font. Rebecca echoed that the weekly meetings for the past 10 weeks for the Task Force provided space to have conversations that continually changed to take into account new information and perspectives.

Leigh said she was deeply grateful for everyone's time and participation and willingness to commit to the process and go through this together.

Vestry members had several questions for Michael and the Task Force. Michael reiterated that any design elements were still possible since the Arts & Architecture Committee was still weighing various options. The Arts & Architecture Committee will come back before Vestry with their final design recommendation. Vestry members also mentioned the need for acoustic experts to help inform the final chair design decisions for the Arts & Architecture Committee. In terms of cost, Michael said that the Task Force made its recommendation without identifying the exact source of funds to pay for seating options. They felt that their recommendation should reflect the best course of action for the Cathedral and didn't want to be limited by fiscal constraints. However, Michael said a funding source would need to be identified to accomplish these recommendations. New gifts could help support this work, as could Fund 8. The final quote for the final design will come back before the Vestry and the Finance Committee (if there's a fiscal impact).

Vestry members also discussed the interim seating option that would need to be installed in the nave once HVAC construction is completed including the acoustic implications of temporary seating in the nave. Vestry members also asked about the plans on what would be done with the current pews. Richard said that the current pews are in climate-controlled storage now and we will have further conversations on what to do with them.

Vestry members voiced hesitation with making a final decision without exact knowledge of costs or design of the new chairs. Michael said that if the Vestry accepts this recommendation, the process for more specific elements of this decision would shift to the Arts & Architecture Committee and eventually come back before the Vestry for a final decision. Additionally, the Finance Committee will be involved if there is a fiscal impact.



Leigh asked for a motion to accept the recommendations from the Task Force on new chairs for the nave and to task the Arts & Architecture Committee to come back with a plan and budget for the Vestry to provide final sign-off. Greg made motion. Mike seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Michael said that the wardens and clergy/staff will work to bring more recommendations around temporary seating to the Vestry at their next meeting

Richard said that plans have already started to scope out the communications strategy around this announcement to the wider parish. Evans has scheduled the videographer to record videos on this for announcement in September. He said they would not launch the video if the decision changed from chairs, but they are preparing the videos. He said the videos will be like the video announcing the HVAC project. He said staff and clergy will attempt to go above and beyond to ensure support can be gained for this decision. Michael welcomed any further questions or comments at any time.

Adjourn: 7:45pm