

CHRIST CHURCH CHRISTIANA HUNDRED

Vestry Minutes

March 14, 2024

7:00 PM

Present: Louise Barton, Ruth Beresford, Audrey Bruce, Michael Flynn, Sherri Howell, Ted Ledden, Alexander Maynard, Scott Nickle, Eliza Phillips, Mike Rushlow, Suzanne Smith, Jaq Whalen, Alexia Wolf

Also Present: Stacey Carpenter, Michael Kurth, Carol Morley, John Olsen

Absent: Chuck Arensberg, Bart Reese

The meeting was called to order by the rector at 7:05 PM, and she offered the opening prayer.

Leadership and Governance

2024 Outreach Committee Allocations Plan: John Olsen reported on the Outreach Committee's work over the past year. He summarized the process and criteria the committee utilized for evaluating grant applications and described the additional research done to acquire a deeper understanding of each agency's work, finances, and organizational health. The committee estimated that they would have \$200K to give in grants for the coming year, and their allocation proposal is for a total of \$198,700 to be distributed among 24 agencies. John noted a discrepancy in the grant amount for Lutheran Community Services listed in the two spreadsheets that were sent to the Vestry in advance; \$5K as shown in the file "03 Outreach Allocations 2024.xlsx" is the correct figure. Ruth asked for more information about a new awardee, Delaware Center for Justice, and John explained that their request for \$1K would go toward an initiative wherein audio recordings are made of incarcerated persons reading story books, which are then given to their children to facilitate those parent-child bonds. John also discussed the thinking behind the awards to Tennis Rocks and First State Squash: these sports-centered programs are perceived as very valuable among community leaders for their ability to "hook" young people into tutoring and other support to potentially head off greater problems such as addiction and homelessness. Jaq asked about the three agencies that applied for grants this year and did not receive them; John explained the reasoning behind each of those decisions. One of those applicants primarily serves communities in Pennsylvania, and Jaq expressed the hope that in the future the committee will consider broadening the geographical scope of our grants, as there are numerous parishioners who come from that state. Mike Rushlow commended John and Carol for their excellent leadership of the committee. Suzanne moved to adopt the Outreach allocation recommendation, Ted seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. John thanked the Vestry on behalf of the committee for their support. Ruth asked for a list of the members of the Outreach Committee to be sent to the Vestry for their awareness.

2023 Parochial Report: Ruth spoke about the parochial report that had been sent to the Vestry in advance and passed around the signature page for vestry members to sign. She mentioned that

there were no substantial changes in most of the statistics, though many saw a slight increase. She noted that there are certain demographic classifications about our parishioners that we do not track. In-person service attendance increased while online attendance decreased compared to 2022. The answers to the narrative questions were drawn from input given by vestry members to a survey Ruth had sent several weeks ago. Louise asked for feedback from Ministry Architects about how the membership increases measure up to the goals set in the Strategic Plan.

2024 Annual Meeting Plans: Suzanne gave the report from the Vestry Nominating Committee, that it has been challenging to find willing candidates. Upwards of 25 people have been asked, many of whom have replied that they are not interested “at this time.” Three candidates have agreed to run to date, and Suzanne feels that they will be excellent additions to the Vestry ranks. She asked for all Vestry to assist the outgoing class in identifying additional candidates. Jenno recalled that when she was rolling off Vestry about ten years ago, prior nominating committees had maintained a spreadsheet over a number of years documenting who was approached to run, their responses, and who did run and was elected or not. Louise volunteered to reach out to Becky Rogers to gather information about last year’s nomination solicitations, and Jaq agreed that it would be helpful to begin compiling this information again.

Ruth reminded the Vestry that the worship service plan for Pentecost weekend (May 18-19) is for the usual Saturday 5 PM and Sunday 8 AM services, then a single 9 AM service in the church with Baptism and welcoming of new members, followed by brunch and the annual meeting. Ruth noted that we will give thanks for Denise Gilliam’s tenure at the meeting and asked to be notified of anyone whose ministry should be recognized (e.g., two Pastoral Ministries members who are concluding their service this year) or anyone we should be hearing from at the meeting.

State of the Parish

Rector’s Report: Ruth’s report was distributed in advance. She asked the Vestry to gather feedback from parishioners to gauge their impressions of the various Sunday services. The new Children & Youth Ministry Team has held their first meeting. The Lenten study has been very successful. Mason Cruz starts this Monday, March 18, and his new ministry here will be celebrated at the All Ages Fellowship on April 21. Sheila Abio will attend worship that day as well. Ruth stated that John Faulkner has raised the urgency of beginning the church lighting project soon because more fixtures have failed and cannot be repaired. Michael Flynn elaborated that there is a real fear that the entire lighting system will cease functioning all at once. Deb Piper is helping to identify some grants for energy-saving projects; worst case, we could borrow against the endowment and pay it back. We hope to be able to present a plan at the annual meeting, but the project may not start until next year. Sherri pointed out that energy and insurance costs will decrease significantly with the installation of LED fixtures. Ministry Architects will be here May 9-10 for the Vestry meeting and their third and final on-site consultation. Vestry and their spouses should plan to attend a reception for Sheila and Vince Abio on April 19.

Wardens’ Report: Michael Flynn reported that the Shields’ house, next to the sextons’ house, must get connected to the sewer line at Centennial Drive. There will be large trucks and digging activity

through the Maroney property and Buck Road, which we do not expect to be disruptive to church operations. He commended Ruth for accomplishing two crucial hires of the Minister for Children & Youth and the CCEP Head of School.

CCEP Update: Louise reported that next year's enrollment is very good; there are four on the waitlist for the youngest class, and there will be one pre-K class again with three teachers. Giving Tuesday met the goal of \$2500, a Valentine's Day campaign raised \$185, Do More 24 took in over \$1K, and the Annual Fund is at almost \$22K. The fund-the-cause focus for this year's Gala on May 10 will be the outdoor classroom, a real selling point for the school. Vestry are encouraged to attend, and there is \$20K in sponsorships so far. Parent-teacher meetings are currently being held. Louise said that the school will be in excellent hands with Sheila, and she is a superb addition to our community. The money for the search was well spent, and Educators Collaborative will stay engaged to assist with Sheila's onboarding over the next year. Ruth reported that a number of parents and parishioners have expressed concern to her and to the Trustees about what this announcement means for Denise Gilliam, and the two of them will be in conversation about what God is calling her to. Louise added that the Board is looking at revising the school's contract language around cancelling summer camp reservations to mitigate the effect of late withdrawals on finances and staffing plans. Camp enrollment for this summer stands at 65.

Finance Committee Report: Ted noted that one of the expected large pledge payments we did not receive last year was fulfilled in February; the donor also paid their entire 2024 pledge in a lump sum, adding \$75K to pledge income. This makes income look very favorable early in the year, but that effect will even out over time. Expenses have been running under budget, especially payroll, which has been tracking low due to open positions. A pledge for the chapel organ to be paid in installments has now been fulfilled. The annual audit is in progress. The pension audit has been completed, and we may need to add some funding; this topic will be discussed at the April Finance Committee meeting. Ruth will forward the financial summary from Terri Carpe to the Vestry.

Monthly Management Tasks

Approval of Minutes: February's meeting minutes were approved as presented.

Other Concerns and For the Record

Communication and Gratitude: Louise asked about communications regarding the reduction in Outreach funding from the parish budget; Ruth said she plans to meet with the Outreach Committee to discuss this decision with them in greater depth, potentially with Vestry presence. She would like to see more intentional efforts to encourage parishioners to volunteer their time with our partners, to follow the money we send them. Ruth recalled the saying, "All change is first perceived as loss," before it is possible to recognize the opportunities or wins that the change could bring.

Ruth requested that Vestry and all committee leaders try the different worship services and come to Coffee & Community to get to know the new younger families who are there every Sunday.

Michael Kurth shared that he heard Rosanne Miller speak at the Friendship House fundraiser, where she told the story of how she became involved with Epiphany House through Christ Church, and that her gift of her time, together with other parishioners, continues to this day. Alexia mentioned that in working with Pastor Ty Johnson, he often shares the story of a time when a group of pastors in Wilmington were in conflict, and he needed a place where they could come together. Ruth offered Christ Church as the site for the retreat, which had a lasting impact on the community.

The closing prayer was offered by Ruth, and the meeting adjourned at 8:29 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer O'Connor, Clerke