

CHRIST CHURCH CHRISTIANA HUNDRED

Vestry Minutes

October 10, 2024

7:00 PM

Present: Chuck Arensberg, Ran Barton, Ruth Beresford, Audrey Bruce, Cindi Cozza, Barb King, Ted Ledden, Alexander Maynard, Thorpe Moeckel, Scott Nickle, Eliza Phillips, Jamie Poston, Bart Reese, Jaq Whalen, Alexia Wolf

Also Present: Deb Piper

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

Leading the Congregation

Stewardship: Deb summarized the results of the 2024 stewardship campaign: we received 422 pledges totaling \$1,385,773, which was \$61,771 more than in 2023. Last year was one of the few times in recent years in which we made multiple follow-ups via different media (calls, personal letters, emails, etc.). These additional appeals produced good results, so we will follow the same process this year. With less than one week elapsed since the 2025 stewardship mailings went out, we have already received 41 pledges totaling \$105,790. Our lofty but reachable goal for next year's campaign is 450 pledges, and ingathering will take place at all services on October 26-27. The Stewardship Committee will host Coffee & Community that Sunday. When people include comments on their pledges (on the paper or online form) and check the box that gives us permission to share them, Sherry utilizes them in social media and eNEWS; Ruth encouraged all Vestry members to include some personal words for sharing. Deb also reported that the committee is looking forward to reinvigorating the Planned Giving program next year. They are revising the brochure and will host an event in the spring for current and prospective members of the Legacy Society.

Preschool: Chuck reported that Conscious Discipline training will be provided to the faculty on October 11. Sheila Abio is excited about the "specials" (enrichment classes) that have started up, such as Spanish, music, and Godly Play. The first Open House since the pandemic will be held on November 2 from 10 AM to 12 PM, and representation from Vestry is welcome. Sheila has begun meeting with the schools that CCEP feeds into and has joined the Delaware Association of Independent Schools for networking opportunities. The school has been using the curriculum that goes with the Brightwheel communications app for the lower three age levels (not the Pre-K class). To reduce costs, they will use it for fewer months this school year, saving approximately \$5,200. Sheila noted that there is no funding in the budget for curriculum development over the coming summer, but this need will have to be addressed. Cindi mentioned that it is a challenge for Sheila to navigate the need for substitutes day to day. Bart reported that it is highly likely the school will run a deficit this year, and he discussed fundraising efforts, including the Running of the Rams 5K on October 26 and Annual Fund letters going out soon. Ruth added that Kendall Massett is helping to identify some grants the school can apply for. Academically, the faculty is preparing for the first

round of progress reports. Summer revenue was considerably lower in 2024 than 2023, so Sheila is already promoting that for next year.

Presence of Vestry at Parish Events: Ruth reviewed the list of fellowship, formation, and ministry events from October 16 through November 10. In Adult Formation, the Wednesday night schedule is designed such that newcomers attending the Belong class can interact over dinner with existing parishioners coming to the Saints & Sinners class. She noted the correct date for the Outreach Breakfast is October 17. She asked Vestry members to commit to be present for and support these events, wearing their red nametags, though there is no formal signup for this coverage. Jaq asked for a way to see if a given event will be light on Vestry representation, and Ran responded that we are making progress toward a shared document system where we could maintain that information. Ruth reaffirmed that if an event's description indicates that registration is required (e.g., meals, limited space), Vestry members must comply with that.

Driving the Strategic Plan

Goal Group Working Time: Vestry members divided into their goal teams for breakout sessions. Ruth directed all to check the Vestry calendar that was sent electronically to know which months' meetings their goal group is scheduled to present on their progress.

Managing Parish Resources

Property: Thorpe reported from the Property Committee's meeting on October 9. There are numerous projects in process, including work on the preschool's outdoor classroom, exterior signage, and the lighting in the church sanctuary. Programming of the lighting controls will be completed the week of October 14. Regarding the parish hall leaks, the committee decided to allocate \$3-5K from the current year's budget to have the building envelope consultant from TBS Services, an architecture firm that specializes in this type of construction, develop an order-of-magnitude estimate of the cost to better inform our planning and fundraising. The true total cost will not be known until we carry out the full investigation and design process. We are fairly certain what the solution will be for the patio but not what the elevator and chimney components of the project will involve. The committee hopes to begin construction in May 2025, and until then, we must get by with temporary patches. Chuck asked if we would have multiple vendors performing different pieces of work, and Thorpe responded that it would be ideal to have one outfit do everything, but that depends on what we learn about the nature of the work to be done. We will endeavor to incorporate sustainable solutions, such as a green roof, where possible. Ran commented that if green solutions would add considerably to the cost, that should not be our priority or lead to an extension of scope; however, Ruth noted that green solutions might make us eligible for some grants to assist with the cost.

Personnel: Ran reported on his meeting with Joe Zakielarz, Convener of the Personnel Committee. The annual review process stopped during the pandemic and is being restarted now. They are considering whether the old process brought value and if or how it should be modified going forward. Ran will craft a letter to the parish explaining David Beresford's appointment as the immediate short-term interim in an effort to proactively answer some of the expected questions.

Compensation increases will be included in the budget conversation, and we will consider national indicators as well as our diocese's calculation. As a faith-based organization, we want to be fair and financially prudent. With staff salaries, we had fallen behind the inflation curve, and we intend to make a dent in that in 2025, though we cannot erase it all in one year. Ran invited anyone with interest in this topic to meet with him for more details. He reminded the Vestry that they are the deciders and are not obligated to rubber stamp the Finance and Personnel Committees' recommendations.

Finance Update: Ted had forwarded the summary reports in advance. Ruth drew attention to the pages on the website regarding where our funding comes from and where our giving goes. This information is not included as a piece of paper in the stewardship mailings, so the letter directs people to the website. Ruth reviewed the six budget priorities that were set by a past Vestry (circa 2011) and the need to ensure these are still aligned with where we are going now. For example, last year, growth and property care were prioritized ahead of outreach; these emphases can shift year to year. A few Vestry members expressed a concern about the final priority regarding a culture that leans toward excellence and things being tastefully done; Ran said perhaps some more contemporary language could be incorporated. Jaq remarked that care of our parish community is not named as a priority, and Alexia noted that our core values, for example, about sacred ground, could perhaps be folded in. Ruth asked for volunteers to revise the budget priority statements; Jaq, Barb, and Cindi will work on a draft for Vestry review. Eliza asked for additional clarity around giving outside the parish, and Ran proposed another pie chart be added that breaks down that 16% of expenses. Ran mentioned that the financial concerns people have reported to him center on two topics: personnel, in part driven by Ministry Architects' statement in their assessment that we are over the benchmark, and outreach, whether we should give more ("until it hurts"), or not act as a passthrough at all. Barb asked for background on the outreach decision, and Ran recalled Mark Parsells' statement that if we achieve our growth objectives, budget squeezes will take care of themselves. Chuck pointed out that it does not appear that we have a large line item for growth; Ran and Ruth clarified that both staff time and marketing expense count toward growth, and perhaps it would be helpful to highlight the total financial commitment going toward that. Ran said he hopes the strategic plan establishes a new normal where growth continues to be a budgetary priority. Eliza suggested folding online worship expense into worship and music on the projected expenses pie chart.

Ran explained that the parish acceptance is our contribution to the Episcopal Church in Delaware, what the minimum and fair share percentages are, and that CCCH contributes the largest amount of any parish. He reported that Mark recommends for 2025 that we continue at the minimum of 10.8%, or \$240,945 (based non-restricted income as stated in the 2023 Parochial Report), about a \$2K increase from \$238,374 we gave in 2024. The acceptance accounts for roughly half of the 16% giving beyond CCCH and is about equivalent to our property expenses. Thorpe moved that we give the 10.8% acceptance for 2025, Eliza seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Meeting Tasks and Takeaways

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

Report from the Clergy: Ruth reported that she is working hard on many tasks. Michael Kurth will give a written report in advance of the November meeting.

Concerns and Thanksgivings: Ruth distributed notecards and asked each Vestry member to write a personal note to someone they have not seen in a while, someone they just met, or someone they would like to thank or get together with. Barb said she visited with parishioners experiencing a health issue after the Vestry retreat and told them they had been prayed for, which meant a lot to them. Ran thanked everyone for their participation and positivity at the retreat, and he appreciated that they were good sports about digging in and reckoning with the ambiguity.

To-Do Assignments: Jenno restated the items mentioned during the meeting. Ran added that children 16 and up may pledge separately from their parents and thereby become voting members.

Talk-Abouts: Eliza commented that one could come to church every day of the week for a different event. Barb encouraged talking up all the good things that different ministries are doing toward fulfilling the strategic plan. Ran reminded all to spend time working in goal teams during the month before the next Vestry meeting—it will be impossible to do it all in just the two days before each meeting. Ruth needs to be notified who the driver is for each task.

The closing prayer was offered by Audrey. The meeting adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer O'Connor, Clerke