

CHRIST CHURCH CHRISTIANA HUNDRED

Vestry Minutes

March 13, 2025

7:00 PM

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

Also Present: Sheila Abio, David Beresford, Michael Kurth

Absent: Ruth Beresford, Scott Nickle, Bart Reese

The meeting was called to order by the senior warden at 7:01 PM, and the Rev. David Beresford offered the opening prayer.

Preschool Update

Ran welcomed Sheila Abio, CCEP Head of School, and she spoke on several topics related to the school's future plans and needs. They are in the process of finalizing their five-year strategic plan, which they aim to complete early in the coming school year. A key component of the plan is to achieve accreditation, which will involve writing an in-depth self-study during the 2026-27 year and a validation/verification visit the following year. With so many options for early childhood education, especially at independent schools, they are seeing attrition from the preschool classes not continuing through pre-K. Once older siblings have entered elementary school, parents want to move their younger siblings to preschool classes at the same institution. Sheila perceives a need for more spaces for younger children, because those other schools do not offer programs for 15- or 18-month-olds, as well as a need for flexible spaces that can accommodate different age groups from one year to the next. CCEP will begin accepting children as young as 12 months who are walking. There has been discussion about accepting infants, care for whom is in high demand, but doing so would require major changes. The school needs upgraded outdoor equipment for newly-walking children, and going forward they would like to have direct access to the outdoors from each classroom, a restroom in each classroom, safe indoor recess spaces for large-motor skill and sensory development, a dedicated library, and the ability to use the kitchen for a cooking curriculum. They also wish to offer more programming such as mommy-and-me yoga classes that would attract young families. They need to upgrade the computer systems used to run the school, particularly in the area of HR (e.g., pension and payroll), and they need better integration between school and parish data. They have only two staff (Sheila and her assistant) to handle all the administration for students and faculty, which is particularly challenging to do using outdated technology. They have contracted with Marianne Archbell to provide development support. They are blessed to have an endowment of about \$1 million, which is covering their deficit this year, and Sheila would like to see them put 50% of annual giving toward the endowment each year to sustain it. She wants to establish a continuing education benefit to aid in faculty retention, and she will be investigating local higher education institutions to learn about their programs and what grants and professional development funds are available. Ran asked how shifting the population younger would affect staffing levels and tuition cost. Sheila explained that currently,

tuition is based on the number of days attending rather than age. She researched and found that their tuition is comparable to day care, however CCEP charges extra for before- and after-care and summer camp. There is no difference in the faculty-to-child ratio from 12 to 18 months old. Barb asked if Sheila had already sought HR support; she replied that she has not gotten far with that yet. However, starting this summer, they will shift payroll to the Gusto app (\$3.5K per year), which connects directly to Brightwheel, their core system. The current payroll process is highly complex and manual, and she has retained Denise Gilliam until the end of school year just to handle that task. There are other HR administration needs, though, and Barb wondered if the parish has similar needs and if so, would it be possible to collaborate. Sheila noted that their employee onboarding is handled entirely via email, which is not ideal, and that a face-to-face orientation is essential. Ted asked if they are trying to get away from basing tuition on the number of days attending. Sheila responded that for next year, the Primary program is only offered as five half or full days, no two- or three-day options. The Nursery class has five families grandfathered in for three half days this coming year, but after they move up, that program will be changed to five days only. For the Beginner program, the three-day option is still in demand. Next year all faculty will be paid hourly, with full-time consisting of 35 hours per week to receive benefits (down from 40), worked as three full and two half days, along with the opportunity to take additional hours as substitutes and before- and after-care. Sheila invited Vestry members to come for a tour. Chuck commented that Sheila has taken on a large variety of initiatives in her first year; the Board of Trustees is extremely impressed with her leadership, calling her the right person for the right time.

Leading the Congregation

Presence of Vestry at Parish Events: Ran reviewed the list of fellowship, formation, and ministry events from March 12 through April 3.

Vestry Nominations Update: Audrey reported that they have three nominees so far, and one still considering. The nominee slate must be wrapped up by April 1. The committee does not want to have just five nominees; the option exists to have a slate of only four, but it would be much better to have at least six. Ran will reach out to the committee about enlisting others to make calls. Jaq suggested asking Jane Rubini to run Ministry Match for this role, and Audrey will follow up on that. Alexia reiterated the need to know the reasons people have given for declining to run in case we need to dispel misinformation about the role. Cindi asked Audrey to provide her with the list of those who indicated they would be willing to run in a future year. Vestry members are asked to send additional suggestions.

Parochial Report: Ran circulated the 2024 report prepared by Sherry Lawton-Fasic for the Vestry to review. Vestry members who were present signed the signature sheet.

Driving the Strategic Plan

Goal 2: We will grow deeper relationships with God and with each other, following Jesus Christ.

Inventory of Adult Formation Programs – Cindi met with David, and they confirmed that the list of offerings on the website is correct and simply needs to be maintained going forward.

Assessment of Adult Formation Opportunities – Cindi and David collaborated to develop a feedback form, and David will be contacting each of the Small Group leaders to collect information on their membership, current activities, and resource needs.

Parish Engagement Survey – Cindi reported that this is ready to go once Ruth reviews it.

Communication with CCEP – Jamie will meet with Sheila; they had held off until now to allow her time to get established in her role. They have some concerns about redundancy between Goal 1 and 2 on this topic. Per Barb, Goal 1's benchmark is to increase connections between preschool families and the parish; in support of this, Sheila has been attending Invite-Welcome-Connect meetings. Jaq will review the Goal 2 benchmarks and check for overlap so that Sheila is not being approached by multiple people for the same input. Cindi remarked that we should keep in mind when setting the Year 3 benchmarks to place CCEP with only one goal team.

Minister for Children and Youth – Jaq noted that Mason Cruz is due to give his quarterly report to the Vestry, with April and July being the next meetings in the cycle. Jamie will notify him about the date change for April's Vestry meeting at the next Children and Youth Ministry Team meeting.

Youth – Alexander reported that both the Sunday morning class and evening youth group are holding steady in attendance, with a new student having joined the evening group.

Support for Life Events – Jaq noted that last year, John Newlin, Mike Socha, Stacey Carpenter, and Michael Kurth compiled a comprehensive list of major life events and transitions where lay volunteer support of parishioners could potentially relieve a pressure point on the clergy.

Development of a Pastoral Care Team – There were 30 in attendance at the Fostering Compassionate Connections event on March 8, surpassing expectations. Much good feedback was received on the presentation by John Pumphrey and David Beresford. Jaq is working with David on next steps to form and train the team.

Ministry Match – Alexia discussed the training webinar to be hosted by Rob Dyer of Ministry Architects (MA) on March 30. They have had several meetings with MA on how to encourage participation with the tool and utilize the data. They are requesting that clergy make announcements at services asking people to take the tool again to refresh their results. Cindi asked if the session would be recorded; Alexia replied that they will ask for that. Jaq reported that she has learned there are many ways to use Ministry Match that we have not attempted yet. Ran noted that our present difficulty with identifying Vestry candidates is a prime reason for why we implemented this tool. Cindi mentioned that there is a place in the tool to record confidential feedback from people when they are approached for a given role.

Choristers – Jamie reported on a meeting of the Chorister parents. Jo Harney is re-retiring at the end of this year. Under her leadership and with the addition of the worship services geared toward young people, this program has grown significantly. Given that there is no current plan for replacing Jo, the parents shared concerns that potential changes in rehearsal times would affect participation. This program is a key draw for new young new families, and they feel it is crucial to fill this position. Jaq asked who would instigate a search for a replacement; Jamie understood that Bruce Barber will summarize the input from the meeting.

Potential Marketing and Promotion Initiative: Jaq referred to the email from Mark Parsells that she had forwarded to the Vestry in advance. He spoke at the recent Finance Committee meeting about our goal of reaching 450 pledges and how critical it is to add new young families in order to attain that number. He acknowledged that we are making progress internally with our programs under the banner of the strategic plan, but he was concerned that we are not doing enough to reach out into the community to let people know we are here and what we offer. He suggested that we must think like a business and go after new customers, not merely have a social media presence, but actively promote ourselves through various channels. Chuck commented that what Mark is advocating would require additional labor, but both the staff and Vestry already have full plates. He recalled MA's contention (which we dispute) that we are over-staffed, and suggested others in the parish that may have relevant skills. Thorpe raised the idea of forming a marketing team with knowledge of how to reach our target audience. Ran reiterated Mark's concern that with our largest pledgers aging, it is necessary to make real progress on adding new pledgers, not merely talk about it once a month. Alexia cautioned that we must be mindful not to rush into another new initiative that leads to duplication of effort, and to channel this work through the goal teams. Ran, Barb, and other interested Vestry members will meet to discuss what a marketing effort might encompass and where it belongs in the strategic plan structure, looping in Sherry Lawton-Fasic, and also raising it in our MA coaching sessions.

Managing Parish Resources

Finance Update: Ted reported on February results. Pledge income is below budget. The number of 2025 pledges received is lower than at this time last year. So far, 71 pledges for this year have been fully paid, compared to 64 in February 2024. We have already received a payment toward a 2026 pledge. Utilities expenses were up, as they have been for everyone. Deb Piper's stewardship report, which was distributed at the meeting, mentioned that twelve lost pledges (due to relocations, health issues, or deaths) account for \$107K. The average pledge in that group is more than twice the parish-wide average pledge, meaning that we would need more than twice that quantity of new pledging units to replace that income.

Property: Thorpe distributed the updated capital expense plan, shared at the Property Committee's recent meeting, showing that several projects on the schedule for 2025 have been postponed or scaled back. Design work continues for the roof project, with heavy equipment being brought on site the week of March 17 to investigate the chimney and elevator areas. Whiting Turner has given us a proposal to obtain bids from roofing contractors by mid-April for a preconstruction fee of \$9.5K. The Property Committee would cover this out of the current year's capital budget. Ran asked how long the bids would be valid; Thorpe responded that 60 to 90 days is typical. Thorpe raised the possibility of one of the CCEP Trustees participating on the Property Committee to improve communications between the parish and school, especially in light of the work that is planned this year. Chuck remarked that as part of their strategic plan, CCEP is looking at creating their own property committee. So as not to duplicate efforts, Chuck will follow up with Thorpe on how to align or combine efforts.

Peace Pole Proposal: Jaq directed the Vestry to the Matsumotos' proposal to donate a Peace Pole for installation on the church campus. She summarized her conversation with them about their connections to and investment in the Peace Pole movement. There are already seven of these in

Delaware, and a quarter of a million worldwide. Discussion followed. Ran brought up the draft gift acceptance policy, which Eliza and Deb presented at the December 2023 Vestry meeting. He proposed that we review and finalize that, consider how it would apply to the Matsumotos' offer, and pass it to put it into effect. All agreed to defer any decision until Ruth has a chance to weigh in.

Meeting Tasks and Takeaways

Report from the Clergy: Michael reported that the Outreach Committee is more than halfway through evaluating this year's applications. At their meeting on March 18, they will finalize their allocation decisions for external funding and internal outreach funds. CCEP's Family Movie Night was very successful, with around 70 children enjoying movies and pizza, and their parents appreciating the chance to connect with each other. There are two baptisms taking place at the Easter Vigil, and four more baptisms already scheduled for later in the year. The first session of the Lenten course "Knowing God" had almost 30 people, and David commended the sextons and attendees for their help with setup and cleanup. Sunday, March 16 is the Celtic Eucharist, our second Celtic worship offering, with very different liturgy, music, and lighting. David will be signing copies of his third book "Blessed By God" on Sunday, March 23 at rectory.

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

Concerns and Thanksgivings: Barb gave thanks for the Ash Wednesday service, which was a very meaningful way to start Lent. Ran gave an update on the plan for Vestry document sharing: he now has the email address seniorwarden@christchurchde.org, which will allow him to set up a SharePoint that he hopes to have operational in time for the April meeting. Audrey expressed gratitude to Suzanne Smith and the Parish Fellowship team for the Chili Cookoff and Bingo Night, which was very popular. Cindi mentioned that all are encouraged to buy their Preschool Gala tickets (or sponsorships) early. Barb asked about the talking points on the budget that were discussed at the prior meeting; Alexia said she would forward to Ted what Mark sent her specifically about the Outreach budget, for the Finance Committee to build on. The quarterly update to the parish on progress toward strategic goals is due this month; each goal team is to submit a few brief bullet points to Jenno by Friday, March 28.

To-Do Assignments and Talk-Abouts: Ran and Jenno recapped the tasks identified throughout the meeting.

The closing prayer was offered by Cindi. The meeting adjourned at 9:04 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer O'Connor, Clerke