Minutes of the Meeting of the Vestry of The Chapel of the Cross

15 May 2025

The Vestry of The Chapel of the Cross met on Thursday, May 15, 2025, in the Overlook Room and via Zoom.

All vestry members were present: Anita Howell—via Zoom, Katherine Lavine, Eliza McAllister, Alan Rimer, Sally Goodnight, Perri Kersh (Sr. Warden), Strother Murray-Ndinga (Jr. Warden--via Zoom), Kevin Trapani, Scott Beddingfield, Emma Griffith, M.C. Ragsdale, and Michael Reeves.

The following clergy were present: The Reverend Elizabeth Marie Melchionna (Rector) and The Reverend Mary Catherine Young (Associate Rector for University Ministry).

Also present were Diane McOmie (Parish Administrator and Stewardship Manager); Alistair Nevius (Treasurer--via Zoom); and Alice Cotten (Clerk).

The Rector called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

Devotion/Prayer: Katherine Lavine led the devotion. She spoke of grief and of how funerals can give us permission to grieve together, and liturgies can give space for tears. She recommended two books on the topic of grief: *Memorial Days: A Memoir* (2025) by Geraldine Brooks; and *The Night Lake: A Young Priest Maps the Topography of Grief* (2021) by Liz Tichenor (a friend from Ms. Lavine's Dartmouth days whose mother and infant son died within the same year). She read selections from both and commented that being together as a faith community in times of grief is something she loves and appreciates. Ms. Lavine closed with the prayerful words of the hymn, "Lord of All Hopefulness."

Approval of Consent Agenda: The following items were on the Consent Agenda: Vestry Meeting Minutes and Summary—April 2025, Rector's report, Associate Rector for University Ministry report, Curate for Family and Youth Ministry report, Music report, Christian Formation report, Parish Life and Worship report, Communications report, Faith in Action May report and summary, Stewardship Committee report with Planned Giving Task Force summary, Finance Committee minutes—April, Investment Committee minutes—April, 2025 Q1 Investment report, Solar Panels Financial report.
Upon motion by Alan Rimer, seconded by Kevin Trapani, the Consent Agenda was approved unanimously, with no abstentions.

Rector's Report: The Rector mentioned that Mr. Esposito was on parental leave and Dr. McGugan was on vacation.
She spoke of the wonderful, full Easter services, with 32% increased attendance over last year.

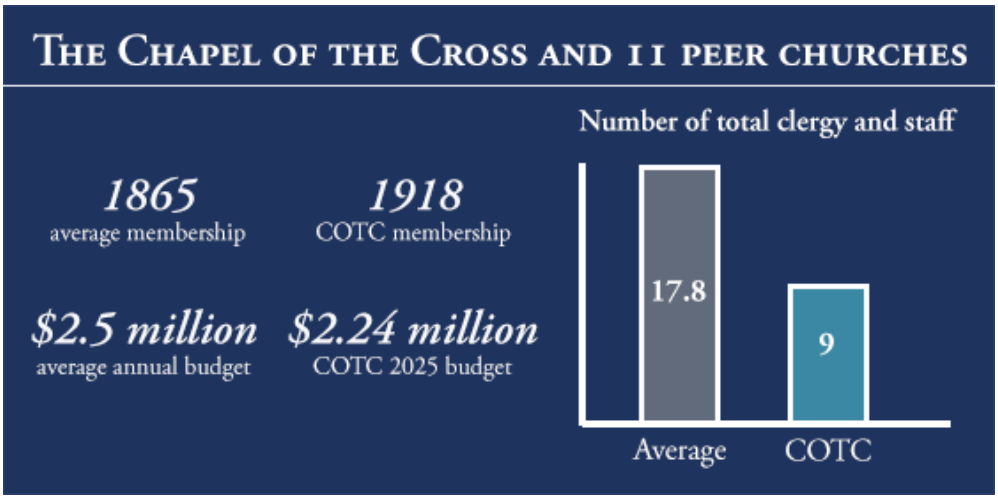
Registration for the Centennial picnic has reached capacity. Parish funerals continue. She noted that during times of grief, comfort comes not only from liturgies but also from the support of parishioners, who in our parish show up for funerals.
The Rector was invited into a colleague group (mostly deans and large parishes) that met recently. One of the topics the group will consider is Christianity's role in preserving democracy.

She noted that the 100th anniversary of the Consecration of the church would be celebrated on May 18. Jeff Crawford and Michael Hardy have worked on an exhibit about the church's history that is set up in the library classroom.

Preschool Bylaws: The Rector expressed appreciation to both the Preschool and vestry leaders for their work on changes proposed for the Preschool bylaws. The changes were primarily designed to incorporate what had become practice. The changes had been agreed upon by the Preschool, the wardens, and the Parish Administrator and had been approved by the Preschool Board. *The proposed changes to the document, "Bylaws of Preschool at The Chapel of the Cross," were unanimously approved, with no abstentions*.

Human Capital Planning Update: Kevin Trapani, Chair of the Personnel Committee, began by saying that this evening was a time to touch base, see what the committee has learned, and think about a shared vision for the future. He thanked Anita Howell, Strother Murray-Ndinga, and M.C. Ragsdale from the vestry, and parishioners Emily Moseley and Paige Zinn, for their work on the project. The report on the Human Capital Planning (HCP) Project was included in the vestry packet and included an overview of HCP; a summary of what the committee has been doing, what it has learned from its work (what parishioners think the parish does well and in what areas they think the parish does less well); a chart titled "COTC Peer Parishes Comparison 5.25"; and what's next.

Mr. Trapani traced the beginning of the HCP Project to about a year ago with vestry conversations, and in January 2025 held a parish-wide forum, and articulated our core mission as "forming disciples of Christ." The committee's aim was to respond to the question of how we can align resources (clergy, staff, and gifts of parishioners) in order to accomplish the mission of our parish. The committee conducted interviews with almost 30 individuals and groups within the parish. Next the committee gathered information on staffing levels within some peer parishes which had similar roles in their community and were approximately the same size as COTC in terms of average Sunday attendance. A revised version of the peer parishes chart is below:



A sample of the Chapel of the Cross and 11 other peer institutions yielded an average of 17.8 clergy and staff team members. The Chapel of the Cross currently has 9.

Mr. Trapani said that two things were heard from almost all those interviewed: we are strongest on Sunday mornings--liturgy, music, and sermons are done extremely well; and, clergy and staff invariably believe that the quality of work in the parish is high and credit others, while saying that they themselves might have room for improvement. One staff member commented that "we have opportunities to increase our scale, but not much need to improve our quality."

Ms. Lavine commented that the chart showing staffing comparisons with peer parishes was powerful, showing COTC well below peer parishes in terms of the total number of staff. Others commented that this staffing model is unsustainable in the long run, leading to staff burnout and risk of turnover. In sum, as one person observed, we are "understaffed and underendowed."

Mr. Trapani remarked that while he originally thought we would need to add staff in order to scale up, after the interviews he now believes that we need to add staff simply to maintain current programming--we "must add to maintain." The Sr. Warden shares this view, as do others who spoke during the discussion.
In addition to staffing needs, the interviews showed a need for more and younger volunteers and for volunteer development and management. There is a desire among program leaders for connecting with the wider parish and with the community outside the parish.
The committee believes that change has been difficult for some and might need more attention from both leadership and parishioners.
At one time the parish had 14 FTEs; we now have nine. In 2016 the parish had a $3.8M deficit. Now we have an approximately $4.5M surplus. Ms. Kersh suggested that it is time to be visionary in thinking about the future human capital needs of the parish.

Mr. Trapani offered some possible staffing and volunteer additions or changes over the next few years, including the approximate financial costs of such additions. The parish needs, he added, both living bequests and more targeted giving (giving to programs of special interest to the donor) to fund the work we have said we value.

Alan Rimer offered a motion to authorize advertising for a full-time Director of Development, which was seconded. Discussion followed. After discussion, *Katherine Lavine offered an amendment to Mr. Rimer's motion: that we pause recruiting and hiring for the part-time stewardship position and gather information, write a job description, and determine cost and funding sources for a full-time position, and then consider next steps. Mr. Rimer accepted the amendment. The amended motion was passed unanimously, with no abstentions.*

Mr. Trapani said that the Committee will next hold conversations with the wider parish to share its work and initial conclusions. Then it will work with clergy, staff, and appropriate committees to develop a staffing and funding plan. The Committee will then talk with the Vestry about how to reach those who do not come to church or participate in our programs.

Faith in Action: The document, "Proposal to change the distribution formula for the ABC Sale net/May 12, 2025" was included in the vestry packet. For the years 2019-2024 the vestry followed a practice of taking ABC Sales revenues in excess of the budgeted amount and dividing them as follows: 75% to Faith in Action for those committees to distribute, and 25% to the Social Ministry fund (from which funds were drawn during the pandemic to maintain budgeted commitments to FIA partners). In 2025 the ABC Sale net was $54,000, which is $29,000 over the budgeted amount. *The proposal brought to the vestry was to consider the distribution of the excess $29,000 from the 2025 ABC Sale as follows: $18,000 to Faith in Action to distribute; $7000 to the parish Seed Fund; $2,000 to the IFC Capital Campaign bathroom renovation (allows collaboration with other local parishes); and $2,000 to the Pauli Murray Center (which has lost $330,000 of federal funding).*
Sr. Warden Perri Kersh moved approval of the proposal. Mr. Beddingfield seconded. The motion was approved unanimously, with no abstentions.

Standing Committee Updates

Finance: On behalf of the Finance Committee, Committee Chair Emma Griffith brought a motion that the vestry reinstate the previous policy for treatment of undesignated bequests. Recently, undesignated gifts went to the Organ Campaign.
The previous policy is as follows:
For undesignated gifts of $5000 and above, 20% will go to the Program Fund, 30% will go to the Capital Reserve Fund, 40% will go to Building & Grounds (applied to the principal), 5% will go to Social Ministries, and 5% will go to Community Outreach Endowment (applied to the principal). Gifts under $5000 are applied to the current year annual budget as unpledged contributions.

In response to a comment, the Rector added that returning to the previous policy is a first step, and that the vestry may in the future want to look at the policy again for any specific needs that arise.
The motion from the Finance Committee to reinstate the previous policy for treatment of undesignated bequests of $5000 or more was approved unanimously, with no abstentions.

Treasurer
Treasurer Alistair Nevius reported that total operating revenues through April were $878,942, which was $129,707 ahead of budget. Pledge revenue for April was $160,407, which was $8,605 ahead of budget for the month. Operating expenses for April were $6,398 over budget, but in March expenses had been $38,378 under budget. For the year we have spent $28,395 less than budgeted. April saw our first monthly operating deficit ($9,655), but the operating surplus for the year through April was $158,102.

Stewardship: Chair Katherine Lavine brought revisions to the Stewardship Committee Charter that had been approved by the Committee. *These changes included having one Chair rather than Co-Chairs, removing the requirement that the Chair has to be a vestry member (though there will still be a vestry representative on the Committee), and clarifying term length for both vestry and non-vestry members.* The motion to approve these revisions came from the Stewardship Committee. There were several comments about the wisdom of these proposed changes. *The motion was approved unanimously, with no abstentions*.

Closing Prayer and Adjourn: The Rector offered a closing prayer, incorporating parish concerns celebrations, and challenges. The meeting was adjourned at 7:49 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Alice R. Cotten
Clerk of the Vestry