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

17 July 2025

The Vestry of The Chapel of the Cross met on Thursday, July 17, 2025, in the Overlook Room and via Zoom.

The following Vestry members were present: Anita Howell, Katherine Lavine, Eliza McAllister, Sally Goodnight, Perri Kersh (Sr. Warden), Strother Murray-Ndinga (Jr. Warden), Kevin Trapani, Scott Beddingfield, M.C. Ragsdale (via Zoom), and Michael Reeves.

Clergy: The Reverend Elizabeth Marie Melchionna (Rector) was present. The Reverend Mary Catherine Young was on vacation. The Reverend Dr. Karen Connor McGugan was representing the parish at the service commemorating The Reverend Dr. Pauli Murray at St. Titus in Durham. The Reverend Keith Esposito was on parental leave.

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

The Rector called the meeting to order at 6:03 P.M.

Devotion/Prayer: Jr. Warden Strother Murray-Ndinga began the devotion by saying that the last Vestry meeting was on the day after she, the Rector, and the Curate for Families and Youth returned from Ecuador, where they had accompanied a parish Youth Short-Term Mission group. She described the week as a transformative experience. She brought some materials from Ecuador, which she circulated. While there she heard many references to our baptismal covenant from the Education=Hope hosts: to seek and serve Christ in all persons and to respect the dignity of every human being. The young participants quickly learned that some things are just different--not bad or good, just different. Respecting differences was a theme. The liturgical theme of the week came from John 15, Jesus the True Vine. All the missioners were encouraged to think about how this short-term mission trip would help them to bear fruit in their lives. She offered a reading from John 15 as a prayer.
The Rector noted that what was learned on this trip will also be useful in other aspects of parish life, especially in Global Mission and Outreach ministries.

Approval of Consent Agenda: The following items were on the Consent Agenda: Vestry Meeting Minutes and Summary—June 2025, Rector's report, Associate Rector for University Ministry report, Curate for Family and Youth report (June/July), Director of Christian Formation report, Communications report, Faith in Action July report, Finance Committee minutes for June, and Stewardship Committee report for July.
Sally Goodnight moved approval of the Consent Agenda, seconded by Kevin Trapani. The motion was approved unanimously, with no abstentions.

Rector's Report: Ms. Melchionna said that she felt that she is being nourished by her recent time in Ecuador, both by our partners there and by being with our parish youth. The Vivancos were here recently and had supper at the Rector's home. The Rector is joyous that the Rev. Keith Esposito will soon return from parental leave. Baptisms are edging out funerals in the parish. She reminded everyone that funerals are also a gift, such as the service earlier that day for 104-year-old Blanche Clark, whose life can serve as an inspiration for us.

The Rector noted progress towards hiring a Director of Parish Giving. Work also continues on a job description for a Coordinator for Worship, Music, and Liturgy who will report to Dr. Joe Causby. This new position will take some pressure off Ellen Cole so she can focus on other responsibilities. The Rector received a comment that day from a funeral attendee from Asheville about what "amazing volunteers" the parish had. And, Ms. Melchionna added, this was a day on which a lot was happening at the church.

The Rector and her family recently started volunteering with Reality Ministries on Monday nights. She realized after an intense year that she was serving in the parish but not in the community and wanted to include her children in the volunteer activity she chose. On her first visit she saw that her name tag was too long and confusing for others ("What's a Rector?"), so she swapped it and selected one that merely stated her baptismal name, realizing that the rest of her identity just didn't matter. Several parishioners are also part of Reality Ministries, which fosters friendships among people of all abilities. Ms. Lavine mentioned that she had been a chaperone at the Reality Prom. The Rector said that the volunteer evening includes supper, a game, news from friends, and Bible teaching.

Class of 2027 Convention delegates: *Upon motion by Anita Howell, seconded by Katherine Lavine, and a unanimous vote with no abstentions, Scott Beddingfield and Margo MacIntyre were elected to serve terms as Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina Annual Convention Delegates in the Class of 2027; and Mary Kent Hill was elected as an alternate for a one-year term.*
The Class of 2027 will join the following parish delegates at the 2025 Convention: Class of 2025—David Dasher and Jennie Mabie; Class of 2026—Michael Reeves and Theresa Scocca.

Seed Fund Committee Proposal: In the absence of the Reverend Keith Esposito (on parental leave), Jr. Warden Strother Murray-Ndinga reported for the Seed Fund Committee. She noted that before Mr. Esposito's leave he set up an excellent procedure based on last year's selection process, which made this year's work easier. Seed Fund grants are designed to promote catalytic, transformative change in the community. The first parish Seed Fund grant was issued in 2024 to Community Home Trust, for $30,000. There were 8 applications in 2025. The committee reviewed all and selected three finalists, all focused on literacy or housing. They conducted Zoom interviews with each of the three finalists. Ms. Murray-Ndinga commented that the committee would have been pleased to fund fully all three finalists but did not want to spend down the endowment.

The committee recommended granting a total of $25,000 divided among these three "transformative and catalytic projects" in Orange County: 1) full funding ($15,010.20) to Family Reading Partners for 40 sets of educational toys and books for a new "Pathway to K" (P2K) program; 2) partial funding ($6000) to Habitat for Humanity, which is working with the Jackson Center, for 24 monthly workshops on home ownership, financial counseling, and direct fiscal support [Mortgage Assistance Plan]; and 3) partial funding ($4000) to the Public School Foundation, which will fund four "Little Free Libraries" in several high-need communities in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City schools area.

In its excellent report to the Vestry, the Seed Fund Committee included a brief introduction to the Seed Fund followed by a list and description of the three proposed 2025 partners, information on why the committee is recommending each for funding and for how much, and opportunities for parish involvement with each partner recommended. There were many favorable comments about the report and the thorough vetting process the committee used in making its recommendations. The information about the ways parishioners can become involved in each project that was recommended for funding was especially appreciated, and Ms. Howell commented that she hopes this information will be publicized within the parish when the grants are announced.
Kevin Trapani offered a motion to affirm the Seed Fund Committee recommendations and disburse the funds. Perri Kersh seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously, with no abstentions.

Standing Committee Updates:

Building & Grounds: Ms. McOmie reported briefly from Buildings & Grounds. The July 6 storm caused a power outage for about 24 hours. There were some water intrusions, but she said that parish buildings now seem okay. Quotes for the Chapel lighting are expected within a week or so. The "targeted ask" in support of the Chapel lighting project has brought in a little over $16,000.

Finance: Treasurer Alistair Nevius reported for the committee. There was no Finance Committee meeting in July. June was a good month. Total operating revenues for the year through June were $1,325,257, which was $201,292 ahead of the straight-line budget. Revenue for the month was $264,950, which was $77,622 over budget. Total operating expenses for June increased to $242,193. This amount was $54,865 over budget, but that is attributable to the $90,000 transfer to the capital budget, which takes place each year in June. All major expense categories remain below or close to budget. For June, the parish had an operating surplus of $22,757, and for the year to date, the operating surplus increased to $173,845.
The parish is moving its bank accounts from Truist to Southern Bank, where we will earn interest on our checking account and get better service. The relatively small clergy discretionary accounts will remain at Truist, which has a branch in Chapel Hill.

Personnel: Chair Kevin Trapani began by saying that the most important current personnel activity was the search for the Director of Parish Giving. He asked Diane McOmie whether she would like to say anything about the search. Ms. McOmie reported that the job has been listed on several career sites, and many of the applications from those listings did not meet the stated criteria for the position. There have also been some referrals, and two or three of those applications look very promising, she said. The Search Committee will meet within the next couple of weeks.

Mr. Trapani said that he expected that the Personnel Committee will soon be back in touch with the Finance Committee about possible funding for other positions. The most pressing question right now, he said, is the question the Rector raised about what parishioners are thinking about staffing issues. There has been little reaction from the information about staffing that was included in the parish email about a month ago. He asked whether Vestry members had received any questions or feedback, and what Vestry members think the next step should be.

A wide-ranging discussion followed, including the importance of volunteer leadership and training, the need for written job descriptions for volunteers to ensure clarity of responsibilities, ways to learn more about what skills parishioners have and might be willing to share (some of this information can be shared through Realm), ways to let staff know they are appreciated, the need to be transparent and clear to the parish about what new staff positions the parish needs in order to do what parishioners said they wanted to do and what that will cost, explaining clearly what we hope to do in the next year, the importance of pledging and having everybody pitch in for the annual campaign and for the work of the parish. Mr. Trapani noted that the Vestry has been receiving information on staffing needs and discussing the topic for over a year, and that other parishioners would benefit from having more information about staffing needs, plans, and costs, and about volunteer positions. He hopes to have planned parish engagements before the next Vestry meeting on August 21. He would like for the Personnel Committee to meet soon and then to talk with the Rector and wardens and plan for the weeks ahead about how to share more information and gather more feedback. Ms. Goodnight suggested that Kick-Off Sunday on September 7 might offer an opportunity to have a "Personnel Table" to offer information and receive feedback. Sr. Warden Perri Kersh reminded everyone to remember that we will have a full-time Director of Parish Giving and the Investment Committee is considering how to grow the parish endowment, but we will never raise enough money in our annual campaign to expand in the way that we need to expand. We are, however, moving in the right direction. Mr. Trapani asked Vestry members to review the Personnel Committee report to the Vestry on Human Capital Planning and then to tell their 5-7 closest friends in the parish about it and solicit their feedback.

The Rector confirmed that The Rev. Dr. Karen Connor McGugan has accepted an invitation to remain at the Chapel of the Cross as Associate Rector for Family and Youth, effective August 1. The final paperwork awaits the Bishop's signature when he returns from vacation.

Stewardship: Chair Katherine Lavine reported that the committee was busy in its summer planning season. The "targeted ask" in support of lighting in the Chapel has raised over $16,000 so far. Annual Campaign co-chairs Lindsay Porter and Craig Smith will attend the August 21 Vestry meeting, at the beginning of the meeting, so that Vestry members can meet them and thank them for their leadership roles. Craig Smith went to the recent event for young families to meet some of these parishioners. For information about other Stewardship activities, Ms. Lavine referred to the committee report included in the Vestry packet.

Additional Reports:
Sr. Warden Perri Kersh pointed out links at the bottom of the first page of the packets for sign-up for 1) Vestry devotion and snacks (once per year per Vestry person); 2) Vestry Person of the Day (VPOD) for the two main Sunday morning services; and 3) Visiting retirement communities.

Anita Howell reported for Faith in Action that seasonal service events are fully staffed now, with at least one leader for every event.

Closing Prayer and Adjourn: The Rector offered a closing prayer asking God for a sense of openness to balance the ways in which we think and act, that we might be nourished by God's word, wisdom, and sacraments and move with an openness and hospitality that allows us to respond to those we encounter as best we are able.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:34 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Alice R. Cotten
Clerk of the Vestry