OLD DONATION EPISCOPAL CHURCH
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
October 2026

This document was prepared for sole use by the Vestry of Old Donation, other leaders of the parish, and for the Diocese, clergy and consultants of this work on behalf of Old Donation.

This work was a series of interviews of vestry, search/profile committee, the Director of Administration and other information gleaned as pertinent to the point of the interviews. The work will give the Vestry an idea of what is working well and where there are opportunities for improvement. It will give the Vestry ideas as to what is needed for the parish as a whole to function more effectively and holistically.

The "FINDINGS" are divided by pertinent subjects. There is a separate section on "Recommendations". What the reader will note in this report is an increasing lack of trust over many differing subjects and a growing sense of what many feel as "secrecy". As the author of this document discovered fairly quickly, most of this is born out of something completely understandable which is that after your long term Rector retired, most felt the parish to be lacking in communication and in education and without leadership. That is because your former Rector was the leader, the educator, and the communicator and that while this model of leadership may work well in some parishes, it does not work well in a parish this size. Please keep this in mind as you continue reading because this is not unsolvable.

1. **WHAT IS THE VESTRY DOING WELL?**
    a. Showing up
    b. Commissions in general (some need tweaking)
    c. Bringing Mimi in is both calming and challenging and provides consistency and dependability
    d. By and large do well together
    e. Bill is a solid Warden, supporting the vestry and working hard; he believes strongly in the church and in the vestry
    f. Though some 3rd years are a bit weary, all feel glad to serve on the Vestry

2. **HOW IS THE PARISH DOING WELL?**
    a. Working together at the Commission/Committee levels (some more than others)
    b. Continuing to be hospitable and welcoming

c. Staff good; showing up and ever a constant
d. Physical plant is well
e. Worship is solid. With one clergy, some concern to look at this closely

3. MIMI

Mimi is a lovely and very welcome presence at Old Donation in the pastoral role. She is dependable, constant, and honest. She challenges the congregation and presents beautiful, meaningful worship and always welcomes people to come and see her. She is a good addition in these challenging days

4. **DIOCESE**

There is a strong concern and some substantive disappointment that the Diocesan has not been supportive of Old Donation, helpful in guiding them a variety of issues in which they've needed guidance, and often unresponsive or unavailable. They have expressed the desire/wish that the Bishop would have come to them. They also wish they had been "educated" to the current times/challenges and that there had been an ongoing presence. (More to say about in the forum).

5. **BENEFITS**

There will be more to say about this in recommendations, but I believe it would be a worthy effort for the Vestry to study the benefit packages of other parishes this size to see if your package is competitive. During a time when there is a void in leadership and a strong desire to have a strong formation program, for example, an important effort would be to position yourselves to discover a person who would match well with Old Donation.

6. **CHALLENGES (as identified by vestry members)**
   a. Feeling "rudderless"…. We have no rudder… how do we land on the shore?
   b. Do not know how to "own" their role.
   c. Felt a lack of education to do their job.
   d. Changed systems to "realm"….need more training
   e. Vestry is a "passive" entity and can feel like we're wasting our time. Need to be prepared for motions; accountable to read material in advance so that we can vote responsibly on motions. Need to use our time wisely for the good of the church.
   f. Don't always feel we do a good job in being the leader in "dispelling myths"
   g. Felt enormous pressure in the search process
   h. Felt ill-equip to make good decisions in the search process

i. Inconsistencies in reporting/decision making.
j. When we see a challenge with a commission, can we help to solve that (i.e. formation, youth minister).
k. Some vestry persons have felt ill-equiped after they were on the vestry to do their jobs…. Needed more education
l. Need a stronger finance program where a vestry person can be helpful with Treasurer and others to be responsible and creative in solving issues involving use of money. Again… education and transparency seem to be a concern.
m. Need to be a stronger presence with the congregation. Each person on this vestry has strong gifts to make the whole better and more effective.

7. **LOOKING AHEAD AT OUR NEXT RECTOR, WHAT DO WE NEED TO CONSIDER?**

a. A different kind of leader. One where leadership is taught, empowered, and shared.
b. One who has experience (or at least an –already in place a system.. i.e. other members of the clergy staff) for leading a large parish with multiple ministries, a strong endowment, and a large campus.
c. Vestry needs to consider being a "pioneer" in how to maintain a strong, large, and important parish of the Diocese when the pool of candidates is small. What are the options? Do some research – what are other like parishes doing in Va. And across the state?
d. We can't just talk about diversity and inclusivity. We need to understand who we are and approach that honestly and actually learn what we need to learn and see who we really are.
e. Who will be best for the PARISH without distinctions?
f. Someone with a strong family presence.

RECOMMENDATIONS - in no particular order.

Note: For those recommendations you decide to work on, consider several small "task forces" to work together to find solutions (including implementation and a timeframe). Each of these do not have to take too much time, with good implementation and follow-up mechanism included. YOU CAN DO THIS!!!

1. Look at Vestry meeting and see how you may want to streamline, improve, enjoy more. What would this look like to you? Mimi has already started this.
2. Restore a process everyone can agree on for meeting guidelines, expectations, reporting, and motions (including preparation beforehand, etc.) so that meetings are enjoyable and not tedious…..
3. Create a strong finance "program", including that Committee Chairs/Commission liaisons know what to expect of themselves and others.
4. Make sure full budget is available to each Vestry member
5. Discuss together what additional training you each feel you need to discover how to strengthen the vestry for current and future leaders. (Understanding the By-laws, what is your role in a search process, how to help individuals solve issues in the church to keep the body built up.
6. Work to understand and strengthen your relationship with the Diocese. What are their processes and what do any of you that work with the Diocese need to give and receive?
7. Establish small groups to solve issues that arise; always leading with a framework and a date by which projects begin and end and how you measure for their success.
8. Track how the Vestry and the Parish are doing in this transition time. Remember to lead with love, take the high road and NEVER contribute to dialogue that could be hurtful to another person.
9. Look closely at the ODEC Benefit Package
10. When it is time to begin the Search Process, write a Search Prayer that will be used in your meetings and prayed together in Church. NOTE: You may want to consider a "Transition Prayer" for the time you are in now.
11. What is your Nominating Process look like? Time for that to be working. Often 3rd years comprise that group… At any rate, this is a time to identify people with strong leadership skills to continue to build a strong Vestry.
12. Especially in the absence of a permanent rector, try to recruit other positions to come to the parish to help in Leadership (i.e. Youth leader). *Note: goes along with looking to make sure packages are competitive.
13. Consider worship and other ways you may support Mimi. I know Bill is working on this and he and others of you are probably thinking "outside the box" already. Consider the

use of “Supply Clergy, Assisting Clergy, Deacons, Visiting Priests, and others… Try to full the 2027 calendar. Even consider talking to Rick Vinson if there is anything he’s willing to do while you’re in the transition phase. Long Term Interim/Priest-in-Charge?

14. Look at weddings, funerals, baptisms, liturgy, preaching, Eucharist. What are some of the options.
15. Update Website? Am not sure about this one.
16. Communicate with the Congregation regularly to let them know what’s been going on and how it’s working. I suggest something to be published news at least once a month and then a 1 to 2 minute blurb during worship once a month by Senior or Junior Warden. It helps tremendously to feel included and is another step in restoring confidence and dispelling myths.

In closing, imagine this….. **LEADING WITH LOVE.** When we are able to do this we are automatically putting God and our faith at the center of everything. Doing this calms our anxieties; it allows us to see our neighbors and friends and church family in a different way. It invites us to live out our Baptismal Covenants and it allows all the earthly things that get in our way to be diminished or to disappear. Keep that image with you and it will help every stressful conversation and give every conflict a way to be resolved… because Leading with Love is the only way to move forward.

While you imagine LEADING WITH LOVE every day. Imagine a PARALLEL TRACK. This is our goal and our plan. To work on three parallel tracks together. Ongoing communication is key (item 16 above).

1. Strengthen, educate, empower the Vestry and other key leadership in the ways identified. (This will be the vestry’s primary work).
2. The Holy Circle – This is a two-part journey. The first is the journey with Mimi through Worship and Prayer and Music and the Sacraments. The other is a Holy Circle where people who are struggling with unresolved feelings as a result of all of the changes can talk and listen with their fellow parishioners who may be experiencing the same or very different feelings. A place to listen and to be heard with God at the center and where healing will be the goal. (facilitated) These may be once a month or every two weeks depending on how the timing works with Mimi and B.J.
3. Preparing for New Clergy – when the time comes, a group of Vestry, and a Search/Profile committee will be formed to do the work God is calling Old Donation to do in finding what God intends for this very important parish.

Faithfully and in Hope
Mimi and B.J.