

Pope Francis and his words for those who ‘wobble’

As the world remembers and reflects on the life and death of Pope Francis this week, one of the things I read was about a message he gave in August of 2020 about trials that shake a person’s faith.

The the headline in the National Catholic Reporter about the pope’s message read: “ ‘Faith wobbles sometimes; what counts is calling for God’s help, pope says.’ ”

Do you remember how 2020 started? It began with the continent of Australia on fire. Then came the global COVID pandemic, then a record-breaking hurricane season with 30 named storms, several of them catastrophic. And then murder hornets,

racial unrest, political upheaval. By August of that year, people everywhere were losing their temper, losing jobs, losing their sense of security, losing their minds and losing hope, losing their faith.

Five years later, with so much still coming at us all at once from multiple directions, constant and unrelenting, we are still wobbling all over the place.

In his 2020 message, Pope Francis shared the well-known gospel story in Matthew 14:22-23 where the disciples were in a boat traveling across a lake during a storm.

As they struggled and fought against the wind, Jesus came walking on the water toward them.



NANCY KENNEDY
GRACE NOTES

MAYOR

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Christopher’s attorney, Jeffrey John Otis, objected that the proceedings were not in strict compliance with KRS 61.823 covering special meetings. No notice of the special hearing was placed at the courthouse announcing the meeting 24 hours prior as mandated.

Luke Morgan, attorney for the Williamstown City Council members, argued the statute’s wording “allows for flexibility.”

Bates agreed that the 1980 statute was vague and said it was appropriate to proceed.

Otis then objected to the “vagueness” of the “nebulous charges” in the resolution instigating removal proceedings, saying they hampered the ability to mount a strong defense.

Bates noted his objection but said the hearing would move forward.

The instant Morgan called Christopher to the witness stand Otis said, “Just for the record I’m objecting to the calling of any witnesses in this matter. I will be objecting to all questioning in the matter as they have not complied with statutory rules that govern what we’re doing here today. So I’m objecting to everything.”

Otis began by objecting to Christopher’s being asked by Morgan to state his name.

Morgan protested. Based on a court of appeals ruling, Bates indicated that as burdensome as it would be, the barrage of objections would be allowed.

True to his word, every single question posed by Morgan was immediately followed by Otis saying, “Objection” and Bates saying-usually-“Overruled.”

In one of the rare light moments of the proceedings, an objection by Otis led to a question as to whether or not the mayor was a hostile witness.

Bates fired back, “If he wasn’t hostile he would need to go to Eastern State for 72-hour examination.”

Christopher said former City Clerk Vivian Link retired on June 30, 2024 and Alex Cummins took her place the following day. He testified he noticed the budget tracker entries were not being received, but he “extended grace.”

They remained undone, however.

Morgan shifted to the issue of overdrafts.

Christopher testified then Assistant City Clerk, Lisa Clifton told him the city had bounced checks a number of times in the previous seven months.

The mayor said he talked to Forcht Bank manager Corey Kightlinger in February and told him to tell Christopher and to one else if it happened again. No overdrafts have occurred since Cummins’s resignation Feb. 19, according to Christopher.

Christopher could not say if or how much the city had paid in overdraft fees.

Morgan hammered away, saying it makes the city look bad. “You just don’t know the extent of

the damage.”

The questioning turned to overtime paid to former Williamstown Fire Chief Josh Willoughby. Morgan pointed out the fire department ordinance says it’s all volunteer.

Christopher replied, “The ordinance is out of compliance with itself,” something he said he tried to correct. The personnel handbook lists it as a paid job, he pointed out.

He testified that he was unaware of the clerk’s authorization of overtime payments for Willoughby. As the personnel handbook says the fire chief is exempt from overtime, Christopher said he was not looking for that when presented with payroll statements to sign.

Morgan next introduced as exhibit one a text message from Christopher to Cummins sent Nov. 14. Peppered with profane language, the text instructed Cummins not to reply to questions from councilmembers.

Asked why he sent it, Christopher said the legislative branch was overstepping the executive branch. He said no city employees should answer to councilmembers.

His testimony made it apparent issues in the clerk’s office were being noticed. In addition to missing information in the budget tracker, purchase orders were being written but did not hit his desk, he said. City superintendents weren’t sure where they were going.

Morgan introduced the minutes from the Nov. 19, 2024, meeting as exhibit two and asked Christopher if he had “any reason to think that that copy of these minutes is somehow deficient or otherwise not accurate.”

Christopher replied he had reason to believe so. “Because the person responsible for maintaining these records had been stealing from the city.” He advised making “sure that everything that was done was done the right way and written and was put on record correctly.”

After a brief recess, the issue of Williamstown City County meeting minutes not being prepared for public inspection was introduced by Morgan. Statute requires meeting minutes to be made available “at reasonable time no later than immediately following the next meeting of the body.”

No minutes of council meetings have been made available in 2025.

Otis objected that this was adding a new charge to the resolution and “a serious violation of my client’s due process rights.” The charges can’t be changed, he argued. He said Christopher had the right to be put on notice of what the allegations are.

Morgan noted the lack of mention in the statute of giving notice.

Bates overruled the objection and said, “Maybe, through this very hearing, this vague 45-year-old statute may be upended after all if you take it to Frankfurt.”

The mayor and councilmembers were aware minutes were not being

done. An April 4 email from Councilmember Jayson Payne to Christopher noted constituents were asking about the minutes. Payne offered assistance with transcription software to get the minutes done.

Christopher said that had been tried two years ago but “hot mics” picked up so much paper rattling the transcription was inaccurate.

He testified that he told Cummins of the importance of getting the minutes out and was assured it would happen, but it never did.

Morgan calculated at least eight meetings worth of minutes had yet to be made public in 2025.

Christopher said that he was not made aware until April 15 that the minutes had to be made public after the next meeting.

Morgan concluded, “The buck stops with the mayor.”

After another recess, Link took the stand. She testified that when she retired, “the city was in good shape” and ready for the FY 2023-2024 audit.

Link was recently rehired to help straighten out the mess in the wake of Cummins’s departure.

Speaking of the budget tracker, she said there were “zeroes in every department” making it appear no one had been paid.

She said she thought anyone who looked at the report would be able to tell information was missing.

“As far as the amount of overtime for the former clerk I couldn’t imagine having that much overtime in one month’s time ... I feel like if it was me doing it I would’ve got caught ... Somebody would have noticed I was getting 80 hours of overtime a month.”

Morgan said, “At the same time the data’s not being put in the system.”

“It appears there’s been little to nothing done since July 1st,” Link confirmed.

She testified noticing the payroll account had been overdrawn “a few times.”

She explained the budget tracker as a report to keep track of revenue and spending. She described them as “important” and thought they should be provided to the mayor and Council monthly.

Otis questioned Link about how the city had run during the year and a half she and Christopher worked together. She confirmed the city ran in good order.

Moving on, he asked Link, as city clerk, “If you so chose ... you could withhold or alter data that you provided to Mayor Christopher couldn’t you?”

Link agreed to the possibility once it was clarified she, personally, would not do such a thing.

She testified that Paul Maddox, CPA, does the city’s payroll. The checks “do not cross the mayor’s desk” but Link said he still had to sign the executive order for payroll.

Otis said altering payroll data “behind the mayor’s back that could alter how employees got paid ... Maddox wouldn’t really be none the wiser,” and Link confirmed.

“One bad actor” can make a lot of trouble, he

concluded. At first, they thought he was a ghost and screamed. But Jesus told them not to be afraid.

“I am Jesus,” he said. Peter replied, “Lord, if it’s really you, tell me to come to you on the water.”

Jesus said, “Come on,” and Peter stepped out of the boat and took a few steps on top of the water. But when he realized how strong the storm was, he got scared and started sinking. “Save me, Lord!” he shouted. And Jesus did just that.

Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and helped Peter back into the boat.

Pope Francis said, “Lord, save me is a beautiful prayer, and believers also should reflect on how Jesus responded, immediately reaching out and taking Peter’s hand, showing that God never abandons us.”

Do you remember Weebles? They were the roly-poly, egg-shaped toys that came out in the 1970s that were advertised with the catchy song, “Weebles wobble but they won’t fall down.”

The secret to Weebles is their foundation, their “stable equilibrium.” They are built to stay upright no matter how they’re battered about.

And so are we. Just like Pope Francis had said, our faith is often weak, we wobble, but if Jesus is our firm foundation, if we belong to him, his hand is ever ready to lift us back to stable equilibrium, to peace and sanity.

And if we need saving, from trouble and trials, even from our own foolishness, “Lord, save me!” is always a beautiful prayer. Even more beautiful is

knowing that Christ stands ready to save.

Pope Francis had his detractors. He was often blunt and some people didn’t like his stand on social issues like immigration and climate change, his support for marginalized people and his outspoken rebuke for those who dehumanize them.

Personally, I don’t agree with everything he said, but some things I do.

Especially when he preached the gospel and let people know that the hand of Jesus is mighty to save anyone with faith to reach for it, even those whose faith wobbles.

Contact Nancy Kennedy at 352-564-2927 (leave a message) or email at nkennedy@chronicleonline.com.

known about it for four months.” Christopher said Crupper told neither him or any other councilmember.

Christopher denied authorizing overtime for Willoughby or Cummins or a raise for Cummins.

He said he received an executive order towards the end of January, 2025, requesting a \$3 pay increase for Cummins but did not think her performance merited it. He did not sign it but found out later “she had backdated herself in December as receiving a \$3 pay increase.”

He testified that twice a month an executive order for payroll comes in. He said he does an “overview” without going over it line by line.

Much of the ensuing testimony plowed the same ground as before regarding procedure for minutes, revelation of overdrafts and the assertion that the Council was “overstepping.”

Otis then asked Christopher whether he had broached the subject of creating a finance committee with Council.

Christopher replied he had done so recently, but council’s response was “That was a waste of time because the Council IS the finance committee.” Though Crupper voiced it, Christopher said, the majority of councilmembers who spoke felt similarly.

“When the issue with Alex came to light, what did city council do to investigate the financial issues?” Otis asked.

“Demanded me to investigate,” Christopher answered.

Otis pointed out that according to statute, Council could investigate the matter themselves, but they did not.

When it came his turn to question the witness, Morgan said, “You’re the one who by statute and ordinance is put in charge of supervising all the city employees, including that clerk, right?”

He questioned Christopher at length about the relationship between himself and Council.

Over five and a half hours into the hearing, Otis and Morgan gave their closing statements.

The Council then went into an hour and a half closed session.

Coming out, their decision was read by Bates: on both charges all six councilmembers marked “yes” and the document was signed by all six councilmembers.

Christopher’s counsel objected, saying rules governing a special meeting were not being followed, so Bates polled each councilmember publicly to confirm their votes and found the decision to be in order. He said that concluded his role in the matter.

A bit of confusion arose as to the next step. Morgan said City Attorney Frank Wichmann said “he thinks no next steps can occur until the appeal is filed.”

The wording of the statute was disputed by both sides as to whether or not the Council could appoint an interim mayor at that point and whether or not the mayor’s office was actually vacated at this time.

Bates said, “There’s no clear guidance in this ... the points are, obviously, if you vacate today and later it’s set aside then you’ve got this odd circumstance where there was someone interim who shouldn’t have been interim. On the other hand if you don’t, and leave him in, then the actions they’ve taken today don’t mean very much, and you go forward with a lame duck, potentially with a panel they don’t get along with whatsoever ... But if you go past today, then when does it take effect would be the question. If not today, when?”

Those are just his thoughts, he reiterated.

At that point Christopher and his attorneys left the courtroom.

Morgan and Wichmann met with Councilmembers in the courtroom to discuss the appointment of an interim mayor.

Council voted to make Councilmember Dave Henson acting interim mayor until the May 5 regular meeting when it can be made official.



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Aubrey Lausman
Williamstown Sr. High School
Parents: Sara Lausman and Ronald Perkins

Aubrey has been a member of FFA for two years. She has been involved in FFA for 4 years. She has served as a committee chairman junior year and is now the vice president.

When she began high school she had to pick a pathway. Something about agriculture interested her. She signed up for Agriculture classes. Within a month her Advisor got her involved in FFA. A group of 4, including Aubrey completed in record keeping at a state level and won first place. After that experience, she fell in love with FFA and knew she should continue her journey in FFA.

Aubrey's favorite thing about FFA is the deep sense of community everyone gets to experience. Being involved with others during meeting and club days is such a great feeling.

Two things that FFA has taught Aubrey is how to serve others and that she can have an impact on others around her.

FFA will benefit her through the lessons she has learned throughout her time in FFA. Her biggest benefit of all is the drive it has given her to teach Agriculture and give back to future FFA members.