

Grace Episcopal Church
Amherst, Massachusetts
Vestry Meeting Minutes
February 25, 2025

A meeting of the Vestry was convened by the Rev. Tom Synan on February 25, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Libby Maxey (recording), Mike Gralenski, Rachel Blain, Kathy Glime, Patrick Kelly, Donna Devine, Cara Crandall, Tim Hampson, Megan McDermott, Nate Marino, Carolyn Collette, Tom Dougherty, Joe Hazlip, Katie Schendel, and Sarah Chadwick

Absent: Peter Sikowitz

We opened with a prayer from Tom and individual check-ins (no opening reflection)

Clerk's Report

January minutes: approved with no new emendations (Rachel moved, Tom D. seconded)

Opening reflections: Libby will poll Vestry members and prepare a schedule of assignments for the rest of our 2025 meetings.

Disseminating minutes: There have been some requests from parishioners to make minutes more visible. (Terrie already keeps them in a notebook in the copy room.) Rachel agrees that posting them would be a good idea—on the website and on a bulletin board at church. Tom D. supports the idea, since the website will give us an archive, too. Tom S. has spoken to Terrie about this, and it sounds like we'll need our web designer to modify the site so that we can have a place to file links to minutes. Sarah wonders if a link to the minutes on the website could go in Grace Notes as well, since that goes out electronically. Kathy notes that we'll want to put an announcement out soon so that the congregation knows what to expect. Terrie is out sick now, but Tom S. thinks we can have this change in place before our next meeting.

Tom D. notes that Libby should feel comfortable asking for a note-taking sub if she's unable to attend a Vestry meeting.

Finance Report

Given questions at the Annual Meeting, Tim clarifies that his financial reports mostly focus on the church budget, which is separate from the earmarked bequests/gifts for particular ministries (altar guild, choir, etc.), which we call the "little funds." These line items don't show up on the general balance sheet.

As for our 2025 budget, pledge amounts are excellent, better than we budgeted for. Fuel costs are high, but that's to be expected.

January financial report: approved with no emendations (Tom D. motioned to accept, Kathy seconded)

Rector's Report

Tom S. expresses regret that he had to miss the Annual Meeting, and offers thanks to Megan, Kathy, Tom D. and the others who led the proceedings in his absence. He notes the challenging weather on two successive Sundays, and explains his commitment to being present for services if at all possible, since somebody will always show up. We even had two visitors at the 8:00 a.m. service on February 16, when conditions were worse than on the previous snowy Sunday. Tom also mentions Beaty Blain's funeral service this past Saturday, "a gift of love" which Beaty herself had planned.

The bishop search is in its preliminary stages. The search committee is holding listening sessions, and although our parish isn't slated to host any, Caleb Ireland, a member of the search committee, plans to hold informal listening sessions this coming Sunday. He will be present for the 8:00 coffee hour, and may adjourn to the Parker Room or somewhere else on the church campus after the 10:30 service. The new bishop will be elected at this year's diocesan convention (November 14-15), so much work has to be done quickly. The committee will gather potential names, then go through applications and meet with candidates. In the next round, candidates will meet with the entire search committee. Then there's a final slate, which will do "walkabouts"—at least three sessions to meet candidates in different parts of the diocese. Then the clergy and lay delegates (a majority of both groups is needed) will vote on the finalists. Everyone is encouraged to share thoughts with Caleb. Parishioners can also fill out the online survey that was in the last weekend e-blast from Grace.

Lent starts in a week; we'll have Ash Wednesday services at 8:00 a.m., 12:10 p.m., 5 (Taizé) and 7:00 (with choir). Megan will do a Monday meditation program, and Tom plans to use Bishop Budde's *How We Learn to Be Brave* for a Lenten book group (first through fifth Sundays of Lent).

Andrew Glace's memorial will be held Saturday, March 8 at 11:00, and Margo McMahon's Monday, March 24 at 11:00 (the date was changed to accommodate her family); Randy Wilburn's memorial March 29 will be at Immanuel Lutheran. Peter Elbow, we learned last week, passed away in Seattle. Tom is hoping we can get some info from Cami about arrangements so that we can send notification to the congregation. We've already informed the congregation about former interim rector Paul Twelves's death; it seems that Grace was the last parish where he served in a full-time interim role. (He was a guest preacher when Grace celebrated our 150th anniversary.)

The annual Parochial Report is due at the end of this week; Kathy, Tim, and Libby will have to sign it. Tom will be in touch once he clarifies with Terrie what she needs us to do and when.

Senior Warden's Report

Committees: Kathy notes that Patrick and Sarah, as our Communications Committee, and Rachel and Cara, as our Newcomers committee, did good work together last year to update our self-presentation on the website. Donna and Suzannah have served as the Fundraising Committee (Mind the Gap), although now that Suzannah has left the Vestry, the committee is in need of new members. Donna is also our delegate to the convention, as she has been for quite a few years. Nancy Lowry will be a delegate as well this year, and Chris Freitag will attend the convention Friday but would only vote in the Saturday election if he were called on as an alternate.

Kathy wants us to consider the idea of returning to in-person meetings. There are benefits to continuing online as we have since the pandemic, but there would also be benefits to meeting in person. If travel is an issue, we could consider meeting after church on Sundays instead of Tuesday nights. We could have *some* in-person meetings but keep some on Zoom. Katie works in a virtual office, and she thinks it works well to have every third meeting in person. Her co-workers make the decision to meet in person the meeting before, so that there can be discussion about it. Tom D. strongly supports Zoom, since it's so much easier on people who have to go to work and school. It saves everybody energy. But he would be willing to meet in person a few times—preferably once we have less winter mess to negotiate. Mike likes the idea of gathering for a potluck meeting in the summer, although he also finds Zoom very convenient, since he lives half an hour away. Kathy would like to continue this discussion, and Vestry members are invited to send her their thoughts, especially if they have strong opinions. We might consider meeting in person as soon as April or May.

Kathy will be traveling from March 11 to April 10. If she has information to share, she'll pass it along ahead of the March meeting if she's not able to attend. She'll be available by email, albeit in a different time zone.

Junior Warden's Report

Tom D. will forward to the new Vestry members information about "Vestry 101" from the Diocese. (There used to be a training in Springfield, but it might be on Zoom now instead.)

We had two energy audits last year; the Rectory basement (part of which is stone) and the attic/roof both need insulation, which shouldn't cost us anything because of incentive programs. Tom is leaning toward working with the company we were connected to through the Climate Action Committee, which has offered to handle both areas of concern. We were also offered a lighting change-out; for \$21,970 we could get it down to \$15,162 with incentives, but we'd see only \$952 in annual savings. Tom is not inclined to pursue this further, since lighting technology changes so quickly; it doesn't make sense to wait 15 years to see a return on the investment. Once Tom D. signs off on the insulation project, it might be months before anything happens (one audit was in July, and he didn't get follow up information until January). Tom S. wants to be sure staff are consulted so that the timing of any work on the building is minimally disruptive. Tom D. will coordinate with Terrie, as well as Dave, our Sexton, and Jaana, our bookkeeper. The Vestry agrees to go ahead with the project.

We currently use four different companies to monitor our safety equipment (extinguishers, sprinkler system, fire alarms/monitoring), and we'd like to reduce that number to one. Our maintenance budget is around \$25,000, and Tom D. would like to use \$1,000 of that to put all our systems into the hands of Fire Equipment. We'll save \$299 a year by getting rid of a phone line which is part of the current system. The Vestry supports this change and use of the aforementioned budget funds.

Kitty and Tom D. will serve pancakes in the connector after the 8:00 service the Sunday before Ash Wednesday; Rachel Blain thinks Nina Scott will be the one in charge of coffee hour, so Tom

D. will contact her to let her know. Doug Moore and Diana Rogers will handle coffee hour with pancakes after the 10:30 service.

Next meeting: March 18 on Zoom.

Tom S. closes the meeting with a prayer.