

Grace Episcopal Church
Amherst, Massachusetts
Vestry Meeting Minutes
May 20, 2025

A meeting of the Vestry was convened by the Rev. Tom Synan on May 20, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Libby Maxey (recording), Mike Gralenski, Rachel Blain, Patrick Kelly, Tim Hampson, Nate Marino, Tom Dougherty, Katie Schendel, Donna Devine, Sarah Chadwick, Kathy Glime, Megan McDermott, Carolyn Collette, and Peter Sikowitz; Guest: Sara Liberty-Laylin

Absent: Joe Hazlip and Cara Crandall

Peter Sikowitz opened the meeting with a meditation on the “serenity prayer,” which was not originally as we know it today.

Garden Ministry request: Sara Liberty-Laylin reports that 54 plants and shrubs were added to the garth in two hours on planting day; now the group is clearing the patio, thanks especially to Mike Gralenski. This Wednesday, they’ll be working on rehabbing the pollinator garden, which had a rough winter. They’ve planted a royal white magnolia in memory of Catherine McGraw, who is interred in the Columbarium; Catherine’s mother, Barbara, wanted to have a planting in honor of her daughter, and made a significant donation. The tree is surrounded with plants, some donated, some purchased with Barbara’s donation. Edging still needs to be done. Barbara would like a bench put in as well. It would be very nice to have a bench for the gardeners—large enough to seat three—since sometimes there are fourteen people working in the garth at once (the Garden Ministry has 16 active members now) and only three chairs on which to rest. Tom D. wonders where the bench will go, and whether there might be more than one. Sara says they’re thinking of one bench, which could be put near the cloister that leads back to the parish hall, by the shade garden in the south-east corner. There’s much appreciation for the energy and momentum of the Garden Ministry. (Sara left the meeting at this point.)

Rachel moves to accept the gift of a garth bench in honor of Catherine McGraw, and Mike seconds the motion. It is unanimously approved. Kathy will get in touch with Sara after the meeting to talk further.

Clerk's Report

April minutes: approved unanimously with no emendations (Rachel moved, Katie seconded).

Finance Report

Tim reports that from an annual budget perspective, we’re still in great shape, although expenses were high this month and revenues were behind schedule. We’re currently \$23,000 ahead of budget.

Tim doesn’t yet know when the audit is happening, since the audit committee needs to read through a good deal of material first. The time is short, however, with the audit due July 1. Tim

will be in touch with Kent Farber, Bruce Stebbins, and Sarah Boy to push along the process. Tom D. moves to accept the finance report; Rachel seconds the motion. It is approved unanimously.

Rector's Report: Carolyn Sharp from Yale Divinity gave a great sermon the Sunday after Easter, putting a different interpretation on the role of Thomas, who is usually seen as out-of-touch. The same weekend we hosted the conclusion of the Bach Festival; Tom S. attended the Sunday afternoon concert, which was packed. At the concert, there was appreciation for those at the church, especially Terrie, who helped to make it possible. In two years, the festival will conclude with the Saint Matthew Passion, which they might do in a larger venue, but it was nice to host the community here this time around. We also had the annual Amherst ABC House gospel benefit concert; it was reportedly well-attended, although Tom missed the event because of the Vestry meeting.

Megan and Tom S. attended the annual clergy conference in New Hampshire. The guest speaker, Stephanie Spellers, was Canon for Evangelism and Reconciliation for the former presiding bishop, Michael Curry, and Tom S. appreciated her remarks. They heard more about the bishop search: they're accepting nominations/applications now, but that might end soon (end of May?). The schedule seems very tight for a November election, between vetting applications/nominations, doing interviews, presenting candidates to the diocese, etc. A slate is supposed to be announced in September.

A week ago Saturday, we had the Hildegard of Bingen celebration, which Tom S. thought was fantastic. He particularly enjoyed hearing excerpts from Hildegard's letters scolding those in ecclesiastical power, although we weren't told what issues motivated her to write the letters. Tom S. thinks that we, as a house of worship, should provide more opportunities for the greater community to come to Grace for something that is not worship. It's a way of developing some kind of connection to the church outside of our usual services, with events that are enlightening and inspiring. Tom thought there were about 100 people in attendance, which was nearly twice the number expected. Tom S. has told Kell he'd be glad to host more things of this kind.

Looking ahead, on May 25, we'll have a baptism for a mother and daughter, and on June 1, Joan O'Brian's grandchild will be baptized. Valerie Gracechild's memorial will be on May 31. June 8 is Pentecost, which marks the beginning of the summer schedule (9:30 a.m. single service), and which will be followed by the traditional Pentecost picnic. The choir will sing through June 15. There will be a solemn choral evensong on Pentecost at 4:00 p.m. (The regular two-service Sunday schedule resumes the Sunday after Labor Day, Sept. 7.) Tom is leaving tomorrow for a working vacation, and will return June 3.

Senior Warden's Report: Responding to the news of Megan's departure from Grace Church this summer, Kathy wants Megan to know how impressed she is with Megan's bravery in pushing herself to do a thing that's important to her (i.e., pursue an MFA in Virginia). Kathy's also glad we'll have time to send Megan off with all the love and care she deserves.

Kathy reminds everyone that we need help to rebuild a fundraising committee; anybody who thinks they can help should volunteer.

We're still planning for an in-person gathering in July. Our July meeting is currently scheduled for July 15 at 7:00, but maybe Sunday after church on July 13 would be preferable to a Tuesday night. And if we were to do it on a Tuesday evening, it would probably be better to do it earlier in the evening. Katie would prefer to do it on the Tuesday we've already reserved. There's enthusiasm for an evening meeting, beginning with a 5:30 p.m. potluck, which would then give way to a meeting close to our usual 7:00. Tom D. says that we'll probably have to use the Connector, since there are evening meetings already scheduled for the Parish Hall (which Tom S. affirms). Kathy will send out a potluck sign-up in anticipation.

Junior Warden's Report: Micah Walter asked Tom D. if anybody would be interested in helping with ringing the bell this summer. Please contact Micah if you're interested; they will set up a schedule if people are willing to ring, but otherwise, the bell will go on summer hiatus.

Sara Liberty-Laylin got a quote to install an irrigation system for \$2,500; for all that the quote covers, it seems like an excellent deal, and she's very enthusiastic about it. The price sounds reasonable to Tom D., but it would be prudent to try to get another quote, given the level of expense. The Garden Ministry needs to know by June 12 if we'll take the bid Sara got. Most of the money would have to come out of the maintenance budget. Tom D. would like a confidence vote to look into this improvement. Mike moves that we go forward with seeking another quote, since the church's volunteers put so much time, effort and capital into the plants; Rachel seconds Mike's motion. It's unanimously accepted.

The Columbarium niches have been delivered, and they will be installed tomorrow, if things go well. Dave Williams has shared some lighting ideas for the Columbarium, and Tom D. is looking into some handrail options as well. He thinks it would be best to install one at first to see how well that covers our needs, since the Columbarium stairs have such low risers. The rail would cost about \$100, although there would be installation costs as well.

There has been some water in the chapel; this only happens with heavy rain. Dave the sexton is going to work with Tom D. to install some extra (discreet) drain piping to try to prevent this from happening. We used to have a Property Committee, and Tom D. would like to start that up again, first by inviting some experienced people in the church to join. Rachel expresses appreciation for all Tom D. does to address the needs of the church campus.

Megan closed the meeting with a prayer.

Next meeting: June 17 at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom.