

Grace Episcopal Church
Amherst, Massachusetts
Vestry Meeting Minutes
June 17, 2025

A meeting of the Vestry was convened by the Rev. Tom Synan on June 17, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Libby Maxey (recording), Cara Crandall, Mike Gralenski, Rachel Blain, Patrick Kelly, Nate Marino, Tom Dougherty, Katie Schendel, Donna Devine, Sarah Chadwick, Kathy Glime, Megan McDermott, Carolyn Collette, and Peter Sikowitz; Guests: Sandy Muspratt and Kent Faerber

Absent: Joe Hazlip, Tim Hampson

Carolyn Collette opened the meeting with a meditation on Richard de Bury, very much a part of the English court in the mid-14th century, whose writings relate to the first reading we heard on Sunday, with Wisdom speaking to her foundational presence in creation. In de Bury's writings, learning and faith go hand in hand, as they still should.

Audit Report: Kent Faerber and Sandy Muspratt attended to speak about the completed audit. (See certificate of Completed Audit [here](#), and audit committee's summary cover letter to the diocese [here](#).) Sarah Boy was also part of the audit committee. Kent reports that the bookkeeping and financial practices enforced by Jaana are meticulous, and leave no doubt in their minds as to the accuracy of our church records. Her attention to detail and adherence to procedure are peerless. They have not recommended any changes in their audit certificate, which the Vestry is to send on to the diocese if approved (with a copy of the minutes noting the vote in favor of approval). This was challenging work for a small group of volunteers, since the diocese requires an audit as thorough as one a CPA would do. In the past, in fact, Grace has hired a CPA recommended by the diocese, and the committee would suggest that for future years, the diocese be asked to provide a list of professionals who might be hired to undertake the audit. The committee also suggests that Grace Church should be sure that its current level of insurance is adequate to its assets. Further, Grace might want to look into whether the diocese's management of our endowment is as we would like it to be. If Grace doesn't have an investment policy, we should consider forming a committee to create one.

Katie wonders what the next step would be, given these recommendations; how can concerns be communicated to the diocese? Kent thinks it would be entirely appropriate to note in our letter to the diocese that the burden of such an audit is too great to be sustained by parish volunteers—at least in the case of Grace Church, the finances of which are more complicated than the average small-town parish. Tom S. is happy to reach out to other parishes in the diocese to find out how others managed their audit.

Motion to accept and approve the Grace Church audit of the year 2024: Katie Schendel moves to accept, Mike Gralenski seconds. The motion passes without further discussion.

Clerk's Report: Tom D. moves to accept the May minutes without emendation. Katie Schendel seconds, and the motion passes without further discussion.

Rector's Report: Tom S. notes that we had three baptisms while he was away in May, as well as Valerie Gracechild's memorial. Pentecost brought the return of our banners, the gospel was read in seven languages, we recognized graduates, and renewed our baptismal vows. The parish picnic was wonderful, and the 4:00 p.m. choral evensong was sublime. Following the Trinity Sunday service, we welcomed climate action speaker Kevin Young of UMass. This coming Saturday, we have a full slate of volunteers lined up to feed hikers on the Appalachian Trail, and on July 1, Megan will be giving a poetry reading down at the Cathedral, including conversation about faith and poetry with Lucy Bergin. Dee Dee Niswonger's memorial takes place July 5 at 11:00, and July 20 will be Megan's last Sunday with us. Sheila Mammen and Kitty Dougherty are overseeing the organization of a celebration to take place after the 9:30 service. Please reach out to them if you'd like to help!

We will be looking for people to take on pieces of Megan's ministry starting in September—two people, part-time, for an interim year, one to organize presentations with the children in lieu of traditional Sunday school (e.g., the Christmas pageant, Pentecost skit, children's choir, etc.) and one to keep a youth group going and pay some attention to campus ministry. Megan notes that the multi-age aspect of children's performances is particularly valuable. Meanwhile, we'll be looking to our retired clergy to join a preaching rota and to help out with pastoral visits and other parish duties along the way.

Finance Report: Tom D. notes that Tim was unable to attend this meeting, and we don't yet have financials from Rich, so we'll approve two reports next month.

Senior Warden's Report: Kathy reminds us that the meeting Tuesday, July 15 will be a potluck. She will send out a signup sheet about a week in advance, to make sure there's some diversity in what we contribute to the meal. We'll gather at 5:30 p.m., and hold our meeting after eating, around 7:00.

Kathy notes that it's important to fundraise, since that's a part of our operating budget; if the bazaar brings in roughly \$10,000, other fundraising should bring in about \$14,000, according to our budget. Even in a year when we're not particularly concerned about meeting financial goals, these events can have community value for the parish, too. An event that only a small group attends is worth doing to bring people together. A group of about a dozen met recently to

brainstorm fundraising ideas, and they decided on four to pursue this year. Donna explains them as follows:

- 1) Mushroom foraging: On September 20, Mike is willing to offer this event again. Last year, 20 people participated for a \$35 donation; if we open the event to 30 people, we could make about \$1,000 this year.
- 2) Candles (i.e., Grace Church swag): If we order the minimum lot of 300 Grace Church votives, we'd purchase for \$6-8 each (that money would have to be spent up front) and sell for \$20, and could make close to \$3,000 in profit. In response to Kathy's question, Tom S. confirms that the Vestry would vote to approve that expense. Tom D. encourages pricing along the lines of buy three, get a discount, to make sure we move the stock.
- 3) Concert: At the beginning of November (November 2 or 9?), we would hold another concert as we did two years ago (then, as part of the harvest festival); it might be a fundraiser for a specific cause (choir expenses or organ maintenance needs, for example).
- 4) Train set tour: There are several people in the congregation who have extensive train sets, and people could visit those homes, much as one would go on a garden tour.

Sarah suggests a Grace Church calendar, with photos by Doug and Nancy, pre-marked with liturgical calendar dates. There's enthusiasm for that idea. Tom S. wants to be sure that Noah is looped into the conversation about the concert. Donna will make sure that those working on concert planning communicate with him.

Junior Warden's Report: Starting this Saturday, over several weekends, a landscaper will install the garth irrigation system. On the indoor front, the sexton would like to work on cleaning the floor in between the pews this summer. We have two floor scrubbers, a large one he uses up on the altar and in the choir area, and a smaller one that would allow him to sand between the pews. It doesn't have any pads at the moment, however, so we would have to spend about \$500 on those. Varnishing the floor would happen on Mondays, so the smell will have dissipated by the weekend.

An experimental railing will be installed soon in the Columbarium, to address the difficulty of navigating the steps. More will be installed as necessary. Some solar lights will go in as well, so that we can test their adequacy far in advance of the next Easter Vigil. We'll install regular LED lights if the solar lights aren't enough.

The St. Michael's picnic will probably be the last Sunday in September, 9/28.

Megan closed the meeting with a prayer.

Next meeting: July 15 at 5:30 p.m. in the Connector.