

Grace Episcopal Church
Amherst, Massachusetts
Vestry Meeting Minutes
July 15, 2025

A meeting of the Vestry was convened by the Rev. Tom Synan on July 15, 2025 at 6:20 p.m.

Present: Libby Maxey (recording), Tim Hampson, Mike Gralenski, Patrick Kelly, Katie Schendel, Donna Devine, Sarah Chadwick, Kathy Glime, Megan McDermott, and Peter Sikowitz

Absent: Joe Hazlip, Cara Crandall, Rachel Blain, Nate Marino, Tom Dougherty, Carolyn Collette

Patrick opened the meeting with a meditation on an experience that an old friend had in Ohio where political differences led to harassment. On the same trip, experiences of reunion and community, set against that grim anecdote, brought to mind Psalm 133 and “God’s participation in our harmonious union with others.”

Clerk’s Report: Mike moves to approval of June 2025 minutes; Tim seconds, and the motion passes unanimously.

Treasurer’s Report: This is a May/June report, since we didn’t have a report in May. Expenses have been a little bit higher, but pledges/revenues have been exceeding budget. The Organ Fund and the Brother Lawrence Guild Fund will need to be replenished by the fourth quarter, since they’re either exhausted already or running low.

Sarah moves to approve the May report, and Peter seconds; the motion passes unanimously. Patrick moves to approve the June report, and Donna seconds; the motion passes unanimously.

Rector’s Report: Ray and Eve Webster’s six-year-old grandson was baptized here since our last meeting, on a Friday. There were also two memorials, one in Williamstown for Susan Haff, and also Deedee Niswonger’s memorial at Grace. The Appalachian Trail hospitality group—Megan, John Stiffler, and Matt Looney, who is relatively new to church—happened to have an unusually slow day on the trail; they welcomed only two hikers the whole day. Megan notes that these trail service dates are given out in the spring, so she’ll make sure Grace has the information to continue this tradition after she leaves. Megan’s poetry reading at the Cathedral had a fine Grace Church turnout; Lucy Bergan moderated a conversation with her about poetry and ministry. Tom’s summer Bible study has been moved to Thursdays at 10:00 a.m.; it will take place on that schedule until Labor Day. Tom and Kathy attended a Creation Care meeting in the past week; the group is planning presentations two Sundays in September, and we’ll adapt some of the church prayers during that month, as we usually do. Creation Care representatives will plan to attend the September Vestry meeting. Next Tuesday, Odyssey Book Shop hosts Rob Hirschfeld’s wife Polly, launching her new book.

This coming Sunday is Megan’s last; we’ll celebrate with a brunch. Plans for an interim year are slowly taking shape. Tom S. and the Wardens have spoken with someone who is enthusiastic about overseeing three youth programs per semester—the pageant being the main one in the fall,

and something for Pentecost in the spring. We hope to have more children's choir activity, too. Kathy notes that we'll need to be sure the Communications Committee helps us promote our new children's programming. Several people are willing to help with youth group, but they don't want to run it. The nursery program requires somebody to work with Tom S. to advertise on the UMass/Amherst College/Hampshire College job boards; then, the coordinator would interview candidates, have them do a Corey check, make sure Tom is looped in on the scheduling and any cancellations. The work would be focused at the beginning of each semester, but it's also ongoing. Megan has two returning nursery workers signed up for the fall, and a third as well. We may need one or two more. As for acolytes, five will be serving for Megan's last Sunday; we may see if Henry can help with recruiting and organizing participation in the coming year, facilitated through the 9:00 youth choir gatherings.

Tom met with Suzannah Fabing in the last month, and she expressed her concern that local immigrants may be targeted in a deportation sweep, resulting in the separation of children from parents. She wondered if the church would be willing to get involved in helping to support such children with a circle of care, assuming that family friends might take them in to keep them out of foster care. Vestry members are concerned about promising something that we might not be able to deliver, which seems like a danger when we know so little about what this scenario would look like if it transpired. Tom suggests that perhaps representatives from the group Suzannah is working with could come and speak to the Vestry, to provide more information. Megan notes that St. Andrew's in Longmeadow has, at least in the past, collected materials (luggage, clothes, etc.) to support children in foster care; they might be a resource.

Senior Warden's Report: Kathy reports that a parishioner has offered us a piece of artwork. Suzannah Fabing has a history with art and museums, and Kathy has other volunteers to join Suzannah as a standing committee, to come up with a set of policies and procedures to help us consider non-monetary donations. We want to make sure that we know what we need to know in order to decide whether we are in a position to accept a donation like a piece of artwork, and we want to have consistency in how we consider such offers. One serious question is whether we have an environment suitable for art.

On a similar note, Kathy has heard from "two handfuls" of parishioners who are concerned about the need for air conditioning in the church. If we want to pursue AC, the church may need a capital campaign, since our anonymous donor's funds are set aside for renovating the undercroft.

Cara's term on the Vestry ends in January, and she is concerned about making sure that her work with newcomers continues. In the fall, she'll want to share with us what she has been doing, what works, and what we should continue. Kathy and Cara have agreed that we should host a newcomers luncheon in September. Katie and Kathy will talk more about that event, but it would be helpful if other Vestry members attended as "minglers." Tom notes that that event is currently scheduled for the Saturday before St. Michael's Sunday, with the accompanying picnic, but the lunch is not expected to be particularly formal/complicated. [N.B. As of September, the luncheon plan has been set aside in favor of encouraging newcomers to attend the St. Michael's picnic on September 28.]

Junior Warden's Report: Tom Dougherty is away, but Kathy shares his notes:

Energy Efficiency Update

After more than a year of planning and coordination, the church was finally able to take advantage of an energy efficiency program from Eversource, implemented by AGI (Advanced Green Insulation). This initiative provided **10 inches of additional attic insulation** in the rectory roof **at no cost to the church**. The result? An estimated **annual savings of \$465** on our heating bills—great stewardship of our resources!



Columbarium Safety Improvements

The **Columbarium Committee**—Sarah Chadwick, Helen Drake, Mike Gralenski, Dave Goodhind, and I—has been working to make the Columbarium safer and more accessible. After an incident earlier this year involving a fall, we took steps to improve safety. A new **handrail** **was installed at the first set of steps**, blending seamlessly into the garden design while enhancing safety. Additional railings are planned for installation throughout the summer.



Garth Garden Irrigation

Thanks to the dedication of **Sara Liberty-Laylin** and the **Garden Committee**, a new **irrigation**

system has been installed in the Garth, helping ensure the beauty and health of this cherished garden space during the hot summer months.



The Vestry hopes John Robinson will join us in September for an update on the vision of/progress on the undercroft renovation, funded by an anonymous donor.

Tim thinks it makes sense to dedicate money to a feasibility study for air conditioning. In response to Katie's question, Kathy notes that Tom D. has been gathering a committee of parishioners to help us make an informed decision about how to go forward. Tom S. notes that it changes people's relationship to the place when it becomes uncomfortably hot in the summer; we actively advise people against getting married in the church in the summer, for instance. Both Tom and Megan have felt sick after Sunday services and weddings because of the July heat.

Motion to authorize Tom D. to invest in a feasibility study: Katie moves, Tim seconds, and the motion passes unanimously. The next Grace Notes will have a front-page notice to inform the congregation, with promises of updates as we have them.

Other Business: Mike would like to get a nice photo of Grace Church and a saying that could go on a Grace Church votive. Sarah notes that Terrie has our library of photos, taken for communications; Doug Moore and Nancy Lowry will have good photos as well. Mike has managed to find a way to get the minimum candle order down from 300 to 100.