

Grace Episcopal Church
Amherst, Massachusetts
Vestry Meeting Minutes
September 16, 2025

A meeting of the Vestry was convened by the Rev. Tom Synan on September 16, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Libby Maxey (recording), Tom Dougherty, Rebecca Grant, Joe Hazlip, Tim Hampson, Mike Gralenski, Sarah Chadwick, Kathy Glime, Peter Sikowitz, Rachel Blain, Carolyn Collette, Donna Devine, and Edith and Donny Allison

Absent: Patrick Kelly, Katie Schendel, Cara Crandall, Nate Marino

Michael opened the meeting with a beautiful prayer for our work here tonight, our work as a church, and the state of our divided and hurting world.

Creation Care Report: Edith and Donny Allison have joined us to talk about Creation Care work at Grace. They have a strong group, and aim to be educational and supportive. They want to have an impact, but also to share hope and real joy. This is the fourth year that Climate Action at Grace has been ringing the bells on the eleventh day of every month, for eleven minutes at 11:00 a.m., to bring attention to the planet's eleventh-hour situation. The committee meets once a month and they begin and end with special prayers. Seasonally, they'll contact our legislators, and every six months or so, they fine tune their efforts.

Currently, they're thinking about how to coordinate with other parishes along the Connecticut River. Two weekends ago, there was an all-day retreat in Greenfield with the Rev. Jimmy Pickett that Grace co-hosted with the Church of Saints James and Andrew. Twenty people attended, and half of those came to the climate presentation the next day at Grace. This weekend, the program will be Marianne Connor's "Conversation about Aging from a Regenerative Perspective." The group is looking forward to the upcoming commissioning on October 5. They've gathered some ideas at Sts. James and Andrew that would be easy to implement, and they want to share these with Tom and the Sexton. They also want to help the Vestry to implement changes toward sustainability. This is a global issue, and potentially overwhelming; it's not about short-term benefits, but about easing suffering in the long term.

Edith wonders if somebody could be the Vestry liaison to Creation Care. She reiterates the joy of the work and the connection to wider issues of justice, even though it can also arouse feelings of despair. Tom S. notes that our energy audit was undertaken largely thanks to Creation Care. Tom D. adds that Edith was the one who connected him with the company that saw through our audit after another company failed to follow through. Tom S. thinks a liaison would have to be somebody who's able to attend Creation Care meetings with at least some regularity. Tom D. has many irons in the fire, but notes that he's already playing that role, at least in part, because of the work he does to implement changes on our campus. Tom D. will reach out to Edith to follow up.

Clerk's Report: Tom D. moves to approve the July 2025 minutes; Mike seconds, and the motion passes unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: Tim thinks that it's safe to say we'll have a surplus at the end of the year. We'll need to make some decisions about what to do with it. Rich's spreadsheet indicates that we're well ahead on revenue with Megan's departure, and expenses are all on track, so he expects things to continue along similar lines. Rachel mentions "deferred maintenance," and Tom D. volunteers that he has a list of things that could and should be done for the church (see Junior Warden's report below).

Tom D. moves to accept both July and August financial reports, and Rachel seconds. The motion passes unanimously.

Rector's Report: It sounds like Megan's first semester in Virginia is going well so far. Meanwhile, our interim period necessitates spreading around the associate priest's duties. Arianne Abela, Noah's wife, who teaches at Amherst College, is now running a children's choir in lieu of Sunday school. They are scheduled to make their first appearance, with the adult choir, on October 5. The Christmas Pageant will also be part of Arianne's duties, and Tom S. is hoping that the youth will put on a few presentations during the sermon time. Taylor McCain and Bella Lozier (one from Amherst College, the other from Smith) are assisting her. Down the road, we will want to discuss, what is Grace Church's mission for children and youth ministry? Far and wide, it seems that COVID has accelerated the unraveling of Sunday School as it was, so we need to figure out how to work with youth in the 21st century. Lucy Bergin is taking on youth group, with the help of some of our college students; the first meeting will probably be in October. Nancy Rose-Weeber, Mark Marshall and Helen Leung, and Raisin Horn have come together to brainstorm about how Grace Church can be intentional about the college and university students among us. Megan found it nearly impossible to get these students together, but Tom thinks it's a ministry of presence, about not allowing them to be invisible among us.

The nursery will now be coordinated by Heidi Erickson. She will see to hiring staff as necessary. This past Sunday, both scheduled attendants cancelled, which was a disappointment to parishioners who brought young children. The students did notify Heidi, but with very little notice. She tried to find last-minute replacements, but with no success. What can we do on the odd Sunday when nobody shows up to run the nursery? Can we organize a group that would cover in a pinch? Kathy notes that parishioners couldn't step in to cover if they weren't CORI checked. Rachel notes that our planning is for the nursery to be staffed, and in the nonoptimal situation where that planning falls through and there is no coverage, we should bow to exigent circumstances and close the nursery. Tom S. suggests that when we realize we're in this situation, we should alert the ushers so that they can spread the word to anybody bringing young children into the church. At least we have entertaining supplies for children in the back, and the connector is a useful retreat. Kathy would like to bring Heidi more fully into this conversation, since Megan also had problems with student workers not showing up. Getting to know the students and the system will likely mean learning who the most responsible workers are, but Kathy would like Heidi to decide what reasonable efforts we could make in looking for possible solutions to this problem.

Creation Care, as we heard, will have a second presentation this Sunday, and on Oct. 5, Climate Action at Grace, the Garden Committee, and the children and youth choir will all be commissioned. There will be a blessing of the gardens afterwards. Tom S. just found out that a concert is scheduled for that afternoon, so the blessing of the animals will take place across the street on the Common.

In other news, the new parish directory now exists in draft form. Terrie is hoping it will be ready for distribution at the picnic on St. Michael and All Angels Sunday. Tom S. is grateful to all the retired clergy who have joined the preaching rota in Megan's absence, and it's a pleasure to have a deacon at Grace, too. One of Rebecca Grant's primary tasks will be coordinating lay Eucharistic visits—a tough task that needs more attention than anybody realizes, and he has wanted to be able to put more into that program ever since he came to Grace. Rebecca notes that it can be intimidating if you've never done it before, so she wants to handle recruitment to this ministry, as well as training for it, with care.

Tom S. is enthusiastic about the church's new efforts to build community by simply socializing. We have the Advent suppers coming up in December, and he's hoping for four activities per month this fall. With the new welcome program, a request has been made that Vestry members should sign up for Sundays when they could serve as welcomers, so that the coordinating committee would know to expect Vestry participation on specific days. There's probably more of a need at 10:30 services than at 8:00. A number of Vestry members are willing to help, so Libby will put together a sign up sheet and send it around. The Feast of St. Michael and All Angels is coming up, which is always wonderful, and the Wednesday 12:10 service has resumed.

Terrie is checking in with the Diocese to find out about the status of Ascentria, since Kevyn can't get in touch with them anymore; our clothing drive for them is on pause. We reached our Haiti uniform fundraising goal this summer, however. There's an upcoming drive for the Survival Center, and we started to gather in cooking oil, canned tomatoes and canned beans for Not Bread Alone last Sunday, since they've been suffering some supply shortages. We'll do that until mid-October, at which time we'll shift gears for our Thanksgiving stuffing drive.

Tom D. wonders if Tom S. has heard from the Town when Boltwood Ave. will open again. Tom S. doesn't know, but he has asked Terrie to check in next door. The church is paying attention to that situation.

Senior Warden's Report: Kathy invites Donna to share her updates on fundraising decisions. Donna reports that we're still planning to hold the Grace Church harvest concert on November 8, at 4:00 p.m. It's a great community event, and the proceeds will benefit the Organ Fund. Other fundraisers that had been planned will be set aside for now. Tom S. notes that it has probably been a decade since we fundraised for the Organ Fund, and the instrument needs constant tending. We emptied the fund with a \$5,000 repair just a few months ago. Kathy notes that we won't hit our mark on the fundraising line item in the budget (\$24,000, usually, with about \$10,000 coming from bazaar proceeds), but it has been decided that this isn't the right time for fundraising.

Kathy mentioned at the last meeting that she was gathering a standing committee to create policy

to guide consideration of and decision making around nonmonetary donations, such as pieces of art. Jane Wald, Sandy Lillydahl, and Suzannah Fabing have all agreed to participate. Kathy hopes their work will be useful for the future, and she has already learned a lot from the targeted experience of these three people with museums, artwork, icons, etc. Having a more objective policy will remove questions of subjective taste from the equation. And if we decide not to take a donation, this committee might be helpful to would-be donors in exploring other ways to share whatever they have offered.

Kathy notes that at the September 28 picnic, there will be some specific effort to extend our hospitality program—perhaps open seats at various tables specifically designated for newcomers.

Junior Warden's Report: Tom D. reports that we had two mics for our sound system, and Tom S. asked for a third. Tom D. procured one, which Rebecca can use; it has a longer mic. Tom D. mentioned to Tom S. a concern among ushers about the stairs up to the altar; some don't come up to the altar because the stairs feel too hazardous. Tom S. suggests that Tom D. talk to altar guild members about the possibility of installing a central handrail. There *are* side handrails, but it would be very awkward to use them; many people don't even know they're there, since they're often obscured by banners. We want to make sure that anybody going up to the altar has security—although of course we recognize that we'd want to make a decision that suited the aesthetics of the church. The new handrails in the Columbarium are perfect for the space and should be crucially helpful to people, and Tom S. is confident that something similar is out there that would suit the interior of the church.

With John Robinson and Chris Freitag, Tom D. has been working on a feasibility study for air conditioning. Just to do the study, according to the first quote, would cost \$11,000. We're waiting on a second quote, but don't expect it to be much lower. Tom D. has no idea what kind of sum we'll be looking at for installation work.

In the past, we've had four different companies coming in to take care of fire extinguishers, sprinklers, alarms, etc. in the church, but now Fire Equipment handles it all. They've been in the church the past few days, and the work they did totalled around \$8,000, although we saved close to a thousand dollars by asking them to bundle all of the work over two days. (We have an extensive sprinkler system, which has to be hydrostatically tested periodically.) We had to cut down a boxwood by the Parke House to keep safety equipment clear. Fire Equipment updated the fire panel in the Parke House, and we have a quote for \$7,000 to change out the fire panel and sensors in the rectory as well.