

Grace Episcopal Church  
Amherst, Massachusetts  
Vestry Meeting Minutes  
November 18, 2025

A meeting of the Vestry was convened by the Rev. Tom Synan on November 18, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Libby Maxey (recording), Rebecca Grant, Tom Dougherty, Joe Hazlip, Sarah Chadwick, Kathy Glime, Peter Sikowitz, Patrick Kelly, Carolyn Collette, Donna Devine, and Katie Schendel

Absent: Rachel Blain, Tim Hampson, Cara Crandall, Mike Gralenski, and Nate Marino

Donna Devine opened the meeting with a meditation on the recent Diocesan Convention, and the election of our new bishop, Miguelina Howell, who will be the tenth bishop in Western Mass. Donna shared the prayer said for the new bishop after her election, available [at this link](#) (prayer at 2.32.21).

Clerk's Report: Tom D. moves to accept the October minutes, Katie seconds; the minutes are unanimously approved.

Communications Committee Report: Since Libby had sent around the document of suggestions from the Communications Committee's meeting with Vicki Ix about our church's digital footprint, Sarah summarizes Vicki's suggestions. (See appendix below for list of suggestions.) Vicki thought it was very important for the Vestry to get regular monthly reports from the Communications Committee, in case any concerns arise. Patrick notes that some of Vicki's recommendations aren't suggestions, but things we have to do to be in compliance with diocesan policy. In particular, we need to be more cautious with church members' information in the directory. Tom S. says it's now available only on request. Additionally, it's essentially important to inform the congregation that they're being filmed in the livestream. Sarah and Patrick drafted the following statement to put in the bulletin, in the seasonal booklet in the pews, and perhaps elsewhere, too:

**Today's Service is Being Recorded**

Please be aware that today's worship service is being live-streamed and recorded for our online community, social media pages, and newsletter. By entering our sanctuary, you grant your consent to be photographed, filmed, and/or otherwise recorded. We are mindful of your privacy. If you would prefer not to appear on camera or be photographed, please speak with an usher who can direct you to a seating area that is out of view of the main cameras.

Tom D. clarifies that the camera shots cover the altar, lectern, choir area, baptismal font, and midway down the center aisle, so those in the back or not sitting directly on the center aisle shouldn't appear on camera. If we wanted to recommend a quadrant where people wouldn't be filmed, the corner nearest the connector door would be best—although Tom D. will consult with

Charlie Tebbitts to be sure there's agreement on that. Katie thinks it would be ideal to include that information in the bulletin. The usher coordinators (Doug Moore, Brenda Aldrich) should also be informed.

Sarah and Patrick have also drafted an official waiver, based on the digital communications/social media document that Vicki shared, to give to the parents of children whose images might appear in our media. Copies might also be made available at the back of the church. The Pageant isn't live streamed, but it will be important to make sure any parents whose children join at the last minute sign the photo release form.

We have QR codes for the website, for the Facebook page, and for the YouTube channel, so all of these could be included in the pew booklets for easy access, since printing the church website address in the bulletin isn't particularly useful. Tom says we can start this with Epiphany, but for now, we can print inserts that people can carry away with them. Notices about the bazaar are now in the Amherst Area Parents FB group, a Hadley/Sunderland community forum, some local thrift pages, etc. Noah has been consulted about using copyrighted anthems during the service, and whether our YouTube license allows us to include these in our live streaming. Noah has been very busy, but Tom will be sure to follow up with him on this.

Sarah and Katie have both had recent experiences where new people in church are struggling to move between the seasonal pew booklet and the Sunday bulletin/insert. Tom wonders if we could put a QR code in the pews that would connect people through their phones to the full program that those watching the service online can see. Carolyn wonders if we could make the message more prominent that the ushers and greeters are available to help people who need help to participate successfully in the service. Tom suggests that that could be made clear to those clicking through the QR code. Katie would be happy to join a committee that would focus on removing barriers to access, to help more people be a part of Grace. Tom suggests and Katie agrees that she should work with the Communications Committee to identify some short-term goals.

Terrie already has the QR codes, since they're in the newcomers booklet, so we can start incorporating those into the pew literature. Tom D. suggests that we revisit Vicki's suggestions monthly, for at least the next few months, to check in on what has been addressed.

Treasurer's Report: Tom S. reports in Tim's absence. Overall expenses were over budget in October, given large sums for building maintenance and office supplies (i.e., the new directory), although we remain ahead, in line with our budget forecast. We should end the year with the expected surplus, in consequence of Megan's departure. Carolyn moves to accept the report, Katie seconds; the motion passes.

Rector's Report: We had a wonderful All Saints Sunday, with a baptism, and the blessing of the Paschal candle given in honor of Janet Teng's 90th birthday. The next day we had an All Souls service, as well as Arline Wright's memorial. The next weekend, we raised about \$1,800 for the

organ fund, with nearly 100 people in attendance at the Harvest Concert. We also had our Haiti partners in attendance from St. James Indian Head. We rang our bell for the Veterans Day gathering on the Common, and Tom gave the invocation. The Diocesan Convention resulted in the election of Miguelina Howell, currently dean of the cathedral in Hartford. She's licensed as a clinical psychologist, and having come from the Dominican Republic, she did her divinity training there. She will be ordained a bishop on April 25. We last had a bishop visit for confirmation in 2024, so although we're due in 2026, it's not clear how that would work out with the bishop transition. Tom is thinking of writing to Miguelina to see if we could jump the line and get an early appointment with her in the spring.

This past weekend, Carol Dick gave a presentation after the 10:30 service about ways to have a sustainable holiday season. Tom notes that in the past month, Grace has been called on to help address unusual needs locally, through Not Bread Alone and the Survival Center, and more recently, in response to the apartment fire that displaced so many UMass students. It's a lot, but this congregation has risen to the occasion. Tomorrow, Annie Cheatham will present at 2:00 in the connector on a book she has published. This coming weekend, we'll have our Feast of Grace potluck after the 10:30 service; it would be great to see Vestry members there. Dave the Sexton and Tom D. will set up the Parish Hall, and BLG will help with setup, serving and clean-up (although more help with clean-up would be appreciated). There will be a 10:00 a.m.

Thanksgiving at Grace, but not the interfaith service that often takes place on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. The situation in the Middle East has strained interfaith relations in the area, but the hope is to hold a 4:00 p.m. interfaith gathering of hope, healing and justice on the Common on January 5. A notice has gone out about Advent Suppers—this time, including two Saturday brunches at 11:00 a.m. for those who don't want to go out at night. The Saint Nicholas bazaar is coming soon, and on December 14, we'll have an Advent Lessons and Carols in honor of Bishop Doug, and his 13 years of leadership, guidance and inspiration. He and Betsy will attend, and a reception will follow.

What we're calling the "nursery" needs looking into, since that's really not what it is; it's childcare, and with the children's choir, we're averaging 8 or 9 kids in there with two UMass students supervising. Tom was informed while he was away that there was a Sunday when only one person was there to supervise, which isn't okay. It happened again this past Sunday, and Nancy Lowry went in to be the second person. Tom S. would like a task force to consider what we're offering. Should there be an age cut-off? Are we using an appropriate space? Tom S. would like to include Noah and Ariane and those grandparents whose grandchildren are currently regulars, but he'd also like some Vestry members to be involved in the conversation. For now, we may need to tell people that the nursery will be closed for much of December and January, with so many students away. Heidi Erickson has a list of new people to interview, however, and we'll see if any of them will be around over the break. Tom D. and Sarah are both willing to be a part of the conversation, as is Kathy. Heidi Erickson would obviously be included as well, and Nancy Lowry should be, too, given all the work she has done with kids in the church over the years. Tom S. clarifies that our nursery workers are there for three hours, since they come in for the period between services.

Senior Warden's Report: Kathy agrees that the safety of the children in the church has to be of the utmost importance. We need administrative structures around when kids are dropped off, how to get ahold of the parents, what allergies people should be aware of, etc.

The art donation documents are now in Terrie's hands, in both digital and paper form. We'll plan for an in-person meeting January 20, at 5:00 p.m. We can decide as a group whether we'd like to do a potluck again, or just order some pizzas and bring in some drinks. The vote is heavily in favor of pizza. Tom D. offers a ride to anybody who needs one. We need nominations for new Vestry members, to replace Donna Devine, Cara Crandall, and Sarah Chadwick. The Annual Meeting is Sunday, February 1. Tom S. asks if Donna and Sarah would be willing to speak at a Sunday service about their time on the Vestry, with a word of encouragement for people to prayerfully consider joining/submitting names. Every year, the deliberation is different, since the Vestry members who are stepping down are the ones who discern what the new Vestry members should contribute. We usually host a gathering for people to hear more about the Vestry. We could put nomination forms in the bulletin as soon as possible—this Sunday, in fact. Donna and Sarah are welcome to remain on their current committees (Fundraising, Communications), even though they're leaving the Vestry. But Kathy notes that they might want to look for new members who could also contribute to those committees. Tom S. notes that Vestry members should share with Donna and Sarah any thoughts about what abilities might benefit the Vestry. We'd want to have a slate ready by our January 20 meeting.

Junior Warden's Report: Tom D. has been looking into a railing to go up the center of the steps to the altar. He knows that not everyone is happy about the aesthetic ramifications, but safety is paramount. Tom D. notes that the riser height differs from step to step. The 5.5-6" rise is not a normal step height, which is part of why people feel unsteady going up and down. The cost for a brass railing to cover 4 steps would be \$1,300, plus about \$400 for shipping. Katie notes that she herself finds the steps difficult to navigate, and when she used to coordinate ushers, she was aware of people who wanted to usher, but bowed out specifically because of the stairs. Sarah agrees that the stairs are a source of anxiety. Katie notes that the railing wouldn't help people carrying plates up the stairs with both hands, although the stairs are perhaps most dangerous for people on their way down, which is when the railing would be useful. Tom D. notes that people could lean on the railing, even with their hands full. The railing is also removable, in case that's necessary for concerts or similar events. Tom D. needs Vestry approval to go ahead with the purchase; Dave the Sexton could install it. Tom S. would like a bit more direct input from the ushers first, to make sure that what we're considering seems like it would be helpful. Tom D. will check in with Doug Moore and Brenda Aldrich about polling the ushers. Katie would be more than happy to gather people at the front of the church after a service and talk through how the railing would work.

The most expensive AC feasibility study quote is the one that's recommended by John Robinson and Chris Freitag—Salas O'Brien, for \$12,500. It would include a draft report before the final report and take six weeks. The money could come out of building maintenance. If we did it now, we wouldn't have anything to consider as a Vestry until February. At that point, we'd get quotes from contractors. Kathy wonders why Chris and John chose this company. John has dealt with them while working for Smith and UMass, and they might be able to give us a quote for initial installation, depending on what options the feasibility study gives us. M. J. Moran might be good

for installation (they installed our heating system, in fact), but there was a concern that we wouldn't get a comprehensive set of options from their feasibility study. Katie moves to approve the expense for a feasibility study with Salas O'Brien, and Peter seconds the motion, which passes.

Tom D. went to another Climate Action meeting a couple weekends ago, where he learned that Edith is going to be gone to NYC to help with a new grandchild for a month or so. If nobody takes over for her, the group may need to go on hiatus.

Rebecca closed the meeting with a prayer.

Appendix: Recommendations from the Communications Committee's meeting with Vicki Ix

1. For Sunday streaming: It would be helpful if there was a host to welcome participants at the beginning of the service. Perhaps to read our policy on how all are welcome. This would assist in presenting friendliness and warmth to those online.
2. In addition to greeting online participants, may also want someone available to answer questions or at the very least share where we are located and church service times.
3. We discussed our concern about not informing the congregation that we are live streaming and that the photographs we take could be used in our social media pages, website, newsletter, etc. Vicki agreed that we should plan to inform the congregation as soon as possible, especially since we are recruiting newcomers. Most churches put a notice in the bulletin – and in our case also the reusable service bulletin that stays in the pews since there are times when we do not have enough bulletins.
4. Social Media and Children. We have not as a rule photographed children or if we did, Megan would get permission from the parents to post or publish them. If we post children under 18, we should not use their names or in any way identify them.
5. In order to live-stream the youth choir, parents should fill out a release form that should be given to the Parish Administrator. Additionally, these forms should be available in the back of the church if needed. A draft has been prepared for review and is based on a sample in the "Digital Communication & Social Media: Good Use Guidelines for Clergy & Congregations" as prepared by the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts and sent to us by Vicki.
6. Take the website addresses off the pew bulletin. In its place put the QR codes for our website and social media pages. Also put the QR codes on the back of the regular bulletin. These are easier to access.
7. On the blue cards, add section asking how folks heard of us. In that section list social media options to help us track efforts.

8. Since the communications committee is representing the church and regularly putting out public flyers, notices in published event listings, email, social media posts, etc. they should regularly report to the church governing body. The governing body should have an awareness of church communications and what is being disseminated. Vicki suggested that a brief monthly update should be provided to the vestry.
9. Make sure that we are all set with our streaming licenses. The religious service exemption under U.S. copyright law permits the performance of copyrighted music and literary works during a religious service but does not permit recording or streaming that performance.
10. Finally, due to privacy and security, never have the church directory out on tables or available where non-members can pick them up. These have been used by scammers.