

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

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

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

Absent: Cara Crandall and Mike Gralenski

Katie opened the meeting with a meditation on the emotional burden of this season, especially given current events in the news and the exhaustion we often feel during preparations for Christmas. She finds comfort in the Biblical line, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” These words remind her that “it isn’t about doing more and finding the answer, but about remembering who we’re called to be when things become complicated.” She calls us to remember that showing up is enough, and that we aren’t alone.

Clerk’s Report: Tom D. had a correction to the figure for the AC feasibility study estimate; that has been made, so he moves to accept the November minutes as revised. Katie seconds the motion, which passes. Peter volunteers to give the meditation at the January meeting. Tom S. notes that if clergy needed to request a change to the housing allowance, this would be the time for a motion, but Tom S. says his housing allowance can remain at its current level.

Treasurer’s Report: Tim observes that we’re \$12,000 ahead of budget at this stage, which is actually not quite as much as expected, so there are some line items he’d like to examine more closely. He needs to work with the Diocese to get some figures so that he can work on the 2026 budget, to be approved at the annual meeting. Tom D. motions to accept the treasurer’s report; Katie seconds the motion, which passes.

Rector’s Report: The St. Nicholas Bazaar brought in over \$16,000 at the beginning of the month—a surprise for some, since antiques and collectibles didn’t have as much inventory as usual. Kudos to Joan O’Brien and her trusty helpers for making this event happen. Tom S. will check in with Joan to find out if there are people who might be prepared to take over organizational duties from her when she’s ready to step down as coordinator. This past Sunday, there was tree trimming after both services during coffee hour, and in the afternoon, Advent Lessons and Carols in celebration of Bishop Doug, which couldn’t have come together better than it did. Tom S. explains that he took aside Doug’s wife Betsy at the fall clergy day at the beginning of October to get her help in inviting people from Doug’s life to do the readings. Following the election of the new bishop, Tom S. immediately reached out to Miguelina Howell to invite her to read the final lesson, and he was overjoyed when she agreed to do it. The list of readers was left out of the programs that Doug and Betsy received, so they were a genuine surprise

to Bishop Doug. The music was fantastic, and the reception matched the glory of the service. We definitely gave our incoming bishop a sense of Grace Church. Katie wonders if an outgoing bishop still retains the title of bishop; the answer is yes.

Advent suppers (and brunches) are ongoing; two have taken place, and there are three this week. This Saturday, Pastoral Care will be putting together packages of holiday treats for the homebound. Those will be distributed Sunday. The now-traditional *Messiah* sing will take place on Sunday, Dec. 21 at 5:00 p.m. and, as usual, it will be a benefit for the Gazette's toy fund. We'll have services at 4:00, 8:00, and 11:00 p.m. on Christmas eve, with musical preludes for the 8:00 and 11:00; Hanif Lawrence will be the soloist for the 10:45 p.m. prelude. The Sunday after Christmas, December 28, there will be Lessons and Carols at a combined 9:30 a.m. service. There are two Sundays in the twelve days of Christmas this year, so there will be Epiphany Lessons and Carols, too.

This past Sunday, between the two services, Tom S. wrote to Rabbi Ben at the JCA, and asked if there was anything we could do, given recent horrific events. The latter appreciated the outreach, but didn't have anything to suggest. Yesterday, Tom S. saw the menorah on the Common, and had Terrie contact the Town Hall to see who's responsible for it. Chabad House at UMass supervises it, so Tom S. contacted that community and asked if we could join in the lighting on one of the nights of Hanukkah; the invitation in response was, "Come tonight!" An email went out, and Grace Church doubled the attendance at that evening's lighting; everybody enjoyed latkes, jelly doughnuts, hot cider, etc. The Jewish community was very appreciative that Grace Church was thinking of them, and had turned out to be with them.

Senior Warden's Report: There was a good meeting with a number of people invested in the question of nursery/child care at Grace Church—those bringing children, and those who have had experience with prior programs we've had. The nursery is on hiatus until the first weekend of February, while all the college student staffers are away, which will give us time to set up a new model for child care. We'll invite children up to four years of age to the nursery, which will be in the Parker Room. That space will no longer be used as the go-to meeting room, because it's best for keeping young children accessible to caregivers. Furniture will have to be moved out, and a changing table and toys will be moved in. Meanwhile, we need to consider the hourly rate we're paying nursery attendants, to make sure that we can retain staff, and we need to be sure of two adults in the room, and that everybody has Safe Church training. At 10:15, after junior choir, children five years and older would be invited to come to the sanctuary and process; then they would leave for something like a liturgical arts program. They would return to the sanctuary for the peace, and perhaps help to bring up the gifts, ring the bell, etc. We'll switch children's supplies over to the south side of the church. Parents/guardians would be expected to supervise their own children in church. The planning group will have to meet again to work on setup, and to further consider details, such as structures for drop-off, parent/guardian contact channels, etc. This is just a beginning, but we want to become more welcoming to children in a way that's doable.

Cara, Donna, and Sarah are leaving the Vestry, but we have a healthy list of nominees for new members—most of whom were unaware that they had been nominated. Joe and Nathan are also moving on (now that they've both completed their college applications!).

The Communications Committee has been busy, getting the livestream notification into the bulletin, as well as the QR codes. Sarah did talk to Doug Moore about what the ushers need to know, but she plans to make a sheet available in the back so that they can refer to that if they need to direct people who want to sit where they won't be filmed. Sarah and Patrick advertised quite a bit for the bazaar. They did hear some feedback at the bazaar that the event wasn't visible on the church website, so they followed up with Terrie and made sure that Lessons and Carols would show up as the first picture scrolling on the homepage. In future, we'd feature the bazaar that way as well. (If we wanted to add some kind of event banner, we have to pay our web designer to do that.) The Diocese shared our Lessons and Carols Facebook reel on their page, and the bishop elect "liked" it. It had more than one hundred views as of Monday.

Donna notes that she has been representing the Vestry at the convention, and Tom S. says that she could still be nominated to attend as our second rep in 2026, even once she has left the Vestry.

Kathy reminds us that on January 20 at 5:00 p.m., we'll have an in-person Vestry meeting at the church; Tom D. has volunteered to drive anybody who needs a ride. We'll provide pizza, and each person can bring their beverage of choice. We'll have 45-60 minutes of supper and fellowship, and start the meeting around 6:00. We'll have to pass the budget then, since the Annual Meeting is Sunday, February 1. The new Vestry will then come together for the February meeting.

Junior Warden's Report: Tom D. did sign off on the feasibility study. We'll hear more on that toward the end of February, re. adding AC to the sanctuary, connector and undercroft. Tom D. spearheads the BLG right now, so he'll be getting ready for the brunch at the annual meeting, after a combined 9:30 a.m. service. He thinks we probably served lunch to 80 people at the bazaar. Jeffrey DeSantis deserves credit for seasoning the chili.

Sarah notes that the Haiti soup supper will take place on February 7. Save the date!

Rebecca closes the meeting with a prayer.