

Grace Episcopal Church
Amherst, Massachusetts
Vestry Meeting Minutes
February 24, 2026

A meeting of the Vestry was convened by the Rev. Tom Synan on February 24, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom.

Present: Libby Maxey (recording), Rachel Blain, Michael Gralenski, Peter Sikowitz, Tim Hampson, Tom Dougherty, Patrick Kelly, Katie Schendel, Janet Durfee, Harold Norris, Henry Maxey, Gail Gnatek, Charlie Tebbetts, Sheila Mammen, Georgann Mirick

Absent: Carolyn Collette

Rachel opened the meeting with a meditation on Ash Wednesday, and her struggle to merge church life with weekday life. This year, taking Eaglebrook students for a quick imposition of ashes in Greenfield made her think in a new way about what she was doing. She was inspired by a student who talked about his experience of Ramadan and fasting as a child; it made her think about what's missing from her own practice. She has added the Litany of Penitence to her Lent, putting a copy by her bed to look at each night, to help her clear internal space—to “keep her closet clean.”

Altar Guild budget: Sheila, director of the Altar Guild, and Georgann, who manages the budgeting and accounts, attended the meeting to speak about a need for more Altar Guild funding. Sheila noted that 11,500 people attended services at Grace last year, and the Altar Guild had to prepare the church for all of them. Before COVID, the guild had a budget of \$2,200; because of COVID, it was reduced to \$1,200, then \$800 subsequently. The budget remained at \$800 the following year. The Altar Guild has a policy of submitting for reimbursement for any expense greater than \$25. This past year, their expenses totaled \$3,184.69 with an \$800 budget. Wafers and wine cost more now, so even the pre-COVID budget is insufficient. Meanwhile, necessary maintenance work and replacement of worn-out items have been put off for lack of funds, but these things have to be done eventually. Sheila requested that the Altar Guild's budget be increased to \$3,000 for 2026 (from \$800) and that a Vestry representative be in touch with the guild in the fall to check in about where the budget stands, and what might be needed for 2027. Georgann reported that last year, we spent \$266.05 on wafers, \$362.76 on wine, \$136.73 on linens and \$2,421.15 on miscellaneous needs—some of which were quite expensive. One such expense was new hymnals and prayer books; 25 hymnals purchased last year cost \$600. A new Gospel book cost \$180; a new lectionary cost \$150. The guild went through all the chasubles with Tom last year, some of which had mildewed. David the sexton helped clean out the vesting closet to get rid of mildew, but it cost \$250 to clean the linens. The guild also spent \$400 for purificators (small altar linens).

Tom D. said there should be money to amend the 2026 budget to address this shortfall, since Tom S. will be leaving midway through the year, and we've continued to include Megan's salary in the budget, but won't replace her until after we've found a new rector. Tim noted that the budget numbers have to be turned around so quickly to have them ready for the Annual Meeting,

things can slip through the cracks. The 2026 budget was modified in response to requests from various ministries, but indeed, not all needs came to the Finance Committee's attention in time. The Altar's Guild's concern has been discussed by the Finance Committee, but only after the budget was already drawn up. Rachel observed that this is not a matter of hardship, just a matter of making the budget more accurate to the needs of the parish. Mike wondered if a little more than \$3,000 would be necessary for a cushion, given the way prices are escalating. Sheila would just as soon stick to a total of \$3,000 (\$2,200 more than originally budgeted), and talk to Tim at the end of the year about the budget for 2027. Rachel added that since this is only Tim's second year as treasurer, this situation is, in part, the result of a hole in institutional memory; it would be helpful if we could keep centralized notes on key ministries, so that the finance committee could check them as part of the budgeting process.

Tom D. made a motion to increase the Altar Guild's budget by \$2,200 to a total of \$3,000 for 2026; Mike seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Tim suggested that to balance the budget, the easiest approach would be to consider this expense covered by the draw from investments. Tom S. will communicate the Vestry's decision to the Altar Guild.

Clerk's Report: Rachel moved that we accept the January 20, 2026 minutes as submitted to the Vestry. Katie seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Libby thanked the Vestry members who volunteered to contribute opening reflections in the coming year; Carolyn has offered to be the substitute if anyone has to miss the meeting for which they're scheduled. Libby is editing the 2026 Annual Meeting minutes so that they'll be ready for next year, but needs clarity on our convention delegates. Last year, we approved two plus an alternate at the Annual Meeting, but this year, we only approved Donna Devine. Tom S. explained that at the last diocesan convention a resolution was passed to change the rules of delegate selection. We used to be required to send a Vestry member and another congregant, but now, a Vestry delegate is optional; we could simply choose two members of the congregation. Donna wanted to continue as a delegate when she left the Vestry, so for this year, since the Annual Meeting is behind us, we should choose a member of the Vestry as our second delegate. We should also decide, however, how we want to handle delegate selection going forward. Tom S. clarified that we only had an alternate delegate last year because the convention was electing a bishop. At our next meeting, we should discuss this further; it would be helpful for Tom S. to know which Vestry members are interested in being a convention delegate; those who are might talk to Donna or Nancy Lowry to get a sense of what the role entails.

Treasurer's Report: Matt Looney is going to take over the work that Rich Spurgin has been doing to help with the monthly financials. Income across the board was up in January, with pledge income coming in, and expenses were not as bad as they might be, considering heating costs. Rachel moved that we accept the treasurer's report; Katie seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Rector's Report: Tom S. welcomed all the new Vestry members. The Annual Meeting on February 1 went very well; Tom D. reported that 212 place settings were used by 210 people, so it was a rather full house. The icon exhibit took place in the chapel on the same weekend. On February 8, the children's choir sang at the service, and this past Sunday, the children sang at the Arbors. We held Mardi Gras themed coffee hours on February 15. Richard Webster, retired but

currently associated with the Institute of Sacred Music at Yale, was our guest conductor that weekend, and the piece the choir sang was one that he had composed. Harold notes that he was last at Grace to sing with the choir for Ania Masinter's wedding, since he used to conduct her church choir at Trinity when she lived in Boston.

Tom S. noted that there are a lot of visitors to the church on Ash Wednesday, which always takes him by surprise, though it's an important opportunity to encourage people to come back and experience more of Grace Church during the season of Lent. It's a unique thing that the church provides, to allow people to take stock of where they are in life, confront a sense of mortality, etc. The Ash Wednesday service is beautiful, and it's an honor to preside over it, although without Megan here this year, the day was a long one for Tom S. The theme for this Lent at Grace is rather Benedictine, with an emphasis on *ora et labora*, the balance of prayer and work. We're offering parishioners opportunities for involvement in the various ministries at Grace, and also reading the Rule of Saint Benedict as part of Lenten practice.

With an eye toward current events, Tom S. will be attending a LUCE Zoom for clergy on March 3, "a faith organizing conversation," possibly with our deacon, Rebecca. On Saturday, March 7 at 2:00 p.m., LUCE will host a bystander training at Grace. Ascentria is interested in putting together a list of potential volunteers to whom they can reach out with future volunteer needs.

The new youth program has now begun: nursery care is offered in the Parker Room, Arianne Abela's youth choir rehearses before the service, and liturgical arts activities are offered during the service; phase two might be trying to get some of the participating children to become acolytes. Henry might be off at college by then, but we're hoping he can help to train the next generation of acolytes. There will be a description of the new youth program in the next Grace Notes, which will appear in the next week or two.

The Parochial Report is due at the beginning of March. It used to be due in April, but we now have a month less to prepare it. Terrie is out sick, so the process of preparing it is on hold. Tom D., Tim and Libby need to sign it by this Friday, if possible. Terrie and Tom S. will be in touch once it's ready. The Vestry has to approve the report as well, so we should look for the finalized report in an email (maybe by Thursday?), review it and respond so that it can be submitted.

Suzannah Fabing has advised Tom S. that Ken Samonds, who now lives in Virginia, is ready to publish a history of Grace Church, something of a companion to his book on the stained glass windows of Grace. Tom S. suggested inviting Suzannah to the March meeting to talk about the project so that we can discuss supporting the publication with funds.

Sophia Gergely passed away this weekend. She has been down in Connecticut this past year; Tom S. spoke to her partner, and it doesn't look like there will be a memorial service. Cara Crandall is in hospice; we should keep her in our prayers.

Senior Warden's Report: Tom D. now has recommendations from the air conditioning feasibility study. Chris Freitag and John Robinson will join him to review the four options with Jeff from Salas O'Brien next Thursday. They'll share their thoughts with the Vestry and then with the parish. Once we choose an option, we'll have to get contractors to bid so we can figure out how

much the project will cost.

The first week of the new children's ministry, nobody used the nursery, although staff were present; meanwhile, we were short an adult supervisor for liturgical arts, since somebody called out sick. We're still working to figure out how to make staffing work from week to week.

It has been brought to Tom D.'s attention that Dick Damon's camera, which helps him take cues at the organ, is on the fritz. Tom D. will consider replacement options and talk to Dick, especially about whether a wireless or wired model would be best. We still have clothes to donate in the fireplace room; Tom S., Tom D. and Dave the Sexton will work together to figure out what needs to be done to take care of the accumulation so that we can clear the space for meetings. On the stairway to the old Sunday school rooms in the Parke House there's a roof leak; the roof is slate, which makes leaks hard to detect, and we can't do anything about it until the snow on the roof melts. The elevator has been inspected, and our backup battery and a switch need to be replaced. Meanwhile, the elevator is in working order, and we can continue to use it.

Junior Warden's Report: Mike G. asked Tom D. about repairs to our fire alarm system. Tom D. confirms that we have two different issues with our system that need to be addressed, and he will follow up on those.

Mike shared that the Garden Committee would normally do a campus cleanup at the end of March, but there's so much snow, it may have to be delayed. The committee will keep the parish advised of its plans.

Tom S. closed the meeting with a prayer.