

*St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Vestry Meeting
Date: March 25, 2025*

Present (virtually by Zoom):

Rev. Dr. Nina Pooley, Rector
John Garinther, (Senior) Co-Warden
David Nevin, (Junior) Co-Warden
Dr. J. Christopher Perry, Treasurer
William O'Neill, Assistant Treasurer
Christopher Plankey, Clerk
Christine Furcinite Reynolds
Leah Luczynski
James Brennan
James Alden
Caleb Harmon
William Morey

Regrets: none

Meeting began at 7:06 p.m. by Zoom

I. Opening scripture and Prayer offered by Rev. Pooley

Scripture: Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom;
and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Wisdom by David Steindl-Rast

If you're grateful, you're not fearful,
and if you're not fearful, you're not violent.
If you're grateful, you act out of a sense of enough
and not of a sense of scarcity, and you are willing to share.
If you are grateful, you are enjoying the differences between people.
You are respectful to everybody.
And that changes this power pyramid under which we live.

Prayer: from Daily Prayers for All Seasons

God of hope, from you come every blessing and all peace:
Show us that, in the midst of our struggles, you are with us.
Give us the abundance of your grace that we may do the work you give us to do

and that we may be for the world a sign of your presence;
through Christ, the Way and the Truth. *Amen.*

II. **Clerk Report: Minutes from previous meeting**

Motion to approve by email on March 10, 2025 by James Alden.

Motion seconded by email on March 10, 2025 by John Garinther.

In Favor: all

Opposed: none

Minutes unanimously approved by email on March 10, 2025.

Abstained: Chris Plankey as a non-voting member

III. **Old Business**

a. Action Items from Previous Meeting:

1. Vestry members instructed to sign up for VPOD slots.
2. Vestry members instructed to update contact information.

The above items were completed or otherwise marked resolved.

IV. **New Business**

a. **Marietta Cawse: Stand-Out**

John Garinther led a discussion of an idea by Marietta Cawse for a public gathering by members of the church with signs displaying words and phrases meant to call out oppression. While the inference is that the timing of this action is brought on by our current political climate, we will not display political messages and are not supporting a specific cause. Rather, we would gather to demonstrate what we stand for as a community.

The vestry has approved, and Marietta will be free to pursue fleshing out and continuing to organize what she has in mind. Will this be an “official action” of St. Stephen’s? That is, will we display the name St. Stephen’s in any way? Where will it take place? On our front lawn? On Park Square? Will we need a permit?

b. **Sound System Update**

Roy Stillman has brought it to our attention that our sound system must sometimes be turned on and off multiple times before it starts working as it should. This, combined with our desire to improve our online worship experience has caused us to pursue general improvements to its overall reliability and performance, particularly when it comes to improving the sound of online worship. Ken Pooley has connected with a colleague, a

sound engineer, who has already come in and looked our system over. His initial reaction to our system is that we will likely keep nearly all of what we have and he foresees the need for a low anticipated investment in new gear. We have hired him, at a modest fee of \$500, to come in again and really go through our system. He sees some unused capability that should give us the unique outgoing mix we need to improve the audio signal routed to online service production. He also thinks some of the finicky aspects of our current system (like the lectern mic cutting in and out online, seemingly linked to extreme humidity in the summer) might be rectified by a thorough cleaning of the interiors of our audio cabinet and its components. This is something we've never done, but is considered routine maintenance for many types of audio gear.

c. **Proposal for Load Analysis for Installation of Ceiling Fans**

The property committee is ready to rent scaffolding in order to move this project forward. Committee members will climb the scaffolding to the lowest overhead cross beams in the sanctuary where we plan to have large fans installed. We will remove a portion of the wood (not visible from the floor) to reveal a portion of the interior steel structure within the wooden beams. Then, structural engineers from Hill Engineering of Dalton will come in and climb the scaffolding to observe what they need to see, representing the final step in their professional process of signing off on our project, allowing it to officially move forward. Hill estimates a fee for this of \$5500. This analysis is required before the manufacturer of the fans will sell us the fans. We anticipate scaffolding being in the sanctuary for one week.

MOTION: Nina put forth a motion to approve that we accept Hill's contract and the related \$5500 expenditure for the load analysis. Bill Morey seconded. In favor: all. Opposed: none.

Abstained: Chris Plankey as a non-voting member. The motion passed.

d. **Proposal for Boiler Digital Control System**

After many months of waiting, among the largest proposals making up the improvements to our heating system has come through. After our initial best guess dollar figure of \$12k, revised and raised to \$23k over time for the sake of accurately estimating the total expenditure to upgrade our heating system as it relates to the major fundraising effort underway for 2025, the actual proposal came in the morning of this meeting at \$24,625. The property committee will review the proposal and it will eventually be put forward for vestry approval.

e. **501c3 Update**

As we get this process going officially, we need to designate who the Board members are. Bill O'Neill gave us a rundown of what the process of lining up the official formation documents looks like, with input from Chris Perry. An important distinction was discussed: The 501c3 dictates how the fundraising arm operates, not how the Table itself will operate.

For the Board: Madeleine McKeon has agreed to be on the board, she is working on some organizing documents, and will help with grant writing. Josie Ellis has agreed to be on the board as well. Nina thinks Josie will be serving as our Treasurer as we get started. Nina will serve as our board president, and she's hoping Craig Reynolds will join in as our clerk (John Garinther is asking him if he'll consider this). So we're closer to being ready to file the initial paperwork.

The most important next step is what we'll name our 501c3. We had previously discussed the logic for choosing a name and the impact the wrong name can have on organizations who bar making donations to religious entities.

In order to keep the formal process of formation from stalling, Bill O'Neill suggests the vestry is as good a group as any to come up with a name for the 501c3 (for the sake of this discussion, called "the Fund"). Chris Perry agrees, but suggests we formalize the relationship of the vestry as an appointing body for the initial establishment of the 501c3. Then we have to ask ourselves if the vestry will have any additional role once the organization is ongoing, and if so, it should be built into the articles of incorporation. For instance, will the vestry seek additional board members or will the Fund seek additional members? That is, how does the Fund and the vestry connect with each other? Bill O'Neill agrees and explains these things are summarized in a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) where the vestry, as the representative of St. Stephen's, and the Fund sit down and decide what is the Fund's role at St. Stephen's Table? However, he doesn't think the lack of that understanding should hold us up from filing for the 501c3. Subject to the MOU, he feels that the Fund will never be very far away from the control of the vestry, again subject to the MOU, and that's something to be worked out in the future.

MOTION: Bill O'Neill made a motion to name the 501c3 "Park Square Meals". Caleb Harmon seconded. In Favor: all. Opposed: none.

Abstained: Chris Plankey as a non-voting member. The motion passed.

Chris Perry brought up the Petricca donation and wants to ensure the gift is used as it was intended. It was sent as a capital gift, not as an operating gift. This means maybe it should not be transferred into the Fund, as that might not be appropriate given the purpose the Petriccas intended. Perhaps the capital needed can be part of the current fundraising effort? Christine Reynolds questions what could be on the horizon as far as a cooperative effort between other churches to establish a community kitchen. This has been discussed in the past and it raises the question of what this might mean for this effort and our related investment. We agreed this is a good question, but is a pattern of discussion that has emerged repeatedly over the years without tangible results. Nina pointed out that so many of the downtown parishes are possibly in transition at this time, particularly when you look at the ages of the volunteers making these feeding programs operate. To Christine's question, it is safe to say there is nothing concrete being discussed as far as this goes at this time.

V. Committee Reports

a. **Treasurer's Report** (Chris Perry)

No questions were asked of the treasurer's report.

The report includes:

1. A review of terms of reference for the finance committee and its membership and the functions their meetings have.
2. A summary of the reports they generate for the quarterly newsletter. Chris Perry commented there are some spreadsheets coming together to easily show our income situation. He suggests quarter by quarter is better than month to month and gives reasons why.
3. An update on the process for the contract for purchasing gas. It is decided we will wait until summer to lock in a lower "shoulder season" contract rate.
4. Chris Perry has begun writing a preparation guide or procedure manual for financial reporting in the Parochial Report.
5. Do we need additional Finance Committee members?
6. A discussion about separating capital from operating budget.
7. A discussion about the audit process. Don Phipps and Al Symmonds have been appointed to the audit committee. He stresses a 3rd person is needed in order to submit our Auditor Appointment form to the Diocese by Monday, March 31st. A name will be put forth by email for

a vestry vote by then.

- b. **Property Committee** (John Garinther, Chris Plankey)
No questions were asked of the property report.

The report includes:

1. The status of our heating system upgrades. Chris Plankey took a moment to point out that the dollar amount for the newest proposal to come in related to the heating system was right within what we estimated for the portion of the 2025 fundraising campaign related to our heating system improvements.
2. A status report of our project to update the sanctuary sound system.
3. The plan for mowing the lawn now that our cleaning crew will no longer tak of it.
4. Information about our annual building inspection by the City of Pittsfield. As part of the items being corrected from last year's inspection, the committee recently trimmed the Allen Street doors so both doors operate freely.
5. A list of actions driven by the change of seasons. Most notable, the dehumidifier in the Acolyte room where our paper records are stored will be replaced with one that empties itself automatically.

- c. **Wardens' Report** (John Garinther, David Nevin)
No questions were asked about the wardens' report.

The report includes:

1. vestry housekeeping reminders, including upcoming Safe Church training
2. a summary of recent and upcoming events, including attendance and income information about the recent YPF Pasta Dinner Fundraiser
3. the draft application for the St. Stephen's Table 501(c)3 Team and names potential board members associated with it
4. an update on the stewardship team
5. general property information including an update on BIC ending their lease and a summary of major property expenses.

- e. **Rector's Report** (Nina+)
No questions were asked about the rector's report.

The report includes:

1. Nina's upcoming schedule and other liturgical events including the details of Holy Week.
2. Details about Good Friday and a request for vestry to decide if we'd like to offer the opportunity for people to come and pray the stations inside the church.

St. Stephen's typically has the most sizable showing of those in attendance at Good Friday's Stations of the Cross with Campus Churches which moves about downtown outdoors. After some discussion, it was decided to open our sanctuary on Good Friday for the stations of the cross. With our office now closed on Fridays, this is not as easy as it used to be.

3. Details about Easter Vigil and a request for two volunteers to act as Chalice Bearers at the portion "feast", in United Church's food pantry, where Nina will be the celebrant.
4. Craig Reynolds has applied to participate in the Diocesan Lay Leadership training to become both a Lay Preacher and Worship Leader.

MOTION: Nina put forth a motion to approve Craig's application. Chris Perry seconded. In Favor: all. Opposed: none. Abstained: Chris Plankey as a non-voting member. The motion passed.

5. An update on the outcome of the city council meeting dealing with panhandling in Pittsfield.
6. An ICE update. Our policy and signage is in place.
7. Nina shared information about a trip to see her dad the last week of May.

VI. Action Items from this Meeting:

- a. John Garinther to follow up with Marietta on stand-out.
- b. Vestry members are encouraged to watch [Vestry 101](#) (38 min.).
- c. Nina needs 2 Chalice Bearers from St. Stephen's for the Easter Vigil. If you will be present and have experience with that, please let Nina know.
- d. Nina to coordinate with Roy Stillman on opening the sanctuary on Good Friday.
- e. Facilitate email vote for 3rd person on the audit committee.
- f. John Garinther to ask Craig Reynolds to join 501c3 Board.

VII. Next Meeting scheduled: April 29, 2025 at 7 p.m. in person.

VIII. Closing Wisdom by *Rebecca Solnit*

Every minute of every hour of every day you are making the world,
just as you are making yourself,
and you might as well do it with generosity and kindness and style.

Closing Prayer: *adapted from Romans 15:13*

May the God of hope fill us with generosity and kindness and style,
empowered through the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

VII. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned by unanimous consent: 8:31 p.m..

End of Minutes.

Respectfully submitted,
Christopher Plankey, Clerk

Addendum

Approval of these minutes:

Motion by email to approve minutes on: by: David Nevin

Motion by email seconded by: William Morey

In favor: all

Opposed: non

Abstained: Chris Plankey as a non-voting member.

Minutes unanimously approved by email on: by email on April 2, 2025