

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

Present (in person in the Sears Room):

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

Regrets: Caleb Harmon

Meeting began at 7:00 p.m.

I. Opening scripture and Prayer (Rev. Nina)

Scripture: Philippians 4:6

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

Two Readings:

The Gift by Mary Oliver

Be still, my soul, and steadfast.

Earth and heaven both are still watching
though time is draining from the clock
and your walk, that was confident and quick,
has become slow.

So, be slow if you must, but let
the heart still play its true part.
Love still as once you loved, deeply
and without patience. Let God and the world
know you are grateful. That the gift has been given.

from A.A. Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh

Piglet noticed that even though he had a Very Small Heart, it could hold a rather

large amount of Gratitude.

A Prayer by my friend, the late Rev. John Woolverton:

Almighty God, as we walk the way you would have us go, make our faith resolute, our hope inspiring, our compassion wide, our witness compelling, and our gratitude unbroken. So may we bring others to that reconciliation commanded by your son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

II. Clerk Report: Approve Minutes from Previous Meeting

Motion to approve by David Nevin.

Motion seconded by Jim Brennan.

In Favor: all

Opposed: none

Abstained: Christopher Plankey as a non-voting member.

The minutes are approved.

III. Old Business

Action Items from previous Meeting:

1. Review and prepare/shop for your assigned duties related to the upcoming bishop meet & greet. Done.
2. Study bishop candidate profiles and report back to Rev. Nina or lay delegates. Done.
3. Consider volunteering for the holiday decorating committee. Done.
4. Jim Brennan to report back on anything else he learns about the warming shelter idea. Caleb Harmon to report his findings on the warming shelter, if anything. On today's agenda.
5. Stewardship to report back to Finance on their request for an update concerning any plan(s) for a capital campaign. On their radar.

IV. New Business

a. Security Assessment Update (John)

On November 20th, Chris Plankey, David Nevin, John Garinther, and Rev. Nina met with Andrew Hoffman, Deputy Regional Security Advisor with the Secure Community Network based in western Massachusetts. He presented his background and what his company does. We then toured the facility while Andrew took notes and hundreds of pictures. In about two weeks he'll provide us with a report with suggestions for how we can make our facility more secure against outside threats. This assessment is completely complementary. Andrew then helps organizations apply for federal and state grants that are available to get the work done. Most grants are in the range of \$150-200k and require a written security

assessment. This assessment satisfies that requirement.

b. **Facility Utilization Summary** (John)

In another clergy-to-clergy correspondence, Nina was speaking with Rev. Lisa Ransom, from the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont, who mentioned a consultant that provides recommendations for larger parishes that have underutilized space. On November 19th, David Nevin, John Garinther, Chris Plankey, and Rev. Nina met via Zoom with Haiko Cornelissen from Stewardship Realty, who presented background on his company and what it offers. Now, Rev. Nina and the wardens are assembling a list of follow-up questions to gain a better understanding of what working together might look like. They will provide an update when they know more.

c. **Roof Repair** (John, Chris Plankey)

We received a quote from Mahan Slate Roofing Co. for \$15,000 to fix the leak in our Sanctuary roof. The leak is active over the pews each time it rains. For another \$17,500 Mahan will replace approx. 150 slates identified as having the potential to leak along with 20 feet of missing ridge cap. As we move into winter, in the interest of mitigating any further water damage, and in the hope we can get onto Mahan's spring schedule as soon as possible, the Property Committee is seeking vestry approval for the \$15k portion of the quote to repair the active leak.

MOTION: Made by Chris Perry to accept the proposal for \$15k to repair the active leak. Seconded by David. All in favor. Opposed: none.
Abstained: Chris Plankey as a non-voting member.

d. **Stewardship** (Jim Alden)

The fall pledge campaign with the theme *Generosity from Generation to Generation* culminated with the in-gathering on November 23rd. The pledge package distributed to parishioners included a couple of unique documents this year: FAQs and Time & Talent Request Forms. The team made a concerted effort to get as much information as possible about our current financial situation out to parishioners. If able, parishioners were asked to increase their current pledges by 10% and volunteer their talent.

So far, 51 pledges are in, for a total of \$150,190. 35 pledges from last year have not come in yet, but we are safely estimating 20 of those will, and we estimate those additional pledges at around \$45k. Of the 51 that have

come in so far, 35 showed increases of 20% on average. Some discussion was had about the effectiveness of finding ways to communicate with those who have historically pledged, but haven't. What methods of communication were used, taking into consideration any pastoral reasons, etc.

Jim shared he has been sending postcards from St. Stephen's to new members of our wider geographic community. He uses public real estate transactions advertised in the newspaper as his mailing list. He is tracking who he has sent these to. These could average over 600 in one year. As a result, we were encouraged to keep our eyes open for new faces in the pews and to be aware this could be one reason why.

e. **Holiday Decorating Committee** (Christine)

There are 9 people on the newly organized decorating committee for Christmas and Easter. They will meet on December 7th to see what we have, what we need, etc. Decorating for Christmas will happen on December 21st after church.

f. **Horizon Team Summary** (Christine)

The Horizons Team is comprised of Craig Reynolds, Christine Furcinite Reynolds, John Garinther, Chris Plankey, and Rev. Nina as a consultant. We continue to discuss how the church might navigate the ongoing challenges of our declining population and increasing budget deficits. If these challenges go unaddressed, our endowment will gradually whittle away. If we make a few uninformed or bad decisions, the endowment could diminish even quicker. So this team has been discussing our long term future and what direction we might take.

The team is not working in a bubble. We have reached out to Canon Steven Wilco at the diocese regarding how other parishes have managed this problem. Canon Wilco has extensive experience in the Episcopal and Lutheran denominations. He provided us with parish names and points-of-contact for us to initiate discussions with them. However, before we take this step, we need to look inward and gauge the understanding of our own parishioners. How satisfied are they with the church? What do they value most about the church? Do they fully understand our financial situation? To that end, we have put together a brief survey to poll the parish. This will be finalized over the next couple weeks and distributed in mid December. The goal is to report back the results at the 2026 Annual Meeting.

The long term plan is to conduct this type of survey on a quarterly basis using the results of the previous survey to focus the next, and to lay a groundwork for dialogue followed by action, so everyone feels seen, heard, and kept aware of our current situation and any possibilities for what might be considered as we work to strengthen our future.

g. **Simple Suppers (John)**

We discussed bringing back the simple suppers in January. These are potlucks held in the dining room. We discussed possible days and times. They had been held on Fridays, but some shared they'd prefer a day other than Friday. We discussed impacts on Table, and some seemed in favor of considering a Sunday lunch model to take place immediately after church on Sunday. We will discuss this more next time we meet.

h. **Warming Space Update (Jim Brennan)**

The existing warming space received all the funding they were hoping for and plans to keep the same location they have been using. They said, "Maybe next year."

V. **Committee Reports**

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

The report details:

- an update on the progress of establishing a new money market account for the church. All the documents are in, we should hear by next week.
- plans to develop a capital budget spreadsheet. This involves the finance committee and stewardship committees meeting to coordinate efforts to summarize and organize current (and/or future) capital income and expenditures
- a monthly review of finances
- some discussion about changing banks from Berkshire Bank. What do we hope to see done better, etc.?
- some discussion about the potential to hire a new bookkeeper. Levels of service, fees, etc.
- beginning the development of the 2026 budget
- Al Symonds recommends a spreadsheet showing year end investment values starting with 2024. The committee agrees.
- a question from Sarah Morrisison about the options for how to

arrive at the amount needed to withdraw from the endowment to cover the 2025 deficit.

No questions were asked of the finance report. Chris Perry explained the vestry will vote by email on the amount to be pulled from the endowment to balance the 2025 budget. That information will appear as an addendum to these minutes.

b. **Property Committee** (Chris Plankey)

The report contains updates on:

- heating system upgrade
- sanctuary sound system upgrade
- failed safety inspections of our exterior staircases
- balcony clean up and ceiling repair
- seeking vestry approval for the sanctuary roof leak repair
- the decision not to install a new brochure rack
- elevator slide guide replacement
- moving the crucifers back to getting ready in the acolyte room
- locking all breaker boxes in the facility
- summary of upcoming facility meetings

No questions were asked of the property report.

c. **Wardens' Report** (John)

The report includes:

1. dates for upcoming Safe Church training
2. a summary of recent and upcoming Parish events including knit & sip, paint & sip, bell ringers concert, ypf caroling, and the date for Christmas decorating
3. Stewardship Team Update: including summary of the fall campaign and a link with all 2025 campaign documents
4. information on the recent facility utilization assessment meeting. See IV. b. above.
5. General Property Information - The following are current or pending projects that the Property Committee is requesting or reviewing:
 - Sound System Upgrade estimate - \$5,000 estimate - quotes pending. *Rationale:* The online audio is currently very poor.

- Exterior staircases repair or rebuild. *Rationale:* The Choir Room exterior staircase has failed a mandated state inspection. The alleyway exterior staircase has failed the city building inspection.
 - Roof repair - \$32,500 quote received. *Rationale:* The roof has a leak in the main sanctuary and has 150 damaged or deteriorating slate shingles. Vestry approval is being sought on the \$15k portion to repair the active roof leak in the sanctuary.
6. Horizon's Team update. The overarching mission is to consider what St. Stephen's could/should/would look like in 5 to 10 years. More in IV. f. above, but in the short term, the group is planning to administer a short survey ahead of the annual meeting.
 7. Safety/security update. See IV. a. above.

No questions were asked about the wardens' report.

d. **Rector's Report** (Rev. Nina)

The report includes:

1. Nina's upcoming work schedule, a list of dates for other liturgical events (including key dates and ecumenical efforts through the Christmas season), and updates on her schedule/continuing ed
2. Thoughts on the bishop meet & greet and on the diocesan convention
3. Information on the passing of the most recent atonement resolution
4. Information on the blessing at Thanksgiving Angels on November 24th. Rev. Nina was responsible for blessing the guests/recipients of the meals

VI. Action Item from this Meeting:

1. Rev. Nina and wardens to follow up with more information on the Facility Utilization meeting with Haiko Cornelissen.
2. Vestry to watch for email vote originating from the Finance Committee concerning balancing the 2025 budget with a withdrawal from the endowment.

VII. Next Meeting scheduled: December 16, 2025 at 7 p.m. via Zoom.

VIII. Closing Prayer (Rev. Nina)

Keep watch, dear Lord,

with those who work, or watch, or weep this night,
and give your angels charge over those who sleep.
Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary,
bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted,
shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen.

IX. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned by unanimous consent: 8:30 p.m.

End of Minutes.

Respectfully submitted,
Christopher Plankey, Clerk

Addendum

Approval of these minutes by email:

Motion by email to approve minutes on December 3, 2025 by Leah Luczynski

Motion by email seconded by James Brennan on December 3, 2025.

In favor: all who responded

Opposed: none

No response: Christopher Perry and Caleb Harmon

Abstained: Christopher Plankey as a non-voting member.

Minutes approved by email on December 10, 2025.