

*St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Vestry Meeting
Date: December 16, 2025*

Present (via Zoom):

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
Caleb Harmon
Christine Furcinite Reynolds
James Brennan
James Alden
William Morey

Regrets: Leah Luczynski

Meeting began at 7:03 p.m.

I. Opening Scripture and Prayer (Rev. Nina)

Scripture: John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Reflection: "Peace" by Brother David Vryhof, SSJE posted on December 15, 2025

We do not yet see the peace of God reigning among the nations of the world, but God calls us to live by God's light, and not to dwell in the present darkness. God calls us to faith in a soaring promise of peace, and asks us to become peacemakers, wherever and however we can.

Prayer:

O God of peace, in the wake of the unimaginable violence of this world, we hold in our hearts those who have no peace.

May we be instruments of your peace.

We pray for our Jewish brothers and sisters:
those who live in fear, who have traumatized,
those who were killed or injured in Sydney and those who love them.

May we be instruments of your peace.

We pray for the community of Brown University:
the students, faculty and staff, and their families.
May we be instruments of your peace.

We pray for those whose suffering we carry close to our hearts,
and name silently or aloud.
adding our own intercessions here
May we be instruments of your peace.

Let us pray:
Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is discord, union;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

II. Clerk Report: Approve Minutes from Previous Meeting

Approval of previous minutes: Approved by email; see previous meeting addendum.

III. Old Business

Action Items from previous Meeting:

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

IV. New Business

a. Security Assessment Update (John)

We received a 130 page report. We plan to separate out the action items and come back to the vestry with a list of recommendations. What is

reasonable for us? **ACTION:** Jim Brennan agreed to report back with items relating to personnel. **ACTION:** property committee to come back with those related to the physical plant.

b. **Basic Brunch** (David)

A basic brunch is being planned for a Sunday after church. Think of it as a potluck in the form of an extended coffee hour. Two dates were considered. We chose Sunday, January 25th.

c. **Stewardship** (Jim Alden)

Jim announced he'll be staying on Stewardship. Recently, their main focus has been on the pledge drive. There are still 14 households that usually pledge that haven't yet. Assuming they do, pledge numbers are similar to what they were last year which is good. *Plus* there are 5 "check writers" we can count on who haven't submitted theirs yet.

Craig Smith is returning and plans to attend their Jan. 8th meeting where conversations about the capital campaign will pick up where they left off 6 months ago.

d. **Parish Questionnaire Discussion** (Rev. Nina)

The Horizons Team distributed a simple five-question survey to the congregation on Saturday, Dec. 13th and Sunday, Dec 14. It was distributed in paper form at both services and also through an online Google Survey found on our website. This data will be compiled and the results reported to vestry at the January meeting.

The long term plan is to conduct this type of survey on a quarterly basis using the results of the previous survey to take concrete action within the church and to help us drill down on different questions for the next survey.

Nina added the surveys are just one mechanism. The point isn't to merely do surveys but to learn from them, then respond. The goal is to report results at the 2026 Annual Meeting.

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, including a conversation he had to inform the Diocesan Treasurer.
- an update on opening a checking account at Lee Bank with a number of specific questions being answered
- new business focused on going over the budget and making a draft of a proposed budget for 2026

No questions were asked of the finance report. Chris Perry explained the current estimate for withdrawal from the endowment to balance the books heading into 2026 is approximately \$112k. David Nevin requested summaries of the church's finances be provided to the vestry monthly and ideally beyond the vestry. An example was given how these monthly snapshots were once visible on our website, but have not been since September 2024. There are updates listed for 9 months of 2025, but the format differs and doesn't always include an easy to read income vs. expenses format.

ACTION: David, Al, and Chris Perry to agree on the format, frequency, and distribution of financial summaries offering at-a-glance looks at our finances to the vestry and beyond.

Chris Perry reiterated vestry members should be on the lookout for a vote by email on the exact 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
- progress on getting our exterior staircases repaired
- balcony clean up and ceiling repair
- plans to repair the sanctuary roof leak
- elevator slide guide replacement
- the plan to lock the auditorium breaker box
- a link to the security assessment report
- a link to the BFT make-up water spreadsheet

No questions were asked of the property report.

John Garinther brought forth an important message: The vestry is not only responsible for authorizing expenditures above a certain dollar amount, but clarifying “where” the money will come from. That the money exists, what the source of the funds will be, etc.

c. **Wardens’ Report (John)**

The report includes:

1. Requirements for Safe Church training and dates for upcoming sessions, if any
2. a summary of recent and upcoming Parish events including a kids paint & sip, New England Bell Ringers concert, YPF Caroling/Pizza, and the date for Christmas decorating
3. Stewardship Team Update: including summary of pledges to date and a link to a folder containing all the 2025 campaign documents as well as documents related to stewardship activity throughout the year
4. information on the recent facility utilization assessment meeting with Haiko Cornelissen, who is a leader at STEWARDSHIP REALTY LLC. This company assesses church properties and proposes actions that can help the church to take advantage of its underutilized space.
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 - **proposal pending**. *Rationale:* The online audio is currently very poor.
 - Exterior staircases repair or rebuild. - **proposal pending**. *Rationale:* The Choir Room exterior staircase has failed a mandated state inspection. The alleyway exterior staircase has failed the city building inspection.
 - Roof repair - \$15,000 **quote accepted - work scheduled**. *Rationale:* The roof has a leak in the main sanctuary
 - Balcony Ceiling Repair **working with contractors to get proposals**. *Rationale:* the ceiling is falling.
6. Horizon’s Team update, including details on the first parish survey administered, its purpose, etc.
7. Safety/security update, including a link to the report and what we plan to do with it

No questions were asked about the wardens’ report.

d. **Rector’s Report (Rev. Nina)**

The report includes:

1. Dates and details for: Christmas Eve services, office hours through the Holidays, Christmas I, Epiphany, upcoming ecumenical service, dates for seasons following Christmas, through to Easter Sunday
2. Nina's personal schedule (including plans to take time off during the office closure and for some continuing ed time in January)
3. Annual Meeting Discussion

We selected February 8th as the date (with Feb. 15th as the back up date). **ACTION:** Nina will communicate with Sunday Funday teachers to determine what we'll do that day so teachers aren't forced to miss the meeting. We agreed the messaging for annual meeting will likely encompass contributions from stewardship (talent/volunteer drive, capital campaign), the finance team (capital campaign, statement of present and future finances), horizons team (results of parish survey and how that informs and guides the executive team). **ACTION:** these groups to communicate on programming for annual meeting.

4. Details on possibility for a parish dinner. See IV. b.
5. Getting people involved discussion

Nina shared thoughts on the volunteer drive element of annual meeting. Someone suggested a rally day. Nina described why they don't work well. Instead, we agreed which of her ideas we'll likely consider implementing: a short blurb on a ministry at the end of each service (1 ministry at a time spread out over time. 1 each week?), the most effective way to recruit volunteers: ask (for example: "I think you'd enjoy this. Would you like to tag along with me the next time I do it?") In order to free up slots in the schedules, some of the folks that have been doing it the longest could be offered to move to a "substitutes" list. They would fill in as needed. This would free up slots for new volunteers to be worked into the schedules with more frequency. Teams (where possible/applicable) work well too; long-timers paired with newbies, etc. Some names that were brought up: Alex Morin, Jeannette and Matt Smith, their daughters Cassidy and Savannah, Colin Behnke, Jamie and Trevor Ciempa, ... etc. Let's see if we can find an intentional way to do this. **ACTION:** Who wants to be part of the team?

VI. Action Item from this Meeting:

1. On the security report: Jim Brennan agreed to report back with items relating to personnel, property committee to report back with items related to the physical plant.
2. David, Al, and Chris Perry to agree on the format, frequency, and distribution of financial summaries offering at-a-glance looks at our finances to the vestry and beyond.
3. Nina to communicate with Sunday Funday teachers to determine how to keep teachers from being forced to miss annual meeting.
4. Appropriate groups (listed in V. d. 3.) to communicate on programming for annual meeting.
5. Determine who wants to help be part of the team that gets more people involved (item V. d. 5)

VII. Next Meeting scheduled: January 27, 2025 at 7 p.m. via Zoom.

VIII. Closing Prayer (Rev. Nina)

Holy One, you hold both heaven and earth in a single peace. Let the design of your great love shine on the waste of this world's anger and sorrow; give peace to your Church, peace among nations, peace on your earth, peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts, in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord almighty grant us a peaceful night
and a perfect end. Amen.

IX. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned by unanimous consent: 8:41 p.m.

End of Minutes.

Respectfully submitted,
Christopher Plankey, Clerk

Addendum

MOTION

Motion made by email on 12/18/25 by Dr. J. Christopher Perry, Treasurer:
"I am asking for your vote to approve taking \$ 114,451 from the Endowment to replenish the Savings account."

Motion seconded by email by Al Symonds.

In favor: all who responded

Opposed: none

No response: Caleb Harmon.

Abstained: Christopher Plankey as a non-voting member.
Motion passes with clerk tally on 12/21/25.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by email to approve minutes by David Nevin on 1/3/2026
Motion by email seconded by Christine Furcinte Reynolds on 1/3/2026
In favor: all who responded
Opposed: none
No response(s): 4 members
Abstained: Christopher Plankey as a non-voting member.
Minutes approved by email on 1/8/2026