

Grace Memorial Episcopal Church  
Vestry Minutes, March 2023 meeting  
**March 16, 2023**  
Approved by Vestry **June 15, 2023**

**Members and clergy present:** Alan Cowart (Rector), Linda Carroll, Gloria Cardwell, Ronda Spinner, Sharon Davis, Lessy Nixon, Marsha Cooper, and Elysia Lyday (Clerk)

**The meeting was opened with a prayerful reading of Psalm 138.**

**Minutes of previous meetings:**

The January minutes were approved.

**Motion to approve by Sharon Davis, Second by Linda Carroll. All approved.**

**Convention Delegates:**

Vestry approved slate of nominees for Diocesan Convention Delegates. Marsha Cooper and Sharon Davis were nominated as delegates. Martin Tolhoek was nominated as alternate.

**Motion to accept delegates and alternate for the annual convention:** Motion made by Linda Carroll, then seconded by Lessy Nixon. All Approved.

Opposed: None.

**Election of Trustees:**

The Vestry was informed that Rick Read had resigned as a trustee of the parish and the Vestry was invited to appoint/elect a new trustee, the first time since 1998. Trustees hold the property title in trust for the parish and diocese. They are the individuals recognized by the commonwealth. They are often signers of record in several transaction the parish enacts. They must be a faithful member in good standing. There is benefit for the trustees to have longer relationships with the church. Lessy and Alan approached Gary Smith about interest in fulfilling this role. The Vestry expressed enthusiasm about this change. If approved, the three trustees create a good team of reliable, faithful trustees. A new form of the resolution to be approved establishes the trustees and takes the place of previous elections, but now elects for a 5-year term. This helps parishes look more frequently at this important but often unsung role. The Vestry was presented the attached resolution to elect Pat Clough, George Klacynski, and Gary Smith to 5-year terms as trustees of the parish.

**Motion to elect three trustees, Pat Clough, George Klacynski, and Gary Smith as trustees, per attached resolution:** First made motion by Sharon Davis, then seconded by Gloria Cardwell. All approved.

Opposed: None.

**Filing the trustee resolution:** The completed, approved resolution must be filed with the court to take effect. The diocese has suggested that the parish file the resolution but the Chancellor of the Diocese has offered to help with the process. The vestry considered if Gary Smith might file for Grace. Alan would check if he were willing and able. If not, they would seek help from the Chancellor.

**Motion to authorize Gary Smith to appoint to file the current trustee resolution:** First made motion by Lessy Nixon, then seconded by Sharon Davis. All approved.  
Opposed: None.

**Building fund:**

Lessy Nixon reported an update from the Finance Committee, including the ongoing conversation about the Building Fund. Several parishioners pledge and/or contribute to the Building Fund. The Finance Committee and Vestry have both discussed if it is appropriate for those individuals to be offered the opportunity to un-designate those funds so they may be used in the General Operating Fund. The conversation included the fact that operating funds could be used for maintenance and repairs. The Treasurer had previously commented that more repairs (which come from the operating funds) could be taken from the building fund. The Vestry discussed the balance between maintaining the facilities and the flexibility of using the operating fund. It was also wondered how many of the building fund contributions represented a portion of a total pledge (which would reduce the total pledged dollars expected in the operating fund). The Vestry considered re-organizing the budget but emphasized that this would likely only increase the budget deficit without changing other items. Alan noted that these gifts were given in good faith and need to be honored – the decision should be up to the individuals. Individual conversations (where the individuals are known) should take place, but the congregation should continue to be informed about these developments and options. The Vestry would be careful in prayerfully moving forward to honor those who pledged for buildings and ground. There was much discussion about maintaining privacy. A vote was suggested to approve these conversations. Alan reminded the Vestry that the conversations need to lead from our values and the current reality of the parish finances. He suggested reminding parishioners that in the past we have needed to protect the Building Fund for future use, but the Vestry believes that our priority at the moment is to protect the Operating Fund. He reminded that these are faithful gifts from faithful givers and we are grateful for each of these contributions.

**Motion to authorize conversations with building fund givers about combining finances with the operating fund:** First made by Sharon Davis, then seconded by Linda Carroll. All approved.  
Opposed: None.

The categories of facility maintenance need to be clarified. Some members have requested to charge the B&G fund for more facility maintenance charges rather than pulling from the operating expenses. Others had issue with items that were not for long-term updates being taken from operating funds. It was suggested that to navigate whether a bill is pulled from the B&G or the operating fund; Joe, the treasurer, has suggested a specific dollar amount category. (Charges above \$200-250 could be charged from the building fund, while charges under be charged to the operating fund). The Building & Grounds committee will discuss this at an upcoming meeting.

**Parochial report**

The parochial report was presented to the Vestry which discussed the updated form. Alan presented a summary of last year's data.

Active Baptized Members: 186  
2022 Increases: 3  
2022 Decreases: 17 (including overdue membership roll adjustments)  
Communicants in Good Standing: 85  
Total active participants: 104  
2022 Average Sunday Attendance: 34 (2021=29)  
Weekly online participation: 18  
2022 Pledges: 38  
Total Pledged: \$141, 767

A new category is the way we record active participants who aren't members of the parish. We have a number of individuals who have membership elsewhere and show more of the reach of the parish. As the report considers online participation, Alan encouraged the Vestry to consider how we minister to those individuals beyond being simply numbers. He suggested we consider how online participants might more fully engage in the services they watch and how they might be better ministered to by the parish. The Vestry had previously discussed recording demographic information of the parish which will be tracked in future reports. Alan suggested an annual anonymous survey so that clergy and leaders are not guessing at information, nor are we requesting information that we may never use. Alan also led the Vestry to examine our data in comparison with other dioceses and parishes, especially in looking at post-COVID trends. Alan discussed how to share this information with the parish. Lessy proposed the report (or Alan's summary) be part of the annual report.

### **Treasurer's report**

Alan continued to encourage the Vestry to look closely at the reports each month and invited conversation about what each person learned or where they needed clarification. Discussions were raised about the expense of printing Sunday bulletins in color, the Digital Mission Grant award, and the decreasing cash balances. One of the CDs is maturing, and the finance committee will discuss renewing and possibly transferring some of these funds when they are available.

**Motion to accept the report as presented:** First made motion by Lessy Nixon and seconded by Gloria Cardwell. All approved.

Opposed: None.

### **Audit:**

Per previous years and diocesan recommendations for churches of this size, the parish has requested an exemption to the CPA audit and will ask the diocese for permission to perform the internal financial review checklist. Alan explained the role of this review and the diocesan support for parishes who have generally healthy oversight practices.

**Motion to apply for exemption to CPA audit as permitted by diocesan canon:** First made motion by Sharon Davis, then by Linda Carroll. All approved.

Opposed: None.

For the audit team, the Vestry and Finance Committee will immediately start to explore members who will fit the team best.

### **Vestry retreat**

Father Alan is working on agendas and arranging speaker guests for the upcoming vestry retreat. A portion of the retreat will be investigating the daily mission of a small-footprint church. Alan is seeking conversation partners with clergy and laity from smaller local parishes. The Rev. Allison Caudell from St. Mark's Clifford and Grace, Massie's Mill will be available for a brief Q&A and to talk about daily realities in other small churches. A small number of Grace parishioners were invited to participate in this portion of the retreat.

### **Grace house on the mountains:**

The Outreach Committee is hosting a spaghetti dinner as a fundraiser for Grace House on the Mountain. The event will have food, entertainment, raffles, and door prizes for guests. The outreach team needs volunteers and donations for the program. Tickets will be on sale for a broad audience. There will be takeout available and other churches will be encouraged to attend as well. The vestry members are encouraged to share the program with people around them to participate in the event. Handmade items have already been donated for the raffle.

### **Pastoral Care**

Parishioners in crisis who need care, attention, help, or prayers were discussed. Appropriate support was discussed for a number of individuals. When families of individuals in crisis want clergy to convince someone of something, Alan reminded vestry that his role is always pastoral and helps the individuals in crisis see God's presence rather than support a family decision.

The Vestry discussed the importance of finding ways for church members to keep in touch and contact with certain members. There is no way the parish can't prioritize care for parishioners as a primary ministry. The members discussed creating new programs, such as a flower ministry which has recently started.

### **Announcements**

The elevator/ lift is currently out of order. The contractor will be present soon, but there is also an ongoing issue with a soon-to-be replaced valve, which is back-ordered.

The Vestry discussed implementing small meetings between the monthly vestry meetings to discuss details of different subjects that need more attention such as pastoral care and parish life. Vestry members were in favor of online, brief gatherings.

### **The meeting was adjourned with the Lord's Prayer**