

Preach the Gospel at all times.
If necessary, use words.
-St. Francis of Assisi

The Annual Meeting of Saint Francis Episcopal Church Holden, Massachusetts

Sunday, January 25, 2026



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.

from *The Book of Common Prayer*, p.833

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**THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH OF
ST. FRANCIS EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

Sunday, January 25, 2026

AGENDA

- † The Annual Meeting Convened
- † Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever living God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with us as we take counsel in Saint Francis, Holden, for the renewal and mission of your Church. Teach us in all things to seek first your honor and glory. Guide us to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(BCP 818 - #12)

- † Reading and Adoption of the Minutes of the 2025 Annual Meeting
- † Presentation of Annual Reports
 - (1) Rector's Report
 - (2) Wardens' Report
 - (3) Other reports (by title)
- † Report of the Nominating Committee
- † Elections
- † Report on the 2026 Budget for Mission and Ministry
- † Other business
- † Adjournment
- † Dismissal:
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

The ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH OF ST. FRANCIS EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sunday, January 26, 2025

The Reverend Patrick Perkins convened the meeting at 11:55 am.

The Rector prayed "Almighty and ever living God,...Teach us in all things to seek first your honor and glory. Guide us to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it..."

A motion to waive the reading of the 2024 Annual Meeting minutes and accept as presented in the Annual Report, made by Liz Carroll, seconded by Matt Surabian, passed.

Presentation of the Annual Reports:

Rector's Report (The Rev. Perkins) - Ministry reports may be found in the Annual Meeting Report, including one written by Archdeacon Jane Griesbach, St. Francis' former deacon. She is now visiting other churches to both support deacons in their assigned churches and to support churches who do not have deacons. We are on the list to receive a deacon. The Archdeacon appreciates this community and is aware of our gifts and needs. The Rector recognized that there are going to be challenges ahead, but as a faith community we take the challenges as they come and have faith. The spirit is here, in this congregation. We have tenacity and faithfulness. The rector finds that the light that emanates from this church at night, which he can see from the rectory, says "We're here." We made it through the tough times of Covid. He is grateful for everyone, both present here today and those not able to be here. Those leaving their leadership positions, Senior Warden Susan Bastardo, vestry members Joy Head and Mary Cook, have been a blessing. The Sunday Morning Bible Study is going very well. A recent visitor who attended the study was moved by the discussion, thoughtfulness, and lack of judgement. A Lay Preaching class is currently underway with four people attending. There is a shortage of supply priests. The lay people being trained will be able to cover if priests are not available when the rector is away.

Wardens' Report (Senior Warden Susan Bastardo) - The offgoing Senior Warden had many thank yous to convey: to the rector for his guidance and deep caring for this community and the future, Archdeacon Jane who was so generous with her time and assistance during the rector's sabbatical, to her co-wardens Bryan Diehl and Craig Stanovich who helped her feel valued, to the finance and property people for their hard work and dedication, and to Dawn Rooke for her knowledge and assistance.

(Junior Warden Craig Stanovich) - Many thanks to Susan Bastardo. While we always have our challenges, Susan has been instrumental in the change in energy and spirit. Pledges this year are at their highest since the junior warden's time as chair of stewardship. Thanks to all for your fantastic generosity. Some improvements to property in the past year include new lights in Fellowship Hall - many thanks to Bryan Diehl for seeing this project to completion. New carpet was installed in Fellowship Hall, hallways, and upstairs classrooms. Lighting in the worship space was updated. We will continue moving forward with some maintenance issues. The junior warden noted that there are many new families joining us.

The rector invited any ministry chairs to the floor who wished to address the meeting:

Julie Russell (Mission Ministries Chair) - The offgoing chair of Mission Ministries thanked all for the generous support of this ministry's endeavors, both at present and since the start of the pandemic five years ago. This ministry can't do the work without this congregation. While it seems that we are often asking for treasure in the form of money and donations, time and talent are also very important. In re-evaluating our relationship with mission partners Mustard Seed, Abby's House, and Dismas Family Farm we find that our time and talent is still an important part of these relationships. While our opportunities for such involvement at Abby's House had dropped off in recent years, we are learning that there are once again many things we will be able to do going forward. In

2025, Mission Ministries will be led by Andy Mellors. While several longtime members will be leaving this committee, many new members are on board answering God's call to help those in need, bringing new ideas and energy.

Amy Mellors (Church School Coordinator) - Many thanks to all the volunteers who keep this program running. We have great children, thoughtful and with lots of energy, Thanks to all for your support. Currently there are 24 children enrolled, with an average of 15 each week. The rector commented that we are blessed to have this wonderful church school program. Most congregations in our diocese no longer are able to support church school.

Joy Head (Youth Group) - Joy and the rector have been working on rebuilding the Youth Group program over the past few years. There is a small core group this year, and we are hoping to continue to have steady growth. The rector added that while for many years we had a paid youth minister, we are now bringing the program back after the pandemic had put an end to things. We are trying to build on the energy from Church School.

Bev Giarusso (Altar Guild)- Altar Guild is the "Invisible Ministry," with much of the work done behind the scenes, before and after services. Thank you to MargeTremblay who is stepping down after many years of Altar Guild service.

Joel Wesson (Finance Committee) - The church treasurer explained that while a deficit of \$41,000 was budgeted for 2024, we actually ended with a \$4,800 deficit. This coming year a deficit of \$21,000 is projected. The past couple of years we have come in with higher pledge payments than anticipated, offsetting large deficits. The Grants for Mission Investment Fund is doing well, making available each year 3% of the three past years' average balance as grants for special projects. Many thanks to members of the Finance Committee.

Taryn Surabian (Hospitality) - Many thanks to Dawn Rooke for past years' work with Hospitality and who continues to be involved in this ministry. The goal of Hospitality is to provide opportunities for community and connection. This can't happen without the help of all of you! This congregation has lots of energy for hospitality, in hosting, helping, and attending events. Hosting coffee hour is a great way to connect with others. The chair invited ministry leaders to consider hosting a coffee hour, as a way to give thanks for support from the community, but also to build awareness of their ministries.

Steve Cook (Property) - The Property Committee could use some help, with three buildings to maintain, and many projects ahead. The rector thanked Steve and Andrew Jensen, co-chairs of the Property Committee. He mentioned the spirit and intention of vestry to be bold and do the needed maintenance despite deficit spending. Fellowship Hall windows have been in need of some work but with the help of the property chairs, and community members Bryan Diehl and Jeremy Sanders, some much needed repairs were made saving a very large expense. Another example of using our time and talent!

Nancy Pope (Mustard Seed) - Thank you to Julie Russell for her five years of mission work, especially for her support of the Mustard Seed. Who do we serve? Guests come from all walks of life - single parents, grandparents raising grandchildren, disabled veterans, to name a few. All money to support this ministry (with which St. Francis has been involved for 54 years) comes from fundraising. There are 38 people who rotate cooking, shopping, serving, and filling in at the last minute, as well as an army of bakers. Everyone who has purchased a wreath or swag, made food, coat, or blanket donations, have all touched the Mustard Seed. Baked goods made and purchased at bake sales, donations of Hope for Housing Cards - all have touched the Mustard Seed. Everyone who helped with dinners, all touched the Mustard Seed. The rector thanked the Pope family and Beth Carrigan, mentioning that they are a blessing to the Mustard Seed and this community.

Mary Cook (Dismas Farm) - Archdeacon Jane asked Mary to take over as liaison to this Ministry upon her departure from St. Francis. There are currently four teams rotating providing dinner once per month, including one new team who has recently joined. Each month a team provides a meal and most enjoy the meal with the men of Dismas Farm. It is a very rewarding experience and much appreciated by the recipients. One or two additional teams would be most welcomed. On Christmas Eve, the men received gift cards courtesy of Mission Ministries. For many of the men, this was the only gift they would receive and they were most appreciative.

The rector commended the reading of all reports in the Annual Report, for both information and also to understand the many opportunities available in which to be involved.

Report of the Nominating Committee (The Rev. Perkins) - The Nominating Committee (rector ex officio, junior and senior wardens, treasurer, clerk, and offgoing vestry members) present the following slate of candidates for election:

One year terms: Senior Warden - Craig Stanovich, Junior Warden - Laura Caswell, Treasurer - Joel Wesson, Clerk - Dawn Rooke

Three-year vestry terms expiring in 2028: Rich Farrell, Susan Dresley

Diocesan Convention Delegates: Dick Delorme, Dawn Rooke, Craig Stanovich

Convention Delegate Alternates: Laura Caswell, Susan Bastardo

A motion for the clerk to cast one ballot for the slate of candidates as presented, made by Dick Delorme, seconded by Kathy Dixon, passed unanimously.

The Nominating Committee convenes to discuss the needs of the church and what gifts might be helpful as members go off vestry. If anyone would like to be on vestry in the future, please let the rector know.

The rector thanked and presented gifts to offgoing vestry members: Mary Cook, a very thoughtful vestry member, who will continue her service through lay preaching and as liaison to Dismas Farm; Joy Head, another thoughtful member on vestry, who will continue assisting with Youth Group, giving young adults a voice; and to Senior Warden Susan Bastardo, former church school coordinator, for her thoughtful, spiritual years both on vestry and as junior and senior warden.

Report on the 2025 Plan for Mission and Ministry (Craig Stanovich) - For 2025, we have forecasted a deficit of \$21,000. We have received a very generous offer from a parishioner to cover the deficit and will wait until later in the year to determine what that will look like.

(Pat Perkins and Craig Stanovich) - The 2025 budget was approved by the vestry at their January meeting, and a detailed discussion was available last Sunday to all interested. We will likely have a balanced budget at the end of 2025, thanks in part to the generous offer mentioned previously. However, this budget does not include a youth minister, and a few other items that we were able to fund at one time. Much is done by the grace of God by volunteers but volunteers can get burned out. We hope to continue to grow our budgets into the future. A \$325,000 budget would help us hire a paid youth minister and more. Matt Surabian asked about the cash position of the church, outside of budget. The Balance Sheet, found in the Annual Report, shows a cash position of \$523,000 (\$200,000 higher than when the rector arrived ten years ago.) In 2017 the vestry approved the establishment of an endowment for Grants for Mission and Ministry, and invested \$75,000. Since then the fund has grown to a balance of \$153,000 due to a small bequest, and interest. The Taylor Fund is for the care and maintenance of the Memorial Garden. We have a strong cash position of \$300,000 which includes some restricted accounts. Some of this is in a high interest account earning about 4% interest. The Finance Committee is doing a great job. Members of this committee, along with the vestry, are good stewards of what has been entrusted to us. The vestry does not want to have a deficit budget. Where does the money come from when there is a deficit? There are some savings from past years when there was no deficit, not a huge sum, not sustainable indefinitely.

While the average 2025 pledge is \$3,100, pledges range from \$100 to \$20,000. When larger donors leave, it takes several new pledges to make up the difference. Almost half of this year's pledges were increased and there are many new pledges, which is very encouraging. The rector mentioned that online giving has gone up. People give in different ways and we are looking into other creative ways for people to give to the church, hopefully with fewer fees.

There was no other business.

A motion to adjourn the meeting, made by Craig Stanovich, seconded by Dick Delorme, passed. The meeting was adjourned at 1:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Dawn Rooke, Clerk

From the Parish Register ~ January – December 2025

Baptisms – 4	Reaffirmed – 0
Marriages – 0	Burials – 1
Confirmations – 2	Transfers out – 10
Received – 0	Transfers in – 23

**Saint Francis Episcopal Church
Holden, Massachusetts
In the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts**

Mission Statement

We seek to be instruments of God's peace, bearing witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ for all people.

Vision Statement

Living into the Baptismal Covenant, we strive to grow into the full stature of Christ. We are committed to common prayer, life-long Christian formation, mission to the world, and grateful stewardship as we live out Jesus' command to love God and our neighbor.

Core Values

1. Faith is a life-long journey; it is not certainty, but trust in God. We celebrate the fact that at any given time we are at different places in that journey.
2. As an Episcopal Church, we rejoice in the richness and diversity of the Anglican Communion. Our faith is rooted in Scripture, tradition, and reason.
3. We take Christian formation seriously for every generation, and especially by laying a strong foundation in church school and through our vital youth ministry program.
4. Francis of Assisi is said to have challenged his friends to "preach the gospel at all times; when necessary to use words." We are committed to mission and outreach as a visible witness to the world of our love for God, particularly in hands-on ways that strengthen relationships and transform lives.
5. We believe that our earth and all of life is a gift from a gracious and loving God: in response to God's many blessings we seek to become, with God's help, more faithful stewards of our time, talents, and treasure.

Revised and passed by Vestry, November 11, 2009

RECTOR'S REPORT

"If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind as Christ."
(*Philippians 2:1-2*)

To be of the same mind as Christ, as the Apostle Paul taught, is to live one's life in the Spirit of God; to live as one committed to a faith of living in community with others, with love (which means, without judgment...a hard "human" thing to do) and with a unity of purpose that life should be lived as one striving to accomplish what is "pleasing in the eyes of God." Certainly, this is a tall order, and a goal that each of us often comes up short...or you might say, skins our knees as we try to do our best in what God asks of us. But the Good News is that "doing our best" is exactly what God hopes for us to do! I give thanks for each of you in my daily prayers for being such a loving and courageous Christian community. We live our lives in days that are changing rapidly - the solutions of yesteryear are not only ineffective, they don't seem to have any relationship to the challenges we face. And yet, this community lovingly and courageously continues to hear the Spirit and respond to the challenges of our times.

As I say every year, please read through the various ministry reports in this Annual Report booklet to learn the details of the many Spirit-filled activities of our community. I would like to express my gratitude for all of these wonderful ministries, and would like to speak of a few in my report. Although it is true that a Christian community is made up of the people, not the building; I would like to give thanks and recognize the many people who have shown such care and commitment to our buildings this past year. The lights of Fellowship Hall have long been loud and noisy creatures that have consumed much energy. When our "Lighting Team" identified an opportunity to change these lights to eco-friendly LED lights, the team took up the challenge and accomplished this change in the face of various obstacles - great job! Many thanks to the "Window Team" who committed themselves to a full restoration of the east-side Fellowship Hall windows - a special thanks to David Currie, Jeremy Sanders, and Matt Surabian for countless hours of work and expertise. The community also made improvements to our hall and classroom carpeting, Memorial Garden grounds, and many other areas. Your stewardship of these gifts is much appreciated.

The spiritual development and the care and comfort of our people are also vital ministries of our community. In this regard, I am pleased to say that our Scripture reflection and study continue, as do our programs for children and young adults. The "First Friday TED talk" discussion groups will be back this Spring, many periodic seasonal studies continue as well. I am also very pleased with the growing ministry of "Living with Grief" led by Lori Churchill - a group ministry helping those who live with the changes and sorrows of life, which often put us in places that can challenge us. Finally, I am excited with the start of the BEMA podcast discussion group: a new and unique opportunity to study Scripture through a different lens of faith. I am thankful that the BEMA group has re-ignited our ministry of unCommon Ground, which I am hopeful will continue to expand in the years ahead.

As I stated at the beginning of my report, the changes and challenges of the world call us to respond to the evolving needs of ministry in imaginative and courageous ways. I believe the future needs of the church, which respond to the deepest needs of the world, will require the best of our faithful and committed selves. I am blessed to be part of our St. Francis community, and thankful for the many and varied gifts we share with each other and the world. In the year ahead, I invite you to boldly stretch yourselves by sharing the gifts you possess, or by taking some time to develop new skills and experiences that will broaden your horizon of Christian faith and service. The demands of the world are great, but God is greater, and we are children of the great abundance of that eternal loving God.

Faithfully in Christ,
Patrick Perkins

WARDENS' REPORT

At our vestry retreat of February 8th, we began our shared work by engaging Simon Sinek's Five Rules A Leader Must Follow. His guidance offered us both practical and spiritual insights into leadership:

- **Proactive Action** – focus not on obstacles but on the path forward.
- **Accountability** – recognize when we ourselves may be the problem and take responsibility.
- **Caring** – commit to taking care of one another.
- **Communication** – practice being the last to speak, listening before responding.
- **Humility** – remember that position and seniority are not for personal gain, but for service.

We reflected on these rules and discussed how they can shape our work as vestry members. Each principle resonates with our ministries at St. Francis and our outreach to the wider community. By embracing proactive action, accountability, care, communication, and humility, we strengthen not only our leadership but also our witness as a parish dedicated to service, stewardship, and spiritual growth.

The Vestry also chose for our book study a book by Parker J. Palmer. *Let Your Life Speak* is one of those deceptively slim volumes that opens up profound conversations about vocation, authenticity, and listening to the “inner teacher.” Palmer’s emphasis on living into the truth of who we are—rather than who we think we should be—sparked conversations.

Each year, vestry members choose to serve as liaisons to two or three ministries, helping strengthen their ties to the vestry and to the wider parish. They share stories and updates—often through the Little Portion newsletter—so that all of us can discover and join in the transformative opportunities at St. Francis.

This year the Vestry gratefully accepted a generous bequest of \$54,271 from the Estate of Martin J. Waite. After thoughtful discussion, the Vestry voted to allocate this gift toward three vital initiatives: funding a Youth Minister, supporting the Mission Grant Committee, and providing seed money for the upcoming Capital Campaign.

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of many parishioners—led by Dave Currie, Jerry Sanders, and Matt Surabian—the windows and wall on the parking lot side of the Narthex have been completely replaced. The result is a renewed, welcoming space that looks wonderful!

As our new program year began, we rejoiced in many blessings. Our Church School and Youth Group programs continue to flourish, and the women’s retreat drew an inspiring and well attended gathering. The Scripture Reflection series, led by Pat, has grown steadily and remains highly recommended for all who seek deeper engagement with God’s Word.

We also came together in fellowship through joyful events—our parish picnic, Oktoberfest celebration, and Advent luncheon—each a reminder of the warmth and vitality of our community.

At the same time, we turned outward in service, supporting our Mission Ministries with both financial gifts and the offering of our time and talents. In all these ways, we continue to live out our call to be a community of faith, fellowship, and service.

We rejoice in the noticeable increase in Sunday attendance, a sign of our parish's vitality. High attendance at the Ash Wednesday services and an overflowing Christmas Eve pageant also signal not only strong devotion but also a deep sense of community engagement.

Our financial stewardship campaign continues to make wonderful progress, with pledges rising steadily over the past couple of years. We are especially grateful for the generosity of new members joining in support, and for the many existing members who have increased their commitments. This spirit of giving strengthens our mission and ensures that our community continues to thrive. Thank you for being part of this blessing!

Respectfully submitted,

Craig Stanovich, Senior Warden

Laura Caswell, Junior Warden

CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Church School

The Church School program includes Christian Formation for children who are in preschool through fifth grade.

Current enrollment: 25 students/15 families January to June ('24-'25 school year)

- Our lessons focused on the presentation of Jesus, the baptism and temptation of Jesus, the Prodigal Son, the raising of Lazarus, post-resurrection appearances, the Acts of the Apostles, and the prophet Daniel.
- June: Year-end Pentecost party and "God of Wind and Fire" kite banner. Extra note: There have been a few instances of visitors to the church commenting on how colorful our Fellowship Hall is. The "breath of fresh air" and "growing community" that our banners represent. Thank you to all who have helped with construction and hanging of our banner every year!

September – December ('25-'26 school year)

Church School continues to be offered during the 10:00 AM service. This year, church school is offered in 3 age groups.

- Families are able to register in person or virtually.
- This year's teacher and assistants as follows:
 - Preschool/Kindergarten: Jena DelCid, John Bell, Addison Mellors (A), and Graham Jensen (A)
 - First and Second Grade: Alison Milan, Dave Currie, Ruthie Currie (A), and Emma Milan (A)
 - Third, Fourth and Fifth grade: Lisa Cherrier and Adeline Cherrier (A), and Matt Surabian
- Our lessons for the first part of the year focused on Genesis (Creation to Abraham), Zacchaeus, and Advent (John the Baptist). At our Advent Celebration, the children made luminaries that lit our front walk on Christmas Eve.
- The children participated in one mission/outreach project so far during this school year. In November, we sponsored a food-drive for the Wachusett Food Pantry. We also served Coffee Hour in December. This was a highlight for the children!

Goals for Church School for the upcoming church year:

- Program - Possibility of increasing learning to 4 age groups/classrooms
- Eucharist Instruction - Spring Celebration for children aged 8-10 who are interested and complete the Eucharist Instruction program.
- Outreach - Hands on way for our children to participate in an outreach project/mission
- Community - Foster a collaborative relationship between our youth, our church community, and Church School.

Thank you to our St. Francis community for supporting this program as teachers, assistants, volunteers, or parents who show their appreciation in so many ways!

Amy Mellors
Church School Coordinator

Adult Education Offerings

Adult Education was again anchored by our weekly Sunday Scripture Reflection series, which is offered at 9:00 a.m. (between the Sunday morning services) during the program year. The series follows the “Feasting on the Word” curriculum, offered through Westminster John Knox Press. The series follows the Scripture lessons of the Revised Common Lectionary schedule, which allows the group to explore one of the biblical lessons found in our Sunday worship service. The study group has grown over the year and the library is often filled...just over a dozen people reflecting on God’s Word! In addition to this study group, a newly offered Scripture study group started at the end of the year, with introduction meetings held in November and December. The group follows the BEMA podcast and discussions involve reflecting on Scripture through the lens of the Jewish faith traditions. The group is off to a great start!

Our “First Sunday Conversations” series was a bit more limited this year. The series was primarily focused on St. Francis community and ministry topics, such as stewardship and our various ministries. Outside guests were not part of the series, and the Scripture Reflection series continued throughout many of the first Sundays of the month. The conversation gatherings were well attended, with approximately 15-20 people at each gathering.

Our first “Lay Preaching Course” was held during the program year of 2024-25, with a group of four parishioners graduating from the one-year course in May 2025. All four participants completed the Diocesan requirements and paperwork and were licensed by Bishop Fisher to serve as Lay Preachers at St. Francis Church. In the program year beginning in September 2025, a second group of participants began the one year program. Again, four participants have been continuing with the study: two from St. Francis, one from Good Shepherd, Clinton, and one from St. Mark’s Church, Leominster.

Respectfully submitted,
Patrick Perkins

Youth Ministry

The St. Francis Youth Group is co-led by Joy Head and Patrick Perkins. We also welcome additional “guest leaders” from time to time as we participate in off-site events. We are happy to report that our group is continuing to grow and is a fun, spirit-filled group of young adults. This past year, we have had participation from a great core group of 7 young adults, with a few additional people joining for special events. We meet monthly in our Youth Group room (middle classroom in the upstairs education area) for conversation, games, and pizza lunches! This year we added discussion topics that are part of the journey to the young adult decision to undergo the requirements for the

Sacrament of Confirmation. As the Diocese transitions from one bishop to another, there have been a few delays in this process. During the year, we also volunteered to support the Walk for the Homeless at Elm Park, Worcester, by serving as “road guides” for the walkers. We also had a few fun social events, including unsuccessfully trying to escape from a very challenging Escape Room.

In the coming months, we are looking forward to going on a Summer Mission trip to Rutland, VT. We are also excited to announce that the vestry has approved the hiring of a dedicated Youth Minister to lead this very important ministry!

Respectfully submitted,
Joy Head and Patrick Perkins

WORSHIP MINISTRIES

Acolytes

The Acolyte ministry is slowly coming back to life with a small but enthusiastic group of young people. However, we need more volunteers with the goal of having enough to rotate through and have at least one acolyte each week and ideally three per week. Anyone from Grade 7 through adult is welcome to join. Something nice for a parent and children to do together, which is how I got involved years ago. If you are interested in becoming part of the Acolyte ministry please contact Pat or myself.

Respectfully submitted,
Shirley Blehar

Altar Guild

The Altar Guild is an enjoyable and rewarding ministry. Members work “behind the scenes” to prepare for weekly services and decorate the church for the Christmas and Easter seasons. We are always looking for new members and invite both male and female members of the congregation to join us. The time commitment is just a couple of hours, once a month, working as part of a team.

We welcome, and would love to have additional members. If you think you might be interested talk to one of the current members. Work with a team and see what is involved. It might be a way for you to get involved and make an offering of your time and talent to St. Francis.

We have a group of dedicated members that serve faithfully throughout the year. Many thanks to our current members: Roz Glanville, Kari Currie, Dave Lucas, Lucy Nowak, Sharlene O'Connor, Carol Perkins, Mike Reno, Julie Russell, Jenny Sanders, Carolyn Schmidt, Marje Sullivan, Peggy Jo Webb and Kim Whamond, for their ongoing commitment to the work of the Altar Guild.

A special thanks to Andrew Jensen for hanging the wreaths in perfect alignment for Christmas.

Respectfully submitted,
Beverly Giarusso

Lay Eucharistic Ministers and Lay Readers

Our dedicated ministry team is made up of 6 readers, 10 Lay Eucharistic Ministers (LEMs) and 4 Holden Nursing Home Ministers. Each week members are scheduled to read from the Old and New Testaments during our services. The LEMs are the chalice bearers during each service, while the Holden Nursing Home Ministers share the readings and the Eucharist with individuals at the Holden Nursing Home each week.

Respectfully Submitted,
Linda Shelton

Music

The Music Ministry at St. Francis is composed of a medley of musical groups:

- The Sunday Choir meets every Sunday morning at 8:45a to rehearse the music selections for the 10:00a service.
- The Festive Choir performs on Christmas Eve and Easter morning and is open to all singers, including family and friends visiting for the holidays.
- The St. Francis Bell Choir is currently on hiatus until there is a new director- if you feel a calling to volunteer for this, please contact Beth Keusch or Tina Chen.
- We utilize soloists at various times throughout the year to help elevate our worship, notably in the holy seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter.

The choirs perform during the school year and take recess for the summer. All the musical groups are open to new members as well as new ideas for anthems and preludes. We encourage you to share your musical talents with the congregation. If you have an instrument that you want to play or a song that you want to sing, please let us know and we would be thrilled to add your gifts to the worship service, or for prelude or postlude music.

Our historic Hook & Hastings pipe organ is over 100 years old. Given its age and the New England climate, the instrument has been operating very well, however a few minor problems require attention- in this “ordinary time” period before Lent, we will be engaging our organ technician Stefan Meier for the repairs, and also advise of any larger repairs to be addressed in the summer recess.

It's an honor and joy for me to serve as your Minister of Music. I look forward to a new year of music and fellowship with you all!

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Keusch, Minister of Music

Ushers

Ushers embody the spirit of welcome that defines our parish. By greeting worshippers, offering bulletins, and extending hospitality to newcomers, they foster a true sense of ownership in our community. Their responsibilities also include attendance counts, presenting the collection, and ensuring our worship space remains orderly. If you feel called to this ministry of hospitality, we invite you to join the usher team and help us extend the warmth of St. Francis to all who enter.

We welcome Jeff & Nancy Plante, Susan Bastardo, and John Bryan & Dawn Michanowicz to this ministry in 2025!

Ushers are assigned to the 10:00 AM services as well as holiday and other special services. We invite everyone to usher ministry. If you are interested in serving in this very important ministry or just want to know a little more about it, see me or one of the ushers.

Craig Stanovich, Usher Coordinator

COMMUNITY LIFE

Finance

The efforts and energies of all members of our community to generate and operate ministry programs that match the financial and “hands-on” commitments of our community continue to inspire us all.

The 2025 year-end Operating Statement again benefited from the generosity of our community. Pledge revenue exceeded budget by almost \$4k, plate revenue and other giving exceeded budget by over \$20 thousand and \$8 thousand respectively. Revenue also benefited from investment interest on a Vanguard Money Market account recommended by our Treasurer, Joel Wesson, to take advantage of increased interest rates available in the market. Overall, actual revenues exceeded Budget by over \$40 thousand.

Operating expenses totaled \$295,168 in 2025; a slight decrease from 2024 and 5.7% under budget (\$17.8k). This decrease was further enabled by generous contributions of the construction talent, time, and skill of several Parishioners in the reconstruction of the wall and windows in Fellowship Hall, as well as critical maintenance at the Rectory. Many Thanks to David Ammerman, Mike Bastardo, Dave Currie, Dick Delorme, Bryan Diehl, Andrew Jensen, Jeff Plante, Jeremy Sanders, Tyler Will, Craig Stanovich, Fred Lonardo and Matt Surabian! While most expense categories came in under budget, 42% of the overall reduction in expenses were in the Property Maintenance category. That said, maintaining and updating our buildings will continue to require a strong financial commitment. Also, economies continue to be realized by the Rector’s voluntary benefit choices. When combined with the committed giving of the members of our community, St. Francis finished the 2025 year with a net surplus of revenue over expenses of \$38,716.43.

In addition to the monetary contributions of the Mission Committee shown directly on our operating statement, the community continued to benefit from the many financial, physical and spiritual contributions of our parishioners with our mission partners. The parish continues with financial support to Mission programs with funds committed to and donated directly to our mission partners but passed through our Balance Sheet. Hence, the additional fundraising efforts of our Mission Committee are to be applauded!

Our current balance sheet is healthy, with total cash exceeding \$409,000 (\$51,669 in Checking as well as \$358,139 in a Vanguard Money Market Account). This does not include the \$173,117 in the Mission and Ministry Fund**.

The budget plan for 2026 includes revenue that is based on a 10.4% increase over actual 2025 pledge revenue and includes estimated interest income on the Money Market account. The

Vestry approved the inclusion of \$7,000 from a bequest that will be utilized toward funding a Youth Minister position. Expenses are also planned to increase by 10.3%. Much of this increase is for the Youth Minister Position and the inclusion of Altar Flowers in the operational budget. Otherwise, continued prudent budgeting will be challenged by continuing increases in utility (specifically electricity and water sewer) expenses. Leadership has again locked-in an aggressive heating oil commitment.

While 2025 saw continued uncertainty in our world, the St. Francis community has exhibited continued faith and resilience. That said, our plan tries to make faithful use of these increased pledge revenues with a very hopeful expense budget.

Our 2026 Budget is projecting a surplus of \$308.59 which includes the use of \$7,000 from a Bequest. We are relying on \$316,000 in confirmed Pledges at the time of this report. By including anticipated interest earnings on our Vanguard Money Market account, the \$7,000 Bequest and Other Giving, budgeted revenues total \$345,650 or an 18.3% increase over our 2025 budgeted revenue. The expense plan calls for \$345,341 in budgeted expenses; a \$32,343 increase compared to 2025 budgeted expenses.

The ability of our St. Francis Parish to go from a \$4,819 deficit in 2024 to a \$38,716 surplus in 2025 truly demonstrates the faith and commitment of the St. Francis community. The Finance Committee feels that the St. Francis parishioners will continue to respond spiritually and financially to the needs of our community,

Thanks to the support and guidance of Clergy, Lay Leadership, Staff and all the Ministries and Ministers at St. Francis.

The Finance Committee Richard Delorme

Ann Tripp

Joel Wesson (Treasurer) Elizabeth Carroll

Chris Berglund

** We have not yet received reports for the 4th Quarter valuations on the investment funds managed by the Trustees for the Diocese of Western MA: Taylor Fund (1112) and Grants for Mission Fund (1122). Hence, valuations for these funds are as of September 30, 2025.

Grants for Mission and Ministries Fund

In 2025, the Grants for Mission and Ministries Fund continued to enhance our community through the funding of a \$1,000 Grant to Worcester Interfaith Network.

The Grants for Mission and Ministries Fund was established by the Vestry several years ago following a couple of years of strong financial results which exceeded budget. The purpose of the fund is to encourage, receive and administer gifts in a manner faithful to the loyalty and devotion to God. The vestry voted to build the fund by contributing \$25,000 up to a maximum of \$100,000. It was ultimately funded for 3 quarters for a total investment of \$75,000. The money in the fund is maintained by the Diocese who has the money professionally managed. The market value of the fund has grown over the years and at the end of September 2025 had an uncommitted market value of \$173,117.99. The goal of the Fund is to provide a one-time donation to a current ministry to fund a special project or provide seed money for a new ministry beyond what is possible through our annual operating funds.

Per the Grants for Mission & Ministries Fund Policies and Guidelines, a committee has been established to oversee the distribution of earnings of the fund. The committee consists of 3 voting members as appointed by the Vestry. The first voting members of the Committee are: Ann Tripp, Tyler Will and Chris Berglund. Pat Perkins, the Rector, and Craig Stanovich, Senior Warden, serve as non-voting members. Each voting member will be limited to three - three year terms and new members of the committee will be filled by another member of the congregation voted to the committee by Vestry.

In 2023, the Fund targeted the St. Francis community for requests for donations. This resulted in a \$1,000 gift to the Quilters Ministry. In its second year, the Fund expanded its reach into the surrounding community to provide small financial grants to charitable organizations beyond St. Francis. In 2024, Mustard Seed in Worcester was awarded a \$1,000 gift toward the acquisition of a commercial refrigerator to enhance their mission in the community. In 2025, the Grants for Mission and Ministries Fund continued to enhance our community through the funding of a \$1,000 Grant to Worcester Interfaith Network for Immigrant Support (WINIS). This Grant served to provide "keychain" informational packets for residents of the Worcester area community. These packets contain guidance for a plethora of community services ranging from families needing to access to food, diapers, etc. as well as information on organizations providing legal services and other online services. The fund will look to continue to support charitable opportunities and seed new missions at St Francis and throughout the world.

The committee has posted an application for donations on the website and it will continue to be an annual process. In 2026, all application requests will be due by October 4th, the Feast of St. Francis. Decisions and funding will occur in the fourth quarter of 2026. Applications to the fund will be reviewed and recommended by the Grants for Mission & Ministries Fund committee with a subsequent vote by the Vestry. The maximum distributed will be based on a formula (3% of the market value of the Fund based on a three-year rolling average) and any single donation can be up to \$1,000.

It is exciting to have had the opportunity to establish the Grants for Mission & Ministries Fund and see this Fund grow over the last several years. Parishioners are encouraged to help identify prospective grant applicants that will enable the St. Francis community to further its mission outreach and focus throughout the community.

The Grants for Missions and Ministries Fund Committee

Tyler Will
Ann Tripp
Chris Berglund

Stewardship

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7

The Generosity of St. Francis Members is Truly Amazing! As of this writing, St. Francis has received 91 pledges for 2026 totaling more than \$316,000. Our average pledge has risen to \$3,476 in 2026 from \$2,981 in 2025, with 46 households able to increase their pledge from last year. What a remarkable testament to the support of our mission in bearing witness to Christ's love in the world.

If you have not yet pledged, we warmly invite you to join this outpouring of generosity. Every pledge—large or small—strengthens our parish and helps us share Christ's love more fully.

At St. Francis, Stewardship is rooted in education and shared purpose. This October, parishioners received letters explaining the meaning of a pledge and its vital role in sustaining our ministries. Our First Sunday Conversation focused on Stewardship, and we continue to share updates in the Weekend Bulletin about the goals and progress of the 2026 Financial Stewardship campaign. If you have questions or would like to explore how your pledge supports our mission, please contact me.

Of course, Stewardship is not simply about pledges—it is about living faithfully every day. At St. Francis, we are called to offer our time, our talents, and our treasure as signs of gratitude for God's abundance. Whether through ministry, service, or financial support, our year-round commitment ensures that God's mission continues to flourish among us and beyond our walls.

Craig Stanovich – Chair, Stewardship

Memorial Garden

The garden adjacent to our worship space provides beauty and solace, a place to sit, pray and gather, as it blooms and changes during the seasons. The primary purpose of the garden is to serve as a sacred burial space for the cremains of those who wish to be interred there. The original garden was founded by parishioners in 1984 with the mission of providing a simple, economical burial space. In 2006 a significant renovation was undertaken by the parish to solve serious drainage issues and to create the current beautiful garden with stone walls, paved accessible pathways and teak furniture. The renovation expanded and simplified the available burial areas, which are all the areas covered by vinca.

The garden is available to all who wish to sit, meditate, pray, and gather. It has been a tradition to gather in the fall for our annual Parish Picnic. In honor of St. Francis Day, we gather and pray by name for each person who is at rest in the garden. The names of those persons are on the plaque boards in the back of the worship space next to the door leading to the garden. For the Easter Vigil, weather permitting, we begin in the garden and light a fire from which our individual candles are lit. The garden supplies a beautiful setting for photos at special occasions in our parish life.

The lay members of the Memorial Garden Committee are appointed from year to year by the Vestry, and with the Rector, are entrusted with the care and maintenance of the garden. The committee this past year consisted of Rev. Patrick Perkins, Beverly Giarusso, Kathleen O'Connor, Michael Pope and Joy Head. The vestry liaison was Laura Caswell, Junior Warden.

One major goal for this past year was to thoroughly review and revise the Rules and Regulations governing the garden. This was successfully accomplished by the committee and approved by the Vestry.

A second major goal was the significant paver maintenance project which is necessary every five or so years. That was completed by Busy Bee during the summer. In the coming year, we plan to have comparable paver maintenance done on the small entrance area pavers at the entrance to Fellowship Hall.

The tree planted the summer before was not thriving, so it was replaced by Busy Bee with a more durable species, and appears to be doing well.

Please speak with any of the members if you would like to volunteer for assisting with garden maintenance, or are interested in learning about serving in this ministry. There is no requirement that you be a "gardener"-there are many very ordinary tasks which go into keeping the garden beautiful.

Please speak with Fr. Pat if you are interested in learning more about the burial aspects of the garden. Please note that burial in the garden is open to all persons, regardless of parish membership.

The maintenance of the garden is ongoing throughout the year, but especially during the warmer months. This year the initial spring cleanup, pruning, disease prevention and irrigation closure was handled by Busy Bee Nursery (Busy Bee has been truly wonderful over the years in consistently getting this done before Easter). The ongoing lawn care and edging was handled by our parish lawn maintenance and occasional weeding by committee members, and a paid weeder hired to work an average of two hours per week. We have been fortunate to find reliable people for this necessary position. Beautiful potted flowers were planted by Lisa Marks of In Bloom Florist. The garden benefitted from the fall cleanup project.

Our parish property chair, Andrew Jensen, collaborated with the Memorial Garden Committee to assess current needs and to arrange for any needed maintenance. Garden expenses are funded by burial fees, donations and the Taylor Fund, created by a bequest of former parishioner, Martha Taylor, for the perpetual care of the garden. The Taylor Fund is managed by the Trustees of the Diocese. The parish dedicates the altar flowers once annually in honor of Martha Taylor and her husband, Warren Taylor, in gratitude for the gift of this fund. Beverly Giarusso will be rotating off the Memorial Garden Committee after many years of dedicated and diligent service to this ministry.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen O'Connor, Chair

Hospitality Ministry

2025 was filled with many joyful moments of connection where we gathered as a community. In March we welcomed the return of our annual Shrove Tuesday Dinner where we feasted on gumbo, pancakes and yummy king cake cupcakes. This was a nice return to our tradition to gather and mark the start of the Lenten season and we hope you will join us again this year on February 17th. At the end of March we came together to share in our second annual Refreshment Sunday breakfast to mark the halfway point of lent. This was a lovely opportunity to share a yummy breakfast together after the 10am service. Thanks to the many people who contributed baked goods and helped with set up, clean up and decorations.

At the end of our summer recess we once again welcomed everyone back to church programming with our annual picnic. It was a great day filled with a yummy BBQ and many delicious side dishes and desserts provided by generous parishioners. Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people, connect with long time friends and kick off a new year of church school and ministry work. This year we welcomed our biggest crowd in years and will happily put more hotdogs and burgers on the shopping list for next year! In October, we raised a glass to celebrate Oktoberfest

hosting a fun evening with delicious German food and lively music. Thank you to everyone who helped with both of these community events.

Throughout the entire year many parishioners have volunteered to host coffee hours, providing treats and generously offering the gift of hospitality to the congregation. This act has helped us make connections across our community and welcome new church members with a pastry and cup of coffee or tea. A huge amount of thanks to everyone who hosted this year, it really helps bring us together.

Looking ahead to 2026 we are planning to host an event specifically for new church members and we are looking for another volunteer to help with the hospitality ministry. If you are interested please contact me, Taryn. Hospitality only exists when the community participates. Thank you to everyone who showed up to our events, and donated time, food or service. Your many, many small acts of kindness and generosity tie us together as a community and create a worship community filled with love and support. We are looking forward to another great year with you in 2026!

Respectfully submitted,
Taryn Surabian (Ministry Chair)

Prayer Shawl Ministry

2025 was the 20th year of this active ministry; 69 shawls were blessed (this number included 6 shawls donated by the Hubbardston Senior knitters). All are welcomed and encouraged to take part in and distribute this ministry! Prayer shawls (appropriate, as the blessing says, for both tough times and times of joy) fly off the shelves at St. Francis. At the November and December blessings knitters also offered 38 knit hats for Mustard Seed guests.

Additional hands are encouraged and needed, both knitters and crocheters. Yarn and instructions are available. Members of the group will get newcomers started and/or provide a refresher course. Thank you to Susan Bastardo who offered crochet instructions at a special teaching session. The fellowship of gathering to work on shawls occurs on the third Monday of the month (10:00 am-12:00 noon), twelve months of the year. Some parishioners work at home and drop off beautiful shawls in the “to be blessed” basket in the narthex. A fabric tag indicating that the shawl was made by the prayer shawl crafters is sewn on every shawl.

Thank you to all who knit and crochet to support this ministry.

Respectfully submitted, Barbara Henning

DAYTIME FELLOWSHIP

In 2015, discussion with older members of St. Francis and Rev. Pat and Karen Safstrom, Marge Tremblay and others, the decision was made to set up an activity to offer older members a method to feel more a part of St. Francis as well as self. Over 10 years, the activities have gone through a variety of changes, but the purpose has remained: To encourage movement, get out in society and foster being with similar older persons and develop ideas and practices which would carry out positive behaviors which could help St. Francis. A number of older members worked the original program and Senior Ministry evolved. Over 10 years which followed, this activity had many programs, once per month which helped meet the goal described above. At one point however, the name was changed to Daytime Fellowship to open attendance to any member interested. Activity did not change in 2025.

However, the decision to end this program was made by Marge Tremblay with agreement from Rev. Pat. For Marge, this 10 years has been highly helpful for making her own moving through 'growing old' with enjoyment and successful body changes. Thank you to everyone. However, I need to stop and the activity is now up to someone who is interested. I will talk with anyone who has an interest.

2025 continued some interesting activities especially May baskets made by participants and delivered to church members who are unable to come to church. Although we ended in June 2025, we agreed to meet Rev. Pat's request, and a fourth Advent luncheon was organized and served by those who had been active in Daytime Fellowship for some time. The luncheon was well received and 40 people attended. Thank you to all who attended and especially thank you to those who cooked and served!

Again, thank you to all who took part in the last 10 years.

Marge Tremblay

Update on status of AED (automated external defibrillator)

2025 has been a positive year for our AED. The device has been very functional and with ongoing review weekly, monthly and annually, we are fortunate to have it available. A number of team members continue to be capable for action when needed. The team also works to confirm need to update the defibrillator as time requires. During 2026, opportunities for learning how to use this very important device plus review time for those desiring to do so.

Marge Tremblay and Jim Emard, Coordinators

Property

Chair: Steve Cook and Andrew Jensen; Members: Bryan Diehl, Steve Henning, Joel Wesson, Matt Surabian, Richard Dixon, David Currie, Jeremy Sanders

Additional members are needed!

The following items were undertaken and/or considered. Priorities needed to be determined. Stewardship of our buildings and grounds is an ongoing responsibility.

Special projects

- 1) Outside cleanups were conducted on November 22nd. Holden Landscaping vacuumed up the leaves that were piled up in the corner of the parking lot.
- 2) New smoke detectors St. Clare House.
- 3) New lighting in woman's bathroom.
- 4) Fellowship hall east wall (new windows and repair of water damage)
- 5) Window in kitchen lubricated
- 6) Rectory maintenance:
 - a. New guard rails on deck
 - b. Stabilized deck stairs
 - c. Repaired front wall of garage
 - d. Insulation around dishwasher
 - e. Updated wiring in garage
 - f. Adjusted front door
- 7) 2 large dead Ash trees between St. Francis and neighboring house were removed by Kent Tree.

Deferred/temporary maintenance.

Year Ahead Plans

- 1) Second humidifier may be needed in St. Clare House in warm weather.
- 2) Rectory maintenance and repair – including but not limited to cleaning/replacing; clean/paint rectory exterior; replace/repair siding on dormer; add gutter (full length of the porch); remove 3 large bushes in front; upstairs shower insert; plumbing for dishwater – Andrew and Jeremy will be making a walk-through in 2026;
- 3) Review exterior door in fellowship hall
- 4) Update light fixtures in cross

Suggestions/needs – please convey any concerns to the Property Committee

MINISTRY TO THE WORLD

MISSION MINISTRIES

“WE ARE GIVERS, BEARING WITNESS TO CHRIST’S LOVE.”

As we do every year, we wholeheartedly thank every member of the congregation for your overwhelming generosity and support of our Mission Ministries. As a ministry, our objective is to use the resources at our disposal to foster partnerships with local service organizations to provide projects and services in which parishioners can participate. Our three Mission Partners are Abby’s House (Worcester), Dismas Farm (Oakham), and Mustard Seed (Worcester), but we work with and support other organizations as well throughout the year, including Wachusett Food Pantry (Sterling), Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF), and Heifer International. Please see the brief descriptions of our Mission Partners below.

Your donations of food and monetary contributions helped feed hundreds of families this year. Our “feeding ministries” include preparing and serving meals at both Mustard Seed and Dismas Farm. These activities continue to be a rewarding shared experience for our volunteers (who do not need to be official “members” of Mission Ministries). This year was particularly challenging for people in the area experiencing food scarcity, with the usual pressures on food distribution networks exacerbated by cuts in federal benefits for both food and energy cost subsidies. In addition to the regular St. Francis community food drives, we requested emergency food donations and were overwhelmed by the response. A dedicated group of volunteers are at the church for the food drives, then sort and deliver the donations to our Ministry Partners and the Wachusett Food Pantry. Volunteers also pick up food donations at three area businesses that have collection baskets for St. Francis: Sweets & Java and All One Credit Union in Holden and Pinecroft Dairy in West Boylston.

St. Francis also provides direct financial support to our Mission Partners and other groups. Our financial support through the Mission budget, special collections throughout the year (Holy Week, Thanksgiving, Christmas), and individual donations totaled almost \$20,000.

Apart from the feeding ministries and food drives, we again provided Christmas gifts to 30 Worcester-area children in foster care through the DCF Wonderfund. By providing individual gifts to these children from their wish lists, you also provided them with something intangible. As the Wonderfund Team wrote, “What made this year especially meaningful was not just the number of children supported, but how you supported them. You gave without

judgment---whether a child asked for a book, a toy, or a brand-name item---and in doing so, you honored their dignity and individuality. Your kindness sends a powerful message to young people: 'You are worth listening to and your wishes matter.' You offered joy, validation, and a sense of belonging to children who have faced far more challenges than any child should." With the generous gifts from the congregation, Mission Ministries also contributed \$500 in gift cards for teens and for children who were placed with foster families after the wish lists had been collected.

Lastly, we continue to collect spare change and small bills for the Mampong Babies Orphanage in Ghana. We send these donations to the orphanage to provide diapers and formula for orphaned babies.

Thank you again for your ongoing commitment to helping the least among us.

St. Francis Mission Partners

Abby's House. Abby's House provides shelter and affordable housing as well as support services to homeless, battered, and low-income women and their children. During our partnership with Abby's over many years, St. Francis parishioners have prepared and served meals at the shelter, crafted quilts for the residents, worked at the Thrift Shop, and made significant financial contributions. Kathleen O'Connor is our Mission Ministries liaison and can provide you with more information, or check out their website, www.abbysouse.org

Dismas Farm. Dismas House, a non-profit committed to helping former prisoners with reentry into their communities. The Dismas Family Farm in Oakham is a 12-bed residence and working farm that grows produce that is distributed to other non-profits groups in Worcester county. St. Francis parishioners prepare meals that they share with the residents at the farm, providing an opportunity for meaningful fellowship. If you would like more information about Dismas, see their website at www.dismasisfamily.org, talk to Mary Jude Pigsley about participating in this feeding ministry.

Mustard Seed. Mustard Seed, off Pleasant Street in downtown Worcester, serves dinner five days per week, every week to more than 100 people each evening. They also operate a weekly food pantry that is used by more than 200 people. St. Francis parishioners provided the dinners 14 times last year (about 1,750 meals at a cost of about \$7,000). We also provided funding for a refrigerator for perishable food donations. If you would like to participate in preparing and serving meals at Mustard Seed, Nancy Pope would love to talk to you. You can also find them on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/mustardseedcw/>

Mustard Seed

The highlights for 2025 at the Mustard Seed included a very successful summer camp that had thirty-one campers, of which many were returning from previous summers. This year the campers were up to fourth grade. St. Francis parishioners supported two and half campers. Each child had a curriculum written for them to bring their reading and math skills to grade level.

Field trips included the Worcester Art Museum, Plymouth Plantation and Southwick Zoo. The children also experienced an African percussion band that played music and demonstrated their instruments to them.

A first for the Mustard Seed was the marriage of two regular volunteers who met while serving at the seed. The wedding was held at St. Peter's Worcester, many regular Mustard Seed guests and volunteers attended and

celebrated. Included in the wedding party was a forever Mustard Seed guest who with his fresh haircut and new grey suit served as a groomsman.

Food collections from St. Francis, Sweets & Java, All One Credit Union and Pinecroft continue to be significant supporters of the Mustard Seed. The Mustard Seed Food Pantry is now assisting over 200 families every week with staple groceries.

We are very grateful to have corporate donations of food and summer ice cream from the Milan family, Sweets & Java, Deerhorn Farm, Mesa Farm and the Gardener Food Pantry. Fresh eggs from the Currie family chickens and garden produce from friends and neighbors are also donated.

St. Francis came together to serve two extra meals in 2025 due to a shortage of meal providers. Mid year we were in need of more help to serve meals when the Mustard Seed changed how they would like us to serve our guests. The response from St. Francis volunteers was tremendous.

Lastly I remain grateful to everyone who thoughtfully made weekly and monthly donations to our mission partners. We are blessed to continue to maintain amazing teams of shoppers, cooks and servers. Monthly we have the most amazing bakers who provide lovely home made desserts to go along with the meals. Many thanks to Will and Carol Ames who moved to New Hampshire and still showed up to cook on their scheduled months. That is dedication!

Special thank you to Beth Ann and Julie for doing extra shopping for the Mustard Seed Food Pantry. Thanks to all who have helped make deliveries to the Mustard Seed, Peter, Stephen and Jeff.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy L Pope

Dismas Family Farm

Dismas Family Farm, in Oakham, MA, is a place where (up to 12) formerly incarcerated men are offered rehabilitation and supportive housing on a working farm, learning life and vocational skills within a staffed community setting to help reintegrate them into society.

St. Francis continues its relationship with the Dismas Family Farm organization this year. Once every month, a team from St. Francis prepares, brings and serves a complete meal for the Dismas House men. They eat together and share fellowship with one another. The men have shared how they love it when St. Francis comes and always look forward to the fourth Wednesday of the month! From my personal experience, and from those who have shared, it is a lively time which is a blessing for all!

The four teams that rotate once a month throughout the year (each team serving three meals) are:

Team One: Jane Greisbach, Peggy Pynoski, John Bell and Leah Giles.

Team Two: David Chenevert and Mary and Steven Cook.

Team Three: Richard Dixon, Tyler Will and Mary Hollingsworth.

Team Four: Nicole McGurin and Michael Reno.

Some of the foods provided this year: baked ham and cheese sandwiches, Mexican lasagna, jambalaya, smoked pulled pork, cottage pie, slow cooked pork, meat and vegetable lasagnas, roasted potatoes, fresh and cooked vegetables, chocolate truffle, key lime pie, strawberry shortcake. Mmm...

As liaison from St. Francis to Dismas, I continue to learn about this amazing organization and how our St. Francis community provides prayerful, and other, support. For Christmas, I was blessed to deliver \$500.00 in Walmart gift cards provided through the Missions Ministry here at St. Francis. It was shared with me by a Dismas worker that the men are so very grateful for our support and care. Dismas is also part of the Mission Ministry quarterly food collection. When the state Food Stamp program was going to be withheld this past fall, St. Francis stepped up and delivered much needed provisions to Dismas House. The Coordinator at Dismas shared how grateful they all were and how St. Francis is a true blessing to their community.

When we give, we receive. Before closing, I would like to share a few quotes on how this ministry also feeds some of our team members.

"I love this ministry and the work of Dismas House and Farm!"

"It is rewarding to share a meal together in fellowship – especially with Deacon Jane!"

"What I like most about Dismas is sitting down to eat with the men. I am reminded that Jesus asks us to do this and THAT feeds my soul."

"I enjoy each visit to Dismas Farm because the residents are so very appreciative, respectful and helpful."

Faithfully submitted by,
Mary Cook

Quilting at St. Frances, St. Clare Quilters

The St. Clare Quilters, established in 2017, includes beginners to far more experienced quilters. The group makes small quilts for donation. To date, approximately 350 quilts have been donated. The quilt designs are simple and small, cotton and flannel, intended for warmth and comfort. The group is grateful for generous fabric donations, completed quilts, and our personal stashes of fabric which have allowed this effort to continue. An individual donation and funds raised at the 2024 holiday craft table established a St. Francis fund to help support this work. These funds are used for the cost of batting, an invisible part of each quilt. Overall, quilting is an expensive effort. The St. Clare Quilters were grateful in 2025 to have a St. Francis budget line. The budget line covered the cost of small labels that are attached to finished quilts.

During 2025, 55 quilts were blessed and donated to families with children living in temporary shelters under the auspices of the Central Mass Housing Alliance. The 2025 St. Clare quilters were Susan Delorme, Susan Dresley, Beverly Giarusso, Barbara Henning, Christina Melzar, Allison Mondel and Julie Russell. The mission of the group is to create quilts to warm the hearts and bodies of our neighbors in need while fostering fellowship among our members.

Newcomers, both to quilting and this group, are welcomed and encouraged!

We are truly blessed by the variety of donations and support of this ministry.

Respectfully submitted, Susan Dresley and Barbara Henning, Co-Chairs

2026 Leadership Nominations

(Elected to serve one year term unless otherwise noted)

<u>SENIOR WARDEN</u>	Craig Stanovich
<u>JUNIOR WARDEN</u>	Laura Caswell
<u>CLERK</u>	Dawn Rooke
<u>TREASURER</u>	Joel Wesson
<u>VESTRY:</u> Three-year terms	Laura Papandrea and John Bell (terms expire 2029)
<u>DIOCESAN CONVENTION DELEGATES:</u>	Dick Delorme, Dawn Rooke
<u>DIOCESAN CONVENTION ALTERNATES:</u>	Craig Stanovich, Susan Bastardo, Bev Giarusso

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Vestry:

Term expires 2027:	Ann Tripp and Jeremy Sanders
Term expires 2028:	Rich Farrell and Susan Dresley
Retiring:	Tina Chen and Matt Surabian

Memorial Garden: Appointed

Term expires 2027:	Kathleen O'Connor
Term expires 2028:	Michael Pope
Term expires 2029:	Joy Head and Dawn Michanowicz
Retiring:	Beverly Giarusso

<u>COMMITTEES</u>	<u>CHAIRPERSONS</u>
Finance.....	Chris Berglund
Mission Ministries.....	Andy Mellors
Newcomers.....	Dawn Rooke / Taryn Surabian
Property.....	Andrew Jensen / Steve Cook
Stewardship.....	Craig Stanovich
Memorial Garden.....	Kathleen O'Connor
Altar Guild.....	Bev Giarusso
Ushers.....	Craig Stanovich
Readers/LEMs.....	Linda Shelton
Acolytes.....	Laura Caswell

Vestry Officers: *The following list of names will be presented to be elected to terms as defined in the note on page 26.*

Senior Warden: Craig Stanovich

Jennifer and I have been members of St. Francis since 2000. I was received at St. Francis into the Episcopal Church in 2004. Both of our children, Chelsea and Nicholas, have participated in Church School as well as both being confirmed at St. Francis. After previously serving on the Vestry, and also serving as both Junior and Senior Warden, I have had the privilege of chairing Stewardship for the last several years. In addition, in conjunction with our Rector, I was honored to lead an outstanding RenewalWorks mission team – focusing on the importance of spiritual growth at St. Francis. I have also been a member of the Vestry since 2020 and have served as the Usher Coordinator for the last decade. As an Usher Coordinator, it has been my pleasure to greet St. Francis members at the 10:00 AM service as well as welcome visitors. I am honored to again be nominated for the Junior Warden as the faith community of St. Francis is a vital part of my life. My hope is to continue to welcome and invite folks into participating in our ministries so that they, too, can experience the blessings that have been bestowed on me at St. Francis.

Junior Warden: Laura Caswell

Laura came to St Francis in 1991. Her now adult children grew up at St Francis and she has been involved in many ministries over the years. Currently she is a LEM, member of the handbell choir and a shopper for Mustard Seed. She is honored to be considered for Warden again (this will be her second time in this position). She is looking forward to serving St Francis in this capacity.

Clerk: Dawn Rooke

Dawn has been the Clerk of the Vestry since January 2006 and a parishioner of St. Francis Church since 1991. Before serving as Clerk, she served one full and one partial term as a vestry member. She has also been a longtime member of the Hospitality Committee. Her three adult children were raised in the St. Francis Church School and Youth Group programs, which she believes helped mold them into the adults they have become. Dawn and her husband, Brian, have lived in Holden since 1990.

Treasurer: Joel Wesson

Joel Wesson and Lisa Nicholas moved to Holden in November of 2022 from Mississippi, when we joined St Francis. Joel is a lifelong Episcopalian and has been Sr. Warden, Jr. Warden, and Treasurer for many years at St Paul's Episcopal Church in Picayune, Mississippi. He was also a choir member and Lay Eucharistic Minister at St Paul's. He is a member of the bell choir here. He has also been active in the Men's Saturday Morning workdays and has joined the Finance Committee and an ad hoc lighting committee. He has also worked with Steve Henning this year on some building maintenance items. Since August, Ann Tripp has been re-introducing Joel to Quickbooks accounting and the Treasurer's responsibilities.

Vestry:

The following list of names will be presented to serve three-year terms:

John Bell

St. Francis has been my family's church home since 2023. My wife Leah and I moved to central Massachusetts when I started teaching at Assumption University. After our daughter Juniper was born and the pandemic subsided, we went looking for a church, having previously attended St. James's in Cambridge. We were drawn to St. Francis for its Sunday school program and mission ministries, not to mention its friendly people! I became one of the Pre-K/Kindergarten teachers in fall 2024. For the last two years, I have also helped Susan Bastardo organize the church's Lenten reflection series. In November 2024, I was confirmed in the Episcopal Church. I'm now taking the lay preaching class. My family and I are grateful to be growing in faith as members of this church community, and I would be delighted to give back as a member of the vestry.

Laura Papandrea

Laura has been a member of Saint Francis since 1999. She previously served as a church school teacher for six years and as acolyte coordinator for five years. Her two children attended and were confirmed at Saint Francis. Laura is a professional musician and also worked for thirty years as office manager for her husband's former optometric practice. She is honored to be asked to join the vestry.

Diocesan Convention: *The following list of names will be presented to serve 1 year terms***Dick Delorme**

My wife and I have been members of St. Francis for 25 years. I was Junior Warden and then Senior Warden during Rich's first four years at St. Francis. I then served as Treasurer for four years. I participated in the election of Doug Fisher as our Bishop. The ministry-oriented culture and spiritual aliveness of St. Francis are what make me want to continue serving in my current capacity. I also want to participate in guiding the diocese in the direction that Bishop Fisher wants to take us.

Susan Bastardo

Susan grew up in Seekonk MA and was raised in the Roman Catholic church. She and her family (husband Michael, son Joe, daughter Jena) started attending St. Francis when they moved to Holden in 1990. Soon after joining she volunteered to be a Sunday School teacher. She was received into the Episcopal church in 1992 and was hired as the Church School Coordinator in 1994. She joyfully served in that position for twenty-five years. During that time, she completed the four-year Education for Ministry program and served as a mentor for several confirmands. Her involvement in these ministries provided experiences and led to relationships that helped deepen her faith and strengthen her connection to the St. Francis community. She appreciates the opportunity to learn more about the many ministries of St. Francis while serving as Senior Warden.

Dawn Rooke: see bio above**Diocesan Convention Alternates: *The following list of names will be presented to serve 1 year terms*****Craig Stanovich: see bio above****Bev Giarusso**

Bev is a lifelong Episcopalian and has been a member of St. Francis since the days when services were held in the yellow house. During her years at St. Francis she has taught Sunday school, shopped for Mustard Seed, worked annually on the church fair, served on the vestry, served as warden and helped a group of teenagers build the labyrinth in the back yard of St. Clare House. Currently she is co-director of the Altar Guild, is involved in the nursing home ministry, works with the quilters, and ushers at the Saturday service. She is now retired after 35 years as a Middle School math teacher in the Worcester Public Schools. Bev lives in West Boylston with her husband Vincent – also a WPS retiree. Their family includes a son Richard, daughter-in-law Allison and grandson Adrian.

Basic Responsibilities of the Vestry

The responsibility of the Vestry, like that of the governing body of any organization, is to:

- †Help define and articulate the mission of the congregation;
- †Support the mission by word and deed;
- †Select the rector;
- †Ensure effective organization and planning;
- †Ensure adequate resources in leadership and in financial stewardship;
- †Manage resources effectively;
- †Determine that appropriate programs, policies, and procedures have been developed and are followed;
- †Assess its own performance

The success of a congregation is not measured in terms of numbers of members or size of the endowment, but rather in the degree to which it is working toward the fulfillment of the mission of the Church.

(From "What Is A Vestry?" Publication of Cornerstone, Episcopal Church Foundation)

2025 Financial Information - Page Intentionally Left Blank. For financial information, please contact the church office.