



ANNUAL REPORT

157th Annual Parish Meeting
Sunday, January 25th, 2026

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AGENDA

1. Call to Order and Opening Prayer
2. Appointing of the Clerk for the Annual Meeting
3. Certification of Quorum
4. 2025 Annual Meeting Minutes
5. Recognition of Outgoing Vestry Members
 - Lauren Rentfro
 - Susan Walker
 - Erin Gardella
 - Peg Homeier
 - Michael Keane
6. Vestry Election Process
7. Announcing the Nominees for Vestry Class of 2028
8. Warden Leadership in 2026 (Action)
9. Wardens' Address
10. Treasurer's Report
 - 2025 End of Year Financials
 - 2026 Budget (Action)
11. Selection of Delegates to Diocesan Convention (Action)
12. Vestry Elections (Action)
13. Final Things for the Good of the Order
14. Adjournment and Prayer

CALL TO ORDER & OPENING PRAYER

Rector The Lord be with you.

People **And also with you.**

Rector Let us pray.

Almighty and everliving God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with those who take counsel for the renewal and mission of your Church. Help us to make good use of the many and varied gifts you have given us to that we may do your will here in this parish and beyond its walls. 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.*

APPOINTING OF THE CLERK FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING

The Priest-in-Charge appoints a clerk to record minutes of the Annual Meeting.

CERTIFICATION OF QUORUM

A quorum shall consist of that number of members of the Parish present and qualified to vote at such Annual or Special Parish Meetings as is specified in the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of Chicago.

Those qualified to vote

Parish Members are qualified to vote for Wardens and Vestry, and upon all questions coming before any Annual or Special Parish Meeting, provided they are:

- *baptized persons of sixteen (16) or more years of age*
- *who are recognized as members of the Parish by the Rector and at least one of the Wardens, or, if the Rector be not present, by the two Wardens, and*
- *whose names appear on the books of the Treasurer during the twelve months immediately previous to the Annual or Special Parish Meeting in question, it being understood that the pledge, donation or other obligation for such contributions shall have been incurred prior to the said six months*

2025 Meeting Minutes

Grace Episcopal Church
209 N. Pine Street
New Lenox, IL 60451

GRACE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2025 - February 9, 2025 – 11:00am CDT

Agenda

- Called to order by Susan Walker and Lauren Rentfro (Wardens), Pam & Ed Bloom appointed as Clerks.

Certification of Quorum

- We have a quorum – 45 attendees.

Opening Prayer

- Anne Styx

Regarding 2024 Annual Minutes

- Last year's annual meeting minutes were in the handout. Motion to approve the minutes: Barb Plantz; second, Charles Bopp; motion approved.

Vestry Election Process

- Gina Loftus was recognized for her service.

Nominees for Vestry Class of 2026

- Nominees were introduced – Anne Styx and Madie Redfern.

Leadership

- Motion to reappoint the current wardens during the year and to facilitate the search process for another rector. Charles Bopp; second, Ed Bloom; motion approved.

Priest-in-Charge Address

- Pastor Charlotte was absent due to a recent surgery. The report is included in the handout.

Warden's Address

- Susan Walker has been lining up supply priests for the services. There may have to be only one service depending on when supply priests are available.
- Mike Burns has been donating his time and supplies for repairs at the church. There were requests for Mike's contact info; we will put his info into "friends of Grace" on the newsletter.
- The vicarage has gotten water in the basement again and repairs are ongoing. Robyn Flowers will do a complementary appraisal of the property to assess possible future rental income and to validate the insurance coverage on the vicarage and the organ in the church.

Treasurer's Report

- Chris Francis presented the Treasurer's Report.
- Motion to approve the report: Barb Plantz; second: Pam Bloom; motion carried.

Ministry Reports

- Barb Plantz spoke about the Lazarus Ministry and requested that if anyone knew of legal assistance that could help with forming a 501 3(c) designation.

Selection of Delegates to Diocesan Convention

- Convention will be on Zoom this year.
- Volunteers
 - Linda Carrigan
 - Charles Bopp
 - Matthew Gellert
- Alternates
 - Anne Styx
 - Amanda Bopp
 - Teri Tucci
- Motion to approve delegates: Karen Ziech; second: Brenda Carrier; motion carried.

Vestry Elections

- Motion to elect Anne Styx and Madie Redfern to the Vestry: Mary Wilson; second: Amanda Bopp; motion carried.

For the Good of the Order

- Jackie Mennella spoke about the children's ministry.
- Bernadine Prygrosky and Karen Ziech discussed the Anti-Racism workshop being held at Grace on February 22, 2025
- The CAT survey has been submitted and results will be forthcoming.
- The search committee will begin its work soon after the results of the CAT survey are

received.

Grace Adjournment and Prayer

- Closing prayer offered by Anne Styx.
- Motion to adjourn Annual Meeting: Gina Loftus; second Debbie Poole; motion approved. Meeting adjourned by Lauren Rentfro and Susan Walker at 11:37am CDT.

RECOGNITION OF OUTGOING VESTRY MEMBERS

- Lauren Rentfro
- Susan Walker
- Erin Gardella
- Peg Homeier
- Michael Keane

VESTRY ELECTION PROCESS

Vestry

Outgoing Class of 2025

**Lauren Rentfro
Susan Walker
Erin Gardella
Peg Homeier
Michael Keane**

Class of 2026

**David Schilling
Teri Tucci**

Class of 2027

**Madie Redfern
Anne Styx**

Canons of the Diocese of Chicago:

The Vestry shall transact all the temporal business of the Parish; shall see that all things needful for the Public Services are provided; shall collect and disburse all moneys due for Church purposes; shall provide that under officers be suitably appointed and faithfully discharge their duties; shall pay with punctuality and at intervals agreed upon the stipulated salaries of the Rector and others; shall inform themselves of all collections required by the Canons of the Diocese, and of assessments which may be imposed by the Convention, and take measures for the due and prompt liquidation of these obligations; and before the close of each fiscal year of the Diocese the Vestry shall collect as far as practicable, by subscriptions or otherwise, a sum sufficient to liquidate all the current expenses of the Parish. – Canon 20, Section 2.

NOMINEES FOR VESTRY CLASS OF 2028

CHRIS WHITEHEAD

I have been a member of Grace Church for 34 years, many changes and plenty of history. My daughter, Elizabeth, grew up running the halls of the church we were there so often. I served as treasurer for a number of years as I am a retired accountant. I love all the fellowship events of Grace and the church itself. God has told me it is time to get involved again, I hope you agree.

ADDITIONAL NOMINEES FROM THE FLOOR

NOMINEES FOR WARDEN LEADERSHIP IN 2026

ANNE STYX

Anne Styx has been attending Grace for approximately 16 years. She began attending after looking for a new church home that aligned with her evolving values and faith, and offered opportunities for children, but also offered the comfort of familiar rituals. Grace was a great fit. To Anne, Grace felt like a community she was eager to join, and she is proud to be a member still. She is married with two teenage sons and is a resident of New Lenox. She is also a junior high social studies teacher in New Lenox District 122. She has served on the vestry twice and is excited to support Grace and help the community of Grace thrive in the role of Warden.

TERI TUCCI

My name is Teri Tucci. I'm married with two children, Henry (10) and Eleanor (7). I began attending Grace in the summer of 2022. I jumped into the Newcomer's class almost immediately and never really looked back. A few months later, my mother, Linda Carrigan started to come along with me. Though I grew up in another faith tradition and I had been out of church for a while, I found Grace immediately welcoming and knew I wanted to be a part of the congregation. You'll generally find me at the 10:30 am service, but every now and then, I'm out of the house in time for an 8:00 am service! Professionally, while I have a background in higher education marketing and enrollment management, I'm currently a partner in a small digital agency, where I act as Project Manager in our day-to-day operations. I'm proficient with most things web-related, and handle technology pretty easily--if I don't know the answer, I can usually figure it out. I also act as a Producer on the video side of the agency, so I've got a passing familiarity with most things related to A/V production.

I currently lead the Grace Adult forum group, am in Year 3 of EFM, am a member of the Anti-Racism Committee at Grace, and work with my mom, Linda Carrigan, to maintain the Blessings Box ministry. As I look ahead and consider what I'd like to see for Grace in the coming months and years, I think continual community outreach to help share this special community with others has to be at the top of the list. I'd love to see things like the Lazarus ministry expand to help more and more people in our surrounding areas. I hope that Grace is able to continue to grow and expand the Children's ministry in the coming years as well.

- Recognition of the Outgoing Class
- Vote to approve Warden Leadership for 2026

Resolved, *that Anne Styx and Teri Tucci serve as Co-Wardens, for the period from this meeting to the next Annual Meeting*

PRIEST-IN-CHARGE'S ADDRESS

About this time last year, I was not yet a deacon and I was just beginning to put together my materials to interview at churches. Here at Grace, you were all preparing to say goodbye to a priest and anxiously beginning a new search process, much sooner than you had expected after the previous one. All of us were facing quite a bit of uncertainty. But it is in those times of uncertainty that we put our trust in God and open ourselves to wherever the Spirit leads.

I can honestly say that I never expected my first call to be here at Grace. I had heard stories about you all while I was still up in Chicago. I heard stories about this little church that had made a name for itself by being truly welcoming to all when so many other churches have been welcoming in name only. I heard about how, when so many other churches were shrinking and having to shutter their doors, you had made the jump from mission to parish status. Everyone in the diocese was abuzz about what was going on in New Lenox.

When I saw that you were looking for a new priest and were willing to take a shot at someone newly ordained, I couldn't believe my luck. Though of course, we know that it isn't luck at all. It was the movement of the Spirit (and also the movement of Andrea Mysen and Bishop Paula).

That Spirit brought us together for an interview, several actually. During that time, we learned that we have shared values of hospitality, serving our community, and seeking justice for all God's people. Members of the vestry and search committee told me stories of traditions from the past, like the Ham Dinner, and more recent traditions like Trunk or Treat. We discussed the importance of caring for all of the members of this community, from babbling toddlers to those who are homebound and at the end of their lives. Through this time of mutual discernment, we decided to embark on a shared ministry together and you called me as your Deacon-in-Charge, soon to be Priest-in-Charge.

Most of the summer passed between the signing of the letter of agreement and my start date at the beginning of September, but Grace is not the kind of church that sits around. During that summer, Jackie Mennella led a Vacation Bible School that is so beloved that I have gotten emails from people who do not attend our church, but look forward to coming each year. Teri Tucci led Adult Forum in reading *War Made Invisible*, connecting Grace to the diocese through the One Book, One Diocese program and helping us all to see how our country's actions have impacted the rest of the world. And, of course, many many people worked together to ensure that Pride Mass continued as a way to show that God's love extends to people of all genders and sexualities.

When I arrived, I was thrilled to jump right into the amazing ministry that was already occurring at Grace. Within my first week, I celebrated a baptism and helped lay to rest a former vicar of Grace. Over the next several months, you all patiently went on this journey with me of switching back and forth between Eucharist and Morning Prayer, inviting supply priests to help fill in whenever we were able. I want to say thank you for that patience and your continued patience as I continue to learn and grow into the role of being your priest.

I also want to say thank you for your stories. In the five months since I have arrived, I have had either one on one or small group conversations with over 40 of you about how you came to Grace, your relationships with your faith, and what you would like to see in this church going forward. I have learned so much about what makes this place and all of you so special. It is because of these stories that we brought back the weekly Bible Study. I heard that it meant so much to several people in this congregation, so I moved it to the top of my priority list. I am glad I did! We have a great group that meets weekly to pray together and break open God's Word.

There have also been many other exciting activities going on the past several months. We had multiple successful puzzle nights led by Anne Styx where we welcomed in community members as well as parishioners. We shared God's love with the people of Joliet Pride Fest and had many important conversations with people who had felt excluded from churches in the past. We hosted a delicious chili cooking class, led by Sarah Stapp, and donated all of the delicious meals we cooked to the New Lenox Food Pantry. We also stayed busy during Advent with our animal themed devotional *All Creation Waits*, our Wednesday night activities, and our Book of Common Prayer class.

It seems incredibly fitting that our stewardship campaign theme last year was "Grace in Action" because there certainly has been a lot of action around here lately. And speaking of the stewardship campaign, I hope you haven't forgotten our fun (for me at least) poster activities. Through those activities we discerned together where the Spirit is leading us next. We learned that the answer to that question lies beyond our walls. Our focus in the coming year is to reach out to our community and let them know who we are and what we believe, and not just let them know, but show them through our actions of service. As we say during Morning Prayer in the General Thanksgiving, we "show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives."

This opening of ourselves to the community will look lots of different ways. It will include an expansion and reimagining of the Lazarus Ministry to try to help even more people in our community. Talk to Barb Plants if you are interested in becoming involved in that. It will also look like more community based events like our Olympic watch party and a community BBQ when the weather warms. This Spirit led focus of reaching out to our community will also materialize in

other ways that I can't even imagine. Ultimately, what it looks like will be up to you. This church belongs to each of you and together we will make it a vision of where God is calling us: a home for those of us who need rest from an overwhelming world, a community for those of us who need a listening ear, a place of inspiration for those called to action, and a space of nurturing where every parishioner of every stage of life can grow more deeply into their faith.

The final thing I want to say, is that I do know that we have some work to do here at Grace. Our budget picture isn't as rosy as any of us would hope and our pews are not as full as we would like. But what I know about Grace, what I knew about this church before I met any of you back when I was in Chicago, is that this church can do amazing things. This church has been doing amazing things for over 150 years and I believe it will continue to do amazing things for decades to come. I believe this church has the ingenuity, passion, faith, and love to overcome our financial obstacles and continue to live out the mission to which we have been called by the Holy Spirit. I also believe that this mission is so compelling and the people here are so warm and welcoming that we will certainly begin seeing more people drawn here to join us at Grace.

If you don't believe me, just look around. It has already begun! We have had visitors who have become regular members of our community. We have already had one baptism this year and expect to have at least two more. We have a wedding this summer and at least six people who would like to be confirmed or received into the Episcopal Church. I am filled with joy, even amidst a frightening world; I am filled with hope, amidst the challenges we face; and I am filled with excitement about all of the good we will do together, in God's name, over the coming year.

Peace,

Fr. Bryan
Priest-in-Charge

WARDENS' REPORT

Being part of the vestry for the past 4+ years has been extremely rewarding, although trying at times. We have seen our church family go through struggles and down time, but now we have regrouped, renewed our purpose and direction, and are moving forward as a strong Grace community. As a vestry, we are responsible for controlling our budget and utilizing the incoming donations in a responsible way to keep our church operating. A major consideration is staffing which entails salaries, pensions, insurance and the daily expenses keeping the key positions in our parish staffed, but today we wanted to specifically address the Buildings and Grounds responsibility and how we utilized our portion of the budget.

First of all, we need to mention that your vestry takes the responsibility of how to distribute your gifts very seriously. We thoroughly discuss not only our perceived needs, but how to service these needs responsibly. Our parish guidelines state that we only need a simple majority to pass a proposed expenditure. This vestry has taken that a bit further, and not to sound like a politician, but we cannot recall one major expenditure that we passed these past few years that wasn't approved unanimously.

Now that doesn't happen immediately. There was a lot of discussions, research and alternative solutions to consider before the final product could be approved. A final approval is not given until we all are satisfied and every concern was addressed.

During the past year several plumbing issues have occurred in the Rectory. Much needed repairs, including water damage, were taken care of in a timely fashion. Repairs were needed to the ceiling in the front hallway and to the bathroom directly above that.

Peg Homeier and Dave Poole have been remarkable in keeping track of the ground service providers, and Dave Poole did some much needed work on the Rectory deck. Peg and Brenda Rentfro have spent numerous hours pruning and trimming back overgrown perennials and planting new flowers and ground covers. They have definitely maintained our "curb appeal".

In the fall Father Bryan and the Vestry dedicated a park bench and bird bath in the honor of Dave Warner. We worked with Dave's daughter, Wendy, to ensure that the project went smoothly. The first day the bird bath was in place was a sight to behold. Dozens of birds showed up and waited in line on the roof to take their refreshing baths.

You may have noticed this fall that the hallway from the Church to the Parish Hall was a bit frigid at times. We have had the HVAC units serviced and renewed the maintenance plan to ensure better service and smoother transitions from heating to cooling and back again. We only serviced 2 of our 3 rooftop HVAC units again this year. Realizing that the 3rd unit was unnecessary for the Parish Hall, we took it offline.

The outside stairs to the Sacristy annex were replaced in the fall. The stairs down to the undercroft were also repaired, as was the ejector pump in the office. Mold abatement and reorganizing church materials were also a much-needed project this fall.

One of our most important and rewarding tasks in 2025 was trekking to Peoria to St. Paul's church in December. We presented our Deacon-in-Charge to Bishop Paula for final ordination. The following day, Father Bryan presented his first Mass and Eucharist. Ninety-nine people showed up for that day and feasted on an extended coffee hour. We are blessed!

In closing, your Vestry is definitely committed to tending to the needs of our church community. We are blessed to be a part of this truly loving and committed church family and we are grateful to have served as your wardens this past year and will support the new 2026 wardens.

Lauren Rentfro, Warden
Susan Walker, Warden

MINISTRY REPORTS

MUSIC MINISTRY

Hello everyone! While music at Grace may seem pretty much the same as it has been in the past, there were some highlights and changes that happened throughout 2025. The Grace Choir performed for Easter Sunday, Bryan's first Sunday with us at Grace, and Bryan's first service serving as a priest. We also had the Mescari family join us for the Easter Vigil service, as they have in years past. Their gift of music is always a wonderful way to celebrate the start of the Easter season!

As far as changes, we have started to pick the Hymn of Praise/Kyrie, Sanctus, and Fraction Anthem from one Mass setting (for example, you may have noticed that Advent used service music based on "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"). This gives a sense of continuity in the music throughout the service. We will continue to explore other Mass settings to use in our services this coming year. We also shifted from using simplified chant to Anglican Chant for our psalms, which uses slightly more complex notation. While it took us a little while to learn, I feel like we are getting the hang of it as a congregation! Finally, we made the decision to use the 1982 Hymnals that we have in the pews instead of printing all of the music in the bulletins. This helps to save paper, and also ensures that our hymnals are being used! We are exploring ways to make it easier for everyone to find the hymns within the hymnal during the service like playing longer introductions to hymns.

If you have any feedback as far as music goes, please feel free to reach out to Chrissy or Fr. Bryan.

Chrissy Putlak
Minister of Music

CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES

Sunday School

The curriculum being created follows the Lectionary so it aligns with the gospel reading for each Sunday. The lessons include Bible story related games, readings, video clips, and crafts. Fr. Bryan has joined in on the planning and is creating easy to implement lessons for the volunteers. There are 9 children who participate in Sunday School with the average weekly attendance of 3. Several Sundays had no attendance, typically around holidays and bad weather. The 2025 year has brought in an influx of volunteers as we follow Safe Church training provided by the Diocese of Chicago.

Lauren Rentfro
Warden

Vacation Bible School

The theme in 2025 was "Splash into VBS". The lessons featured water-themed Bible stories such as Jesus walks on water and Fishers of men. The daily lessons included a variety of components such as story time, science, arts & crafts, singing, and games. The week concluded with water games in the church yard. Five returning children, as well as one new child attended. The age of the children ranged from 3 to 11 years. Parents have already requested the dates for summer 2026 VBS.

Lauren Rentfro
Warden

Trunk or Treat

On October 25, Grace Episcopal Church hosted its annual Trunk or Treat event as a community outreach initiative focused on families. Eight participating vehicles featured festively decorated trunks and distributed candy and treats, including non-allergenic options. The event drew a strong turnout from the community, with children of all ages enthusiastically filling their treat bags. This year, approximately 190 community members attended. Each family received church information along with a bag of candy, helping to further introduce Grace Episcopal to our neighbors.

Fr. Bryan and several Vestry members were present and engaged with attendees, offering fellowship and answering questions about the church. Adding to the festive atmosphere, many volunteers wore creative costumes, including Pastorized Milk, Mother Earth, and Joyce, a character inspired by Stranger Things. The event fostered a joyful, welcoming environment and truly brought out the child in all who participated. Looking ahead to 2026, we hope to see the Grace parking lot filled with even more participating vehicles from our congregation. Sharing time, generosity, and simple acts of kindness is a meaningful way to demonstrate Christ's love to our community.

Linda Carrigan

Youth Group

This winter, after noticing that we have a number of older children who are a part of our congregation, we restarted the Grace Youth Group. It is open to all youths in grades 6-12. Our first meeting was in December, when we had a cookie decorating party. We had 8 attendees and a lot of excitement about ideas for future events. We plan to meet monthly on Sunday evenings for the remainder of the school year. This will be a time to learn about our faith, pray together, build community, and above all have fun. Be on the lookout for future events, including hide and seek in the church happening tonight!

Fr. Bryan

THE LAZARUS MINISTRY

2025 has seen some additional needs surfacing for Lazarus Ministry, especially due to the government shut down and the changes in Snap benefits. The church has received multiple calls for requests for Food Gift cards as families and individuals fall short with funds for food at the end of the month.

Lazarus has purchased gift cards to be given to Lazarus clients, and persons who just called the church needing food.

The following is a list of bills paid for clients starting in January 2025:

- Female, disabled, senior, recently widowed ,paid water bill \$ 63.81, Nicor bill \$110.59, Walmart gift card \$100, \$500 towards her Will county Tax bill
- Female, single parent, 7 children, bought mattresses and linens from Morningstar
- Mission Treasure chest \$417.41, \$100 gift card Walmart, \$700 towards rent to stop eviction
- Female, single, on disability paid ComEd \$628.40, Nicor \$289.18, \$150 gift card to Walmart
- Female, single, on disability, payed \$404.95 car payment
- Female 2 disabled adult children, and 1 grandchild, paid \$500 towards rent to stop eviction, \$250 towards ComEd bill to stop shut off, \$50 Aldi gift cards.
- A special collection was created and \$900 was raised to support the Exodus drive. These funds are earmarked separately than the Lazarus funds.
- Lazarus debit card used to purchase supplies for Exodus \$79.82
- Lazarus debit card used for Exodus family groceries at Pete's market, \$79.28

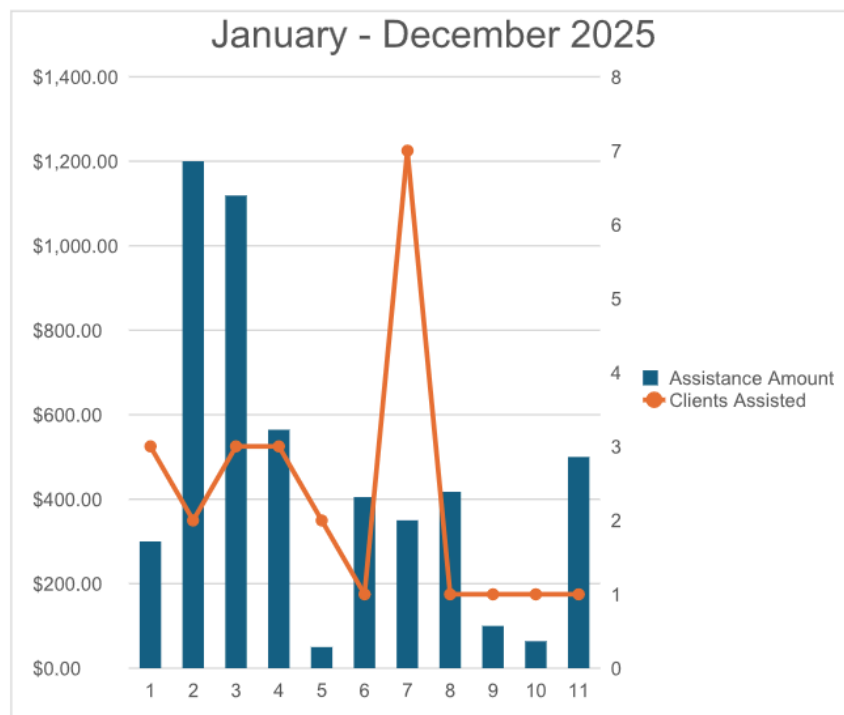
I want to again thank all of you who continue to donate to Lazarus ministry. I am so fortunate to have such a caring church community. With your support I am able to help families when they are facing some difficult times. They are extremely grateful for what we are able to do for them. If you are interested in getting more involved in this ministry please just reach out to me.

Barb Plantz and Gina Loftus

LARARUS SPENDING BREAKDOWN BY CATEGORY

Category	Assistance Amount	Clients Assisted
2025	\$5,069.47	25
Household	\$300.00	3
Rent	\$1,200.00	2
Utilities - Electricity	\$1,118.84	3
Utilities - Natural Gas	\$564.46	3
Vehicle - Gas	\$50.00	2
Car Payment	\$404.95	1
Groceries	\$350.00	7
Furniture	\$417.41	1
Bedding	\$100.00	1
Utilities - Water	\$63.81	1
Property Taxes	\$500.00	1
Grand Total	\$5,069.47	25

LAZARUS SPENDING BY MONTH



ALTAR GUILD

The altar guild is just one of many lay ministries that are part of church life. Altar guild members care for the Altar and Sanctuary by caring for the linens, wine, bread/host, chalice, candles, banders, seasons of the church, and special occasions. The church seasons are Advent (This is the beginning of the church year), Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week (this is the ending Lent, starting with Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil), Easter and then Pentecost. Each season has its own altar set-up. Special occasions are baptisms, weddings, and funerals, which involve their specific altar set-ups. In the coming year the Altar Guild members will be working with Fr. Bryan as he learns about our seasonal and special occasion traditions. Fr. Bryan is looking at doing some hands-on workshops with the Altar Guild, as we become more familiar with each other.

If you are interested in learning more about this ministry, please contact Fr. Bryan or me.

In closing I wish to share a portion of the Altar Guild prayer from the Episcopal Dioceses of Texas: “Almighty God, grant, we beseech thee, that we may handle holy things with reverence and perform our work with such faithfulness and devotion.”

Michael Yazum
Member of the Altar Guild

ADULT EDUCATION

Adult Forum Group

The Adult Forum Group gathers every Sunday at 9:00 AM, both in person and via Zoom. The purpose of the group is to foster spiritual growth by exploring books, films, podcasts, and other media that help us reflect on our faith and its role in navigating the complexities of today's world.

- *My Body is Not a Prayer Request* by Amy Kenny
- *War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of its Military Machine* by Norman Solomon
- *Searching for Sunday*, by Rachel Held Evans
- *Dear White Peacemakers* by Osheta Moore
- *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God* by Kaitlin Curtice
- *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu with Douglas Abrams.

Each week, 6–8 participants join us regularly, with others dropping in occasionally or following along at their own pace. The group is open to all—whether you're a long-time attendee or curious to join for the first time.

What's next? Come help us decide! The Adult Forum Group continues to explore books, films, podcasts, and other media that help us reflect on our faith and its role in the complexities of today's world. Sometimes, our focus is theological; other times, we engage with social justice, fiction, or history. Whatever the subject, our goal is to grow in faith, support one another, and live out our Christian mission to serve our community.

We'd love for you to join the conversation—come see what's in store!

Teri Tucci,
Vestry Member

Bible Study

The Grace Bible Study group was brought back this fall and has been meeting weekly since. Between 5-8 people gather both in person and on Zoom to discuss the weekly lectionary readings and dive deeper into God's Holy Word. Sometimes the conversation focuses on the original meaning of specific Greek words and historical facts to provide context, other times we connect the readings to current events or stories from our own lives. Both types of conversations help us to discern where God is leading us through scripture.

What really makes the Grace Bible Study unique is our focus on shared prayer. Each week we go around the room and share all of the people and things that need our prayers. We pray for members of this community, our families, our country, and our world. We also give thanks for the good things that have come up in our lives each week.

We invite you to join our group each Tuesday at 1:00 pm. If you are unable to make it during that time, you can also find the scripture portion on Youtube. We do not record prayer time for the sake of privacy. We will continue reading from the lectionary until Lent, when we will select a book of the Bible to read straight through during that time.

Fr. Bryan

ANTI-RACISM COMMITTEE

On Feb. 22nd, the Anti-Racism Committee participated in the Crossroads Critical Cultural Competencies workshop, which invited participants to explore the cultural stories that shape us and how they affect our views and actions. The workshop aimed to challenge and question common ideas that, despite our good intentions, can lead to deeper community divisions and unfairness.

Anne Styx
Vestry Member

OUTREACH

Blessing Box

The Blessing Box at Grace Episcopal gives us a tangible way to express our love to the community and further our ministry opportunities. Our Blessings Box is a shed-like structure near the door to the church fellowship hall. We stock donated food items and personal care items. This micro-pantry is free for anyone who needs it and is restocked weekly.

During this past year, we have seen a definite increase in the people using our Blessings Box. With the government shut down, SNAP benefits were stopped or decreased which was noticed during restocking. We have also advertised this mission on Facebook to allow for maximum use. Your support for this ministry is very appreciated. Some of our families choose shopping for our Blessings Box as a monthly love project. Remember personal care items such as soap, combs, brushes, razors, shaving cream etc. are just one of the items that we stock regularly. Any canned good or shelf stable product is welcome. Of special note, pasta and red sauce are consumed each week. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Linda Carrigan

Grace Episcopal Church at Joliet Pride Fest

Greetings to the Grace community,

I would like to share with you some information regarding our participation in the Joliet PrideFest. held Sep. 20, 2025. Grace Community participated for the second year in this event. There are so many to thank for making this event such a success, in spite of the chancy weather. Many people donated items for "SWAG," given out as prizes for our Plinko game, loaned to us by Terri Tucci. Gina Loftus once again loaned us her tent for cover from the sporadic showers, We also had help setting up, and tearing down the tent and booth. We were also blessed to have a substantial group of people who donated time to manning the booth. I want to thank everyone who participated. I believe this event, in which we share our love and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, is one of the more important public ways we demonstrate God's love and acceptance through publicly celebrating the LGBTQ+ community. It gives us the opportunity to share with them about the Episcopal Church's acceptance, and in particular, Gace's welcome for full participation in all aspects of ministry in our community.

Thanks again,
David Schilling
Vestry Member

Pride Mass

On June 29, 2025, the Grace community gathered to celebrate our annual Pride Mass, followed by a potluck meal in the Parish Hall. We observe Pride as a clear expression of our belief that LGBTQIA+ people, like all people, are worthy of dignity and respect as beloved image-bearers of God and are fully invited to respond to God's love. We also recognize that LGBTQIA+ people have too often been denied the honor, freedom, and justice that every person deserves. As in years past, our Pride Mass & Potluck offered a joyful and public witness to who we are at Grace: a community where all are truly welcome and encouraged to participate fully in the life of the church.

Teri Tucci
Vestry Member

Adopt-a-Family

The community of Grace Episcopal supported the Adopt a Family program organized by the Village of New Lenox during the holiday season. A family of five was assigned to us, and through our generous gift-giving, they were able to experience a joyful and memorable holiday, filled with warmth, love, and hope, and we showed them and our community that kindness and compassion are alive and well, even in the most challenging times.

Anne Styx
Vestry Member

Exodus World Service

Since 2021, Grace has partnered with Exodus World Service to provide "Welcome to America" packs for newly arriving refugee families, and "Household Care Packs" for settled refugee families who need some extra assistance.

In May 2025, the Grace community collected enough items and donations to create 5 Household Care Packs, some of which were delivered to refugee families by Grace parishioners. One of these deliveries led a parishioner to join the Exodus New Neighbor program. She continues to meet with the mom on a weekly basis, practicing conversation and helping out with the day to day tasks of school field trip forms and insurance claims.

In October 2025 the Grace community once again went above and beyond to support refugees in our community. We were able to completely fulfill the list of items, and members of the Grace went to deliver and set up an apartment for a new family. In addition, we received enough monetary support to do it again! Grace has earmarked this for a future Exodus project, when the refugee situation changes to allow more families to settle.

Gina Loftus

HALL RENTALS

Hall rentals are a vital part of both our funding and our ministry here at Grace. They are also a way that we can connect with members of the New Lenox community who we might not otherwise meet. There were a total of 12 paid hall rentals this year, including parishioners and outside renters, bringing in a total of \$3,136.00 to help support the work of this church. The hall also hosted various community groups including Boy Scouts, an A.A. Group, Sew-A-Thon, and Arise Labor Organizing for a total of almost 300 hours.

Hall rentals were a success this year thanks to the hard work of many parishioners. Susan Walker led a group in cleaning and organizing the parish hall, helping ensure the space was clear of Grace Church items and ready for renters. Lauren created a new Facebook account for hall rentals and added some updated photos provided by Pam Bloom. The Grace Hall Google listing has also been updated to improve visibility and we are already seeing a boost in interest on that listing due to several positive reviews.

If you would like to support this important part of our ministry here at Grace, there are two main ways you can help. The first is to volunteer to open the hall before renters arrive or lock up when they leave. It only takes about 20 minutes to unlock the building and show the renters around and about the same amount of time to make sure everything looks good before locking up. The more volunteers we have to help with these roles, the less of a burden it is on any one person. We are also developing an improved checklist for renters and volunteer openers/closers to make this easier on anyone who would like to volunteer. If you are interested in helping with hall rentals please contact Fr. Bryan or Lauren in the office. The second thing you can do to help with rentals is tell people about us! Our hall is a great party space for a good price and it helps out a good cause by supporting our church. If you have friends or family looking to plan a party, please ask them to consider hosting it here.

Lauren Meder and Fr. Bryan

TREASURER'S REPORT

Grace Community,

I wanted to highlight a few items regarding the 2026 budget, especially as compared to last year's budget. Special thanks to Chris Whitehead, Fr. Bryan, and the several vestry members and others who attended the budget meetings to talk through the details line-by-line.

On the income side, pledging is up about 10% over 2025, which is great! This is mainly due to some new pledgers and increased pledges from existing members.

Expense-wise, numbers are up quite a bit from last year, mostly because we expect to have a full-time priest for the whole year, whereas we only budgeted for about 6 months last year. In a few places (utilities, for example) we budgeted up based on the actual costs from 2025.

We made as many cuts as we felt were prudent. For example, we decided that on Bryan's Sundays off we would do morning prayer to save the cost of a supply priest. Bryan has also agreed to mow the rectory lawn himself to reduce the lawn care expense. We also built in less "cushion" for unplanned building and grounds maintenance and repair.

We kept things that seemed important to the congregation, like the guest musicians at the Easter Vigil service. We also separated out the "Christian Formation and Education" line to specify most of that as being for children's ministry to demonstrate our commitment to being inclusive of families with kids.

The overall net budget is a bit shocking to see, but that doesn't mean Grace is beyond hope. The Vestry, Fr. Bryan, and myself are working on ideas for ways to close the deficit. We will also need your help in whatever way you are able to contribute, whether that is ideas for fundraising, increased pledge contributions, or volunteering at events that help bring in new members. Together we can ensure Grace continues to be around for a long time.

Sincerely,
Chris Francis
Treasurer

2025 CLOSING REPORT & 2026 BUDGET

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Balances in BMO Accounts (Executive level summary)			As of 12/31/25
Grace Main Checking:			\$15,622.07
	Roger Whitehead Memorial Fund		\$1,609.25
Money Market:			\$180,295.02
	Operating Reserve Fund		\$90,833.02
	Operating Fund (Cash Flow)		\$25,000.00
	Capital Building Fund		\$22,911.00
	Memorial Fund		\$29,771.00
	Sabbatical Saving Fund		\$9,330.00
	Children's Ministry		\$2,100.00
	Rector's Discretionary Fund		\$350.00
Batson Family Endowment Fund			\$36,351.16
Lazarus:			\$6,533.61

OVERVIEW

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Proposed Budget and Actuals

OVERVIEW / SNAPSHOT

	<u>2025 Budget</u>	<u>2025 Final</u>	<u>Proposed Budget 2026</u>
<i>INCOME</i>	\$ 140,800	\$ 173,093	\$ 151,240
<i>EXPENSES</i>	\$ 178,395	\$ 178,215	\$ 205,606
<i>BALANCE</i>	\$ (37,595)	\$ (5,122)	\$ (54,366)

EXPENSES INCOME

GRACE BUDGET			
	2025	2025	2026
	BUDGET	YTD THRU DEC	PROPOSED BUDGET
PAYROLL EXPENSES			
Parish Administrator	\$ 24,595	\$ 24,320	\$ 26,442
Music Director	\$ 17,299	\$ 17,136	\$ 17,479
Laity Pension	\$ 1,230	\$ 1,216	\$ 1,322
Payroll Taxes	\$ 3,205	\$ 3,171	\$ 3,360
Workers Comp	\$ 800	\$ 798	\$ 800
	\$ 47,129	\$ 46,641	\$ 49,403
RECTOR EXPENSES			
Priest Pay	\$ 29,138	\$ 38,279	\$ 55,757
Rector Pension	\$ 7,576	\$ 9,727	\$ 16,675
Priest RSVP Contribution		inc in priest pay	\$ 1,083
Rector Health Insurance	\$ 8,500	\$ 2,140	\$ 11,506
Rector HSA	\$ 1,856	\$ 475	\$ 2,338
Rector Dental Insurance	\$ 330	inc in health ins	\$ 888
Rector Reimbursed Expense	\$ 900	\$ 640	\$ 1,000
Rector Cell Phone	\$ 300	\$ 145	\$ 300
Rector Continuing Ed	\$ 500	\$ -	\$ 1,000
Rector Moving Expenses	\$ 6,000	\$ 2,034	\$ -
	\$ 55,100	\$ 53,440	\$ 90,547
RECTORY			
Rectory Utilities	\$ 3,500	\$ 3,624	\$ 4,000
Rectory Maintenance	\$ 2,500	\$ 5,262	\$ 2,500
	\$ 6,000	\$ 8,886	\$ 6,500
CHURCH BUILDING			
Church Insurance	\$ 8,000	\$ 10,016	\$ 10,032
Church Utilities	\$ 10,000	\$ 11,416	\$ 12,000
Church Phone & Internet	\$ 3,500	\$ 3,363	\$ 4,000
Lawn & Shrub Care & Snow Removal	\$ 3,500	\$ 2,700	\$ 2,500
Other Outside Maintenance	\$ 10,000	\$ 8,481	\$ 5,000
Cleaning Service	\$ 6,240	\$ 6,240	\$ 6,240
Other Inside Maintenance	\$ 3,000	\$ 1,982	\$ 2,000
	\$ 44,240	\$ 44,198	\$ 41,772
PROGRAMS MINISTRY EXPENSES			

Christian Formation & Education	\$ 1,000	\$ 531	\$ 250
Children and Youth programming			\$ 500
Hospitality/Fellowship	\$ 200	\$ 797	\$ 200
Advertising/Outreach	\$ 200	\$ 233	\$ 200
Anti-racism committee	\$ 200		\$ 200
	\$ 1,600	\$ 1,561	\$ 1,350
WORSHIP EXPENSES			
Altar Guild & Supplies	\$ 1,000	\$ 474	\$ 500
Flowers	\$ 1,600	\$ 345	\$ 600
Music Expenses	\$ 400	\$ 812	\$ 650
Assisting Musicians	\$ 200	\$ 500	\$ 500
Supply Priest	\$ 7,000	\$ 7,705	\$ -
	\$ 10,200	\$ 9,836	\$ 2,250
ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES			
Financial Charges & Vendor Fees	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,039	\$ 1,500
Office Supplies	\$ 500	\$ 604	\$ 600
Konica copier	\$ 4,876	\$ 5,205	\$ 5,234
Software Expenses	\$ 3,500	\$ 3,788	\$ 3,100
Kitchen/Bath Consumables	\$ 500	\$ 267	\$ 350
	\$ 11,376	\$ 10,903	\$ 10,784
DIOCESE			
Diocesan Pledge	\$ 2,750	\$ 2,750	\$ 3,000
Diocesan convention			\$ 200
HALL BOOKING DEPOSITS			
Hall Booking deposits	\$ 1,000	\$ -	
Hall Booking refunds	\$ 1,000		
Net Hall Booking deposits		\$ -	\$ -
Operating Expenses	\$ 178,395	\$ 178,215	\$ 205,606
Charitable expenses including Lazarus		\$ 5,739	

	2025	2025	2026
	BUDGET	YTD THRU DEC	PROPOSED BUDGET
Pledges	\$ 112,200	\$ 117,240	\$125,140
Givers of Record	\$ 15,000	\$ 28,524	\$15,000
Coffee & Flower Donation	\$ 1,600	\$ 803	\$600
General Donations, rebates, credits		\$ 15,815	
Hall Rental	\$ 4,500	\$ 3,136	\$4,500
Open Plate	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,201	\$2,500
Outreach, fundraiser,books, pride		\$ 707	
Interest earned	\$ 5,000	\$ 3,667	\$3,500
Operating Income	\$ 140,800	\$ 173,093	\$ 151,240

Resolved, *that the parish approves the Treasurer's closing report of 2025 and approves the 2026 Budget as presented.*

SELECTION OF DELEGATES TO DIOCESAN CONVENTION

***Resolved,** that the congregation of Grace Episcopal Church votes to postpone the selection of delegates and alternates to the Diocesan Convention to such a time when information about the dates and format of the convention has been provided by the diocese. At that time, delegates will be presented to the parish and certified by the Vestry.*

VESTRY ELECTIONS

***Resolved,** that the congregation of Grace Episcopal Church votes to elect **Chris Whitehead** to the Vestry, a three-year term for each that concludes at the Annual Meeting in January-February 2028.*

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

ADJOURNMENT and PRAYER

God of our coming and going, God of our past, our present, and our future, we have met, celebrated, and remembered. We have visioned, shared hopes, and dreamed dreams, and now we go out into the world in which we do most of our living and our ministry. As we go out, remind us that we do not go alone, we go in your Spirit. Remind us that we go with a mission, to love as you love. And fill us with love, hope, and peace to share with the world. May our lives and ministry be hope-filled signs of your love and care for the world. AMEN.

GRACE CHURCH

Clergy, Staff & Lay Ministers

The Rev. Bryan Matias, *Priest in Charge*

Chrissy Putlak, *Minister of Music*

Lauren Meder, *Parish Administrator*

Chris Francis, *Treasurer*

bryan@gracnewlenox.org,

chrissy@gracnewlenox.org

lauren@gracnewlenox.org

treasurer@gracnewlenox.org

Grace Episcopal Church

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