

*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 26, 2025



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.

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

Sunday, January 26, 2025

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 2024 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 2025 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 21, 2024

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

A motion to waive the reading of the 2023 Annual Meeting minutes and accept as presented in the Annual Report, made by Linda Shelton, seconded by Dick Delorme, passed.

Presentation of the Annual Reports:

Rector's Report (The Rev. Perkins) - The rector reflected on 2024 being his tenth Annual Meeting at St. Francis, and the many changes in our parish since 2014. While there were some challenges present in the beginning of his tenure (financial stewardship, waning volunteerism,) our ministries and programs remained strong. After taking on the Renewal Works process, we were working to address these challenges, when the Covid pandemic forced us to close our building. This was heartbreaking, but our congregation persevered. Upon reopening, our community had grown smaller, many ministries had been greatly impacted, some disappeared, some flourished especially Mission Ministries. The rector sees our future as bright despite the challenges ahead. We are not a dying church. We are looking forward, not back. What is God asking us to do? We are connected and what we do matters. We have the ability to share the gifts God is asking us to share. There is always renewal, always opportunity to do what God is asking.

Parishioner David Lucas commended the rector for the great job he did in keeping the church together during the pandemic. This congregation has resilience.

Wardens' Report (Craig Stanovich) - The junior warden echoed the rector's sentiment, that despite the challenges posed over the past few years during the pandemic and following, there is great energy at St. Francis and we are up to the challenges ahead.

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

Mission Ministries - Chair Julie Russell thanked the gathering for its generous support to Mission Ministries and our mission partners, all of whom are appreciative of the assistance we are able to provide to their constituents, many of whom are "people living on the margins." Looking ahead to 2024, Mission Ministries will be offering ways for more parishioners to be involved with Mission Ministries, through opportunities to provide their "time and talent." There will be one time events which will need volunteers and which will not require large time commitments as well as opportunities to see the need first hand. This ministry welcomes new members and has moved its meetings to the second Sunday of the month at 11 am in order to make them more accessible.

Property -Property Chair Steve Henning mentioned the many concerns with our "hodge-podge" of properties including the church, rectory, and St. Clare House. Water issues, improved lighting in the nave and kitchen are a few items that have been addressed recently. There are some upcoming larger projects, including repair to the wall in Fellowship Hall which continues to leak. Contractors are difficult to pin down. Anyone interested in assisting in this important ministry is welcome.

Church School - Senior Warden Susan Bastardo pointed out that last year we had two classes for church school and this year we have three. Unlike the trend in many parishes in our diocese, our church school is growing. Many thanks to Church School Coordinator, Amy Mellors.

Mustard Seed - Since the pandemic restrictions have ended, Ministry Chair Nancy Pope explained, we are now serving a delicious, nutritious sit down meal once per month. Diners are now served at their seats rather than coming up and waiting in line. On a recent evening, over 300 meals were served (this number is usually closer to 200.) St. Francis regularly contributes to the food pantry through our monthly food drives and we are the first to be called when stores are running low. Mustard Seed serves veterans, addicts, low-income and lonely neighborhood residents.

Youth Group - The rector and parishioner Joy Head have been working with Youth Group, which is going well.

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

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

Three-year vestry terms expiring in 2027: Ann Tripp, Jeremy Sanders

Diocesan Convention Delegates: Dick Delorme, Susan Bastardo, Dawn Rooke

Convention Delegate Alternates: Craig Stanovich, Bev Giarusso

A motion for the clerk to cast one ballot for the slate of candidates as presented, made by Kathy Suchenski, seconded by Dawn Michanowicz, passed unanimously.

The rector presented outgoing vestry member, Richard Dixon, a gift in thanks for his service on the vestry.

Outgoing vestry member Mary Jude Pigsley, was not present at the meeting. Dawn Rooke, Clerk of the Vestry, was also presented with a gift in thanks for her many (and continuing) years of service as clerk and in the Hospitality Ministry.

Report on the 2024 Plan for Mission and Ministry (Patrick Perkins) - The 2023 projected budget reflected a \$46,000 deficit. In reality, we ended the year with a \$700 deficit. This is due in part to an unexpected \$25,000 increase in income as well as some lower expenses. Oil prices were lower than expected and some property maintenance issues were not addressed. The 2024 budget was passed by the vestry earlier in the month. Pledge income is projected to be the same as projected for 2023 (\$260,000.) Expenses are projected to be just slightly below those projected for 2023 and it is anticipated that most of those expense budgets will be used. For 2024, a deficit of \$41,000 is projected. All budget details are presented in the Annual Report.

There was no other business.

A motion to adjourn the meeting, made by Craig Stanovich, seconded by Kathy Dixon, passed. The meeting was adjourned at 12:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Dawn Rooke, Clerk

From the Parish Register ~ January – December 2024

Baptisms – 7

Reaffirmed – 1

Marriages – 0

Burials – 1

Confirmations – 3

Transfers out – 3

Received – 2

Transfers in – 5

**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

"Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart."

(2 Corinthians 4:1)

The Apostle Paul proclaimed to the Christians in Corinth, "we do not lose heart because we are engaged in ministry by the mercy of God!" Paul is one of my favorite people of the Bible because he is so authentically human; he wore his heart on his sleeve and he constantly proclaimed his enthusiasm for the Good News of Christ through his words and deeds. He was also mindful to frequently tell others that their actions were important pieces of creating the miraculous and redeeming ministry of Christ in the world. As we begin this new year of 2025, and reflect on 2024 and all that has gone before, I would like to remind you that your actions are important pieces of the redeeming ministry of Christ! Many years ago, Carol and I bought our first new home and we were excited to plant a beautiful fruit tree in the front yard. As winter gave way to spring, we looked forward to seeing the tiny pieces of fruit appear alongside the leaves...no fruit! After a bit of research, I learned it can take three years or more for trees to mature and bear fruit. I feel that maturity cycle has come to fruition in our community: a few years after living beyond the crisis of COVID-19, our community is vibrant and alive, with ministries bearing much spiritual fruit. Thanks be to God, and thanks to everyone in this community!

During these past twelve months, we have experienced the joys and sorrows of Christian life. We have said good-bye to our beloved deacon, Jane Griesbach, (yet, always hold her in our hearts, and look forward to her visits!); we have celebrated the lives of beloved family and loved ones as they joined the saints in heaven; and we have welcomed many new members to our community and have been blessed to have our ministries grow and become enriched with new ideas and spiritual energy. I believe these present blessings from God have been given through the perseverance and faithfulness of this community throughout the challenging days of the past few years. We have prayerfully sought our community's central mission and ministries (our "WHY") and have thoughtfully taken action to make these things come alive. Truly, every member of this community has given in various and special ways. However, this year, I would like to especially thank our Senior Warden, Sue Bastardo. Throughout these past five years, Sue's dedication has been exemplary and her faithfulness a model for us all. I recently joked with her that she is the "last of the COVID kids of vestry," recognizing so many members' additional commitment to our community during those challenging times. We will miss Sue's leadership on our vestry, but are blessed to have her gifts spread among our community in new and exciting ways. Thank you Sue!

In my Annual Report last year, I quoted the late President Kennedy as he considered the challenges of the changing world: "We meet in an hour of change and challenge, in a decade of hope and fear, in an age of both knowledge and ignorance." Last year, I thought of these famous words as an inspiration to take action in our time of challenge - and I am proud to say we have taken up those challenges and are moving forward with renewed spirit. We have enthusiastic members enrolled in a Lay Preaching course, we are reimagining and expanding our ministries to the broader community, and we have given our first financial grant to an outside organization through our Grants for Mission and Ministries Fund, just to name a few of the many exciting actions we are engaged with in the name of Christ's mission to the world. The challenges and opportunities of the world will continue to present themselves, and I am confident that this community will continue to engage the world and grow in God's love in the days ahead. We will count on each and every member of our community to answer the invitation of Christ to "follow me" - I pray that you may be blessed to hear Christ's call and that this coming year will bless you as you grow into a deeper relationship with God.

Faithfully in Christ,
Patrick Perkins

DEACON'S REPORT

A note from the Deacon . . .

I have the heart of St. Francis in me, especially as I visit other parishes.

I recently read Rev. Steven Wilco's piece on 21st Century Congregations. Steven is the new interim Canon to the Ordinary (job that Rich Simpson filled before leaving). Steven spoke about the Star that led the Magi to the manger. What was it about that Star that made it so special? What was it that caused intelligent scientists to gather expensive gifts and start out on a journey to who knows where?

Steven asked folks to consider what the "spark" is in our parishes that makes it worth getting up on Sunday morning to attend worship – what makes it worth becoming involved? I spent 6+ years at St. Francis and I can tell you what the spark was for me. I only recognize it now that I've stepped away and become the 'roving deacon.'

I've seen newcomers become involved after only attending St. Francis for a short time – why? One person said they were impressed with the amount of mission-focused ministries, outreach, that St. Francis is involved in and they wanted to be part of it. Four people have stepped up to take a class on preaching. I've always found preaching to be a bit intimidating – so kudos to them. St. Francis values children – church school, pageants, music, and more to involve our kids. Kids are always welcome in worship – crying babies included.

I've always thought that if we stay faithful to God, God will stay faithful to us. And there are so many ways to stay faithful – persistent prayer, attendance at worship, mission focused ministries, serve on vestry, serve at coffee hour (such a welcome after 10am service!), welcome newcomers. And of course getting out the front doors to share God with the world – not by words necessarily but by the way we live our lives.

When I left St. Francis I spent all of Oct. and part of Nov. as a time to rest. I worshipped at Lutheran parishes. Now I've been to six different Episcopal congregations. Someone asked me if I've found new deacons yet? Or found people at least interested in the diaconate. Well, no. But I've told people about being a deacon, planted seeds, and I believe the rest is up to God. It all needs to percolate. A great joy was visiting St. John's in Athol. I've known the priest, Rev. Jimmy Picket, since he was a young boy. We were both sponsored by Christ Church, Rochdale. Somehow I knew that God had a hand on Jimmy way before he realized it. Then I went to Grace, Great Barrington. Now that's a long drive! They lost their parish building years ago (part of it fell down-really) and they decided not to repair it. They met in a tavern for years and now meet in a community center every Sunday. There's a disabled woman there who feels called to the diaconate – mentored by her priest. It will be complicated, but I mean to find a way to get her there.

So dear people, you have stamped your heart on me. St. Francis is a very good parish. You have a very good priest – treat him kindly! Love one another – welcome newcomers – gently invite folks to become involved and thank them.

Keep the faith,

Jane

WARDENS' REPORT

The current vestry began its work together with the vestry retreat on February 3rd. We viewed a presentation by the Rev. Dr. Jesse Zink entitled, "Christian Hope in a Crisis-Shaped World." In it, Rev Zink reminded us that for Christians, the challenge of living in a crisis-shaped world is not to give in to cynicism or despair, or to have naïve optimism. Instead, we must bear witness to the pain of the world and draw close to others in self-surrendering love while always being mindful of the promised hope revealed in scripture, and allowing that hope to shape our actions now.

One of those "actions" for vestry members is to connect to the various ministries in our church. Each vestry member serves as a liaison to two or three ministries each year, helping to facilitate their connection to the vestry and to the wider community. They do this in a variety of ways including the writing of articles for the Little Portion newsletter. By this, we work to strengthen our community and help all members to find and share in the transformative opportunities at St Francis.

We also engage in book studies together. In the past year, our studies have included "Always a Guest" by Barbara Brown Taylor, "The Four Loves" by C.S. Lewis, and "Parables and the Enneagram" by Clarence Thomson.

In March, we started to prepare for Pat's sabbatical. Rt. Rev. Mark Beckwith visited and met with the vestry to discuss our approaches for helping others to get involved as volunteers and leaders. Deacon Jane made plans to provide a training for those who would be willing to lead morning prayer, while Pat continued to work diligently to arrange for supply clergy.

During the sabbatical, many of the plans regarding our property needs finally come to fruition. We hope you noticed that the lighting in the worship space was greatly enhanced this spring and summer – including installing new lighting over the organ and cross. The lighting in Fellowship Hall was also completely replaced, removing the older, noisy lighting with newer, far more efficient lighting – including the installing of dimmer switches. We replaced the well-worn and stained carpeting in Fellowship Hall, Pat's office, Jane's office, both staircases, and the three upstairs classrooms. We also professionally cleaned the carpeting in the Narthex.

Our entire community was blessed with the presence and hard work of Deacon Jane throughout the sabbatical period. Sadly, it was not an uneventful summer, and along with our weekly services, she was instrumental in helping families to arrange funeral services for two of our beloved members. We are deeply grateful for her constancy and commitment to St. Francis. In October, the community gathered to celebrate Jane's ministry among us as she left to give her full time to her role as Archdeacon/Deacon Formation Director.

As a new program year began, we had much to celebrate including the growth of our Church School and Youth programs, and a very well attended women's retreat. New members joined the Scripture Reflection series led by Pat between services. This is an outstanding program and highly recommended to all. We came together in fellowship at events such as our picnic, Oktoberfest, and Advent luncheon, and we continued to turn our focus outward by supporting our Mission Ministries both financially and with our time and talents.

You may have noticed that regular Sunday attendance has increased - noticeably. Our financial stewardship campaign also continues to make wonderful progress, and we are thankful for the upward trend in pledges over the past couple of years, including pledges from new members and increases in pledges from many existing members. We are grateful for this incredible generosity!

As Deacon Jane always said, "This is a really good place." Holding on to our Christian Hope, let us all continue to commit to our own spiritual growth and let it inspire us to "Go out the front door and be the church."

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Bastardo, Senior Warden
Craig Stanovich, Junior Warden

CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Church School

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

Current enrollment: 26 students/15 families January to June ('23-'24 school year)

- For the second half of the school year, our lessons focused on stories of healing, the Greatest Commandment, Jesus' "I Am" statements, the great commission, and parables of the kingdom.
- The children participated in 1 Mission/outreach project in conjunction with the Mission Committee for the Living Gift Market for Heifer International.
- June: Year-end party and "I am the light of the world" light banner.

Eucharist Instruction

The Eucharist Instruction program is primarily a home-program designed for students between the ages of 8-10 and is run every other year. This spring, six students participated in the program. After completing the study, the children were recognized at the 10:00 AM service on Sunday, April 28th, 2024.

September – December ('24-'25 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: Jena DelCid, John Bell, Addison Mellors (A), and Graham Jensen (A)
 - Kindergarten, First and Second Grade: Alison Milan, Matt Surabian, Dave Currie (A), and Emma Milan (A)
 - Third, Fourth and Fifth grade: Lisa Cherrier and Adeline Cherrier (A), and Richard Giarusso and Alison Mondel
- Our lessons for the first part of the year focused on the First Testament stories of Samuel, Naomi and Ruth, David, and Solomon.
- At our Advent Celebration, the children made Jesse Tree ornaments to decorate the tree in Fellowship Hall.
- The children participated in two mission/outreach projects so far during this school year. In November, we sponsored a food-drive for the Wachusett Food Pantry. In December, we purchased Christmas gifts for two children who are involved with DCF.

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 offerings during the year, 2024, were 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. Most of the sessions were led by the rector, but other people in the group occasionally led the discussion. We are excited to say that beyond a wonderful core group of participants, the group has been growing...and we invite you to join us!

Our “First Sunday Conversations” series continued this year. The spring of 2024 continued to cover the ministries of the church (as was done in 2023), and as the fall began we presented topics that detailed the operations and spiritual growth of the church, examples include Stewardship and the process and information for the church’s annual financial budget. The conversation gatherings were well attended, with approximately 15-20 people at each gathering.

During the spring of 2024, a gathering of nearly ten people participated in a series titled, “The Episcopal Church: History, Worship and Service,” in preparation for receiving the Sacraments of Confirmation, Reception, or Reaffirmation of Ministry. In addition, in the fall 2024, a Lay Preaching Course was started, with four people attending. The course will continue throughout the program year, and the participants will graduate in May. Please keep them in your prayers, and include your prayer to hear them preach one Sunday coming soon!

Respectfully submitted,
Patrick Perkins

Youth Ministry

St. Francis's Youth Group is co-led by Pat Perkins and Joy Head. Youth Group meets once a month to build fellowship and connection among our group members. Youth Group is open to young people in grades 6-12. This year, our group has grown. We have 4-5 youth regularly attending and, with an open invitation for friends to join, sometimes more. The Youth Group room is a great place to meet, have conversations and enjoy foosball and other games. The Youth Group helped with the Crop Walk this fall by welcoming walkers to the halfway point at St. Francis. After their job was completed, some of our members and their families participated in the Crop Walk, as well. In November, we enjoyed some Thanksgiving themed fellowship together in the Youth Group room. In December, we met up at the Living Nativity hosted by Mesa Farm in Rutland. It was a very well attended event and we enjoyed being there. We have plans to venture out to an Escape Room in early March and to Mesa Farm in late spring. There are other plans in the works, as well!

Respectfully submitted,
Joy Head and Patrick Perkins

WORSHIP MINISTRIES

Acolytes

The acolyte ministry slowly began to come back from its pandemic shutdown. The plan to invite people of all ages to this ministry continues, and we are very thankful to Shirley Blehar for her enthusiastic participation as an Acolyte! Shirley volunteered to serve during Bishop Fisher's visit and continued to serve during the Holy days and other times she was available. We hope to build on her great example and continue to invite new members of all ages to serve at the Sunday 10:00 a.m. worship service. If you are interested in joining the Acolyte ministry, please contact me or Patrick Perkins.

Respectfully submitted,
Laura Caswell

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 our current members. Work with a team for a week and see what is involved. It might be a way for you 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 : Kari Currie, Roz Glanville, Dave Lucas, Lucy Nowak, Sharlene O'Connor, Carol Perkins, Mike Reno, Julie Russell, Jenny Sanders, Carolyn Schmidt, Marje Sullivan, and Kim Whamond, for their ongoing commitment to the work of the Altar Guild.

After many years of dedicated service to the Altar Guild Marge Tremblay has had to step down from her regular team duties. Marge assures us she will still be available for decorating the window sills for Christmas and Easter (which is her special talent). Thanks so much Marge for your contributions to the Altar Guild.

As he usually does Doug Rayworth was not able to hang the wreaths this Christmas. Doug, many thanks for your help, time and patience and many years of hanging the wreaths.

We are fortunate that Andrew Jensen was willing to take on the wreath hanging job and got them just right. Thanks Andrew.

Respectfully submitted, Beverly Giarusso

Lay Eucharistic Ministers and Lay Readers

Thank you to a wonderful group of dedicated individuals who read at each service and distribute the Eucharist to our parish as well as Holden Nursing Home residents every Sunday. This year we welcomed 3 new readers to our group!

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, under the leadership of Erik Gladwin, rehearses weekly on Wednesday evenings and performs at services around Christmas and Easter. Membership to the bell choir is open to all.

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.

We will be engaging our organ technician Stefan Meier, to advise on the needed repairs for our historic Hook and Hastings pipe organ. We will begin work on a larger overhaul of the instrument 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

When you attend a St. Francis worship service, we hope one of the first persons you meet is an usher. Ushers aspire to create for all parishioners a sense of ownership in St. Francis – that is our mission. We do this by inviting you to worship, welcoming you, by name when we are able, and giving you the service bulletin and sometimes a hymnal. We also invite guests and visitors to worship with us, including introducing ourselves when we can and providing welcome packets to newcomers. Ushers are responsible for counting the attendance, bringing up the collection, and general straightening up the worship space after each service.

We welcome Kari Currie to this ministry in 2024!

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 2024 year-end Operating Statement benefitted from the generosity of our community exceeding pledge revenue by 5.82% over the 2024 Budget. Our 2024 reported pledge income totaled \$275,145 and exceeded Plan by \$15,144. Revenue also benefitted from Bank interest on a CD due to increased interest rates available in the market. Overall; actual revenues exceeded Budget by over \$20,000.

Operating expenses totaled \$297,017 in 2024; a 4.13% increase over 2023. This increase was somewhat “in-line” with the expense increase in 2023 of 3.9%. Some maintenance projects undertaken in 2024 will partially offset increasing utility costs moving forward. Overall, 2024 expenses were \$14,666 under budget. Conservative budgeting, supply chain and contractor scheduling challenges for some property maintenance projects contributed to this favorable budget result and are not expected to recur. Again, economies continue to be realized by the Rector’s voluntary benefit choices. With the exception of some elevated utility costs in 2024, most expense categories came in below budget. When combined with the committed giving of the members of our community, St. Francis finished the 2024 year with a net deficit of (\$4,819.87) for the period.

In addition to the monetary contributions of the Mission Committee shown directly on our operating statement, the community continued to benefit from the many physical and spiritual contributions of our parishioners. In addition, 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 \$325,000 (\$155,435 in Checking as well as \$169,875 in a Vanguard Money Market Account). This does not include the \$153,681 (which includes Valuation Adjustments through September 2024) in the Mission and Ministry Fund**.

The plan for 2025 provides a revenue forecast that improves slightly over actual 2024 pledge revenue and includes a component for continued anticipated interest on the Money Market account. The expense forecast is budgeted at a .42% increase over the 2024 Budget. This small increase is due to fairly tight budgeting anticipating continued moderation in utility (specifically heating oil) expense due to our leadership diligently “locking –in” an aggressive oil commitment.

While 2024 saw continued uncertainty in our world, the St. Francis community exhibited continued faith and resilience. Pledge commitments are continuing to trend positive which is truly a blessing. That said, our plan tries to account for these “slightly increased” pledge revenues with a very “hopeful” expense budget.

Our 2025 Budget is projecting a deficit of (\$20,953.30). We are relying on \$282,395 in confirmed Pledges at the time of this report. By including anticipated interest earnings on our Vanguard Money Market account and Other Giving, budgeted revenues total \$292,045 or 7.91% increase over our 2024 budgeted revenue. The expense plan calls for \$312,998 in budgeted expenses; a \$1,316 increase compared to 2024’s budgeted expenses.

In spite of the fact that we are coming off the second straight year of an Operating deficit; the Finance Committee feels that St. Francis can absorb this deficit in 2025 given our current cash position and the prayers that our growing parish 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 Ministers at St. Francis.

The Finance Committee
Richard Delorme
Ann Tripp
Joel Wesson (Treasurer)
Elizabeth Carroll
Chris Berglund

** Account 1110; Trustees - DWM and Account; 1120 Mission and Ministry Asset Accounts reflect their market value at quarter ending September 2024.

Grants for Mission and Ministries Fund

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 2024 had an uncommitted market value of \$153,681.81. 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: Chris Berglund, Chair of the Finance Committee, Craig Stanovich,

Junior Warden and Ann Tripp, Vestry. Pat Perkins, the Rector, and Susan Bastardo, 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. 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 be an annual process. In 2025, all application requests will be due by October 4th, the Feast of St. Francis. Decisions and funding will occur in the fourth quarter of 2025. 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. It provides St. Francis community with a vehicle for furthering the mission focus of our church throughout the community.

The Grants for Missions and Ministries Fund Committee

Ann Tripp

Craig Stanovich

Chris Berglund

Stewardship

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace."

1 Peter 4:10

The generosity of St. Francis members is truly amazing! As of this writing, St. Francis has received 92 pledges for 2025 totaling more than \$282,000. Our average pledge is up to \$3,059.00 in 2025 from \$2,920.00 for 2024, with 48 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. We also hope to receive additional pledges from those who may still wish to pledge, but have not yet done so.

One of the many goals of Stewardship is to educate. In October, we sent letters to all parishioners explaining what a pledge is and its importance to St. Francis. Our First Sunday Conversation on November 3rd focused on Stewardship. Additionally, since October, we have included announcements in the Weekend Bulletin about the goals and progress of our 2025 Financial Stewardship campaign. If you have questions, please contact me.

Stewardship of our time, talents, and treasure is a foundational ministry for our faith and the work of God's mission. While financial pledges are a key part of Stewardship, especially at the end of the church year, Stewardship at St. Francis is a year-round commitment.

Craig Stanovich – Chair, Stewardship

Memorial Garden

Next time you are in a church service, look out the window to your right! 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 Carolyn Schmidt. The vestry liaison was Joy Head.

A major goal for the year is to continue revising various aspects and language of the rules and regulations governing the garden, and to present to the Vestry for consideration.

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. The Memorial Garden Board plaques were installed with the names of those interred during the year.

Our parish property chair, Andrew Jensen, collaborated with the Memorial Garden Committee to assess current needs and to arrange for any needed maintenance. This year we accomplished a major expected maintenance project of replacing the capstone of the retaining wall, with Busy Bee completing that work for us. Additionally, the long cherished pink weeping cherry tree was removed, and replaced by a new blossoming tree of more durable species. We are grateful that this new tree was donated by Joy Head and Helene Sughrue in honor and loving memory of their mother, Anita Collins, who is interred in the garden.

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.

Respectfully submitted, Kathleen O'Connor

Fellowship Ministry

2024 was a great year for the Hospitality Ministry filled with many opportunities for community engagement and connection. Our annual Shrove Tuesday Dinner was cancelled due to an impending snow storm that never happened. However, all was not lost, as the shopping had not yet been done, and the lovely King Cake cupcakes, generously provided by several parish bakers, were served at coffee hour and enjoyed by many. Because of the cancellation, we decided to hold a breakfast on "Refreshment Sunday," about halfway through Lent. Everything about this event was delightful - the food, the forsythia on every table, the sunlight shining through the windows, but especially the people who attended. We had a great crowd (60 people) and as a result, this event will make an appearance again during Lent 2025. At the end of our summer recess we once again welcomed everyone back to church programming in September 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. In October, we hosted Oktoberfest, which was once again a very well-attended, lively event, with German food and music, and this year included pumpkin decorating for the children who were in attendance (pumpkins generously donated by Mesa Farm.) One of the areas of opportunity found by the Renewal Works Committee in 2018 was a desire for more hospitality events. Since then we have added two new events, Oktoberfest in the fall and Refreshment Sunday Breakfast in the spring. These events have helped us build community connections and have fun together. These events are only made possible by the many hands who set up, break down, shop, cook, and more. Additionally, many parishioners hosted coffee hours, providing treats and generously offering the gift of hospitality to the congregation. All of these efforts are most appreciated by us at the Hospitality Committee and by each person that attends one of our events. We wouldn't be able to host these events without your generous donations of food, time, and labor, many, many thanks to all. We are looking forward to a new year filled with connection and fun!

Respectfully submitted,

Dawn Rooke and Taryn Surabian (Ministry Chair)

Prayer Shawl Ministry

2024 was the 19th year of this active ministry; fifty-six shawls were blessed. Founded and guided for many years by the late Beryl Turner, over that time the cumulative number of shawls is in the many hundreds. 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 blessing knitters also offered “watch caps” to be blessed and donated. Fr. Pat delivered those caps to Veterans Inc.

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. At 2024 year end the supply of shawls was down to three.

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 (developed by Senior Ministry)

When Senior Ministry began in 2015, focus was on aging and activities thought to be of value to Parish members who were moving ahead in years. As noted in last year’s Annual Report, we are now Daytime Fellowship and open to all interested in sharing refreshments and open conversation with others from our Parish. We continue to encourage everyone, regardless of age, to remain active physically and mentally, and to accept the opportunity to self-direct a pattern of growth which reflects the theme of this group: “Growing older is inevitable, aging is optional.”

Daytime Gathering, not influenced by age, continues to take place on the third Thursday of September through June of the following year from 10 a.m.- 12 Noon. For January 2024 through December, 2024, with open conversation, refreshments and usually a theme or activity determined by the group in September, the following took place:

- January 2024: Sharing of “visits” and travels by cruising and trips to family members in Dubai opened differences in living and sites quite different from MA.
- February 2024: A lovely Valentine’s Day Tea Day Tea hosted by Sharon Foust and Jeanette Dill.
- March 2024: Discussion led by Deacon Jane centering on the Episcopal Church and “Love.
- April: Attendees built May Baskets for several Parish members unable to physically attend St. Francis. Delivered by May Day.
- May 2024: A Visit to All Saint’s Episcopal Church in Worcester took place for the purpose of viewing their “Reredos”: (a wall, screen or architectural structure behind the main Altar which can contain a variety of materials [such as statues of saints or figures representing Biblical history]). All Saints’ Reredos structure is floor to ceiling and very elaborate.
- June 2024: Luncheon together at Pine Croft.
- September 2024: a farewell “party” for Archbishop Jane. Jane has been a strong participant in this activity. She helped identify potential activities, especially those outside our church, and offered events in person. She will be much missed.

- October 2024: Planning for 2024-2025 activities. Assignment of duties for agreed to Advent Luncheon in December
- November 2024: Presentation of “Estate Planning” by Attorney Brenda Rivard”
- December 2024: Third Annual “Advent Luncheon”: Well-attended (over 30). Luncheon prepared and served by Fellowship participants and appeared enjoyed by everyone. Described by Rev. Pat as another example of a St. Francis “Fellowship” event. This event will be considered for repeat in 2025.

Thank you for your support and participation in this St. Francis gathering.
Marge Tremblay, Coordinator

Update on status of AED (automated external defibrillator)

2024 has been a positive and quiet year for our AED. We have also been fortunate that the Parish has been healthy regarding on-site emergency Cardiac events. Mechanically, the AED has remained ‘healthy’ and only new chest pads have been placed as they became outdated. We have currently a good number of prepared respondents but will offer a Training class in Spring 2025 to prepare more who wish and to review for those already having completed the program.

The AED Team continues to faithfully engage in management of this important device. Review of the materials and needs necessary to keep the Parish safe in a cardiac emergency are routinely checked as is the Training program. A poster, which is under the guidance of team member David Lucas with the assistance of all team members, will be a pictorial and written guide which will clearly direct how to respond to an emergency cardiac need. It will be placed near the AED in Fellowship Hall.

Coordinators: Marge Tremblay and Jim Emard

Property

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

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 24th (after being postponed from the prior day due to rain). Holden Landscaping vacuumed up the leaves that were piled up in the corner of the parking lot.
- 2) Carpeting replaced in Fellowship Hall, both set of stairs, as well as Classrooms upstairs.
- 3) New Radiator at St. Clare House.
- 4) New/Additional Lighting in the Sanctuary and New Lighting in the Chancel.
- 5) Completely replace lighting in Fellowship Hall.
- 6) Secured boards on ramp leading to St. Clare House.
- 7) Rotted wood was removed around the rear window in Fellowship Hall.
- 8) New Flashing was installed around the front window in Fellowship Hall.
- 9) Heating oil contract for the 2024/2025 heating season with Brideau Energy – cost is ten cents less per gallon than in 2023/2024.
- 10) Leaky spigots replaced outside of St. Clare House.

11) Carpets professionally cleaned in the Narthex, Library and hallways.

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 dishwasher – Andrew and Jeremy will be making a walk-through in 2025;

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 each and every year, we must begin by whole heartedly thanking each and every member of this Congregation for your unrelenting generosity and support throughout this year. With your help, we have answered God’s call to accompany the lonely and feed the hungry.

You should all know that St. Francis is very highly regarded by our Mission Partners, Mustard Seed (“MS”), Abby’s House (“AH”), Dismas Farm (“DF”), as well as, other groups that we serve, including but not limited to, Wachusett Food Pantry (“WFP”) and Central MA Housing Alliance (“CMHA”). It bears repeating again this year that St. Francis has been described as “quite the collaboration” when it comes to helping those in need.

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.

Support local, national, and worldwide charities and service organizations that correspond with our call to serve.

With your assistance we have once again, been able to accomplish these objectives with compassion and love.

At the end of 2023, Pat asked Mission Ministries **not** to expand our outreach efforts until the parish fully recovered from COVID. We were asked to focus on our Mission Partners, which is what we have done.

In February of this year, we were also asked to re-evaluate our relationships with our Mission Partners, to see if we were meeting their needs. Were there opportunities for us to use our time and talents to help them, that we may be overlooking?

As could be expected, we learned that preparing monthly meals along with actively serving those meals and interacting with the people being served were our most important contributions to “MS” AND “DF”. There was nothing additional that we could do for “DF” at that time. Ray Kane, of the “MS” indicated that there are many other opportunities for people to donate their time and talents at the “MS”, including helping out at the food pantry and maintenance projects at the Piedmont St. property, to name a few.

We completed the “AH” re-evaluation in December. They were in transition and could not meet with us earlier. With their new regime, there are many new opportunities for us to serve and they are open to any ideas that we might have. Volunteer opportunities, to name a few, are preparing food when the food and nutrition manager is out,

serving meals during the holidays, and helping with building maintenance.

THE FOLLOWING OUTLINES WHAT THIS MINISTRY AND THIS PARISH ACCOMPLISHED IN 2024:

ONE-TIME VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES: In January of 2024, we were concerned that we were becoming a fundraising committee, which is not what we wanted to be. We made it our goal to provide projects and services in which parishioners could participate without a long-term commitment. We expanded on a quarterly list of “One-time Volunteer Opportunities”, a practice we started in late 2023, with sign-up sheets where parishioners could work at our Food Drives, bake, cook and serve meals at the “MS” and “DF”, deliver food drive donations to the “MS” and “DF” and help set up and work Mission events. Several parishioners took advantage of these opportunities which unfortunately were all internal. We have discussed expanding outside of St. Francis in the coming year, now that our re-evaluations have been completed.

FOOD DRIVES AND COMMUNITY FOOD COLLECTION:

Monthly Food Drives have continued except during July and August, when a donation from the Mission Budget was given to those groups most in need. Parishioners have donated blankets and clothing in addition to food. Many people donate during office hours and before and after services.

Unfortunately, the problem of food scarcity is not one that has gotten better since COVID. In fact, it has only gotten worse. As an example, the “MS” now distributes bags of food to over 100 families that rely on their food pantry. This figure is up from 60 families in early 2024.

With this increased need in mind, along with the significant increase in food prices which affects all of us, we have continually tried to expand our Community Food Collection Program to give us a broader donation base. Unfortunately, we have not had success with this endeavor. We put additional collection baskets in various businesses, but removed them when no food was donated. Baskets remain at Sweets and Java, and LCU, now All One Credit Union. We asked other nearby congregations to partner with us. They were unable to do so.

FUNDRAISING: Current Mission fundraising is aimed at keeping enough money in our Feeding Ministries’ account to be able to purchase food and supplies for our monthly meals to “MS” and “DF”. “MS” is now serving 2000 meals per month. (“MS” serves dinner to the homeless 5 days each week). We have had to increase the number of commercial pans of the meal that we serve from 4 to 6. Other organizations have stopped making meals, so we have committed to providing two extra meals each year to help fill in the gaps.

We have determined that we currently need \$5200 per year to provide monthly meals to “MS” and “DF”, and like to have the cost of one year of food and supplies in the bank as a cushion.

This year through your generosity, we raised approximately \$5100 with the Spring Concert, Pinecroft Dairy Fundraiser, Bake Sale and Wreath and Greenery Sale. Fundraising in 2022, 2023 and 2024 yielded approximately \$5200 each year, leaving the Feeding Ministries’ account in great shape. We have discussed focusing next year’s fundraising on broader Mission purposes.

HOPE FOR HOUSING CARDS: We continue to sell cards on a monthly basis to assist “CMHA” with their unfunded programs to prevent homelessness in this current Worcester County Housing crisis. Parishioners consistently buy cards and donate them to “MS” and “AH”, benefitting two organizations with one purchase. This year Mission purchased cards with budget funds for teens in foster care and the women at “AH”, benefitting two organizations with one donation. This year our parish purchased approximately \$24,000 in cards. Card vendors donate between 2 and 10 percent of the value of cards sold. 30 Congregations participate. With the volume of cards purchased, “CMHA” receives in the area of \$70 thousand plus each year.

HEIFER LIVING GIFT MARKET: The Heifer Living Gift Market took place on Palm Sunday with donations collected for Heifer International, which teaches hungry and impoverished families in the US and abroad how to support themselves in ecologically sustainable ways.

HOLDEN CROP HUNGER WALK: Parishioners participated in this annual walk with St. Francis continuing to be the mid-point of the walk and the “MS” remaining one of the recipients of the local portion of donations. Crop Walk funds are used locally and abroad to combat hunger and help families make a sustainable living.

MAMPONG BABIES ORPHANAGE IN GHANA: Parishioners continued to donate loose change and small bills enabling us send the orphanage \$636 to provide diapers and formula for the orphan babies.

HOLDEN DAYS BOOTH: We organized the St. Francis Booth for Holden Days. Several parishioners worked the booth handing out candy, along with magnets and bookmarks with information regarding our Food Collection program. Holdenites were enticed to our booth with free tickets to a small prize give-away, which gave us the opportunity to disseminate information regarding our wonderful congregation.

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES:

This year 30 Foster children were given Christmas gifts by parishioners as part of the “DCF” Wonderfund program.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: St. Francis’ annual Holy Week, Thanksgiving and Christmas Special Collections were donated to “WFP”, “DF”, Diocese of Jerusalem in the Middle East as instructed by the Diocese, “MS” and “CMHA”.

SPRING TED TALK SERIES, “ON FAITH, DOUBT AND JOY”:

Esteban Loustaunau put together an excellent series of Ted Talks, which focused on the relation between faith, doubt and joy in the Christian life. These talks were well attended and included lively and poignant discussion led by parishioners, Kathleen O’Connor, Ted Kremer and Matt Surabian.

BUDGET EXPENDITURES: Our Mission Budget was disbursed as follows:

- \$1160.00 to Episcopal Relief & Development (ERD) for the Diocese of Jerusalem in the Middle East to help victims of the Israel/ Hamas War.
- \$1000 to Abby’s House for their Annual Springtacular fundraiser and \$300 for their food pantry in lieu of a summer food drive.
- \$600.00 to Mustard Seed for their summer camp, \$300 for their food pantry in lieu of our summer food drives and \$400 for a food pantry emergency.
- \$1000 to ERD for Hurricane Relief due to Hurricanes, Helene and Milton.
- \$300 to Wachusett Food Pantry for their food pantry in lieu of our summer food drive.
- \$500 in Walmart gift cards to the ten Dismas Farm residents, who do not otherwise receive Christmas gifts.
- \$500 in Hope for Housing Cards to Abby’s House residents
- \$1000 in Price Chopper Gift cards to Mustard Seed families.
- \$490 in Hope for Housing Cards to Dept of Children and Families’ foster teens.

ST. FRANCIS MISSION AND MINISTRY GRANT FUND: This fund is administered by the Finance Committee and was established with funds from a parishioner donation. This year the “MS” applied for and was given a \$1000 grant to help purchase a commercial refrigerator for their food pantry. With this refrigerator they are able to accept donations of milk, dairy products and fresh vegetables that they could not accept previously as they had no source of refrigeration.

THANK YOU: In addition to thanking all of you for your generosity there are many individuals who have worked very hard to accomplish all that is outlined herein. At the risk of leaving someone out, we will not name names. **We are extremely grateful to all who helped in any way.** We must, however, give special mention to our mission partner and service organization liaisons, Kathleen O'Connor, Nancy Pope, Rev. Jane Griesbach and Mary Cook and Carolyn Schmidt.

I, personally, would be remiss if I did not thank the members of this Ministry for their dedication and sacrifice of their time and talents. Those individuals are Mary Ann Barbato, Barbara Henning, Jane Griesbach, Karen Kappes, Esteban Loustaunau, Mary Jude Pigsley and Marge Tremblay.

2025 YEAR IN TRANSITION: I will be stepping down as chairperson of Mission Ministries at the end of this year due to my expanding family. I personally want to thank every member of this congregation for their support of Mission Ministries over the past four plus years. I have gotten to know many of you for the first time and many more of you much better. My heart is truly full when I walk through the doors of St. Francis to break bread with a congregation so focused on helping those in need.

Andy Mellors will be stepping in as chairperson for 2025 with some great new ideas.

We are losing several long-time members, Barbara Henning, Esteban Loustaunau, Deacon Jane and Marge Tremblay. Their contributions are immeasurable.

We were joined by new members, Kathleen O'Connor, Deborah Harris, Kathryn May and very recently, Alison Milan. Of course, the committee will need new members. If you are interested, please talk to Andy Mellors or any committee member.

Peace and Blessings

Julie Russell, Mission Ministries' Chairperson

Mustard Seed

This year left the Mustard Seed calendar short 30 meals that needed to be filled. St. Francis was able to provide three extra meals in addition to our monthly meal. The current economic situation led to a steady increase in nightly guests. Our cooking teams needed to prepare a sixth full tray catering to our monthly meals. On three occasions we did run out of food and prepared peanut butter and jelly sandwiches from the food pantry supply. Throughout the year we noted a large increase of women guests and families with small children.

The food pantry which served 25 families weekly in 2020 is now struggling to accommodate 110 families, although the pantry applied to and was given access to the Worcester County Food Bank it has often been empty or contained very limited products. The monthly food collection is a very significant donation toward the lack of staples that the food pantry attempts to supply families in need.

Construction of the pavilion outside the Mustard Seed continues. It will cover the picnic tables so that there is ample seating in inclement weather. The funding came from a city of Worcester grant.

Summer 2024 brought Mustard Seed Camp to twenty-five 7 and 8 year olds. This year the camp director wrote an individual curriculum for each child to bring them up to their grade level. Twice a week field trips brought them to museums, zoos, parks and nature trails. The transformation of these children over a month's time was remarkable. They were eager to learn and delighted to have traveled outside of Worcester. Lastly, the children were taught that

service to others was important. The children helped prepare a meal for the Mustard Seed guests and helped pack food sacks for the pantry.

St. Francis awarded the Mustard Seed the St. Francis Episcopal Church Holden Fund for mission and ministry a grant for \$1,000 to purchase a refrigerator on wheels for the food pantry. It will be located in the basement of the Mustard Seed and will allow for the storage of fresh produce, milk and eggs.

St. Francis maintains an amazing team of thirty-eight parishioners who shop, cook, bake and serve dinner. Desserts are baked at home and donated by the finest bakers, St. Francis remains famous for our desserts from these generous individuals. The Food Pantry continues to be supported by a monthly food collection, donations of used clothing, new underwear and hundreds of pairs of gloves and blankets. 2024 brought a large donation of beautiful hand made quilts from the Claire Quilters that were distributed among families with children.

Before each meal the Mustard Seed we gather for grace led by a volunteer who remains in recovery. She shines a light on the element of hope, using herself as an example. Speaking about her love of Jesus that brought her to sobriety, finding employment, housing and a second chance at the life God has given her. We conclude with thanks for the meal provided and that we all see each other as God sees us.

Respectfully Submitted,
Nancy 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. We serve a complete dinner once a month throughout the year. Most of those delivering their prepared meals sit with the men, eating and sharing in conversation. It always seems to be a lively time which is a blessing for us and (hopefully) for the men as well!

There are four teams that bring a meal, once a month, on a rotating basis; each team serves three meals per year. This year, one of our teams decided to step down from this ministry to make room for other things. We thank Phyllis Pomerleau and her team for their years of service. Deacon Jane requested that other parishioners consider taking up this ministry. Richard Dixon and Tyler Hill stepped up quickly. The two men love to cook so it should be a great team!

Other team leaders are Nicole McGurin, Jane Griesbach and Dave Chenevert. Deacon Jane loves Dismas Farm and asked to continue being active.

When Deacon Jane needed to leave St. Francis, she asked me to be the liaison between Dismas and the parish. I am learning so much about this amazing organization and how our St. Francis community provides prayerful and other support. For Christmas, I was blessed to be able to deliver to 10 men, each a \$50.00 Walmart Christmas cards provided through the Missions Ministry here at St. Francis. I was told by one of the Dismas Directors that the men were so very grateful for our support and care. Dismas Family Farm is also part of the Mission Ministry monthly food collection.

This report has been written with the assistance of Deacon Jane.

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 300 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, quilt tops and completed quilts, and our personal stashes of fabric and quilts which have allowed this effort to continue. In 2023 the quilters received their first financial assistance, a grant (\$1,000 for quilt batting) from the St. Francis Mission and Ministry Fund. Seventy quilts later, those funds have been spent. A recent generous donation and funds raised at the 2024 holiday craft table have established an on-going fund to help support this work.

During 2024 quilt recipients were Abby's House, St. Michael's on the Heights (mother and baby ministry), Afghan refugee families and families with children living in shelters under the auspices of the Central Mass Housing Alliance. The 2024 St. Clare quilters were Susan Delorme, Susan Dresley, Bev Giarusso, Barbara Henning, Allison Mondel, Julie Russell and Betty Clark (deceased 6/2024). Betty's name has been added to the memory quilt (made by the St. Clare quilters) that hangs at Abby's House. That quilt recognizes deceased contributors (donors, former residents, volunteers, etc.) who made an impact on Abby's House.

Newcomers, both to quilting and this group, are welcomed and encouraged! We are grateful for support from Archdeacon S. Jane Griesbach who became a quilter during her time at St. Francis and often called upon her friends to help us further our outreach. We have also benefitted from recent help from a friend of Susan Delorme.

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

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



2025 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	Rich Farrell and Susan Dresley (terms expire 2028)
<u>DIOCESAN CONVENTION DELEGATES:</u>	Dick Delorme, Dawn Rooke
<u>DIOCESAN CONVENTION ALTERNATES:</u>	Craig Stanovich, Susan Bastardo, Bev Giarusso

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

<u>Vestry:</u>	
Term expires 2026:	Tina Chen and Matt Surabian
Term expires 2027:	Ann Tripp and Jeremy Sanders
Retiring:	Mary Cook and Joy Head

Memorial Garden: Appointed
Term expires 2026: Beverly Giarusso
Term expires 2027: Kathleen O'Connor
Term expires 2028: Michael Pope
Term expires 2029: Joy Head
Retiring: Carolyn Schmidt

<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
Atlas 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 and her husband Brian have lived in Holden since 1990 and have attended St. Francis since 1991. They feel blessed to have been able to raise their three children in this wonderful church that places such a strong emphasis on supporting, nurturing and honoring its youth. During her years at St. Francis, she has been involved with the Newcomer/Fellowship Committee, Dismas Farm Ministry, and served four years on the vestry. She is currently serving as a convention delegate and has been the clerk of the vestry since 2006. She looks forward to continuing to serve the St. Francis parish.

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 name presented to serve three-year terms:

Rich Farrell

I was raised in Marshfield Ma and brought up Roman Catholic. I attended UMass Amherst as a Forestry major. My wife Blanche and I live in Jefferson and have two sons, Richard and Sean. I was employed as a Forestry supervisor by Massachusetts Electric/National Grid and retired after 38 years of service. I have been attending St Francis for 30 years and serve as Acolyte and LEM at the 8am service. I was received into the Episcopal Church in May of 2009. I am a member of the Holden Municipal Electric Power advisory board. I am a model train enthusiast, and one of my favorite things to do is hike or bike at the Quabbin reservoir. I find that sitting at the shoreline is very peaceful and allows me one on one time with God. I am looking forward to this next chapter of my faith journey by serving on the Vestry.

Susan Dresley

Susan Dresley moved to Holden with her husband Larry Doxsey and joined St. Francis in February 2022. Previously, Susan attended the Church of Our Redeemer Episcopal Church in Lexington, MA. There she led the Altar Guild, the Liturgy Team, and finished her first term on the vestry. Currently Susan co-chairs the St Clare Quilters with Barbara Henning, is a member of the Senior Ministry, and serves as a reader and LEM at Sunday services. Retired now, Susan worked for 41 years as a reference librarian for the U.S. Department of Transportation's Volpe Center in Cambridge, MA.

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)

2024 Financial Information - Page Intentionally Left Blank. For financial information, please contact the church office.