

St. Paul's Episcopal Church – Syracuse, NY
Vestry Meeting Minutes
February 17, 2026
DRAFT #3 – FINAL

Attendees:	The Rev. Philip Major – Rector	Tim Cassavaw (2026)
	Ieva Doyle – Senior Warden	Jeanne Chu (2026)
	Joe Russo – Junior Warden	Willson Cummer (2027)
	*Doug Mouncey – Treasurer	DJ Igelsrud (2026)
	*Anita Wagner – Clerk	Isiah Lavender (2027)
		Amy Mangram (2028)
		Tim Simmons (2027)
		Joseph von Souder (2028)

Excused: Catherine Gerard, Vestry; *Sandi Yingling – Assistant Treasurer

*Non-voting

Call to Order, Introductions, and Welcome to New Vestry Members

With a quorum established, Fr. Philip Major called the meeting to order in the Brewster Room at 5:58 pm, following the Shrove Tuesday pancake supper. As the first meeting of this new Vestry, he invited each person to introduce themselves by sharing things they enjoy doing outside of St. Paul's. Reading, gardening, and spending time with friends and family were mentioned often, and a diverse list of interests unfolded as each person spoke: mountain biking, cross-country skiing, cooking, hiking, photography, winetasting, investing in comic books, childrearing, art projects, collecting special objects to remember travel destinations, and more.

By way of orientation for all, Fr. Philip referred to the Vestry job description:

Members of the Vestry at St. Paul's should:

- Actively listen to the needs and ideas of our members.
- Take an active role in the activities of the parish.
- Attend Sunday worship on a regular basis.
- Reach out to new members and visitors and welcome them into the parish.
- Support St. Paul's financially.
- Pray for the parish, its members and staff.
- Engage in the work of the vestry with creativity, collegiality and hope.
- Support our parish as St. Paul's moves into a new vision of being the church in the 21st century.

While all duties are important, he emphasized that most important is the fourth one – actively engaging with new members and visitors, extending a warm welcome into the fellowship of St. Paul's Church. He counseled that Vestry responsibilities can be hard work. He implored us to be gentle with ourselves; if it's ever too much, let him know. While meetings are intended to be 90

minutes in length, they have run longer, primarily due to the complexity of the Open Doors project. While some loose ends still need attention, as evidenced by this meeting's agenda, we are getting closer to wrapping up the Open Doors project.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the January 13, 2026 Vestry meeting were included as Draft #2 in the packet emailed in advance of the meeting. With no corrections needed, Joe Russo entered a motion to accept Draft #2 as the final version. Following a second by DJ Igelsrud, the motion passed unanimously with 11 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstaining.

Minutes of the Special Vestry Meeting via ZOOM on January 25, 2026, which followed the 2026 St. Paul's Church Annual Meeting, were included as Draft #2 in the packet emailed in advance of the meeting. This brief special meeting was called to vote on the nomination of Isiah Lavender to fill the two years remaining in Joe Russo's Vestry term, now that Joe is serving as Junior Warden. With no corrections to the minutes needed, Tim Cassavaw entered a motion to accept Draft #2 as the final version. Following a second by Ieva Doyle and no discussion needed, the motion passed unanimously with 11 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstaining.

Rector's Report

Resolution 26.02.17.01: Proposal for Stage and Accessible Communion Railing

Fr. Philip described the relationship St. Paul's enjoys with the Syracuse Orchestra and how it came about. He explained that the idea of improving the stage area in the front of the nave is not new. It dates back more than 5 years but couldn't advance until now, due to funding and not being able to engage a carpenter with historic preservation credentials. He revealed that, until now, no one locally was interested in the project.

Colin McInnis, a skilled carpenter with historic preservation training and connections, has submitted a cost proposal. Colin has already done work at St. Paul's – trim for the new storage closet in the Hansen Dining Room. In terms of funding, the Syracuse Orchestra has received a \$20,000 grant from the Syracuse Symphony Foundation, which will cover 60% of the project cost. Fr. Philip anticipates that the St. Paul's portion will be covered, in part, by grant money, leaving about \$8,500 to be raised.

The scope of this project now reflects the suggestion offered up at the Vestry's January meeting – is this an opportunity for an accessible communion rail on the main floor of the nave? In consultation with Colin, Fr. Philip has learned a removable communion rail is feasible. When in place for St. Paul's worship services, people can come forward and receive communion together, which is more in keeping with what our Lord intended. There would also be an accessible area for people with walkers or wheelchairs. The rail would be removed for orchestra concerts.

In response to Isiah Lavender's question "Why will this new platform take up 60% of the floor space that is empty of pews? Why not a greater percentage of that empty space?" Fr. Philip suggested that the group go into the nave in order to better visualize the project. Once assembled in the nave, Fr. Philip pointed out the blue tape he'd placed on the floor to approximate the

boundaries of the proposed stage area. In response to Isiah's question, Fr. Philip explained it as "more flexibility for *our* use." That is, we might need the open floor space for special purposes during the church year. If the full stage were in place all the time, we have far less flexibility.

As Fr. Philip explained more aspects of the projects, more questions were raised, including:

- "Where will the remainder of the staging be stored?" The remaining 40% will be stored off to the side, along the wall where the harpsichord currently is stored. The harpsichord will be moved to the opposite wall, nested with the grand piano.
- "Who will move the stage sections in place and put them back?" When the Orchestra needs the full stage, their personnel will install the sections at the conclusion of Sunday worship service and put them back in storage after their concert.
- "Will there be damage from all this maneuvering?" We know the Orchestra personnel have great respect for this sacred space and will take care as they move the staging around. Another component of this project is to coat the floor with extended life finish for better protection.
- "What if we want to take this stage out in the future?" Yes, that would be possible.

Of primary concern, expressed by Willson Cummer and echoed by others, was sight lines throughout the nave. Will the communion rail obstruct worshipers' line of sight? In the interest of not wanting to hold up approval of this project so that it can move forward within the proposed timeframe (i.e., construction in August), everyone concurred that the height of the communion rail could be set later. On a date and time to be determined, Fr. Philip and others will stretch a string across the nave at the proposed height of the communion rail. The Vestry will be invited to sit in various areas of the nave to see if and where sight lines are affected.

After the group returned to the Brewster Room, Fr. Philip asked for any further comments before calling for a motion on the resolution. Tim Cassavaw expressed concern about the historic preservation aspect of this project, asking, "Does the design work from a historical perspective?" Fr. Philip explained that very little in the Chancel area is in its original place, nor is it necessarily original. He then passed around a computer-generated drawing of the project, provided by Colin McInnis, from the perspective of the center aisle, several pews back. While seeing this drawing assuaged concerns for most of the group, Tim felt, in good conscience, he would still need to abstain from voting.

Fr. Philip called for a motion on Resolution 26.02.17.01.

Resolution 26.02.17.01: Resolved, the Vestry authorizes the Rector to sign a contract with McInnis Carpentry for the construction of a 'permanent' stage and accessible communion (rail) with the following conditions:

- a. All construction will be of durable materials that harmonize with the existing chancel woodwork.
- b. Construction to be completed during the month of August.

- c. The stage will consist of a platform approximately 12' x 38' directly adjacent to the chancel area.
- d. The stage will be at the level of the second chancel step (11" above the height of the existing floor).
- e. A communion railing will be constructed at the edge of the stage. The front portion of the railing will be removable to allow for a continuous stage if additional staging is placed at the front.
- f. The stage will be accessible in the front by a single, fixed step (not removable), 6 feet wide and 11" deep.
- g. Maple flooring will be the primary floor surface of the stage. It will be stained to match the cherry woodwork found in the front of the nave. Other surfaces will be cherry hardwood to match the existing woodwork.
- h. The total cost of construction will be \$33,500. The Syracuse Symphony Foundation will provide \$20,000 toward the cost of construction. St. Paul's will be responsible for providing \$13,500 toward the cost of construction. A grant proposal for \$5,000 will be submitted to the Women of St. Paul's Nan Dorr Fund to defray the cost.

The motion was entered by Ieva Doyle and seconded by Jeanne Chu. In response to the need for further discussion, Fr. Philip was asked about his confidence in the Nan Dorr Fund granting funds to defray \$5,000 in project costs. Fr. Philip felt this is the kind of project Nan Dorr would have been 100% behind. He then called for a vote on the resolution. The motion passed, with 10 voting in favor; 0 opposed; and 1 abstained.

Discussion of 8 a.m. Worship Service

At its recent meeting, the Worship Ministry Team discussed the pros and cons of continuing to have two Sunday worship services. Those who regularly attend the 8:00 am worship services have been consulted. The Worship Ministry Team is not planning to return to two services after Easter. No action by Vestry is required.

Proposed Good Friday and 4th of July Worship Services

A strong sense of unity was felt at the Martin Luther King, Jr. vigil. The Holy Spirit clearly was present and moving among those gathered.

In a recent ZOOM meeting with his clergy colleagues, Fr. Philip raised the idea of planning another inter-denominational gathering, perhaps on Good Friday or July 4th or both. His sense is that a Good Friday "Stations of the Cross" vigil does not work, given everyone's already planned and announced activities. He will check back regarding the July 4th holiday timeframe, but he does not think anything will come of it.

Treasurer's Report

Referring to the financial report and Finance Committee meeting notes distributed with the Vestry packet, Treasurer Doug Mouncey commented that it's too early to project how well we'll

do financially on the income side or the expense side. The Finance Committee is watching cashflow closely. Several large, budgeted expenses were paid in January (Property Tax and Commercial Insurance), and snow removal is trending higher than anticipated.

The Finance Committee is researching any potential income tax implications of renting the 3rd floor apartments and the best way to deal with the rental income. They will keep Vestry apprised of their findings.

Doug is willing to schedule a more in-depth financial orientation for new and returning Vestry members.

Warden's Report

Resolution 26.02.17.02

This resolution, brought to the Vestry by the Building and Grounds Committee, the Finance Committee, the Wardens, and the Rector, covers additional expenses related to the completion of the 3rd floor apartments.

Resolution: Resolved, the Vestry of St. Paul's approves the expenditure of \$16,180 for the installation of electrical power for the HVAC system, the purchase and installation of appliances in the kitchens, modifications to the cabinets, construction of the water heater closets, and the replacement of the site-built door/window with a *Marvin* double-hung window.

Fr. Philip called for a motion, entered by Joe Russo and seconded by Tim Cassavaw. Following a discussion about how these new expenses came to light at this point in time, and after noting a concern raised about code compliance with the fire exit egress, Fr. Philip called for the vote. The motion passed, with 11 votes in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstaining.

Resolution 26.02.17.03

Brought to the Vestry by the Wardens and Rector, this resolution prepares the Parish House and sanctuary for our bicentennial celebrations.

Resolution: Resolved, the Vestry of St. Paul's approves the expenditure of \$7000 for refinishing the wood parquet flooring in the Parish House, and \$2418 for cleaning the pew cushions and steam cleaning the carpeting in the sanctuary and choir hallway.

In response to a question about what is meant by "extended life finish to the floor" mentioned in the project description, Fr. Philip explained it meant as much as 25 years. He called for a motion on the resolution, entered by Amy Mangram and seconded by Isiah Lavender. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously, with 11 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstaining.

Resolution 26.02.17.04

This resolution, brought to the Vestry by the Rector and the Wardens, covers expenses throughout the entire main floor of the property, primarily related to changing electrical outlets, adding occupancy sensors, and adding lighting for the Open Doors Donor Wall. In essence, the project brings the main floor of the building up to standard.

Resolution: Resolved, the Vestry of St. Paul's approves the expenditure of \$10,000 for repairs and additions to the electrical service on the main floor.

Fr. Philip called for a motion on the resolution, entered by Joe Russo and seconded by Willson Cumber. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously, with 11 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstaining.

Resolution 26.02.17.05

In accord with St. Paul's legislative documents, the Rector and Wardens hereby recommend the following persons to be appointed to these positions:

- Treasurer: Doug Mouncey
- Clerk of the Vestry: Anita Wagner
- Chair of the Finance Committee: Joe Moorman
- Representative to the Finance Committee: Willson Cumber
- Chair of the Building and Grounds Committee: Bill Pitcher
- Representative to/member of Building and Grounds Committee: Tim Cassavaw
- Member at large to the Personnel Committee: Derina Samuel
- Check signers: Elizabeth Elkins*, Amy Mangram*, Richard Pilgrim, Thomas Cantwell, Elizabeth Barker. (*Also authorized checks for the Women of St. Paul's)
- Convener of Community Fellowship Ministry Team: Liz Belden-Handler
- Convener of Worship Ministry Team: Laurie Sanderson
- Convener of Mission & Service Ministry Team: Betsy Elkins
- Convener of Formation Ministry Team: Jeanne Avery

Fr. Philip called for a motion on the resolution, entered by Joseph von Souder and seconded by DJ Igelsrud. With no further discussion, the motion passed, with 10 in favor, 1 opposed, and 0 abstaining.

Calendar and Closing Prayer

In a brief review of the calendar, Fr. Philip noted that while there is no Vestry meeting in March, the Vestry will have a retreat at his home on Saturday, March 21 from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. He pointed out that regular Vestry meetings are scheduled to start at 5:30 pm to accommodate work schedules.

Fr. Philip closed the meeting with prayer at 7:49 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Anita Wagner, Clerk of the Vestry