

St. Mary Magdalene Orthodox Church Monthly Meeting

November 16, 2025

Call to order / Opening Prayer: 13:05

Fr. Stephen opened with prayer and called to order in Mark's absence.

Approval of October 2025 minutes

Council approved the minutes - Dan moved to accept and Ron seconded.

Rector's Report

Fr. Stephen welcomed Suzanne as Paul had to resign a little sooner than planned.

Fr. Stephen proceeded to update on church growth: there are 56 catechumens, and new people expressing interest in coming to church. The parish discussed the situation with church space and the usage of chairs. The goal is to reduce the number of chairs to 3-4 per row, so that they are available for those who need a chair, but otherwise to have standing services eventually. This will be a gradual process.

The question about wall expansion was also discussed, concluding that it makes the most sense to expand the church building in the back towards the current parish hall – it is likely to be the most cost-effective and realistic approach. Fr. Stephen mentioned that we will need to start the building fund for the church expansion soon.

Fr. Stephen noted that the conversation regarding the new Bible study is still on his list to do.

In touching on the progress with the tithing, there has been a positive dynamic, although last week's tithing was unusually low. Father will be emphasizing the importance of tithing, especially around Thanksgiving time.

Since there are fluctuations with the tithing and there is a need for a set budget, Father will be creating a pledge form. Suzanne mentioned that the parish used to have a pledge form in the past. Ron shared the format of the previous pledge form, and Fr. Stephen suggested a few improvements.

Father informed the council about the progress of the Greeter's team (Nate, Josh, Anthony, Kamaka, Heath). It is very helpful to have new greeters, and he is working on a few improvements for smoother operation. Father has also created 50 visitor packets for those who are not Orthodox.

Website is growing, it receives 300 hits / month and searches include unexpected ones like 'Syrian churches near me'. By February Father expects about 1000 hits / month if the current trend continues. His company dedicates 15 hrs/week to the website. Father also mentioned that our Facebook page is experimenting with some advertising, so he will be monitoring if it is worthwhile.

Warden's Report - tabled until the next meeting in Mark's absence.

Treasurer's Report

Ron walked the council through the Financial dashboard. He mentioned that donations of goods with submitted receipts have been counted as part of collections. A brief discussion followed as to whether to keep them in this category, in favor of keeping.

October 2025 collections were significantly higher than October 2024, mainly due to the rising number of parishioners. November so far is about 15% behind.

It was noted again that knowing how much people can commit to will allow us to estimate the minimum operating budget for next year, hence the importance of the pledge forms.

The council approved October and November reports – Suzanne moved and Dan seconded.

Reports on Parish Activities

Fr. Stephen shared the feedback on the Fall Fest held on November 2nd - it had a great community feel with high participation and was very warmly received. The experimental pumpkin carving activity will be back next year by popular demand.

Regarding the Wednesday class – it has 12 people attending, mainly catechumens. Additionally, people have been downloading the already recorded classes. Anthony has prepared a 12-week curriculum which covers all the relevant areas for the catechumens. Currently, there are 7 recorded classes available on the web page for the catechumens. This curriculum model will help streamline baptisms so that there is one large group baptized on Lazarus' Saturday, and after that there is a large group baptized every 6 months.

There will be a new club beginning December 6 - St. Gabriel of Georgia Strength Club organized by Josh. This is for people to meet before vespers on Saturday and do physical workouts. There are 2 certified trainers in the group.

Another new initiative is Saturday Night Dinners (Starting Dec 6) - there is interest within newer parishioners to do things together, which is welcomed, and could potentially become a part of the outreach. Dan suggested firepit potlucks as an alternative or additional Saturday activity.

New Business

- Expanding Building / New Church - see rector's report
- Men's Bathroom Tile Project (Nov 28th-29th) - it was discussed that going forward council should approve all projects taking place on church property, regardless of whether funding comes from separate donations or church budget. Since the tile is being replaced, it is relatively easy to replace toilets as well, although they are functioning properly, just need proper cleaning.
- Bishop Gerasim's Visit (Jan 16th-19th, 2026) - Bishop will split his time between Fr. John's parish and ours, serving Saturday liturgy and vespers at St. James' and Sunday liturgy with us. We will offer transportation and coordinate lodging. The cost will be split 50/50. Ron and Tahir will be readers, Fr. Stephen is working to finalize the plan.
- Pastoral Conference (Feb 4th-6th, 2026) - will be held in Kernersville, NC. Fr. Stephen will be attending, and Deacon Vassiliy and Ron are encouraged to attend.

Old Business

- New Hall - Suzanne suggested looking into pre-made buildings such as modular classrooms to replace the current building. Current building can be potentially sold.
- Altar Robes - Ron will be ordering from Fr. Jaroslav in NJ. Turnaround time is around 2 weeks. Will need to communicate sizing/measurements. Allocated budget is \$3200. We will aim at ordering red/blue set of 6, 12 gold, and adjust the number of sets as needed. Since pricing is more expensive than originally planned, we are not going to get green/purple. Ron will be placing the order this week. Liam and Tom will serve as guides for measurements. Small size is made so that the hem can be let out.
- Dumpster / Removing broken play area - Fr. Stephen will discuss with Mark over text.
- Kitchen Inventory List - tabled till next month

- Land for sale – based on recommendations from the property attorney, the council decided to move forward with making an offer for the land behind the church, which is estimated at \$26,000. The initial offer will be at \$10,000. Fr. Stephen will add this to his list to do. If the offer is accepted, we would not need to get a loan, as it can be covered by savings.
- Security measures – the council covered topics such as insurance for the security team members, first aid kit, GSW/EMT training and cost of gun shields and bullets. Deacon Vassily expressed interest in being on the vetting team. So far 4 resumes have been submitted. Once members have been selected, Director will need to be appointed. Deacon Vassily, Dan and Fr. Stephen will do a phone conference to discuss current applicants, and Fr. Stephen will announce a reminder to submit resumes for anyone interested.

Brainstorming

Most pressing issues have been discussed.

Call for Adjournment / Closing Prayer - Meeting adjourned at 2:40 pm. Suzanne moved and Ron seconded.

Next Meeting: December 21, 2025