

St. Mary Magdalene Orthodox Church Monthly Meeting Minutes
September 20, 2026

1. Call to Order / Opening Prayer - 12:09 pm.
2. Approval of August 2026 Minutes: Dan moved, Nate seconded, all voted in favor; minutes approved.
3. Rector's Report.

Fr. Stephen noted that attendance has been climbing back up after the summer slowdown. Average attendance has been between 105-125 people, last week with 2 baptisms we had 133 people in attendance, and today, with many people taking the trip together to Disney - 113. The full email list for the parish is about 300 people. Our website has 200 visits/month. This is due to tailored content, even the other larger parishes in our Diocese do not have this kind of traffic. We track demographics and trends, and at present have been tailoring our web content, making it family oriented. The articles on the website are meant to increase engagement. Currently we have 80 catechumens, with plans to have 30 of them baptized in December.

Fr. Stephen has been working with Anthony on how to keep the newly baptized/chrisdated parishioners sustainably engaged. Fr. Stephen made a note that since becoming orthodox is a part of the modern counterculture, some newly baptized/chrisdated christians feel like they've reached their personal goal by simply becoming orthodox, without truly practicing their faith consistently being a part of the Body of Christ.

Dan checked whether this could possibly be due to fast-tracking new catechumens. Fr. Stephen provided the current guidelines for catechism, stating that all catechumens are expected to study and prepare for at least 6 months, with the goal being 9-12 months. This is not a typical schooling environment. The most important task is to evoke involvement, which results in better retainment.

We already have a group of established parishioners who help in reaching out to specific groups of catechumens, this is designed in a way that certain groups find a relatable and approachable mentor within our parish.

4. Protodeacon's Report.

Protodeacon Vassily has congratulated the council on a wonderful start to a new year and thanked Fr. Stephen for his media and communications efforts, successfully resulting in growing our parish. He shared that his family has gifted a new Gospel to the parish in the memory of his late mother, replacing the older one that had no special hard binding. He reminded of his family story, when his father back in Slovakia in the late 1800s purchased a Gospel for his parish with two cows.

As it turned out, there are no actual Gospel books currently published that fit within the new binding, but we were lucky to have Fr. Thomas Moore provide a fitting Gospel book that fits.

Fr. Vassiliy shared that he is looking into gifting a blessing cross for the parish as well.

He noted that there have been many more servers in the altar, and that there is a minor challenge of finding the right-sized candles for them to carry, as the company that used to sell these candles is no longer in business.

He shared that he had expressed intent to serve at Bishop Gerasim's enthronement service on November 13-14 in Dallas, TX, and is expecting confirmation on that this week.

5. Warden's Report.

Dan made note of the purchase and installment of the new icon of St. Mary Magdalene above the church entrance. He informed that a changing table has been ordered for the men's bathroom, since we have a growing number of small children in the parish.

He inquired about the procedure of burning any blessed/holy items such as palms or old clothes, and after Fr. Stephen's clarification it was established that once the weather gets cooler, and once the cleaning out of the closets in the parish hall is done, such items can be burned in the backyard firepit, inviting parish members who have a need to have their items burned as well.

Dan brought up the issue with proper church etiquette during the services. Newer people need more guidance regarding the use of smart phones, having conversations during services, etc. A question regarding sitting during the liturgy was also raised. During the discussion, it was established that these are the 'growing pains' of a rapidly expanding parish, which was originally not designed to be crowded. We are very blessed with newcomers, and have a feel of a mission, rather than an established parish. With some guidance from the greeters and leading by example of more influential parishioners we will get to where we need to be.

6. Treasurer's Report.

Ron opened by drawing attention to the direct links to financial reports in the bulletin. He stated that for the month of August we managed to beat the goal at the very end of the month. Since most of our 'big ticket' expenses such as insurance normally occur in the beginning of the year, our expenses to date are all covered and we have been able to add \$ 8K to our savings. All expenses - added 8000 to savings. Though we haven't met our September goal yet, there is still time and we are expected to meet it. As of August 31, we are 2% over our goal.

Ron confirmed that this year's income goal is 20% higher than last year's and we have been on track.

We will be going back to the routine of speaking about the finances before the parish every 3rd Sunday after liturgy, with Ron giving a short report next Sunday.

7. Parish Activities

We had 2 new Baptisms on September 13 - Josh Banks and Evan Joiner became newly baptized.

Dormition Fast Blessings occurred between 8/1-16/26. Fr. Stephen mentioned that next year he will be planning to announce cross blessings during the feast of the Elevation of the Cross. Fr. Stephen briefly explained the liturgical rules around coinciding holidays.

Greek Food Festival will be happening in Savannah on 10/8/26, and all are encouraged to volunteer with St. Paul's in an effort to build up good relationship. The goal is to have 20-30 people from our parish volunteer during the Greek Festival, with the expectation that St. Paul's parish will grow interest in attending our events.

The Ghost Pirates Game will be on 10/17/26, which is also a planned parish outing. It is this year's opening weekend, and 33 people are going so far.

Fall Fest is scheduled for 11/1/26. We will be inviting people from St. Paul's. We will have a chili cook-off and activities for children. We are not planning this as a community outreach event at this time.

There will be 30 people receiving Baptisms in December, and this will be split between 12/13 and 12/20 due to such a high number.

8. New Business

Fr. Stephen informed that Reader Tahir will be attending the Open House at St. Vladimir's Seminary in NY next month. The total cost for him to attend is \$2K. He asked the council if there is a will to cover any part of this cost from the parish' budget.

He provided insight into the rules and costs of the actual enrolment into the Seminary, so that the council has clarity on what needs to be budgeted for 2027, and the expectations.

Susanne moved to cover \$1K of the cost of Reader Tahir's attendance of the Open House from the parish budget. Ron confirmed that we have sufficient funds. Nate seconded, all voted in favor.

Dan asked about the possibility of Trunk Or Treat on 10/31, and after discussing the likely levels of attendance it was decided not to proceed with this event this year.

9. Old Business

'Made in the Image' Podcast is going live in early October. The episodes have been recorded, and intros are to be re-recorded. Ben Dickson, who runs this project on the UoJ side has commented on the uniqueness and appeal of our content.

Church and Hall Expansion: -Tom and Fr. Stephen will be meeting with a local retired architect to discuss best options.

New Treasurer for 2027: Tom is going to become the new Treasurer.

OCF at GSU Tuesday Night Bible Studies: Reader Ron provided an update about the Orthodox Christian Fellowship at their home, and a new Bible Study on UGA campus. Currently, 2 meetings a month are planned, with Fr. Stephen potentially running the Tuesday meeting.

DVP Programme: Reader Ron shared that his training program has been fascinating and inspirational for the OCF initiative at their home, helping shape our parish and retain catechumens.

Trailer Registration: Protodeacon Vassily confirmed this is postponed.

Kitchen Inventory List: Suzanne shared that everything is going smoothly and noted that there is a need for pans, pots, baking pans and a larger crock-pot. Fr. Stephen will announce this once the needed items are confirmed. Suzanne also shared that coffee creamer is something that coffee drinkers could donate, and that purchasing water bottles has been costly and it generates waste. In discussing this, council agreed that there is no immediate need for plastic water bottles and pitchers with filtered water can be used instead.

Dan mentioned that since there will be a burning of blessed items, this would be an opportunity for anyone wishing to dispose of their old US flags.

Fr. Stephen announced the council's offer to cover \$1K for the Open House trip to Reader Tahir, wishing him a fruitful journey.

Dan moved to adjourn the meeting. Nate seconded.
Meeting adjourned at 1:33 pm with a closing prayer.

Next Meeting: Oct 18, 2026.