

St. John Chrysostom Albanian Orthodox Church
Parish Semi-Annual Meeting
October 20, 2024
(in person; recorded)

Roll Call

Parish Council Members Present: Donna Dimitri, Sergio Georgi, Davit Jishkariani, Reem Tarazi

Parish Council Members Absent: Christine Dardaris, Nilda Salavachi, Zach Smith

Clergy: Fr. Kai

Meeting opened with prayer at 11:42am

Welcome by Chairperson Donna Dimitri

Parish Council Election (run by Stephanie Kosta)

The following parishioners have agreed to serve on council: Christine Dardaris, Donna Dimitri, Sergio Georgi, Davit Jishkariani, Zach Smith, Reem Tarazi, Anila Vero

No nominations from the floor.

Motion to approve slate by Colleen Xhoxhi. Seconded by Linda Croke. Motion passed. None opposed. No abstentions.

Thank you to Nilda Salavachi for your years of service to parish council.

Secretary's Report (reported by Reem Tarazi)

Reem presented the meeting minutes from semi-annual meeting in June 2024. No questions or concerns. Linda Croke made a motion to accept the minutes as presented, seconded by Michele Sarkos. No discussion. Motion passed.

Donna thanked Reem for her service.

Treasurer's Report (prepared by Zach Smith, presented by Donna Dimitri)

Treasurer report made available for review (see Appendix).

We are doing well financially in 2024, in context of expensive window project

- Cost of project is \$60,000; received donations of \$20,000; will try to elicit more donations

Donna directed attention to proposed 2025 budget. Reviewed meaningful expenses and slight increases in some expected revenue and expenses. Most budget items are consistent with 2024.

- ~147,800 in expenses budgeted
- ~147,000 income budgeted, which includes ~27,700 transfer from investment account

Motion to accept report by Peter Ghicondey, seconded by Linda Croke. No discussion. Motion passed. No opposition or abstention.

Donna recognized Zach's efforts and contribution.

Clergy Report (presented by Fr. Kai)

- 1) Reviewed goals for the coming year, especially church attendance with a focus on children
- 2) Highlighted our important and unique church traditions and our need to be present, participate, and share our skills and talents
- 3) Contact Fr. Kai anytime

Donna thanked Fr. Kai for his continued leadership and commitment.

Vice-Chairperson Report (presented by Sergio Georgi)

- 1) Sergio thanked parishioners in attendance and highlighted importance of the semi-annual meetings
- 2) Sergio highlighted the efforts of parish council and the reward experienced from serving on council
- 3) Continues to make effort to improve website and livestream
 - o Always in need for assistance with livestream and website maintenance. Please contact council if interested.
- 4) Thanked Fr. Kai for his efforts to include Albanian language in services
- 5) Thanked Ilirjan for filling Sunday School director position
- 6) Thanked Melnik family for their continued service to the parish

Donna recognized Sergio's incredible work on website and livestream and his continued commitment to the parish.

Chairperson Report (presented by Donna Dimitri)

- 1) Overall things have been going well for our parish. We are extremely blessed to have Fr. Kai as our priest. He is ready willing and able to assist our parishioners at a moment's notice. He would like to get to know more of our parishioners and visit them in their homes. It is an ongoing process.
- 2) The window project has been completed. The Icon film was installed this past Thursday and Friday. We are very happy with how everything turned out. To date we have received three donations, \$6000.00 each which will sponsor three windows. Two other donations totaling \$3000.00 have been received. We will send information requesting additional donations in the very near future.
- 3) The church sign which had been removed from the stand in front of the church was hung on the outside wall of the church. Special thanks to Tom Moore for having the bracket made and then hanging the sign. The existing stone base will be removed.
- 4) Fr. Dennis and Donna are the Albanian Archdiocesan representatives to the OCA. We attended the OCA Metropolitan Council meeting in Springfield VA, October 9-11. An overview of the upcoming All-American Council, which will be held in July 2025 in Phoenix Arizona, was presented. A good portion of the meeting was devoted to the OCA pension plan and the OCA 2025 Budget. A full report will be available on the OCA website.

5) Thanked Ilirjan for filling Sunday School director position

Nick Naum Scholarship Report (reported by Reem Tarazi)

This year we awarded five scholarships at \$2000 each. The fund sits at ~\$86,000 and continues to reflect the activity of the market but we are doing well and can continue to provide scholarships for the foreseeable future. Some past scholarship recipients will take over a number of committee spots moving forward.

Old Business

- 1) Overview of Archdiocesan Assembly meeting in September at Ss. Peter and Paul
 - a. Anila's reflections: First experience, wonderful experience, discussion around bringing more people into the church
 - b. Sergio's reflections:
 - i. Well organized, good attendance
 - ii. Highlighted Bishop's effort to integrate and participate more and enhance relationships between churches here in US and churches in Albania and ways to reach Albanian communities
 - iii. Discussion of finances
 - iv. Background check policies enhanced
 - v. Ordination of Deacon Eugene as priest (his education here in US funded fully by Archdiocese Student Fund, which we support)
 - c. Donna shared more information about the Student Fund and efforts to recruit students
- 2) Church hall window project – someone came to recalk all windows
- 3) None from floor

New Business

None

Reem Tarazi made motion to close meeting. Linda Croke seconded. Motion passed.

Meeting concluded at 12:20pm.

Respectfully submitted by Reem Tarazi

APPENDIX: TREASURER REPORT (prepared by Zach Smith)

I once again have the honor of presenting you the budget for next year. The 2025 budget again relies on the investment account to meet the parish's budgetary needs. As I said last year, continued reliance on the investment account is not sustainable for the future of the parish. Nonetheless, there are some positive signs in the income and expenses for this year. Please find notes on this year's expenses and next year's budget below.

1. Parish financial state, 2024:

1. Total pledges as of 9/30/24: \$42,036.43, of which \$33,670.43 received. We budget \$60,000 per year for pledges and did not meet this goal in 2023.
2. Total icon pledges as of 9/30/24: \$17,060, of which \$13,240.28 received. We budgeted \$14,000 for the proceeds of the Icon Auction, and we are grateful to parishioners for exceeding this goal.
3. Candles and collections income this year are well on track to exceed their budgeted amount.
4. The Parish has withdrawn \$15,000 from the Investment Account to cover expenses associated with the window replacement work to date, and the Parish will withdraw \$10,000 from the Investment Account to cover the annual insurance premium. However, when windows are fully installed, we hope we will have additional parishioner donations to allow reimbursing the investment account for some or all of the expenditures.
5. The Women's Day Dance was a spectacular success, netting the church more than \$7,000. Thank you to Nilda Salavachi for her coordination of this event.
6. In the 2024 figures for priest's expenses, I accidentally double-counted the portion of Fr. Kai's salary allocated to his pension contribution as both salary and cost to the church. This has not impacted Fr. Kai's pay, which was calculated correctly, only the line item on the budget for 2024. This was corrected for 2025:
 1. Salary: \$10,055.96
 2. Housing allowance: \$53,268.44 (pending update from Fr. Kai in December 2024)
 3. Social security contribution: \$5,609.32
 4. Total: \$68,933.72 less \$3,799.46 priest's pension contribution, for \$65,134.26.

2. Window project

1. The 2023 October semiannual meeting authorized \$75,000 for this work, to be taken from the investment account if necessary.
2. Total costs are anticipated to be around \$66,000 after the icon film is installed.
3. We have received just over \$20,000 in donations from parishioners to offset the expenses of this project.
4. Without the window project (and parishioner donations to support it, as well as investment withdrawals), the parish budget would be short only \$100 as of 9/30/24 and projected to be in deficit \$19,000 by year end.

3. 2025 Budget

1. The Archdiocesan Assembly voted to increase the Fair Share payment to St. John Chrysostom by about 44%. This increase is reflected in the 2025 budget.
2. We are grateful to Fr. Kai for his leadership of our parish. Additionally, we are obligated by the Archdiocese and the OCA to provide a cost-of-living increase to our clergy. This is reflected in the 2025 budget.
3. Increases to income from candles and collections this year and last year led me to propose increasing our collections budget to \$7,000.
4. Certain expenses have increased for the parish as for many parishioners:
 1. Gas: from \$6,000 to \$7,000 annually
 2. Internet and telephone: from \$1,000 to \$1,200 annually

5. Our insurance premium dropped by \$628 to \$12,559 annually.
4. **Bottom line:**
 1. The budget relies on a projected transfer of **\$27,774.34** from the investment account to balance for 2025.
 2. This year, the gain on the investment account as of 9/30/24 is just over \$27,000. Past performance is no prediction of future gains, but the stock market typically appreciates on average 5-7% per year, or between \$14,000-\$20,000, based on the value of our investments at present. In years when the stock market drops (as in 2022), relying on the investment account is financially unsound.
 3. The recipe for a balanced budget is simple but hard to implement. We simply need more and higher value pledges. It sounds crude to put it this way, but that is the only path to financial sustainability for a parish. We cannot rely on memorial donations, bequests, and special events to meet the need, nor can we indefinitely rely on our investments.

Zachary Smith