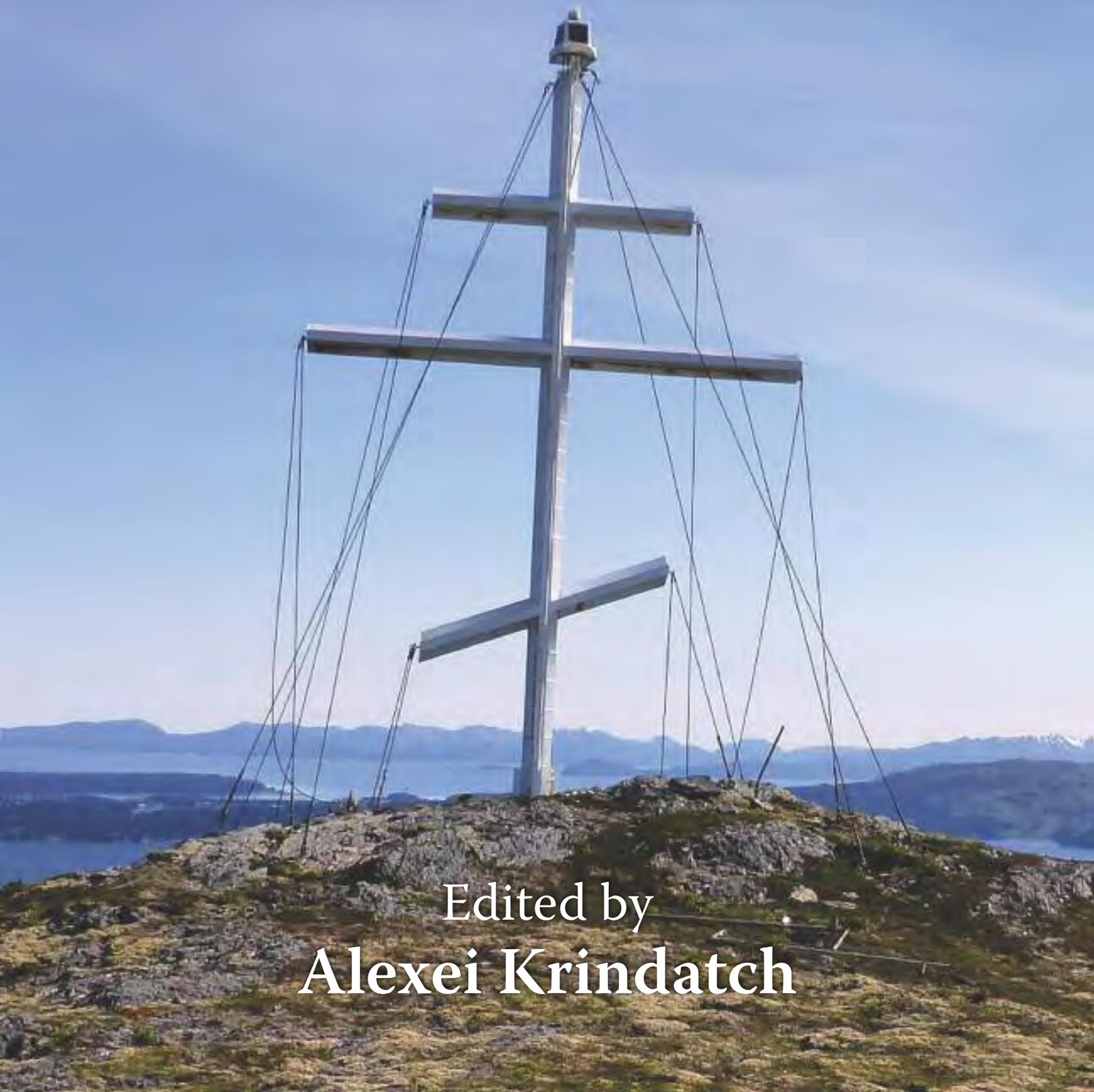


# Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries



Edited by  
**Alexei Krindatch**

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**Alexei Krindatch**

A publication of the  
**Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops  
of the United States of America**

[www.assemblyofbishops.org](http://www.assemblyofbishops.org)



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**Cover photo:** Orthodox Cross on the Top of Mount St. Herman on Spruce Island, Alaska.  
St. Herman of Alaska, the member of the original missionary team of Russian  
monks and America's first canonized Orthodox saint, lived on Spruce island  
for more than twenty years until his death in 1836.

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## Message from Archbishop Demetrios, Chairman, Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America

To the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Presidents and Members of Parish Councils, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools, the Members of Philanthropic Organizations, the Youth and Youth Workers, and the entire Orthodox Christian Family in the United States of America

Beloved and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ,

Well into its seventh year since its inception in 2009, the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States has labored to fulfill its mission to forge a unified Orthodox witness in society and has strived to pave a path for fuller expressions of the Eucharistic communion in our common work. To this end, I am most grateful for the initiative of the *Committee on Monastic Communities* to produce the *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries*. This truly constitutes a labor of love.

Along with the *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Churches*, this present work produced by the Assembly of Bishops not only spiritually edifies the lives of our people, but also serves as a practical and useful resource for those seeking to learn more about the Orthodox Church, and specifically about the monastic tradition in the United States.

Like so many others before them, the countless nuns and monks have committed themselves to a life of constant prayer, fasting, obedience, and repentance. And while the “angelic life” has a central place in their lives, monastics are also known for their creativity, artistic work, and philanthropy.

As we have witnessed throughout the centuries, and as the *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries* points out, while monastics have renounced *the ways* of the world, they never *renounce the world*. Their fruit of their constant prayer for the world led to the formation of hospitals, old-age homes, and orphanages. As the *Atlas* points out, our monasteries joyfully offer hospitality to those on pilgrimage or retreat; they seek to offer comfort to the downtrodden and the marginalized.

In closing, I express my sincere and heartfelt appreciation to my dear brothers, the members of the *Committee on Monastic Communities*—Archbishop Kyrill (Committee Chairman), Metropolitans Gerasimos and Tikhon, and Bishop Longin—for their initiative, and express my gratitude to Mr. Alexei Krindatch, the editor of the *Atlas*, for his efforts to coordinate this most useful resource.

With love and high esteem in Christ,

+Archbishop Demetrios of America  
Chairman

# Editor's Note: About This Book

In 1794 a group of ten monks, from the Valaam and Konevits Monasteries in the Russian north, arrived on the island of Kodiak in Alaska. Sent to what was then Russian America, the monks built a church dedicated to Christ's Holy Resurrection and a wooden monastery for the members of the mission near the Kodiak harbor. Their arrival marked the beginnings of organized Orthodox church life and an Orthodox monastic presence in America. Today nearly two thousand local Orthodox Christian parishes (congregations) and seventy-seven Orthodox monastic communities<sup>1</sup> have become an important part of America's diverse "religious landscape."

The idea for this book was born out of the study of US Orthodox Christian monasteries conducted in 2014 by the Committee for Monastic Communities of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America.<sup>2</sup> While working on this study, three facts caught my attention. First, while American Orthodox Christian churches have various ethnic origins and "roots" (Greek, Russian, Serbian, Romanian, etc.), most US Orthodox monasteries use today English in their worship services and everyday life. That is, there is no "language barrier" for people who may wish to visit these monasteries either as Orthodox pilgrims, non-Orthodox inquirers, or simply American "religious tourists." Second, offering hospitality and welcoming guests—Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike—is seen by many monasteries as a priority and important to their mission. As the abbot of one of the monasteries described in this book said: "We live by the words of St. Benedict: 'Let every guest be received as Christ.'" Third and most importantly, Orthodox Christianity was brought to America by people from a variety of countries. Being planted on American soil, their parishes and monastic communities continued to have different ethnic and cultural "flavors" (even though English has gradually replaced Greek, Russian, Serbian, Bulgarian, and other languages). Accordingly, being in

different Orthodox monasteries in America, one can experience very different traditions of Orthodox monasticism: the way it is practiced in Greece, or Russia, or Romania, or Serbia. There is no other country in the world where these different monastic traditions coexist under "the same roof." In short, US Orthodox monasteries are welcoming and interesting places to visit for both Orthodox Christians and members of other faith communities, and even for nonreligious persons.

The purpose of this Atlas is to provide a clear overview of the past and present of Orthodox monasticism in the United States. This book is addressed to a wide audience. Both Orthodox and non-Orthodox persons, "experts" on the Orthodox Church and those who know very little about Eastern Christianity, will find plenty of interesting and useful information. Simultaneously, the *Atlas of American Orthodox Monasteries* is intended to be a reference book, a thematic monograph, and a tour guide. It is a reference book because it offers comprehensive information on all American Orthodox monasteries that are part of the Assembly of Canonical Bishops of the United States of America. It is a thematic monograph because the first and second chapters discuss the traditions of Orthodox monasticism in general and the history of Orthodox monasteries in the United States. And it is a tour guide because the essays in the final part of the book describe in detail selected individual monasteries, with particular emphasis on facts that may be interesting and helpful for those who may wish to visit these monasteries. We called this book an "Atlas" because it has several maps providing various data on American monasteries and also because the essays on individual monasteries are accompanied by many photographs from the everyday lives of each monastic community.

Structurally, this book unfolds in four parts. Chapter 1 focuses on traditions and the most quintessential features of Orthodox monasticism in general. Chapter 2 looks at the historical development of Orthodox monasteries in the United States and offers many interesting facts about particular monastic communities and personalities associated with them. Chapter 3 contains a state-by-state directory of US Orthodox monasteries. For each monastery, we provide the most important information, such as contact details (address, phone, e-mail, website), year of founding,

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, we will use the words "monastery" and "monastic community" as synonymous. Also, in this book, the word "monastery" is used to describe both male and female monastic communities.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops look here: [www.assemblyofbishops.org](http://www.assemblyofbishops.org). The study report can be downloaded here: <http://assemblyofbishops.org/assets/files/docs/research/StudyOfUSMonasteriesReportFinal.pdf>.

number of monastics in residence,<sup>3</sup> name of the monastery's superior, language(s) used in worship services and in the monastery's everyday life, which church calendar the monastery follows,<sup>4</sup> the monastery's feast days, and the availability of overnight accommodations for visitors. In addition, there is also a brief description of each monastic community. The directory is accompanied by four maps that visually present geographic distribution and some important data on all US Orthodox monasteries. The last chapter offers the essays with "stories" about selected American Orthodox monasteries. Each essay is accompanied by a number of photographs. When writing these essays, a particular emphasis was placed on what is "most special" and distinct about each monastery and on the information that might be especially interesting and useful for those who wish to visit. The Atlas is concluded with a short article on "A Few Simple Rules to Follow When Visiting an Orthodox Christian Monastery." This article should help the reader to better plan his or her future visits to Orthodox monasteries.

An internally very diverse "family" of American Orthodox monasteries is covered in this book. Their individual histories, their varying ways of living and religious practices, and their visions for their mission within the Orthodox Church and society at large are complex subjects that at times are quite sensitive. I have done my best to be accurate and objective in presenting information and data about each monastery. Any comments that readers may wish to make, as well as updates on any subject included in this book, are welcomed. Correspondence can be addressed to: [akrindatch@aol.com](mailto:akrindatch@aol.com).

It is our hope that this book will help readers to discover for themselves the richness of Orthodox monasticism and, most importantly, its relevance for the people living in twenty-first-century America.

**Alexei D. Krindatch**  
***Principal author, data compiler, and editor***

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<sup>3</sup> "Monastic" is a collective term to describe monks, nuns, and novices.

<sup>4</sup> I.e., "Old" (Julian) or "New" (revised Julian also called "Gregorian") Calendar.

# Acknowledgements and Contributing Authors

This book was made possible by the generous support from the Virginia H. Farah Foundation and Cottonwood Foundation, which awarded a substantial grant for this publication.

Our special gratitude goes to Bishop George (Schaefer) and Archbishop Kyrill (Dmitrieff)—the former and the current heads of the Committee for Monastic Communities of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America. Their strong support and endorsement of this project were crucial throughout the development of the Atlas.

I am indebted to and must thank a number of people who worked diligently (and very patiently!) from “behind the scenes” on this publication. Richard Houseal developed the entire layout of the Atlas. Dale Jones designed all the maps. Dr. Anton C. Vrame and Holy Cross Orthodox Press gave this publication its final shape and form. Without their input and full dedication, the book would never have appeared.

And of course, the Atlas would never have been published without support and cooperation on the part of the American Orthodox monasteries. All of them helped us greatly as we gathered comprehensive and up-to-date information on their communities. Twenty-two of them (described in essays in the last part of the book) welcomed us and provided with the opportunity to visit and stay for a few days while working on the story about each monastery.

Finally, three persons made invaluable contributions as the coauthors of this Atlas. They are listed in order of appearance of their articles:

- Archimandrite Irenei (Stenberg) of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, who wrote the chapter on “Traditions of Orthodox Monasticism”
- Monk Moses (Worcester) of the Serbian Orthodox Monastery of St. Herman of Alaska, who wrote the chapter on “The Historical Development of Orthodox Monasteries in the United States: An Overview.”

- Miss Chrysanthe Loizos, communication officer of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, who wrote essays on two monastic communities: Holy Protection Orthodox Monastery (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America) and St. Tikhon’s Orthodox Monastery (Orthodox Church in America).

Many thanks to all of you!

*Alexei D. Krindatch*

*Principal author, data compiler, and editor*

# Inclusiveness of the Atlas, Terminology, and Glossary

## Inclusiveness of the Atlas

The *Atlas of American Orthodox Monasteries* provides a historical overview and present day information on all US monastic communities affiliated with various Orthodox Christian Churches that constitute the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America ([www.assemblyofbishops.org](http://www.assemblyofbishops.org)). The table below lists these Orthodox Churches and shows the number of Orthodox monasteries affiliated with each Church.

The main source of information presented in this atlas was the survey of US Orthodox monasteries conducted in 2014 with follow-up and updating in 2015. That is, the data was obtained directly from each monastery and not from the headquarters of the respective Orthodox Churches. Therefore this atlas provides first-hand, reliable, and up-to-date (as of fall 2015) information on the Orthodox Christian monasteries in the United States. In addition, we visited in person and interviewed all monasteries that are described in details in the final chapter.

## Terminology

Four terms are very frequently used in this Atlas:

- **“Monastic community”** is a synonym for “Monastery.” “Monastery”/“Monastic Community” includes both “monastery for men” and “monastery for women.” That is, we do not use the separate term “convent” that is frequently used in Western Christianity to describe monastic communities for women.
- **“Monastic(s)”** is a collective term to describe monks, nuns, and novices.
- **“Orthodox jurisdiction”** (or “Orthodox Church jurisdiction”) is the term most commonly used by the American Orthodox Christians to describe a national Orthodox Church body. While there are twelve Orthodox Church bodies that constitute the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops, theologically, these Orthodox Church bodies are uniform and they see themselves as belonging to the one Orthodox Church. Therefore, the term

| <b>Orthodox Christian Churches that are Part of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America (alphabetical order)</b> | <b>Number of US Orthodox Monasteries that Belong to Each Church (2015)</b> |
|---|--|
| Albanian Orthodox Diocese   | 0  |
| American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of the USA   | 0  |
| Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America  | 3  |
| Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese of the USA, Canada and Australia   | 1  |
| Georgian Orthodox Church  | 2  |
| Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America   | 19   |
| Orthodox Church in America  | 19   |
| Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas   | 2  |
| Russian Orthodox Church   | 1  |
| Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia   | 18   |
| Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America  | 14   |
| Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA  | 0  |

“jurisdiction” reflects only the administrative/organizational separation between American Orthodox Churches, but not theological disagreement—as the term “denomination” typically suggests when used among Protestants. Accordingly, the expression “under the jurisdiction of” or “in the jurisdiction of” should be understood as “being part” of a particular national Orthodox Church body.

- **“Church Calendar”** used by Orthodox Church or Orthodox monastery. In their sacramental lives and annual cycle of worship services (i.e. how feast and fast days are reckoned), the Orthodox Churches and monasteries in America use two different Church calendars. One is known as “Old” (also called “Julian”) calendar, while another is the “New” (also called “revised Julian” or “Gregorian”) calendar. Essentially, the “New” calendar fully corresponds with the “normal” civic calendar in use globally. Differently, the “Old” (“Julian”) calendar is thirteen days behind the New calendar. For instance, a monastery that uses the “New” calendar celebrates Christmas on December 25, while a monastery that follows “Old” calendar celebrates Christmas on January 7, because according to “Old” calendar reckoning it is December 25.<sup>1</sup>

## Short Glossary

**Abbot/Abbess:** the head of a monastery for men/women.

**Archimandrite:** monastic rank above *igumen*.

**Geronta/Geronda** (in Greek tradition) or **Staretz** (in Russian tradition): both mean “elder.” In the Russian tradition, the term *staretz* (or *staritsa*) is usually reserved for a monastic who possesses a special charismatic gift of giving spiritual direction to others. In the Greek tradition, *geronta* (or *gerontissa*) is used in the same way, but is also used more commonly to refer to the spiritual fathers or mothers of monasteries.

**Hesychasm:** a particular mystical tradition of prayer in the Orthodox Church that, in several different ways, focuses on the process of retiring inward by ceasing to register the “outside senses” with the goal to achieve an experiential knowledge of God. The renowned Orthodox theologian, Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware), offers several related meanings of the term “hesychasm”: (a) the practice of constant inner prayer, aiming at union with God on a level beyond images, concepts, and language; (b) the quest for such union through the so-called *Jesus Prayer*; (c) a particular psychosomatic technique in combination with the *Jesus Prayer*; (d) the “eremetical” (i.e., solitary) life (in which sense the term has been used since the fourth century); and (e) the theology of St. Gregory Palamas.

**Hieromonk:** a monk who is also ordained into the ranks of clergy (i.e. a monk who is also a priest).

**Igumen:** the monastic rank above *hieromonk*, but below *archimandrite*.

**Jesus Prayer:** the short prayer “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (or shorter variants thereof). It has been widely taught and practiced throughout the entire history of the Church. The continuous saying of the Jesus Prayer (either aloud or silently) is especially emphasized as an integral part of *hesychasm*. The Jesus Prayer is revered by the spiritual fathers of this tradition as a method of opening a person’s heart and soul to God.

**Catholicon** (sometimes spelled “Katholicon”): a monastery’s main church.

**Kellion, kellia:** a monastic cell or cells; a hermitage.

**Khouria:** in the Arabic tradition, a term of endearment for a priest’s wife.

**Matushka:** in the Slavic tradition, a term of endearment for a priest’s wife or a nun.

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<sup>1</sup> The Julian Calendar is attributed to the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar, whose name it bears. It was later corrected in the sixteenth century by Pope Gregory XIII due to the ever-increasing discrepancy between calendar time and calculated astronomical time. Thus the Gregorian Calendar came into being. Inasmuch as the Julian Calendar had been in continuous use in the Christian East and West throughout the centuries, the subsequent introduction of the Gregorian Calendar in the West created yet another anomaly in the deteriorating relations between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. Despite the efforts of the emissaries of Pope Gregory to convince the Orthodox (i.e. Eastern Christians) to accept the New (Gregorian) Calendar, the Orthodox Church rejected it. The main reason for its rejection was that the celebration of Easter would be altered: contrary to the injunctions of canon 7 of the Holy Apostles, the decree of the First Ecumenical Synod, and canon 1 of Ancyra, Easter would sometimes coincide with the Jewish Passover in the Gregorian calendar. Hence, until the end of World War I, all Orthodox Churches had strictly abided by the Old (Julian) Calendar rather than the New (Gregorian) Calendar, long since adopted by the rest of Christendom. In May of 1923, however, an “Inter-Orthodox Congress” was convened at Constantinople (currently, Istanbul) by the then Ecumenical Patriarch, Meletios IV. Not all Orthodox Churches were in attendance. The Churches of Serbia, Romania, Greece, and Cyprus were there, but the Churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Bulgaria were not. One of the issues discussed at this Congress was the adoption of the New Calendar. No unanimous agreement was reached. Several of the Orthodox Churches, however, did eventually agree, though not all at the same time, to adopt the New Calendar. These were the Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Poland, and most recently, Bulgaria (1968). Differently, the Churches of Jerusalem, Russia, Georgia, Japan and Serbia, along with the monasteries on Mt. Athos, all continue to adhere to the Old (Julian) Calendar.

**Mount Athos:** a mountainous peninsula in northern Greece that protrudes into the Aegean Sea and covers an area of about 390 square kilometers. Mount Athos is home to twenty Orthodox monasteries and numerous smaller communities, and has an autonomous status (often referred to as a “monastic republic”) within the Greek State. Only monks are allowed to establish permanent residency on Mount Athos, and only men are allowed to visit the monasteries. Monastics from Mount Athos are often referred to as “Athonites” or “Hagiorites.”

**Novice:** a candidate to become monk or nun, one who enters a monastery to test his or her vocation. He may or may not be clothed in the basic monastic robe and soft monastic hat (Russian: *skufia*; Greek: *skoufos*), depending on the customs of his monastery. Novices do not take vows and can return to lay life with a blessing.

**Obedience:** a task or job assigned to a monastic (monk, nun, novice) by his or her superior.

**Panagia:** a) a Greek word for the Most Holy Mother of God (literally, “Most Holy”) or b) a clerical chest decoration depicting the Mother of God and signifying the rank of hierarch in the Orthodox Church.

**Parish:** a local Orthodox congregation, usually possessing its own facilities such as a church building with sanctuary, hall, offices, etc. Parish boundaries are not geographically determined in the Orthodox Church, as would be found in the Roman Catholic Church.

**Presbytera:** in the Greek tradition, a term of endearment for a priest’s wife.

**Prosphora** (Greek for “offering”): bread prepared for use in the Orthodox Eucharistic Liturgy. A portion of it, known as the “lamb” (or “amnos”) is consecrated during the Divine Liturgy for the Eucharist, while the rest is cut up to be the “antidoron”—the blessed bread distributed at the end of the Liturgy. During its preparation, prosphora is stamped with an image usually including **IC XC NIKA** (“Jesus Christ conquers”). Prosphora can vary in size and stamp in different traditions.

**Riassaphore-monk:** one who has received the first degree of monasticism after his novitiate. He is tonsured by the *abbot* but does not make any formal vows. He is generally given a new name. He is required to persevere in the monastic life, even though he has not yet taken vows.

**Schemamonk:** a monk who has been tonsured into the third, highest degree of monastic life. He takes the same vows he did as when he became a *stavrophore monk*. In the Greek tradition, especially on Mount Athos, the schema is commonly given to monks early in their monastic life, often three years after they take their first vows. In the Russian tradition the schema is more commonly given to a monk who is extremely ill or near the end of his life. His rule of prayer becomes longer and his personal asceticism more strict.

**Skete:** historically, “skete” refers to a small and remote monastic community. Skete can also refer to a type of monastic community that has a chapel surrounded by the individual monks’ cells.

**Stavrophore monk:** a monk who is tonsured to the second degree of monasticism, generally several years after becoming a *riassaphore-monk*. The abbot of the monastery administers vows to him, to which he gives the appropriate responses. He is given a longer prayer rule and more responsibility.

**Theotokos:** Greek word for the Most Holy Mother of God; literally, “God-bearer.”

**Trapeza:** refectory, dining hall.

**Typicon** (Greek: τυπικόν/*tyrikon*, pl. τυπικα/*tyrika*, literally, “following the order”): directives and rules that establish the order of Orthodox worship services for each day of the year. In the case of a monastery, the typicon includes the rules of life of the monastic community, the rules of monks’ individual prayer, and their communal worship services. There are a number of major typicon traditions, but there are also many local variations, often codified into official typicons of particular monasteries.

# Some Interesting Facts about Orthodox Christian Monasteries in the United States

- As of December 2015 there are seventy-nine Orthodox Christian monasteries on the territory of the United States of America under the jurisdiction of the various American Orthodox Churches belonging to the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States. This number is nearly equally divided between monastic communities for men (40) and monastic communities for women (39).
- The total number of monastics (monks, nuns, and novices) residing in all American Orthodox monasteries is 573. This includes 308 in monasteries for men and 265 in monasteries for women.
- Most US Orthodox monasteries are small in size. Thirty-four out of the seventy-nine have no more than three monastics in residence. Only nine American Orthodox monasteries have more than twenty monks, nuns, and novices.
- The largest monastery for men is St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery in Florence, Arizona, which has forty-nine monks and novices. The largest monastery for women is Holy Protection of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Monastery in White Haven, Pennsylvania, which has twenty-five nuns and novices.
- Out of twelve Orthodox church jurisdictions (i.e. national Orthodox church bodies) that constitute the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, nine have monasteries. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and the Orthodox Church in America have the largest number of monasteries: 19 each. The three Orthodox church jurisdictions that do not have monasteries are: the Albanian Diocese, the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA.
- The top three American states by the number of Orthodox monasteries are New York (13), California (11), and Pennsylvania (6).
- The three oldest of the currently existing US Orthodox monasteries are: St. Tikhon's Monastery for men in South Canaan, Pennsylvania (founded in 1905); St. Sava Monastery for men in Libertyville, Illinois (founded in 1923); and Holy Trinity Monastery for men in Jordanville, New York (founded in 1930). Among monasteries for women, the oldest is the Holy Assumption Monastery in Calistoga, California, which was established in 1940.
- Many American Orthodox monasteries have significant land property. The largest landowner among all US Orthodox monastic communities is Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Monastery in Jordanville, New York, which has nine hundred acres of land.
- Most people hardly think about the monastic life as something that would attract young persons. But even if this stereotype is true as a whole, there are remarkable exceptions. The "youngest" of the American Orthodox monasteries by the average age of the monastics is St. John the Forerunner Greek Orthodox Monastery for women in Goldendale, Washington. The average age of the twenty-two nuns and novices residing there is only thirty-three years old.
- The highest-altitude Orthodox monastery in America is Protection of the Holy Virgin Monastery for women in Lake George, Colorado. It is situated at the elevation of 9,000 feet.
- Arguably, the American Orthodox monastery that can be qualified as the "most remote" is St. Nilus Skete for women in Alaska. It is situated on

Nelson Island in the Ouzinkie Narrow Straits, about a forty-minute boat ride from Kodiak Island. The whole tiny islet belongs to the monastery, and there is no other settlement there. When bad weather arrives, St. Nilus Skete can be entirely disconnected from the “rest of the world” for days or even weeks.

- Out of seventy-nine US Orthodox monasteries, forty-five use English as the primary language of worship. In addition, nine monasteries use English and some other language equally in their worship services.
- Out of seventy-nine American Orthodox monasteries, fifty-eight offer overnight accommodations for visitors, including thirty-eight that can host both men and women, nine that host women only, and ten that provide overnight accommodations only for men.
- Many American Orthodox monasteries are well known for their liturgical arts (icon and fresco painting, sewing clerical vestments, etc.) and production of various religious items (beeswax candles, prayer ropes, incense). And yet some of them have developed very successful “industries” that are not necessarily related to the Orthodox Church or worship services. The Monks of New Skete in Cambridge, New York, are famous for their dog training programs. Holy Archangels Greek Orthodox Monastery in Kendalia, Texas, produces award-winning wines. The natural goat milk soaps and soap-related products handcrafted by the Hermitage of the Holy Cross in Wayne, West Virginia, are sought after and sold internationally. The coffee and tea blends made by the All-Merciful Saviour Monastery on Vashon Island, Washington, are popular among coffee and tea connoisseurs. For more on what is unique about each monastery, see information provided in chapters 3 and 4 of this book.



# Chapter 1

## Traditions of Orthodox Monasticism

By Archimandrite Irenei (Steenberg)

*“If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast, and give it to the poor . . . then come and follow Me.” (Mt. 19:21)*

The words uttered by our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ are, each of them, words resonant with divine power, yet perhaps there is no phrase so singularly potent as this “word” from the Holy Gospel. It is stark, almost wonderfully direct. Perfection is offered, nothing less, and a direct path is spelled out to receiving it. The Gospel of life is condensed to a single command, a calling, and the words beg a response to this call. How will I answer? What will I do?

Thus it was that St. Anthony the Great of Egypt heard these words when they were proclaimed in the small temple he attended, sometime in the latter part of the third century AD,<sup>1</sup> and his response would play a significant role in a rapidly changing world. Through all

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<sup>1</sup> Sometime after AD 269, when his parents had died in St. Anthony's eighteenth year.

the centuries since, the Church has looked to him as a great founding father of monasticism; and though, as we shall see, this is only partially correct, it is nonetheless a reflection of the influence that even one man's response to the Lord's call can have. There is power in the calling, and in the answering.

This fundamental observation must be with us from the very outset, as we set out to explore the traditions of monasticism in some small, introductory sense. *The Lord's call can be answered.* Here we find our starting point, rather than in a sweeping study of history or a categorical description of form. Monasticism begins with the Gospel and its effect upon the human heart. And if this is its fundamental message, that the Lord's call can be heard and answered, then monasticism is a thing relevant to every age, including our own. We live today,

in the burgeoning twenty-first century, in a world that is in many ways vastly dissimilar to that of St. Anthony in the third and fourth; and yet in some ways it is a world of familiar, ageless temptations and struggles. Around us are remarkable technologies; a surfeit of accessible information; advances in medicine, the sciences, and the arts—and yet ours is an age in which Christ’s calling still seems foreign, as it did in those days of an empire that had only just been guided by the Equal of the Apostles, St. Constantine the Great, to receive Christianity as a permissible thing. Questions asked now are questions that were asked then. Christianity is permissible, perhaps—but attainable? An idea, indeed, maybe even a profound one—but a life to be followed and actually lived?

If we were to learn from monasticism only this one thing, that the life in Christ is genuinely available to man, we would learn enough to illumine our modern-day existence; yet there is much more available to us, since our contemporary world is one that, when the exterior circumstances are removed from center view, still struggles with the same interior drives that have always been a part of the monastic way. We are foolish if we believe that the world tempts us to abstract the Gospel from the actual motions of life any more today than it did so many centuries ago. Yes, there is the temptation today to approach Christianity like some system of philosophy, or to hear the commandments of Christ as if they were merely an extended set of metaphors or general “good advice” for a religious life; but this was every bit as true in the days of Nicaea, of Constantinople, of the greatest Christian empires. And it is precisely here that monasticism speaks its clear, unchanging message into the world and into the hearts of those who will hear it: *Christ is calling. He is offering you a way into the Kingdom of God. He will guide your hearts and your steps and your lips and your hands—and you will find yourself closer to that Kingdom. So then . . . what will you do?*

### **Monasticism and Creation: Beginning in Paradise**

It should come as no surprise, then—given that it speaks of redemption and provides a concrete path to obtaining it—that the spirit of monasticism is essentially as old as creation itself, for creation is itself a redemptive gift, and through it the Creator provides a means to union with Himself. And so, while there are many places we might look for the “origins” of Orthodox monasticism in its human, historical dimensions, that which most authentically gives voice to this mystery is none other than Eden. This paradise was fashioned by God to be the avenue of man’s spiritual growth, to draw the creature

into an ever greater communion with its Creator. It was the safe harbor, containing all that man needed to grow into life; and we are far, far from the first to see in Eden a kind of icon of monastic sanctity.

But Adam’s story was not to be one of an uninterrupted growth in that heavenly communion. We know the familiar history of his temptation, his transgression (cf. Gen. 2:15–3:24); and we feel in our hearts every day the effects rebellion has on human life. Yet far from casting blame upon Adam for our woes, the Church teaches us to see him as an image of that which can be redeemed, and how.<sup>2</sup> It is an image we see repeated liturgically every evening at Vespers: standing beyond the closed gates of Eden, now guarded by a fiery sword, Adam gazes into paradise and beholds the delights from which his own transgression has made him a stranger, just as the priest stands outside the closed Royal Gates and prays the Prayers of Light. We stand together; Adam’s story is our own. And within that story we find the impetus to change, to repent. As Adam turned to face the world of new realities—the realities of his sin and the changed circumstances it wrought—he had but a single thought: *to return*. To dwell once again in Paradise, to regain the homeland from which he had strayed. When Christ, many generations later, would tell the story of the prodigal son returning to his father’s home (cf. Lk. 15:11–32), He was telling Adam’s story.

Its central element—the awareness of sin and the desire to return to man’s true home—is as good a summary as has ever been found of the fundamental calling of the monk and the nun, of the very substance of the desire that fuels the monastic heart. It may not have, in every monastic, the clarity of vision of Adam, but this heart cries out always with the same longing: to be shed of the chains of sin. To break free from the shackles of a world defined by its transgression. To cling to its once and future homeland—that of the Kingdom of God—above all else, knowing that “here have we no abiding city” (Heb. 13:14). This heart’s desire is to regain the innocence lost in the tragedy of sin and seek the perfect completion of human life promised in the Gospel: the Life in Christ.

This deep, interior yearning for the Kingdom of God, for communion in the Trinity, is the first and abiding tradition of Orthodox monasticism. It is its heart and its center. It is not foreign to the calling that fuels non-monastic

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, Ode 2, Troparion 24, where Adam is likened to the prodigal son, and “I”—that is, every Christian—am called to see in myself Adam’s sin and the prodigal’s repentance: “Like the publican I cry to Thee: Be merciful, O Savior, be merciful to me; for no child of Adam has sinned as I against Thee.”

life as well—these two paths are far more similar than many assume—yet it has unique force and characteristics within monasticism, which give rise to the lived traditions through which it is known to the world.

### **The First Great Tradition: The Anchoritic Way**

These traditions are most often known through the legacies of two great forebears in the monastic life, whose names are attached to the two broad forms of that life as it has existed throughout Christian history. The first of these is St. Anthony (ca. AD 251–356), whom we have already mentioned, and who is generally taken as the founding father of monasticism itself in its broadest sense. He is, however, more specifically the principal founder of the form of life we call *anchoritic* (from the Greek verb *anachorein*, “to withdraw”), grounded in the solitude of withdrawal from the world.

St. Athanasius the Great (ca. AD 296–373), who penned St. Anthony’s *Life* for posterity, takes special care to note that St. Anthony was not the “first monk,” nor was he the first ascetic, or desert-dweller, or anchorite. The founding father of monasticism had his forebears in all these things, some from long before (such as the Holy Forerunner, St. John the Baptist, whom monastics have always taken as a kind of icon of their way of life), and some from his own day, to whom he had recourse.<sup>3</sup> Yet it is St. Anthony who becomes the icon for us, since his response to the Lord’s calling is so paradigmatic for all monastic obedience as to make it a “light for the world” (cf. Mt. 5:14) that serves as a beacon for all.

It was on hearing the words of Christ that we have already mentioned—“If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all thou hast, and give it to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; then come and follow Me” (Mt. 19:21)—that this noble monastic forebear begins the course that will change his life and the lives of thousands and millions to follow. He hears the words of the Gospel, spoken in the temple yet spoken as if to his own heart, and with a stark, immediate simplicity he answers the call. It is said that upon hearing these words, “Anthony, as though God had put him in mind of the saints and the passage had been read on his account, went out immediately from the church, and gave the possessions of his forefathers to the villagers” (*Life of St. Anthony*, 2). He held back a little, out of concern to care for his sister; but

<sup>3</sup> Cf. his *Life*, 3: “And at first he began to abide in places outside the village: then if he heard of a good man anywhere, like the prudent bee, he went forth and sought him, nor turned back to his own palace until he had seen him; and he returned, having got from the good man as it were supplies for his journey in the way of virtue.”

then he returned to the temple and heard Christ say, “Be not anxious for the morrow” (Mt. 6:34), and “he could stay no longer, but went out and gave those things also to the poor,” entrusting his sister to the care of a community of virgins (and it is of interest to note that such a community of dedicated virgins already existed at the outset of St. Anthony’s own ascetical life).

Let us take note of two remarkable aspects to St. Anthony’s response. Firstly, the saint heard the Lord’s words with a simple, straightforward belief in the promise they implied. “If thou wilt be perfect” meant that the Lord desired St. Anthony to attain perfection. This promise was not a literary flourish or rhetorical embellishment: it was a real goal, something attainable. It was something the Lord desired for him, and that he ought therefore to desire for himself. And secondly, St. Anthony listened to the words *and obeyed*. While Christ’s words begin “If thou wilt,” they move ultimately towards a command: “Then go.” Anthony heard the command and he went, and his life would never be the same.

This attitude of hearing the Gospel in simplicity and fervent, immediate belief, combined with the practical obedience of heeding what is heard, marks out the monastic way in all the various forms it will take across history, in all the “starting points” it has had in the world. St. Anthony did what the Lord instructed: he sold what he had, then he went into the desert to take up his cross. It is easy to romanticize the desert, to make this withdrawal into a pastoral wandering into comfortable solitude. But the desert was not a place of comfort, and St. Anthony found there neither comfort nor tranquility. He found temptations and demons and the violent force of his broken will. He found battle—the genuine bearing of a genuine cross. But he trusted in that singular word the Lord had spoken “on his account,” and knew that he was seeking neither comfort nor solace but a treasure to come in the Kingdom. Thus in temptations, he prevailed; and the signs of the perfection the Lord had promised—of holiness, of genuine repentance, of spiritual grace—began to be manifest (cf. *Life*, 5–15).

What St. Anthony did not obtain during his life, however, though he constantly sought it, was solitude. The example of this holy man and this way of ascetical struggle spread throughout the empire, until, as St. Athanasius would famously say, “it happened in the end that cells arose even in the mountains, and the desert became a city, filled with monks, who came forth from their own people and enrolled themselves for the citizenship in the heavens” (*Life*, 14).

Still, for all that his holy example called followers into

the desert to take up the angelic life he exemplified, and for all the multitudes that took up their abode there, the pattern of life that St. Anthony established remained, at its heart, one of withdrawal. Prior to accepting others to join him, St. Anthony first spent some twenty years in isolation; and even when communities eventually formed around him, he still maintained a practice of solitude, mixed with time in community. This way of life, known as *eremitic* or *anchoritic*, is the type of monasticism to which St. Anthony is particularly attached as forefather. It is a life focused on a degree of solitude and separation (though always in an environment of community and obedience), which would give rise to the *kellias* and *skete* communities that would become standard in so many places. Monks in these solitude-minded enclaves would live lives involving as much psalmody, prayer, and manual labor as possible, spending considerable time toiling alone with Christ, apart from others, yet gathered into small communities, or *sketes*, of perhaps five to fifteen monks, with one of experience at their center: the father or elder of the *skete*. These small *sketes* would often exist in close proximity one to another, and the various little communities would meet in central churches for great feasts and other larger celebrations. Otherwise the life of the monks was lived in a quiet but severe withdrawal, even from other monastics.

Monks and nuns still live this way of life today. *Sketes* that would, in almost all essential ways, be indistinguishable from those known to St. Anthony still exist in our twenty-first century, though the anchoritic form of monasticism has also taken other outward shapes over history. The principles of a withdrawn life, kept in the bonds of community to a degree that prevents solitude from becoming isolation and renunciation merely self-dependence, continues to flourish in the deserts of our day. In it the fundamental meaning of the word “monk,” from the Greek *mone*, “solitude,” is manifest: the man or the woman “alone” in the world, yet ever with God in a personal communion that his or her retreat enables.

### **The Second Great Tradition: The Life of Community**

While St. Anthony is the most notable founding father of this anchoritic path, there exists alongside it another broad tradition of monasticism, and it has its own father as well. This tradition is known as *coenobitic* (also spelled “cenobitic”), or “communal,” and its spiritual patron is another man known as “the Great”: St. Pachomius of Egypt (ca. AD 282–348).

That the Lord would call St. Anthony to a life of withdrawn solitude only a handful of years from the time

when He sent an angel to call St. Pachomius to a different vision of monastic structure presents us with an important lesson. Monasticism has never been a monolithic enterprise, a “one-size-fits-all” phenomenon, or a uniform way of clinging to Christ’s Gospel. What is consistent, what is genuinely common across the vast heritage of monastic history, is the clinging itself: the fierce determination to follow Christ above all else. But where God would show St. Anthony how to cling to Him through solitude, He would show St. Pachomius how to cling to Him through his brethren.

St. Pachomius’s story begins with hospitality and brotherly love. The angel who came to lead him along this path came not into the “ordinary” circumstances of his life, but into the midst of a remarkable encounter. The young Pachomius (who was perhaps twenty-one at the time) was a soldier and not yet a Christian, sent by ship to a prison in Thebes on the Nile. In this prison a group of Christians tended to the inmates, and St. Pachomius saw there a revelation of love that led him towards the God of these Christians. This led him to vow to be baptized when his service was complete, which took place in 314, after which Pachomius pursued the ascetic life (following the example of the already renowned St. Anthony). But, when his heart had been made ready, an angel of the Lord came to him near Tabennisi and revealed the course his newly-illuminated life was to take. It was a different life than that of the burgeoning Anthonian heritage. The rule that the angel breathed into his heart was one of community, of a common house (*coenobium*) in which souls strive together after the Kingdom.

It is this “Pachomian” model of coenobitic communities that gave rise to the form of monasticism most immediately associated with the lives of monks and nuns in Christian traditions both eastern and western.<sup>4</sup> Here monastics did not live in far-removed cells or small *sketes*, but in larger “houses” (often made up of several buildings, sometimes with a surrounding wall) in which monks lived in single cells or in dormitories, where meals were in common, obediences were a community enterprise, services were held together on a set schedule—where all things were shared in the harmony of obedience. In such an environment, St. Pachomius understood, the community would serve as a check against self-will and delusion; common obedience and life would combat the *idiorhythm* (i.e., self-governed schedules, rules, practices) that isolation

<sup>4</sup> Though, just as St. Anthony was not the first anchorite, neither was St. Pachomius the first to live in this way. He was guided in his personal asceticism by Palaemon, and St. Macarius had already founded certain *lavras*, or assembled communities of cells, in the Egyptian deserts.

could foster; and a strict regimen of life would restore the sense of order, stability, and sacred time to lives too fragmented by the world.

Pachomian houses looked very much like many monasteries seen in the Orthodox world today. They had a central *katholikon*, or monastery temple; a refectory where the brethren would eat together (always together, never on one's own schedule) and receive instruction; cells and dormitories; libraries with collections of standard reading for the fathers; workshops; and so on. There was one father to each house, the abbot, who had deputies in charge of various functions, thus making the communities into functioning bodies while also preserving a clear structure of obedience and eldership. Monks' lives revolved around prayer and work, all of which was given shape by the community.

Because of the "safeguards" this way of life included against the temptations of isolation and separation (always risks in an anchoritic context), it would ultimately become the more dominant form of monastic life within Orthodoxy, and when we today think of "a monastery," whether it be a very large complex of hundreds of monks or an extremely small community of just two or three, we generally have in our mind the image of what amounts to a Pachomian-style house. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to draw too sharp a line between the anchoritic and coenobitic traditions. As we have seen, even in St. Anthony's solitude he had communion with others, and his followers belonged to a distinct, if unusual, community. Similarly, monks in Pachomian houses lived together, yet they fostered within their community an interior solitude that must mark out any authentic monasticism. The two ways are intertwined, their manifestation in a particular monastery always a matter of degree; and neither is complete without partaking of the lessons of the other.

### **Variations on a Theme: Varieties of Monasticism in History**

Thus we have painted a brief portrait of the "two ways" of monastic life—the anchoritic path of St. Anthony and the coenobitic path of St. Pachomius, which are the mainstays of Orthodox monasticism as it has endured across two millennia. Yet these have never been the only ways that monasticism has existed or flourished. A consistent tendency of modern man is to compartmentalize the world into firm categories with strict delineations; but the person who convinces himself that all genuine monasticism takes the form of an anchoritic skete or a Pachomian-style coenobium is confronted with a history full of other realities.

On the one hand, a tradition of monastics living a life of near-absolute solitude is ancient, though almost always reserved for those of long experience in a community or skete and who have attained a high degree of spiritual development (this being something else entirely from monks or nuns living by themselves merely out of personal preference, which custom the monastic tradition generally abhors). The forms of such solitude are extremely varied. Some have lived in caves, some in trees; some have disappeared into forests, others into cities. But all who have approached this severe solitude authentically, in a manner that is not simply an act of will or delusion, have done so as the fruit of spiritual formation in the monastic path, with the blessing of a superior, always in obedience and always in full ecclesial communion with the Church.

This particular "alternative form" of monastic life is fairly well known. But equally as ancient, and perhaps less well understood, is monasticism "in the cities." While the desert and the city were points of contrast in some of the earliest ascetical literature—with the monks living in one and the masses in the other—the value of monasticism *within the city* was seen early on and incorporated into the Church's life.<sup>5</sup> Not only was it perceived that the city could be a fruitful venue for monastic life (for if the desert is a place of temptation and struggle, so too the city), and so monasticism could authentically flourish here, but it was also understood that a monastic presence "in the heart of the city" was of value alongside the monastic presence in the deserts. Some of the monasteries that had the most impact on the life, liturgical practice, and prayers of the Church were in the heart of the Byzantine metropolis of Constantinople. In Imperial Russia monasteries lined the same streets as storefronts and political office buildings. The witness of this "otherworldly life" in the midst of this world was taken as an ordinary and expected part of the life of the Church.

This raises the issue of another variety of monasticism that has been known from ancient times, namely, missionary monasticism. The title is misleading, for all monasticism is intrinsically missionary, and it is so chiefly through the integrity of its monastic life. A monastery, simply by being a monastery and giving authentic voice to its inherited tradition, illumines the world. Yet monks and nuns have long also been involved in concrete works that benefit the Church and her people—not as an intrinsic part of monasticism everywhere, but as an aspect of it in certain

<sup>5</sup> Largely through the work and writings of certain hierarchs during the early generations of the rise of monasticism (such as St. Basil the Great of Caesarea, AD 329/30–379) to ensure that monasticism was always seen as part of the Church, not a thing separate from it.

places. Monasteries have run printing presses, hospitals, schools, academies. The first printing house in Russia is still physically attached to the monastery that once ran it (now on one of the more expensive shopping streets in central Moscow), and there used to be a high school on Mount Athos (the Athonias) that taught both classical philosophy and contemporary sciences. The idea that “all monasteries must be off in the remote wilderness” and detached from the Church’s missionary work to contemporary society may have a romantic appeal, but it does not authentically reflect Orthodox tradition.

Yet—and this is perhaps a cardinal point—monasticism is always called to be “other.” Whether the monastic lives in a cave inaccessible to other men, or in a city surrounded by office buildings and coffee shops, his life is called to bear witness to “another way.” Whether he is the member of an anchoritic skete or a village-sized lavra (a large coenobitic house), he must always be “not of this world.”

### **Traditions at the Core: Chastity, Poverty, Obedience**

Grounding the variety of traditions and contexts visible within the monastic heritage is a core that is the same everywhere and infuses monasticism with its essential breath. This core is summed up in the classic vows entered into by a monk or a nun at the time of tonsure, which speak to a way of life more than to specific acts or obligations.<sup>6</sup>

The first of these is *chastity*, which in its simplest outward form is associated with bodily abstinence. A monastic is one who elects, of his own free will, to forego the customary social ties of marriage and family in order to be united wholly to Christ—the Bridegroom of each soul that takes the angelic schema. While monastics may come from any background (some entering monasticism from a young age, as their first and primary calling in life; others arriving at the entrance to the monastic estate after marriage, children, etc.), it is expected that one who undertakes this life will do so with singular devotion for the rest of his days, remembering always the words of the Savior, “He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me” (Mt. 10:37, 38).

Yet chastity represents for the monk or nun something far greater than simply sexual abstinence or any supposed

<sup>6</sup> These vows are contained in the modern-day rite of the Tonsure to the Little Schema.

“deprivation” of the normal modes of social life. This virtue is chiefly a condition of the heart: a state of simplicity, in which what is sought is to retain the purity of man’s first-created state. It is closely bound up with the God-pleasing childlikeness that the Lord exhorts of His people: “Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein” (cf. Lk. 18:16, 17; Mt. 19:14). The monastic is called, and seeks, to foster a heart that approaches God with the unadulterated innocence of a small child, unburdened by the dominance of lust and free, so far as is possible, from the yoke of the passions. The monastic seeks to approach all other people too with this same chastity, understood not in a negative sense as a denial of certain “rights” or “freedoms,” but positively, as the active pursuit of a life of genuine interpersonalit: a life capable of relating to other persons without the selfishness of lust, capable of loving each person distinctly without being bound to any exclusively. Thus this vow of chastity defines a whole manner of approaching life; and far from being simply a “condition” tacked on to entrance into the monastic culture, it forms its very substance in the most profound way.

The same is true for the other two principal vows of the tonsure: *poverty* and *obedience*. In each case, it is easy to see how such a vow might be perceived as purely practical in focus. A monk must give up possessions in order to enter into a life of renunciation, and a degree of obedience is required to give order to any type of intentional community. Yet in both cases we find a degradation of what these virtues mean within the monastic tradition. Here, poverty represents not simply a shedding of material possessions, but the condition of a life seeking non-possessiveness. Where we are often conditioned to equate possessions to happiness and the acquisition of “things” to success, the monastic is called to find his fulfillment in an intentional non-possessiveness. He is filled when he empties himself; he clutches most securely that which he freely gives away; he trusts God most fully when he has little of his own that might foster a reliance on himself.

And he is freest when he is most obedient. Obedience, let us be clear, is a commandment for all Christians—and perhaps the spiritual condition of the modern world is so weak for no more singular a reason than we have forgotten what it means to be obedient, and indeed have come to regard this virtue almost as an evil. We are wont to interpret obedience as “slavery” and one who is obedient to another’s will as a drone whose identity is lost in the very act. Yet here monasticism bears witness to a reality the world is too keen to forget. In the monastic tradition we see obedience not as the oppressive avenue of mindless

slavery, but as the life-creating context of authentic freedom. It is only the one who is willing—freely—to offer up his well-practiced regime of self-rule to the guidance and care of another, who begins to see just how enslaving his former “freedom” had truly been. Within the monastic culture the monk or nun begins to see how obedience to the self (which is the context from which every person comes into monasticism, whatever his background in particular terms) had in fact been a shackle; how the lack of obedience to another in fact meant an absolute and unlimited obedience to one’s own desires, one’s understandings, one’s evaluations, all of which are profoundly deformed by the wound of sin. Just as Adam’s troubles began when he determined not to let God be his Lord, but instead to let his mind be lord over him—deciding for himself what was good and what was bad, and how to act—so the monastic comes to realize that he has fallen prey to the same self-enslavement, and that the only true freedom comes from wholly attaching the heart to the God who would set it free.

This emphasis upon freedom is another characteristic of the monastic life, given birth by these three vows. While to outside eyes it may appear that the monk lives a quite constrained life—prescribed clothing, prescribed hours, prescribed prayers, proscribed activities—the irony of the monastic life, the “foolishness” it presents to the world (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18), is that the monk or the nun is often the person who feels the most free in all of God’s creation. Yes, there are hard labors and long struggles; but through them tired and world-beaten hearts find a new communion in the “life-creating Spirit,” Who bears them up to a life that soars as if in flight. This can only be done through a full respecting of each person’s full freedom. There is, there can be, no coercion in monasticism. Everything undertaken is undertaken of free choice, knowingly, with assent. This is most poignantly demonstrated in the tonsure to the Little Schema itself: the candidate for tonsure is presented with the scissors that will be used to cut his hair—in some traditions, these are thrown by the abbot onto the floor so that the candidate must pick them up, whereas in other traditions they are placed into his hand—and he must set them on the Gospel book himself as a sign that he freely asks for tonsure. This is repeated three times, and only after the novice has thus freely stepped up to the gates of repentance is he enrolled in this new life.

The same is true for all aspects of the monastic’s life. He is obedient to his elder, to the monastery abbot, but never out of obligation and never as a denial of his freedom. Genuine obedience is a shaping of freedom, not an elimination of it. Thus through dedication to his chastity,

poverty, and obedience, the monastic finds himself set free to discover the authentic person God has called him to be, and will spend the remainder of his life growing into the maturity of that calling.

### **Steps of the Angelic Life: Monastic Ranks**

Mention of the tonsure and the Little Schema brings us to the structure of the monastic ranks, which, like the structure of monastic communities, has been varied over history but bears marks of continuity found across the variety of traditions lived in the Church today.

From the very beginning, entrance into the monastic life has always begun with a period of trial. In English this period is usually known as the “novitiate” and a person within it as a “novice,” meaning someone who is new to the culture and learning its traditions. In Greek a novice is a *dokimos*, that is, one who is “trying out” or “being proved” in monasticism; in Russian he is a *poslushnik*, one who is “under obedience” to a new way of life. But whatever the title, the essential factor is that monasticism is never simply stepped into without a period of preparation, testing, and discovery. This life has never been perceived—by the Church, by her Fathers—as a life meant for all. It is in fact a very particular life, meant only for those who are called to it. To enter it without trial is to open a door to temptations that will remain for the rest of a monk’s life.

The normal period of the novitiate (which may follow a yet earlier period of trial, known as a postulancy or candidacy) has been somewhat standardized to three years, and there are some local canons that give this as a definite prescription. There is the wisdom of experience in this length. Often during the first year when one is in a monastery, he is captivated by all that is new, different, even “exciting” about this way of life. There must be adequate time for this newcomer’s awe to wear off, to see this life as it really is. The second year is often a period of “settling in,” where things have been seen before and practiced (the liturgical cycle, which is the basic rhythm of life in a monastery, having been gone through once in its entirety), yet still there is a certain impetus of momentum that can push upon a heart. A third year sheds the novelty more fully: one is in the monastery now not as a “new project,” not as someone “getting used to” things, but as someone familiar with the life of the community, whose emotional reactions have had time to pass (or, at least, to wane) and who can assess and be assessed in terms of whether this is a suitable way of life for the remainder of his years. But, as in so much in the Orthodox life, this is a flexible pattern. Some novitiates may last a shorter time,

many last much longer. Each person is unique. Each approach to the angelic life is that person's own.

Following the novitiate comes the fuller entrance into the monastic life. In the Russian and Slavic traditions, this is through a graduated series of "ranks" or orders of monastic life: a ladder ascended by the monk or nun as monastic experience increases. The first is "ryassophore" (ryassa-bearer), during which the new monastic is given the *ryassa* (outer garment with broad sleeves) to wear, as well as the monastic *klobuk*, a cylindrical hat with a veil. After some years, the monastic may be elevated to the rank of the Little Schema, often also called "stavrophore" (cross-bearer) in light of the fact that the monastic schema (or "habit"), which is the physical sign of the monastic's communion in Christ's life, is made up of a *paraman*, or square cloth worn on the back, and a cross worn over the chest, beneath the other garments.

The rank of the Great Angelic Schema is, in the Russian and Slavic traditions, reserved generally for monastics of great experience in the monastic life who desire an increased degree of solitude and renunciation, and in practice it is seen quite rarely (and when it is seen it is quite noticeable, being a multipart schema, often of bright red or even many colors, which covers the head and most of the monk's body). In Greek traditions, however, it is customary for a new monk to be tonsured directly into the Great Schema after his novitiate, and indeed for all tonsured monastics to be in the Great Schema. In such a case, the donning of the Great Schema represents not the attainment of great experience (since it immediately follows the novitiate), but rather the full "armor of God" (cf. Eph. 6:11), the complete vesture of the monastic life, offered so that the monk may be wholly embraced and protected by them from the first day of his tonsure until his final breath. In these traditions the schema is itself of a different design, still with red lettering but generally a much smaller garment worn beneath the outer, black garments and generally only in the temple when one is intending to commune.

What is the purpose of these ranks to the monastic life? Whether it be the case that they come in two or three stages as in the Byzantine custom, or in four or five as in the Slavic, the essential point is that this life is ordered and progresses. It is not a static reality, a black-and-white "in or out" way of life. One steps onto the path that leads into the Kingdom, and one must progress forward. As one does, he is united ever more fully to Christ: bearing His Cross, His wounds, one day even His heart.

## Monasticism's Place in the Church

With all its attention on the purification of the heart, on attaining to the Evangelical life through solitude as well as community, on renunciation and withdrawal, it would be an easy thing to consider monasticism as something cut off from the broader life of the Church. Indeed, in moments of excess and "zealotry without wisdom" (cf. Rom. 10:2, 3; Prov. 19:2), certain monasteries and monastics have viewed themselves this way. But Orthodox monasticism is fundamentally an ecclesial reality. It exists only in, and with, and as a part of the one Body of Christ, which is His Church. The monk who retreats from the world does so not to abandon the world—much less the Church—but in order to discover a more authentic, Godly relationship to it. This is a point that was made in the fifth century by Evagrius the Solitary (though usually attributed to St. Nilus of Mount Sinai):

A monk is he who, withdrawing from all men, is united with all men. . . . The more a monk overcomes the world, the brighter shines his grace-filled rays and the greater the number of people who can be warmed and illumined by them. From his isolated cell, he sees deeper and becomes familiar with his fellow human beings, and grows far closer to them in heart than is possible for those living in the world, for he sees them all and is united with them in God. (St. Nilus of Sinai, *On Prayer* 124)

His thought is echoed in the shorter and more well known phrase of another who grew in his monasticism on that same holy mountain: "Angels are a light for monastics, and the monastics are a light for laymen" (St. John of the Ladder, *Ladder of Paradise*).

The monk is united to the Church first and foremost through the Divine Mysteries, which are the lifeblood of monasticism just as they are the lifeblood of every Christian. Though of course historical circumstances have called forth certain rare exceptions, a general rule holds fast: without the divine services, there is no monasticism. A monk confesses, often daily; a monk communes—and he does so in precisely the same Mysteries as all Christians, drawing himself more deeply into communion with God and with the whole Church.

Monasticism is also ecclesial in its relation to the Church's hierarchy. Every monastery falls under the spiritual protection and authority of a bishop; it is subject to the Church's canons, which guide and order its life. It is shaped by the Church's traditions. Though each monastery has its own "flavor" and unique characteristics, none is permitted to invent its traditions for itself. It must receive

all in the living heritage of the tradition of the Church.

This tradition includes monasticism also having a voice to the Church. It does not simply receive the tradition: it also gives it voice and proclaims it. Monasticism bears witness to the whole Church of the possibility of attaining the Apostolic and Evangelical life. It cries out, oftentimes when others grow lax, that a firm adherence to the Church's teachings is both possible and profitable to the soul. In its withdrawal it safeguards doctrines that are so often attacked by the world, and if ever the faithful of the Church grow weary in speaking truth to the world, monasticism speaks to the Church with a prophetic voice, calling them forward to bear witness with courage.

Monasticism, then, both receives from the Church and gives to the Church—for the Church is a body of which monasticism is a part, just as each person is a part, each being connected to every other. Its prophetic place as a "light for those in the world," as a beacon of the higher path of repentance, does not make it "better" than other ways of life ("If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" [1 Cor. 12:15]), but it does grant monasticism the role of being a significant symbol of the Body's vigor as a whole. For this reason it is often said that "monasticism is the spiritual barometer of the Church": where it is seen to thrive, there the spiritual life of the Church as a whole also thrives. Where it is weak, the whole Body is weak.

### The Angelic Life

Throughout our introduction to the traditions of monasticism, we have referred to the monastic way by a number of traditional titles: the Angelic life, the Evangelical life, the apostolic life. These titles are not prescribed by accident, and each reveals an aspect to monasticism that guides us in understanding this unique way of life.

The monastic life is called the "Evangelical life" because, as we have discussed, it strives to live out the Gospel of Christ in an immediate, direct way. As Christ speaks and commands, so the monastic seeks to follow. And while, again, this is not unique to monasticism (all Christians are called to live the Gospel fully), the *manner* in which monasticism strives to respond to the Gospel, to embody the Gospel, renders it iconographic for all of Christendom (the "light for those in the world" of which St. John of the Ladder spoke). Not only does it respond to the Gospel calling with stark obedience and immediacy, its way of life is so wholly shaped by this response that monasticism itself becomes a lived proclamation of the Gospel. "Here is the Life in Christ," it says to the world. "Here is the Gospel, embodied in flesh and blood."

Monasticism is also called the "Apostolic life," for it seeks always to live the life shared with the world by the witness of the Holy Apostles—a life of repentance, of following the commandments of Christ. This title refers not only to the similarity of some of the forms of monastic life to the structure of some early Church communities in the Apostolic age (cf. Acts 2:42–47<sup>7</sup>), but more fundamentally to the connection of the monastic *response to Christ* to that witnessed in His Apostles. When the Lord first called St. Andrew and St. Peter to His side, the response of the two fishermen to the calling was immediate and unequivocal: "He saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him" (Mt. 4:19, 20). St. Peter's love for Christ was elicited most fully in the awareness of his own sin (cf. Jn. 21:15–17), and in turning his life wholly over to his Lord, he found a freedom that could come from living a life no longer in his own self-control. As Christ said to him: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not" (Jn. 21:18).

In many such ways the life of the Apostles is paradigmatic for the life of the monastic—a life that is wholly committed to the following of Christ without qualification or encumbrance, and whatever the cost.

But perhaps the most well known title for monasticism is the "angelic life." We have already seen how St. John of the Ladder viewed the monastic life as being illumined by the life of the angels; we have seen how St. Pachomius received his *Rule* from an angelic hand. Neither is the only to bear witness to the angelic nature of this way of life. The winter journey of seven pilgrims to the Egyptian desert in AD 394–395, recorded for posterity in the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* ("History of the Monks in Egypt"), described the whole way of life that they encountered in precisely these terms:

I saw many fathers living the angelic life as they went forward in the imitation of our divine Savior, and I saw other new prophets who have attained a divine state by their inspired and wonderful and virtuous way of life. As true servants of God, they

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<sup>7</sup> These verses describe a form of community that resonates with aspects of a monastic cenobium: "And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship . . . and all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need; and they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart."

do not worry about any earthly matter or consider anything temporal, but while dwelling on earth in this manner they have their citizenship in heaven. (*Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, prologue, 5)

If the life of the angels is one of continual service to the Lord, as is proclaimed so often in the Scriptures and liturgical services of the Church, then the Church's monks and nuns can be seen as a striving for no other way of life but theirs. The angels, the "bodiless host," are not encumbered by material bodies in their tireless and eternal service; and while monastics labor in the flesh that is a part of their human creation, they seek to the greatest degree possible to be freed from the slavery of that flesh's brokenness—the slavery of the passions, of worldly cares—and to serve the Holy Trinity with the same tireless fervor of the angelic ranks. As the angels are ever occupied with serving the Lord's will, so the monk and nun strive always to be busy with the heavenly labor of the ascetical life. As the angelic host are always singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy" (cf. Rev. 4:8), so the monastic works to attain unceasing hymnody and prayer in the depths of his heart by abandoning all else to which he might cling.

### **The Kingdom of God Is at Hand**

What, then, can we ultimately say about the traditions of Orthodox monasticism? For all that they are varied in form and structure, they are united in this central desire: to follow the calling of the Savior, and to live the life of the Gospel, of the Apostles, even of the angels. And by the grace of the same God who promised to St. Anthony—and Who promises to every Christian—that the perfection of the Kingdom is attainable to man, so these traditions bear the light of those realities into the world. In the light of authentic monasticism, the whole Church beholds the Gospel, the Apostles, and the angels. She witnesses the life of man becoming the life of Christ; and all her people, whether monastics or laity, rejoice in the witness that "the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Lk. 21:31).

## Chapter 2

# The Historical Development of Orthodox Monasteries in the United States: An Overview

By Monk Moses (Worcester)

Orthodox monasticism in America is still in its youth, or even its infancy. Although the earliest examples of monastic settlements in America go back much earlier, the oldest currently existing Orthodox monastery in the United States is only a little over a hundred years old. At the same time, Orthodox monasticism has grown exponentially in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Out of today's seventy-seven Orthodox monasteries in the United States, only five existed prior to 1950, and only eight before 1970. Well over half have been founded in the past twenty-five years.

We will examine here the historical development of Orthodox monasteries in America, highlighting early, foundational monastic communities, while also calling attention to some of the more recent foundations. Each of the currently existing monasteries in the United States is

shortly described in part 3 of this *Atlas*. In part 4 twenty-three monasteries are profiled in detail, with emphasis on the present.

### **The Beginnings**

Based on written accounts dating from the ninth century, it has been speculated that the early Irish monk Brendan the Navigator<sup>1</sup> arrived in North America around the year 530 and established a short-lived community of Irish monks. They would have lived in a few small huts, fashioned of whatever materials were at hand and dispersed around a small oratory, after the model of many small monastic communities in Ireland at the time. If Abbot Brendan and his monks did in fact reach the New World,

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<sup>1</sup> Glorified as St. Brendan, abbot of Clonfert (†ca. 577, commemorated May 16).

the remains of their settlement have long since been erased by the ravages of time.

Twelve centuries later, in 1794, a group of six monks and four novices, from Valaam and Konevits Monasteries in the Russian north, arrived far on the other side of the North American continent, on the island of Kodiak, Alaska. Sent as missionaries to what was then Russian America, the missionary monks built near the Kodiak harbor a church dedicated to Christ's Holy Resurrection and a wooden monastery for the members of the mission. As a result of the missionaries' labors, several thousand native Alaskans were baptized. But by God's unfathomable providence, the success of the mission was not to endure for long. The monks were relentlessly persecuted by the representatives of the Russian-American Company for their defense of the local people against the abuses of the company. Then, the head of the mission, Archimandrite Ioasaph, suffered shipwreck on his way back from Russia, where he had been consecrated a bishop, and he drowned along with his entire party, including two other monks from the Kodiak mission. Hieromonk<sup>2</sup> Juvenal<sup>3</sup> had already met a martyr's death. Others gradually left the mission, while others reposed, leaving only the monk Herman—the future St. Herman.<sup>4</sup>

Born in 1751 in a village of the province of Voronezh, Russia, the future St. Herman had become a novice at the Monastery of Sarov in 1778, the same year that the future St. Seraphim of Sarov<sup>5</sup> was received as a novice there. Four years later Hieromonk Nazarius of Sarov<sup>6</sup> chose the future St. Herman as one of the four novices to accompany him, when he was assigned as superior of Valaam Monastery, located on an archipelago on Lake Ladoga, north of St. Petersburg. After laboring at various obediences<sup>7</sup> at Valaam, Fr. Herman had been vouchsafed to live in seclusion in a thick forest about a mile from the monastery before he was chosen for the mission to Alaska.

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<sup>2</sup> Hieromonk: a monk of priestly rank.

<sup>3</sup> Glorified as St. Juvenal, first martyr of the American land (†1796, commemorated December 12).

<sup>4</sup> Glorified as St. Herman of Alaska (†1836, commemorated November 15, August 9, and December 13).

<sup>5</sup> Glorified as St. Seraphim of Sarov (†1833, commemorated January 2 and July 19). A hieromonk and spiritual father, St. Seraphim is one of the best-loved Russian saints. Known for having spent a thousand days and nights praying on a rock, he was seen in the Uncreated Light during his renowned "Conversation with Motovilov," in which he spoke of the aim of the Christian life as the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>6</sup> Glorified as St. Nazarius of Sarov and Valaam (†1809, commemorated February 23).

<sup>7</sup> Obedience: a task or job assigned to a monastic by his or her superior.

Now that he was the only one remaining of the Kodiak mission, the monk Herman returned to a life of seclusion, moving to a small, forested, and uninhabited island near Kodiak, which he named "New Valaam" (known today as Spruce Island). There he dug with his own hands a cave for his cell, where he carried out his spiritual labors, singing and performing the monastic services, thus conversing with God and the holy angels.

At the same time, future St. Herman did not cease to care for the native Aleuts<sup>8</sup>; he counseled them, interceded for them before the Russian authorities, and helped them in any way he could. When in 1819 a deadly infectious disease was brought by ship to Kodiak, St. Herman worked tirelessly, nursing and serving the people in their suffering. Not far from his cell, he created a school for orphaned Aleut children, where he himself taught them the law of God, as well as church singing.

By the time of St. Herman's repose in 1836, he had many Aleut disciples, but there were no monks among them. Thus, the monastic mission to Kodiak and St. Herman's "New Valaam" did not endure beyond the death of St. Herman. A hundred years later, in 1935, a Russian hieromonk, Archimandrite Gerasim (Schmaltz), came to Spruce Island, and lived for thirty years at the place of St. Herman's ascetic labors, fulfilling St. Herman's prediction: a monk "fleeing the glory of men will come and will live on Spruce Island." Besides keeping the light of the monastic life burning on the site of St. Herman's dwelling, Fr. Gerasim served as a dedicated and self-sacrificing pastor of the Aleut village of Ouzinkie, on the other side of the island. He reposed in 1969.

### **The Monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (Orthodox Church in America)**

Seventy years after the repose of St. Herman of Alaska, the Monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk was established in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. Founded in 1905, it is the oldest currently existing monastic Orthodox community in the United States.

The idea of founding St. Tikhon's Monastery began with the young Hieromonk Arseny (Chagovtsev), later archbishop of Winnipeg. After his arrival in America in 1902, Fr. Arseny served as rector of the St. John the Baptist parish in nearby Mayfield, Pennsylvania. Recognizing the central place of monasticism in the Orthodox Church, and seeing the need for missionary work in the vast new land of America, Fr. Arseny conceived the idea of the monastery as a "mother house" for monks serving

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<sup>8</sup> Also known as the Alutiiq or Sugpiak people.

as missionaries, to which they could return for spiritual rejuvenation. And just as St. Herman had cared for local orphans, so also an orphan's home was established next to the new monastery.

On July 31, 1905, Bishop Raphael (Hawaweeny)<sup>9</sup> dedicated the grounds and served the first Divine Liturgy. Among the concelebrating clergy was Fr. Alexander Hotovitsky,<sup>10</sup> who was later to be martyred in Russia. The official opening and consecration of the monastery took place almost a year later, on May 30, 1906. Hundreds of pilgrims flocked to the new monastery; up to twelve hundred arrived on two specially chartered trains. Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the newly built church by Bishop Tikhon (Belavin),<sup>11</sup> then Bishop of North America and later Patriarch of Moscow. The future St. Tikhon spoke to the assembly, calling monasticism the adornment of the Church: "Is it not a vain dream and a waste of effort and funds to organize a monastery, with its contemplative and eastern way of life, in a land whose inhabitants are known throughout the world for their practical needs, external efficiency and life-style of worldly comforts? . . . Even here there are living souls that thirst for the Lord and long for true, unworldly life. . . . Therefore, look down from heaven, O God, upon the monastery now founded, and behold and visit this vine which You have planted with Your right hand, and establish it!"

In the following years, in keeping with the original vision of Fr. Arseny, the monastery provided clergy for the American mission at a time when there was a shortage of priests. In 1938 St. Tikhon's Seminary was established on the monastery property, thus increasing the number of American-trained priests.

Today, under the abbacy of a young convert to the Orthodox faith, a brotherhood of thirteen carries on the 110-year tradition of monastic life at St. Tikhon's.

### **Holy Virgin Protection Convent**

In the 1890s Russian immigrants had begun settling in the southern Vermont town of Springfield, which was an industrial town with plentiful opportunities for employment. In October 1905 the first Divine Liturgy was served in Springfield by Fr. Alexander Hotovitsky, who had participated in the first Liturgy at the Monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk less than three months earlier. Archpriest

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<sup>9</sup> Glorified as St. Raphael of Brooklyn (†1915, commemorated February 27 and the first Saturday in November).

<sup>10</sup> Glorified as St. Alexander Hotovitsky († 1937, commemorated December 4).

<sup>11</sup> Glorified as St. Tikhon, patriarch of Moscow and all Russia (†1925, commemorated April 7).

Alexander would subsequently come from New York City once a month to serve the Liturgy in private homes. By 1911 the Springfield congregation had converted a house into a church, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, with a steeple rising almost seventy feet above the foundation. Soon a women's monastic community was established, connected to the parish and dedicated to the Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God. In 1915 the newly assigned Archbishop Evdokim (Meschersky) ordered the transfer of an orphanage originally located in Brooklyn, New York, to the Protection Convent in Springfield, and directed that property be bought adjacent to the church so as to house both the convent and the orphanage. Soon the number of orphans doubled to over a hundred, and additional property was purchased on which to grow vegetables and raise cattle in order to feed the orphans.

But before long the convent and orphanage fell victim to the difficulties that arose in the wake of the Russian Revolution of October 1917. Archbishop Evdokim went to Russia in August of that year in order to take part in the All-Russian Sobor<sup>12</sup> and never returned. Most of the financial support for the orphanage had come from Russia, and now that support was cut off, leaving the orphanage without resources. Unable to pay their bills, the convent and orphanage eventually dissolved.

### **St. Sava Monastery (Serbian Orthodox Church in America)**

Serbian immigrants had been coming to America since around 1820, and they began to immigrate in large numbers after 1880. Bishop Nikolai (Velimirovich)<sup>13</sup> spent three months in America in 1921, with a task of studying the situation and needs of the Serbian Church in America. In his report, he pointed out the need to establish in America "at least one monastery."

St. Sava Monastery, in Libertyville, Illinois, about thirty miles north of Chicago, was founded in 1923 by Archimandrite Mardarije (Uskokovich),<sup>14</sup> who in 1926 was consecrated as the first bishop of the American-Canadian diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church. On September 3 of that year, the monastery land was consecrated, with over two thousand Serbs in attendance.

The greatest financial benefactor of the project was the illustrious Serbian American physicist Michael Pupin.

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<sup>12</sup> A council of the entire Russian Orthodox Church.

<sup>13</sup> Glorified as St. Nikolai of Zhicha and South Canaan (†1956, commemorated March 18).

<sup>14</sup> Glorified as St. Mardarije of Libertyville (†1935, commemorated December 12).

Bishop Mardarije labored tirelessly to build the St. Sava Monastery, and in September 1931 it was officially dedicated, becoming the first Serbian Orthodox monastery in America.

### **Holy Trinity Monastery (Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia)**

Holy Trinity Monastery, in Jordanville, New York, was established in 1930, by Hieromonk Panteleimon (Nizhnik) and his spiritual son, Ivan Kolos. Born in Russia in 1885, Fr. Panteleimon had immigrated to America in 1913, first working at a sugar factory near Chicago. In 1918 he entered St. Tikhon's Monastery, where he was soon tonsured a monk and ordained to the priesthood. However, he had already conceived the desire to live a more contemplative monastic life. While at St. Tikhon's, Hieromonk Panteleimon met Ivan Kolos, who worked as a psalm-reader and choir director and wanted to become a monk. In order to pursue their aspirations, in 1928 they bought the property where Holy Trinity Monastery now stands. Fr. Panteleimon recalled, "Everything here was desolate, silence all around, and not a soul to be seen. I went up the wooded hill a few times, relished the quietude around me, and gazed upon our property: an old windowless, two-story little house and a well, and four other wells in various spots—and that was it, forest and quiet all around; the wilderness."

By 1935 they had built a sixteen-cell monastic house, containing a small church dedicated to the Holy Trinity. On the day after Pentecost that year, the monastery and the church were consecrated by Bishop Vitaly (Maximenko) of Detroit. However, that very day, at the end of the Divine Liturgy, smoke was discovered coming from the second floor of the monastic house, and within a few hours everything had burned to the ground. Not giving in to despondency, but trusting in God, the brethren lived outdoors and began to rebuild the monastery. In the fall of the same year, the brothers bought a house nearby, which was larger and of better quality than the one that had burned.

By the mid-1940s the monastery succeeded in paying off the mortgage on the house, completing a barn that could hold eighty cows, buying another two hundred acres of land, acquiring all the necessary farm equipment, and buying a large printing press and linotype machine. In 1946 the construction of the monastery's large golden-domed cathedral began.

At the same time, the monastery was greatly enriched by the arrival of monks from the Brotherhood of St. Job of Pochaev, originally from the Pochaev Lavra in the Ukraine. In 1902 the future Archbishop Vitaly (Maximenko)

had been appointed to organize a missionary and ecclesiastical press at the Pochaev Lavra. After the onslaught of the Russian Revolution, Archimandrite Vitaly fled to Czechoslovakia, where he founded a new monastic brotherhood, which continued the publishing work of the original Pochaev Lavra. After leaving Czechoslovakia due to the advance of the Soviet Army at the end of World War II, some of the monks formed the Monastery of St. Job of Pochaev in Germany, while fourteen of the brothers came to America and settled at Holy Trinity Monastery.<sup>15</sup> In Jordanville the Brotherhood of St. Job of Pochaev continued the publishing it had done in Czechoslovakia, greatly increasing the small-scale publishing already being done by the monastery.

Adjoining the monastery, the Holy Trinity Seminary was established in 1948, in order to train the Orthodox clergy.

In addition to the well-known *Jordanville Prayer Book*,<sup>16</sup> the monastery has published a number of English-language materials for use in church services. Of particular note is the work of monk Lawrence (Campbell)<sup>17</sup> in translating and making English-language liturgical texts available, particularly, the *Unabbreviated Horologion*,<sup>18</sup> first published in 1992. Today Holy Trinity Monastery's edition of the *Horologion* is used in performing the daily cycle of services in monasteries throughout the United States.

### **Holy Assumption Monastery (Orthodox Church in America)**

The Holy Assumption Monastery in Calistoga, California, was founded in the early 1940s by a small group of nuns who fled from Russia and China in order to find the freedom to practice their faith. They first settled in San

<sup>15</sup> There is one member of the pre-World War II monastic community who still lives with the monks at Holy Trinity: a layman named "Lev." Born in 1917 in Russia, he emigrated with his parents to Yugoslavia. After death of the father, his mother was unable to support the family. She put Lev on a train to Slovakia with a sign attached, saying simply, "To the monastery." The monks picked him up from the train, and he has stayed with the brotherhood his entire—now nearly one-hundred-year-long—life.

<sup>16</sup> The original English edition had been translated by one of the first modern-day British converts to Orthodoxy, Archimandrite Lazarus Moore (†1992), who is significant for his early work in making Orthodox texts available in English. Fr. Lazarus also translated such texts as the Psalter; *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by St. John Climacus; and *The Arena* and *On the Prayer of Jesus*, both by St. Ignatius Brianchaninov. His translation of the four Gospels has yet to be published.

<sup>17</sup> Tonsured in 2012 as Monk John after St. John of San Francisco, he had been an early member of the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood before entering Holy Trinity Monastery. He reposed in 2014.

<sup>18</sup> The *Horologion*, or *Book of the Hours*, contains the portions of the daily cycle of church services that remain constant from day to day.

Francisco and then purchased property in the quiet town of Calistoga, eighty miles north of the city.

The monastery thrived through the 1970s. For various reasons, however, the last of the nuns had left by the mid-1980s, and the monastery ceased to function. The monastery buildings fell into disrepair and became dilapidated. But in 1998, through the inspiration and efforts of Abbot Sergius (Gerken), a ten-year restoration project began, in order to make the monastery habitable again—if only God would send some nuns. In 2009 the nuns arrived in an unexpected way. In October of that year, the St. Barbara Monastery in Santa Paula, California, was told by the county authorities that they had only thirty days to remove the RVs in which most of the community was living. And so, ten of the sisters moved to Calistoga and repopulated the monastery. Today the monastery is an image of paradise in the midst of Calistoga, renowned for its tranquil atmosphere and beautiful grounds.

### **New Diveyevo Convent (Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia)**

Founded in 1949 by Fr. Adrian Rymarenko (later Archbishop Andrew of Rockland), the Convent of New Diveyevo is located near Spring Valley, New York, twenty-three miles north of New York City. Named in honor of the Monastery of Diveyevo,<sup>19</sup> the New Diveyevo Convent possesses an original full-length portrait of St. Seraphim of Sarov, painted shortly before his repose. At the time of the glorification of St. Seraphim (1903), the last Russian emperor, Nicholas II, and his entire family prayed fervently before this portrait of the saint. After the Russian Revolution, the portrait was sent from Diveyevo to Kiev for safekeeping, and then in 1943 it was sent and entrusted to Fr. Adrian, who had been evacuated to Berlin and assigned as rector of the Russian cathedral there.<sup>20</sup> In Berlin a spiritual community of émigrés gathered around Fr. Adrian. With the advance of the Soviets, they moved to West Germany, and then came to America in 1949.

In New York several immigrant nuns had already been given a blessing by Archbishop Vitaly to form a monastic community with the name New Diveyevo. It was to them that Fr. Adrian and his spiritual community came, along with the treasured portrait of St. Seraphim.

Soon an Orthodox cemetery was established on the monastery grounds, and the sisters assumed the responsi-

<sup>19</sup> A prominent women's monastery in Russia, founded by St. Seraphim of Sarov. Today the monastery houses the relics of St. Seraphim.

<sup>20</sup> Before leaving his homeland, Fr. Adrian had been imprisoned several times by the Soviets.

bility of burying and praying for the dead. Today the cemetery is the largest Russian Orthodox cemetery outside of Russia, with over eight thousand graves, including those of Prince Georgy and Princess Vera of Russia (second cousins of Emperor-Martyr Nicholas), Alexandra Tolstaya (daughter of the writer Leo Tolstoy), and the Russian pianist, conductor, and composer Alexander Siloti.

From the beginning, the sisters endeavored to care for the sick and homeless. In 1972 they founded a home for the elderly, which today can accommodate over seventy residents. Daily services at the convent are available to the residents, and meals are prepared in a traditional Slavic style.

### **The Monks of New Skete (Orthodox Church in America)**

The Monks of New Skete in Cambridge, New York, near the Vermont border, began as a community in 1966. Originally members of a group of Byzantine rite Franciscans (a Roman Catholic monastic order), the thirteen founding brothers separated from that community in order to live a fuller monastic life in accordance with the Eastern Christian tradition. They were received into the Orthodox Church in 1979. In order to support themselves financially, the monks turned to breeding German shepherds, and have since become world famous for their dog training programs.

The monastery's main church, dedicated to the Holy Wisdom, is built in a modern basilica style. The sanctuary (altar) is constructed in a way that harks back to an early practice in the Church: it projects out into the main space, with an icon screen (iconostasis) on three sides. The icon screen is more of a fence than a wall, with icons supported by a few pieces of wood, thus allowing the congregation visual access to clergy's actions during the Divine Liturgy.

### **The Nuns of New Skete (Orthodox Church in America)**

In 1969 the monks of New Skete were joined by seven Poor Clare (Roman Catholic) nuns from Indiana who, like the monks, were drawn to a contemplative monastic life inspired by the Eastern tradition. The nuns were received into the Orthodox Church in 1979, along with the monks. In order to support themselves, the nuns produce cheese-cakes and brandied fruitcakes, which are sold in their gift shop, online, and in selected local stores. They share many of the services with the monks of New Skete in the Holy Wisdom Temple.

The Monks and Nuns of New Skete represent a unique expression of monastic life within the Orthodox Church. While retaining some of the traditions inherited from the

Roman Catholic communities from which they came, they have sought inspiration in the foundational period of Christian monasticism (fourth through sixth centuries), endeavoring to adapt that tradition to contemporary America.

### **Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration (Orthodox Church in America)**

Founded in 1967 by Mother Alexandra (the former Princess Ileana of Romania), the Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration is located in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, about forty miles northwest of Pittsburgh, not far from the Ohio border.

Mother Alexandra, the daughter of King Ferdinand of Romania and a direct descendant of Emperor Alexander II of Russia and Queen Victoria, had lived in exile in the United States since 1952.<sup>21</sup> In 1961, after two marriages and the birth of several grandchildren, Mother Alexandra entered the Monastery of the Protection of the Veil of the Mother of God in Bussy-en-Othe, France, at the age of fifty-two. At that time there were still very few monasteries in America, none of them were Romanian, none of them primarily used the English language, and very few were for women, and so Mother Alexandra went to France in order to test her vocation. She had been speaking French since a young age, but the liturgical language of the monastery was Slavonic, which she could not understand at all. However, one of the nuns of the monastery, Mother Mary, was fluent in both Slavonic and English, and she offered to translate the services into English for Mother Alexandra.

It became Mother Alexandra's dream to create a monastery in America, a place where American Orthodox women of all ethnic backgrounds could live the monastic life and benefit from the liturgical services in English. In summer 1964 she and the abbess of the monastery in France (Mother Eudoxia), along with Mother Mary, made a trip to the United States in order to find a place for a monastery. They considered a site in Nevada, which could supply the monastic ideal of the desert, but they settled on the property in Western Pennsylvania where the monastery now stands. It is a day's drive from several major cities, and thus accessible to those who wish to make a pilgrimage to the monastery. With the new English-language monastery in view, Mother Mary redoubled her translation efforts, enlisting the collaboration of Fr. Timothy Ware (later Metropolitan Kallistos). Their translations of the *Festal*

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<sup>21</sup> That year the US Congress passed a special bill, introduced by Senator John F. Kennedy, granting her the right to live and work in this country.

*Menaion*, the *Lenten Triodion*, and the *Octoechos* were later published and are used today all over the English-speaking Orthodox world.

On Lazarus Saturday, 1967, Mother Alexandra was tonsured as a nun. She left for the United States almost immediately in order to work on the new monastery. By 1968 one more sister, a young convert, had joined her, and the monastery grounds were dedicated and the altar consecrated. In 1978 the second abbess of the community, Mother Benedicta, came from Varatec Monastery in Romania. Mother Alexandra, who reposed in 1991, would go all over North America giving talks on monasticism and the Orthodox faith. Today the monastery, which is home to nuns of a variety of backgrounds, continues in this missionary spirit: welcoming visitors, hosting retreats, speaking at events outside the monastery, and publishing.

### **St. Herman of Alaska Monastery (Serbian Orthodox Church in America)**

The St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, in Platina, California, grew out of a lay missionary brotherhood in San Francisco. In the early 1960s there were very few Orthodox books in the English language. The young men who began the St. Herman Brotherhood resolved to do missionary work among English-speaking Americans by making Orthodox literature available in English. One of those young men was an American of Protestant background from Southern California—Eugene Rose, later Hieromonk Seraphim.

In 1963 the brotherhood was blessed by Archbishop John (Maximovitch),<sup>22</sup> who had recently been appointed archbishop of San Francisco (Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, or ROCOR). The following year the brothers opened a bookstore next to the new Holy Virgin “Joy of All Who Sorrow” Cathedral in San Francisco. Having set up a hand printing press in the back of the store, in 1965 they began to publish the periodical *The Orthodox Word*, thus providing Orthodox literature to English-speaking people.

Meanwhile, the brothers dreamed of a wilderness skete where they could live a monastic life while continuing their missionary work through publishing. In 1969 they moved to the land where the monastery is now located (near town of Platina and forty-five miles west of Red Bluff, California), and a year later the first brothers were tonsured as monks.

In *The Orthodox Word*, the fathers provided contemporary God-seekers with an abundance of monastic texts—

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<sup>22</sup> Glorified as St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, Wonderworker (†1966, commemorated July 2).

lives of monastic saints as well as spiritual counsels—most of which had not previously appeared in the English language. In 1973 the fathers began serializing in *The Orthodox Word* the lives of Russian desert-dwellers of the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. The lives were later compiled into a book, *The Northern Thebaid*,<sup>23</sup> which helped to inspire many Americans to lead a monastic life.

In the two decades between Fr. Seraphim's reception into the Orthodox Church in 1962 and his repose in 1982, not only did he translate and publish an abundance of Orthodox materials in English, but he also produced many articles and books of his own. His writings have had a life-changing impact on vast numbers of souls both in America and abroad, especially in Russia and Eastern Europe, where before the fall of Communism underground translations of his writings were passed around in typewritten copies.

Comprised of a significant number of converts to the Orthodox faith, the St. Herman Brotherhood has continued to this day to make Orthodox literature available to English-speaking people, through *The Orthodox Word* as well as through books, with over forty titles currently in print.

### **The 1970s**

As of 1970, only ten of the seventy-six monasteries that exist today had been established. The 1970s witnessed the founding of several more monastic communities.

The Brotherhood of the Holy Cross (Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia) in East Setauket, New York, was founded in 1974. Located on the northern shore of Long Island, near Stony Brook, the monastery produces and sells pure beeswax hand-dipped candles as well as Athonite-style incense. Services are in English with a smattering of Greek, Slavonic, Romanian, Georgian, Arabic, and Spanish.

In 1975 Monastery Marcha, in Richfield, Ohio (about twenty miles south of Cleveland), was established as a women's monastery in the Serbian Orthodox Church. In 2001 His Holiness Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church took part in the consecration of the newly built monastery church. Mother Anna (Radetic) became the first American-born Serbian Orthodox nun.

Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery (Orthodox Church in America) began in 1977, with the first Divine Liturgy celebrated on the Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women. In 1983 the sisters moved to their present location: an old

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<sup>23</sup> *The Northern Thebaid* (Platina, California: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1975).

farm in Otego, New York, about forty miles northwest of Binghamton. In addition to caring for farm animals and tending their vegetable garden, the sisters run a mail-order business with their own greeting card designs and other products.

Our Lady of Kazan Skete (Orthodox Church in America), in Santa Rosa, California, was founded in 1979 by Archimandrite Dimitry (Egoroff) in the tradition of a quiet Russian skete.

### **The 1980s**

During the 1980s the number of Orthodox monasteries in America more than doubled: sixteen communities were established, bringing the total to thirty by 1989.

The decade began with the establishment of St. Xenia Skete (Serbian Orthodox Church). In 1978 the St. Herman Brotherhood had purchased land for a women's community near the old lumberjack settlement of Wildwood, California, ten miles west of Platina. That summer the sisters began living there in the open air, and two years later, in 1980, the first nun (Mother Brigid) was tonsured at the skete, which was dedicated to the then newly canonized St. Xenia of St. Petersburg.

In 1983 the oldest currently existing Greek Orthodox monastic community in the United States was established by Bishop Maximos of Pittsburgh: St. Gregory Palamas Monastery in Hayesville, Ohio, about eighty miles southwest of Cleveland. Unlike most of the Greek monasteries that would subsequently be established in the United States, the church services in this men's monastic community are conducted in English. The monastery is renowned for its translation and publication of liturgical texts in contemporary English, which fit Byzantine melodies.

That same year, the St. Herman Monastery acquired a piece of land on Spruce Island, Alaska, halfway between St. Herman's gravesite and the native village of Ouzinkie, and founded there a skete dedicated to the Archangel Michael. Having built a monastic dwelling on a steep hillside facing Kodiak Island, the brotherhood has maintained a monastic presence there ever since. The brothers of St. Michael's Skete strive to provide as much of their own food as possible, through fishing; gardening; and gathering wild mushrooms, berries, and other plants.

In 1984 the New Gracanica Monastery (Serbian Orthodox Church), dedicated to the Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God, was established in Third Lake, Illinois. The magnificent main church is a replica of the historic Gracanica Church in Kosovo. Serbs from all over the country come to New Gracanica for educational and

cultural events. The monastery maintains a library with materials relating to Serbian culture and history.

The Hermitage of the Holy Cross (ROCOR) was founded in 1986 in House Springs, Missouri, not far from St. Louis. Having outgrown their facilities, the brothers moved in the year 2000 to their current location in Wayne, West Virginia, in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. It is now one of the largest monastic communities in the United States, with twenty-five monks and novices as of 2015. A vibrant and growing community of monks from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the brotherhood includes a substantial number of converts to the Orthodox faith. The divine services are conducted in English. The monastery produces incense and handmade natural goat-milk soaps, which are shipped all over the world. The monastery also maintains a farm, which provides the community with milk, eggs, and fresh vegetables.

In 1987 Mother Benedicta (the retired abbess of the Monastery of the Transfiguration in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania), along with two other nuns from Romania, founded a Romanian-speaking community, the Monastery of the Dormition of the Mother of God (OCA), in Rives Junction, Michigan, about seventy-five miles west of Detroit. The monastery was established with a view to doing missionary work in America. The sisters often travel to parishes throughout North America to give spiritual presentations.

Other monasteries established in the 1980s include the Monastery of the Glorious Ascension, in Resaca, Georgia; the All-Merciful Saviour Monastery, located on Vashon Island, near Seattle, Washington; and St. Elizabeth Skete, a women's community located near the Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York—all of which are in the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

### **The 1990s: The Monasteries of Elder Ephraim**

Until the 1990s Orthodox monasteries in America were mostly of Slavic background, and there were very few Greek monastic communities. Indeed, as mentioned above, the only Greek monastery existing then in the United States was the monastery of St. Gregory Palamas, in Ohio. But with the arrival of Elder Ephraim in America and the subsequent founding of seventeen Greek monasteries in North America, the situation has changed dramatically. Today the Greek Archdiocese of America has more monasteries in the United States than any other Orthodox Church. The Greek monasteries also tend to be larger than other American monasteries. The largest Orthodox monastery in the United States is St. Anthony's Greek

Orthodox Monastery, in Florence, Arizona. With approximately fifty brothers, it is currently twice as large as any other American monastery. Of the eight largest monastic communities in the United States, six are Greek Orthodox monasteries. Today nearly half of the over five hundred Orthodox monks, nuns, and novices in the United States reside in Greek monasteries.<sup>24</sup>

Before coming to America, Elder Ephraim had been a monk on Mount Athos in Greece for forty years. He was a disciple of Elder Joseph the Hesychast, who was known for his strict ascetic life, which emphasized the keeping of vigil at night and the constant repetition of the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Elder Ephraim became abbot of Philotheou Monastery in 1973 and quickly revived the spiritual life there. He was asked to rejuvenate three other monasteries on Mount Athos that had been in decline.<sup>25</sup> In 1979 Elder Ephraim needed surgery, and some of his spiritual children invited him to Canada for the operation. Recognizing a spiritual need in North America, over the next few years he made several more trips to Canada and the United States, at the invitation of his spiritual children. Finally, he moved to America in order to care for his flock and to revive the spiritual life among the Greek communities in North America.

The first monastic community established by Elder Ephraim in America was the Monastery of the Nativity of the Theotokos in Saxonburg, Pennsylvania, not far from Pittsburgh. Founded in 1989, it was the first Greek Orthodox women's monastery in the United States.

Over the next ten years or so, through the efforts of Elder Ephraim, another sixteen monasteries were established: two of them in Canada and the rest in the United States. In the summer of 1995, Elder Ephraim came to southern Arizona, along with five other monks from Mount Athos. In the blazing heat of the Sonoran Desert, they set about constructing a monastery dedicated to St. Anthony the Great, the renowned Egyptian desert father of the third and fourth centuries. In a very short time, a portion of the Arizona desert was transformed into a true oasis. First, the monks built the main church, living quarters, a dining hall, and facilities for guests. Soon the desert was planted with vineyards, citrus orchards, and olive groves, while the central areas of the monastery were landscaped with blossoming plants, pathways, and fountains. All of the

<sup>24</sup> That is, 239 out of 512. This and other figures are based on the 2014 study "Orthodox Monastic Communities in the United States." The study is available here: <http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/assets/files/docs/research/StudyOfUSMonasteriesReportFinal.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Xeropotamou, Konstamonitou, and Karakallou.

construction is of very high quality materials, with beautiful stonework and carved wood. The interior walls are painted with an extensive number of icons. St. Anthony's is the flagship of the monasteries established by Elder Ephraim, and as was mentioned above, it is by far the largest Orthodox monastery in the United States. Pilgrims stream into St. Anthony's not only from all parts of the United States and Canada, but from all over the world. And not only pilgrims, but also tourists who are simply curious come to St. Anthony's by the busload, especially during the winter months, when Arizona becomes home to flocks of snowbirds seeking refuge from the frozen northern climes. In fact, in the state of Arizona, St. Anthony's is second only to the Grand Canyon in the number of visitors it receives.

Of the monasteries established by Elder Ephraim, ten are women's communities, and the remaining seven are for men. Two of the oldest and largest of the women's monasteries are the Monastery of the Theotokos, the Life-Giving Spring, in Dunlap, California (in the foothills of the Sierras, not far from the Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks); and the Monastery of St. John the Forerunner in Goldendale, Washington (not far from the Oregon border, about a hundred miles west of Portland). After St. Anthony's, the largest of the men's communities is the Monastery of St. Nektarios, in Roscoe, New York (at the edge of the Catskills, about three hours' drive from New York City).

In establishing monasteries in America, Elder Ephraim has sought to transplant the thousand-year-old tradition of Mount Athos to the soil of the New World. In doing so he has followed the pattern of sending to a new monastery a core of seasoned monastics either from Mount Athos or from monasteries under the elder's guidance elsewhere in Greece, or ultimately from already established communities in America. Around the core of experienced monks or nuns gather those new to the monastic life, not only Greeks but others as well, including a significant number of converts.

In contrast to the practice in most of the other monasteries in America, where the use of the English language prevails, in the monasteries founded by Elder Ephraim, Greek is used exclusively in the divine services, as well as in the readings during the common meals.

Selections from the letters and homilies of Elder Ephraim have been gathered and published as a book, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*,<sup>26</sup> making an impact far beyond the monasteries he has established.

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<sup>26</sup> *Counsels from the Holy Mountain* (Florence, AZ: St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, 1999).

## 1990 to the Present

Since 1990, in addition to the fifteen monasteries founded by Elder Ephraim, nearly thirty other monastic communities have been established in the United States. All of them are briefly described in the chapter "Directory of Orthodox Monastic Communities by State," while some are also featured in the more extensive essays on individual monasteries that conclude this book. It should be noted that along with the overall increase in the number of Orthodox monasteries in America, several Orthodox jurisdictions have planted their first monastic communities on American soil.

Until fairly recently there were no monastic communities in the United States under the jurisdiction of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese; now there are three. Two of them are for women: St. Paul Skete in Grand Junction, Tennessee, founded in 2003; and the Convent of St. Thekla in Glenville, Pennsylvania, founded in 2013. The most recently established is a community for men in Wichita, Kansas: St. Silouan Skete.

Today the Bulgarian Church also has a monastic community in America: the Skete of St. Maximos the Confessor, in Palmyra, Virginia (about sixty-five miles northwest of Richmond, not far from Charlottesville).

Meanwhile, the first Georgian monasteries in America have also been recently established: the Monastery of St. Nina (for women), in Union Bridge, Maryland (about forty-five minutes from Washington, DC); and the Monastery of the Holy Spirit (for men), in Ashley, Pennsylvania (a few miles south of Wilkes-Barre).

One of the newest Orthodox monastic community in America (as of the publication of this *Atlas*) is the Holy Archangel Michael and All Angels Skete (Serbian Orthodox Church), in Weatherby, Missouri, near Kansas City. Established in 2014 by Hieromonk Alexii (Altschul), the monastery is designed as two communities at separate sites on the property, but both serve God as one: a group of nuns, formerly the St. Xenia Sisterhood from Kansas City; as well as a group of monks. Fr. Alexii was once the pastor of a racially diverse Protestant church in the Kansas City ghetto. Having set out on a search for authentic, ancient Christianity, he discovered the Orthodox faith. He came across a copy of *The Northern Thebaid* at the public library and was very much inspired to read the lives of the desert-dwellers of the Russian North. Seeing that the book was published by St. Herman Press, he and a few members of his church showed up unexpectedly at the gate of the St. Herman of Alaska Monastery one Sunday night in the summer of 1992. That visit to the

monastery confirmed him in his resolve to become Orthodox, and soon he and his community were baptized. After the repose of his matushka<sup>27</sup> in 2012, he was tonsured a monk and sent to Mount Athos for an extended time, with an assignment to establish a monastery upon his return.

The last part of the twentieth century in America witnessed a renewed interest in all things spiritual, especially among young people, with many turning to various Eastern religions and New Age philosophies. Ultimately, some of those seekers found their way also to Eastern Christianity. Others have come to the Orthodox Church directly from the Roman Catholic Church or various Protestant denominations. Accordingly, an abundance, or even a preponderance, of converts is evident in many of the Orthodox monasteries in America. Of those monks and nuns who are “cradle Orthodox,” many if not most are at least second- or third-generation Americans, born and raised in the United States. Not surprisingly, most of the monastic communities in the United States use English as their primary language of worship, and an even greater proportion use English as their chief language for everyday communication.

An American Orthodox monk, with his long beard and black robes, may look foreign at first glance, but when he opens his mouth he may well sound as though he grew up next door. While Orthodox monks and nuns in America practice a way of life rooted in a tradition that originated in the early centuries of the Church on the other side of the globe, they are still twenty-first-century Americans. They retain elements of the culture in which they grew up and by which they are surrounded; inevitably the culture of the time and place has an influence on the monastic life.

Virtually all the Orthodox monasteries in America have a telephone, use of computers is widespread, and almost all use e-mail. Although the monks’ and nuns’ degree of personal access to the Internet may be limited—and undoubtedly varies among, as well as within, monastic communities—a large number of the monasteries maintain informational websites, with many offering products for sale over the Internet in order to support themselves. Some also reach out to the world by blogs or various forms of social media.

Monasteries in America are diverse just as Orthodox Christianity in America is diverse, and as America itself is diverse. Not conceived by a single organization, these monasteries have been established by Greeks, Russians, Serbs, Romanians, and others, as well as simply by Amer-

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<sup>27</sup> Matushka: a Russian term of endearment for a priest’s wife or a nun.

icans. Some monasteries have been begun by individuals seeking to live the monastic life, while others have been established by bishops or church institutions. Some have been founded by monastics fleeing persecution in their native lands, while others have been established as missionary endeavors. Each monastery is unique, with its own particular customs and its own particular flavor, yet they all share a common position at the heart of the Church. They are all places where Christians strive toward the heavenly Kingdom, while praying on behalf of the Church and for the whole world.

## **Timeline**

- 530: Irish monk Brendan the Navigator (later glorified as St. Brendan, abbot of Clonfert) possibly establishes a short-lived monastic community in North America.
- 1794: Arrival of a group of Russian missionary monks (including the monk Herman) on Kodiak Island, Alaska.
- 1836: Repose of Monk Herman (later glorified as St. Herman of Alaska, “Wonderworker of All America”) on Spruce Island, Alaska.
- 1905: St. Tikhon of Zadonsk Monastery founded in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, by Hieromonk Arseny (Chagovtsev); grounds dedicated by Bishop Raphael (Hawaweeny) (later glorified as St. Raphael of Brooklyn). Oldest currently existing monastery in America.
- 1923: St. Sava Monastery founded in Libertyville, Illinois, by Archimandrite (later Bishop) Mardarije (glorified in 2015 as St. Mardarije of Libertyville) of the American-Canadian diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church. First Serbian Monastery in America.
- 1930: Holy Trinity Monastery founded in Jordanville, New York, the major center of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.
- 1963: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood founded in San Francisco. Significant for its publishing and missionary work among English-speaking Americans, the brotherhood subsequently moved to Platina, California.
- 1966: Repose of Archbishop John (Maximovitch), archbishop of San Francisco. (In 1994 he was glorified as St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, Wonderworker.)
- 1967: Monastery of the Transfiguration founded by Mother Alexandra (formerly Princess Ileana of Romania) in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania. First Romanian monastery in America.

- 1970: Glorification of St. Herman of Alaska: first glorification of an American Orthodox saint. St. Herman is regarded as the patron saint of North America.
- 1983: Monastery of St. Gregory Palamas founded in Hayesville, Ohio, by Bishop Maximos of Pittsburgh. Oldest Greek monastery in America.
- 1989: Monastery of the Nativity of the Mother of God established in Saxonburg, Pennsylvania. First monastery established in North America by Elder Ephraim, former abbot of Philotheou Monastery on Mount Athos, founder of seventeen monasteries in United States and Canada. First Greek women's monastery in America.
- 1995: St. Anthony's Monastery established by Elder Ephraim in Florence, Arizona. Flagship of the Greek monasteries established by Elder Ephraim, largest Orthodox monastery in the United States, and major international pilgrimage destination.
- 2003: St. Paul Orthodox Skete established. First Antiochian Orthodox monastery in America.
- 2012: Sacred Monastery of St. Nina founded. First Georgian Orthodox monastery in America.



## Chapter 3

# Directory of Orthodox Christian Monasteries by State

# Maps

## Codes for Abbreviated Names of Monasteries Used on Maps

| <b>Code</b> | <b>Name of Monastic Community</b>                         | <b>Orthodox Church Jurisdiction to Which Monastery Belongs</b> |
|-------------|---|--|
| AMS         | All-Merciful Saviour Orthodox Monastery                   | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| ASG         | All Saints Greek Orthodox Monastery                       | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| ATG         | Annunciation of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Monastery    | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| BHC         | Brotherhood of the Holy Cross                             | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| BSJ         | Brotherhood of St. John Climacus                          | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| CNV         | Convent of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary                | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| CTS         | Christminster (Christ the Saviour) Monastery              | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| DMG         | Dormition of the Mother of God                            | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| ETS         | Entrance of the Theotokos Skete                           | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| HAA         | Holy Archangels Michael and All Saints Skete              | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| HAG         | Holy Archangels Greek Orthodox Monastery                  | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| HAR         | Holy Ascension Romanian Orthodox Monastery                | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| HAS         | Holy Assumption Monastery                                 | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| HCO         | Holy Cross Orthodox Monastery                             | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| HHC         | Hermitage of the Holy Cross                               | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| HMM         | Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery                               | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| HPP         | Holy Monastery of Panagia Pammakaristos                   | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| HPT         | Holy Protection of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Monastery | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| HRM         | Holy Resurrection Orthodox Monastery                      | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| HSA         | Hermitage of St. Arsenius                                 | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| HSA         | Hermitage of St. Cornelius the Great Martyr               | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| HST         | Holy Convent of Saint Thekla                              | Antiochian Christian Archdiocese                               |
| HTG         | Holy Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Monastery             | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| HTM         | Holy Trinity Monastery                                    | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| HTR         | Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Monastery                     | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| MAM         | Monastery of the Holy Archangel Michael                   | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| MGA         | Monastery of the Glorious Ascension                       | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| MGE         | Monastery of St. Macarius the Great of Egypt              | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| MHT         | Monastery of the Holy Theotokos the Life Giving Spring    | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| MMA         | Monastery Marcha  | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| MNS         | Monks of New Skete  | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| MSJ         | Monastery of St. John of San Francisco                    | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| MSM         | Monastery of St. Mary of Egypt (Treadwell Abbey)          | Russian Orthodox Church  |
| MST         | Monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk                        | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| NMG         | Nativity of the Mother of God Serbian Orthodox Monastery  | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| NNS         | Nuns of New Skete   | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| NOL         | Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ                         | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| NTG         | Nativity of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Monastery        | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| OLK         | Our Lady of Kazan Skete                                   | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| OMT         | Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration                 | Orthodox Church in America                                     |

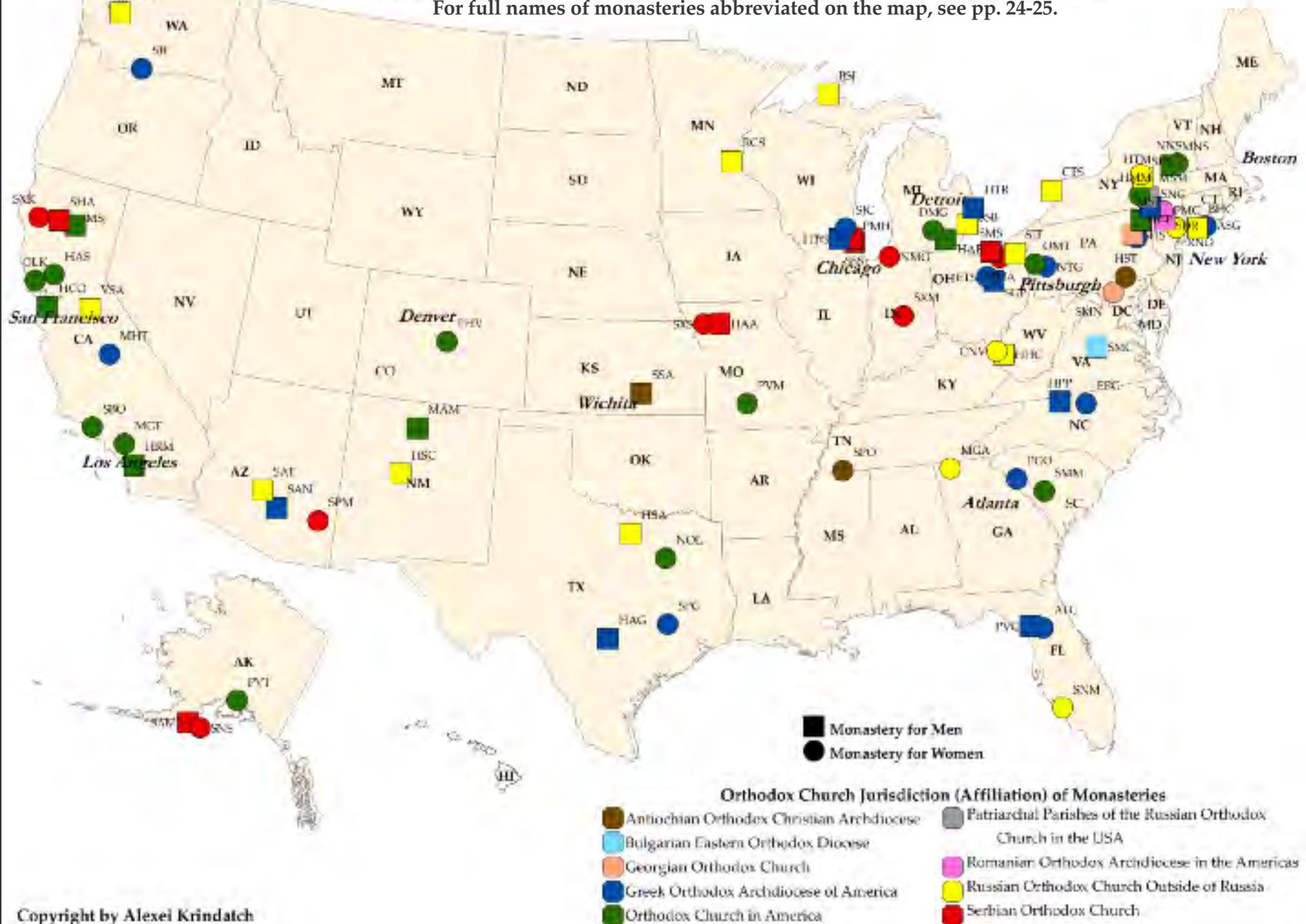
## Codes for Abbreviated Names of Monasteries Used on Maps

| <b>Code</b> | <b>Name of Monastic Community</b>                                     | <b>Orthodox Church Jurisdiction to Which Monastery Belongs</b> |
|-------------|---|--|
| PGO         | Parakletos Greek Orthodox Monastery                                   | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| PHV         | Protection of the Holy Virgin Orthodox Monastery                      | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| PMG         | Protection of the Mother of God Romanian Monastery                    | Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese                                  |
| PMH         | Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God ("New Gracanica") Monastery | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| PPG         | Panagia Prousiotissa Greek Orthodox Monastery                         | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| PVG         | Panagia Vlahernon Greek Orthodox Monastery                            | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| PVM         | Presentation of the Virgin Mary Orthodox Monastery                    | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| PVT         | Protecting Veil of the Theotokos Orthodox Community                   | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| RCS         | Resurrection of Christ / St. Seraphim Skete                           | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| RND         | Russian Orthodox Convent Novo-Diveevo                                 | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| SAM         | St. Archangel Michael Skete   | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| SAN         | St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery                                | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| SAT         | St. Anthony the Great Stavropegial Monastery                          | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| SBO         | St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery  | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| SDR         | St. Dumitru Romanian Orthodox Monastery                               | Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese                                  |
| SES         | St. Elizabeth Skete   | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| SGP         | St. Gregory Palamas Monastery   | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| SHA         | St. Herman of Alaska Monastery  | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| SHS         | Sacred Monastery of the Holy Spirit                                   | Georgian Orthodox Church                                       |
| SJC         | St. John Chrysostom Monastery   | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| SJF         | St. John the Forerunner Greek Orthodox Monastery                      | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| SJT         | Skete of St. John the Theologian                                      | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| SMC         | St. Maximos the Confessor Skete                                       | Bulgarian Orthodox Diocese                                     |
| SMM         | Saints Mary and Martha Orthodox Monastery                             | Orthodox Church in America                                     |
| SMN         | Sacred Monastery of St. Nina  | Georgian Orthodox Church                                       |
| SMS         | St. Mark Serbian Orthodox Monastery                                   | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| SNG         | St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Monastery                                | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| SNM         | Saint Nicholas Monastery  | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| SNS         | St. Nilus Skete   | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| SPG         | St. Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Monastery                                | Greek Orthodox Archdiocese                                     |
| SPM         | St. Paisius Monastery   | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| SPO         | St. Paul Orthodox Skete   | Antiochian Christian Archdiocese                               |
| SSA         | St. Silouan the Athonite Monastery                                    | Antiochian Christian Archdiocese                               |
| SSB         | St. Sabbas the Sanctified Orthodox Monastery                          | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
| SSS         | St. Sava Serbian Stavropegial Orthodox Monastery                      | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| SXK         | St. Xenia Skete   | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| SXM         | St. Xenia Metochion (St. Xenia Monastic Community)                    | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| SXS         | St. Xenia Sisterhood  | Serbian Orthodox Church  |
| VSA         | Monastery of the Venerable St. Silouan the Athonite                   | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |

# Overview of Orthodox Christian Monasteries in the United States

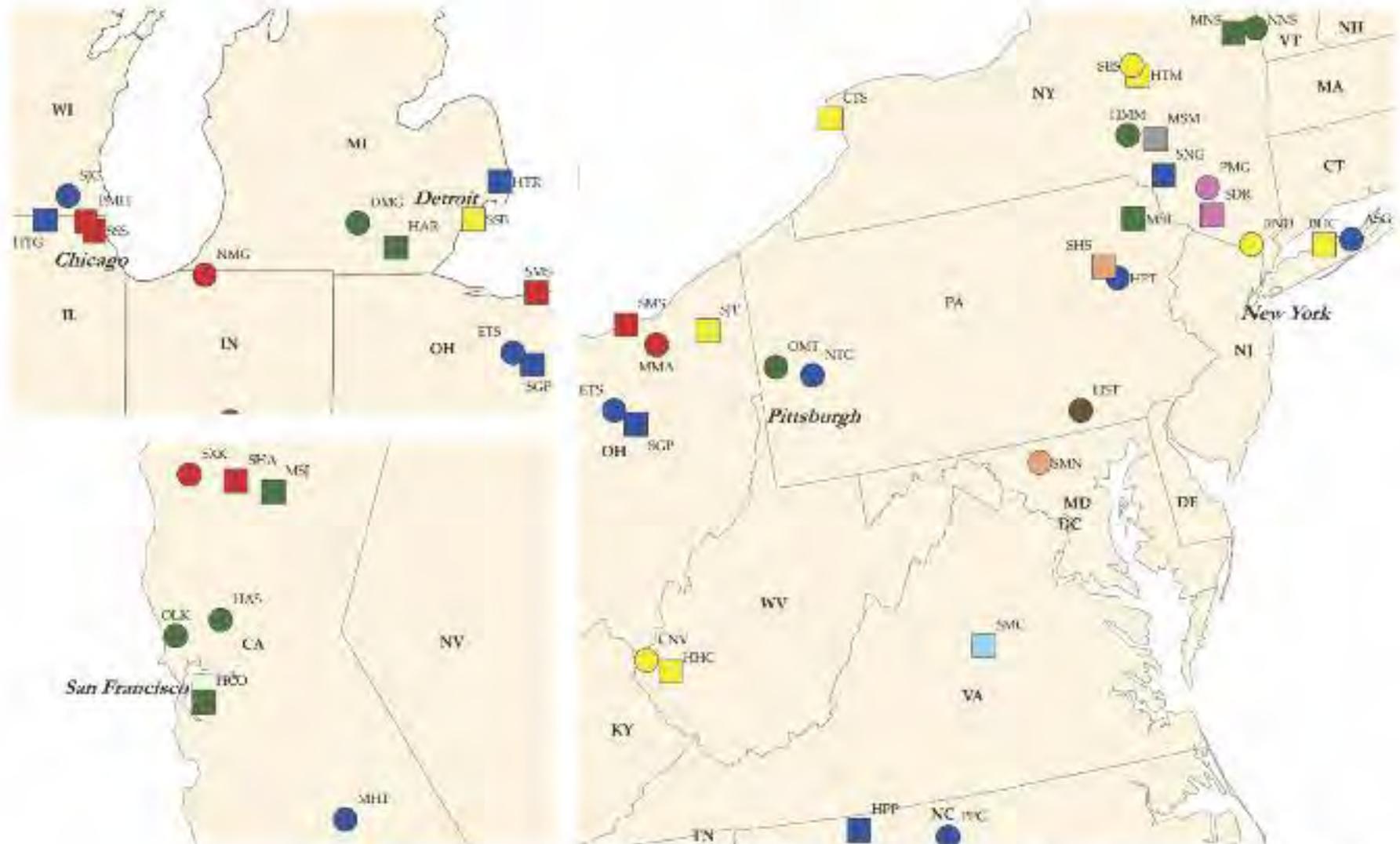
For the areas of high concentration see additional inset maps on the next page.

For full names of monasteries abbreviated on the map, see pp. 24-25.



# Overview of Orthodox Christian Monasteries in the United States

For full names of monasteries abbreviated on the map, see pp. 24-25.



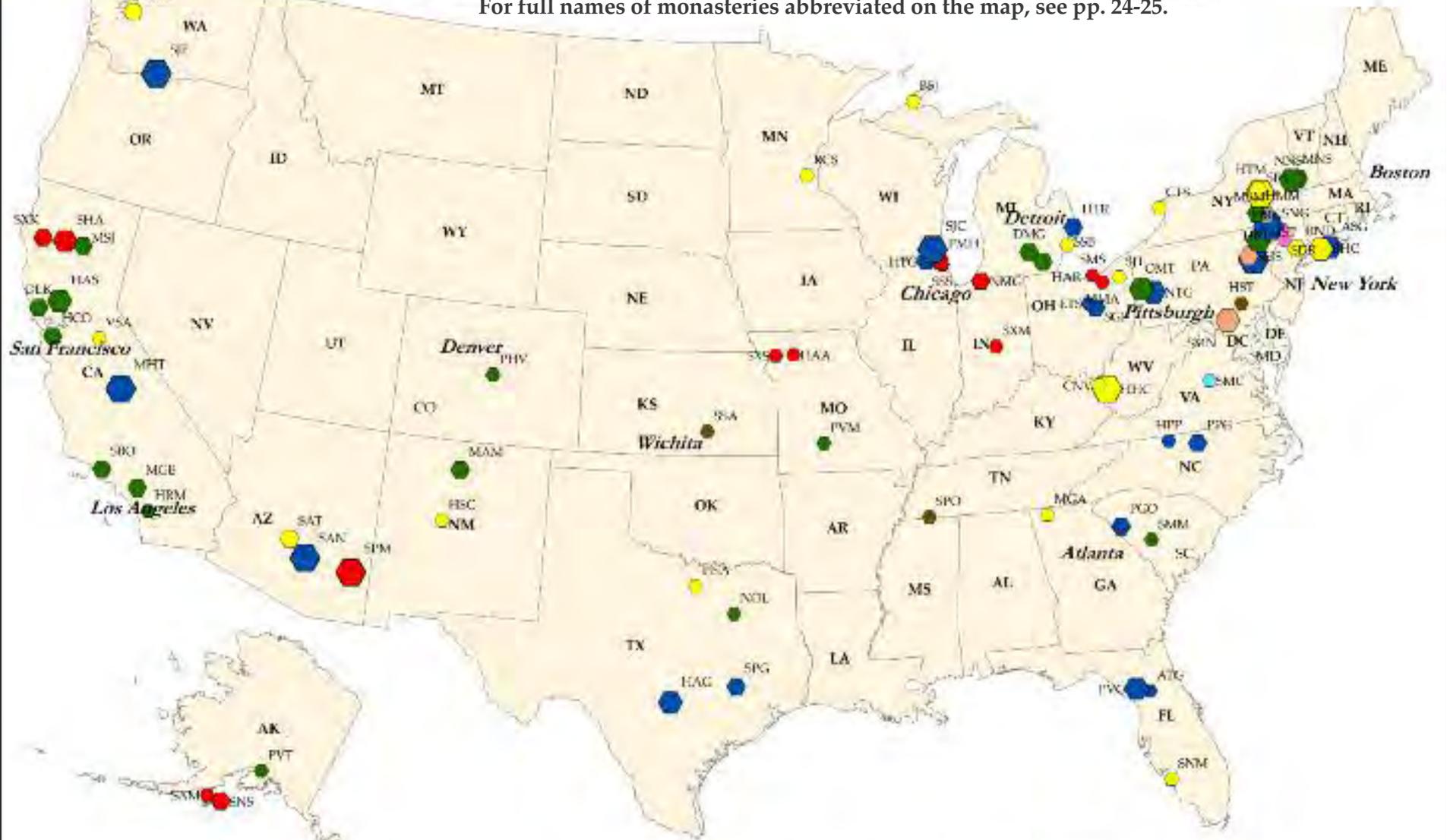
### Orthodox Church Jurisdiction (Affiliation) of Monasteries

- |                       |   |  |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| ■ Monastery for Men   | ● Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese | ■ Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in the USA |
| ● Monastery for Women | ■ Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese        | ■ Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas                  |
|                       | ■ Georgian Orthodox Church                  | ■ Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia                      |
|                       | ■ Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America     | ■ Serbian Orthodox Church  |
|                       | ■ Orthodox Church in America                |  |

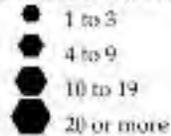
# Orthodox Christian Monasteries: Size of Monastic Community

For the areas of high concentration see additional inset maps on the next page.

For full names of monasteries abbreviated on the map, see pp. 24-25.



Number of Monastics (Monks, Nuns, Novices) in Residence

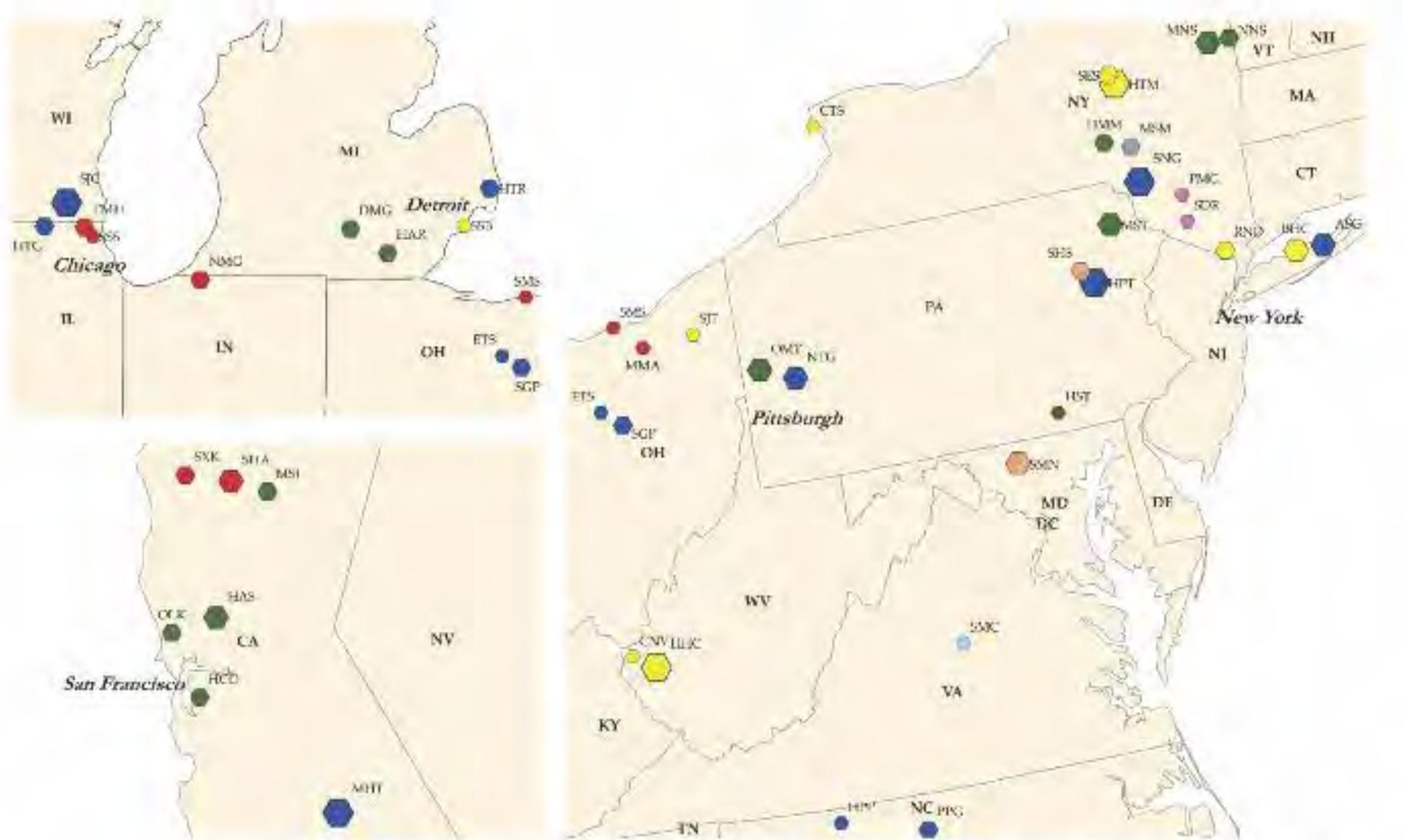


## Orthodox Church Jurisdiction (Affiliation) of Monasteries

- Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
- Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese
- Georgian Orthodox Church
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
- Orthodox Church in America
- Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in the USA
- Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas
- Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia
- Serbian Orthodox Church

# Orthodox Christian Monasteries: Size of Monastic Community

For full names of monasteries abbreviated on the map, see pp. 24-25.



**Number of Monastics (Monks, Nuns, Novices) in Residence**

- 1 to 3
- 4 to 9
- 10 to 19
- 20 or more

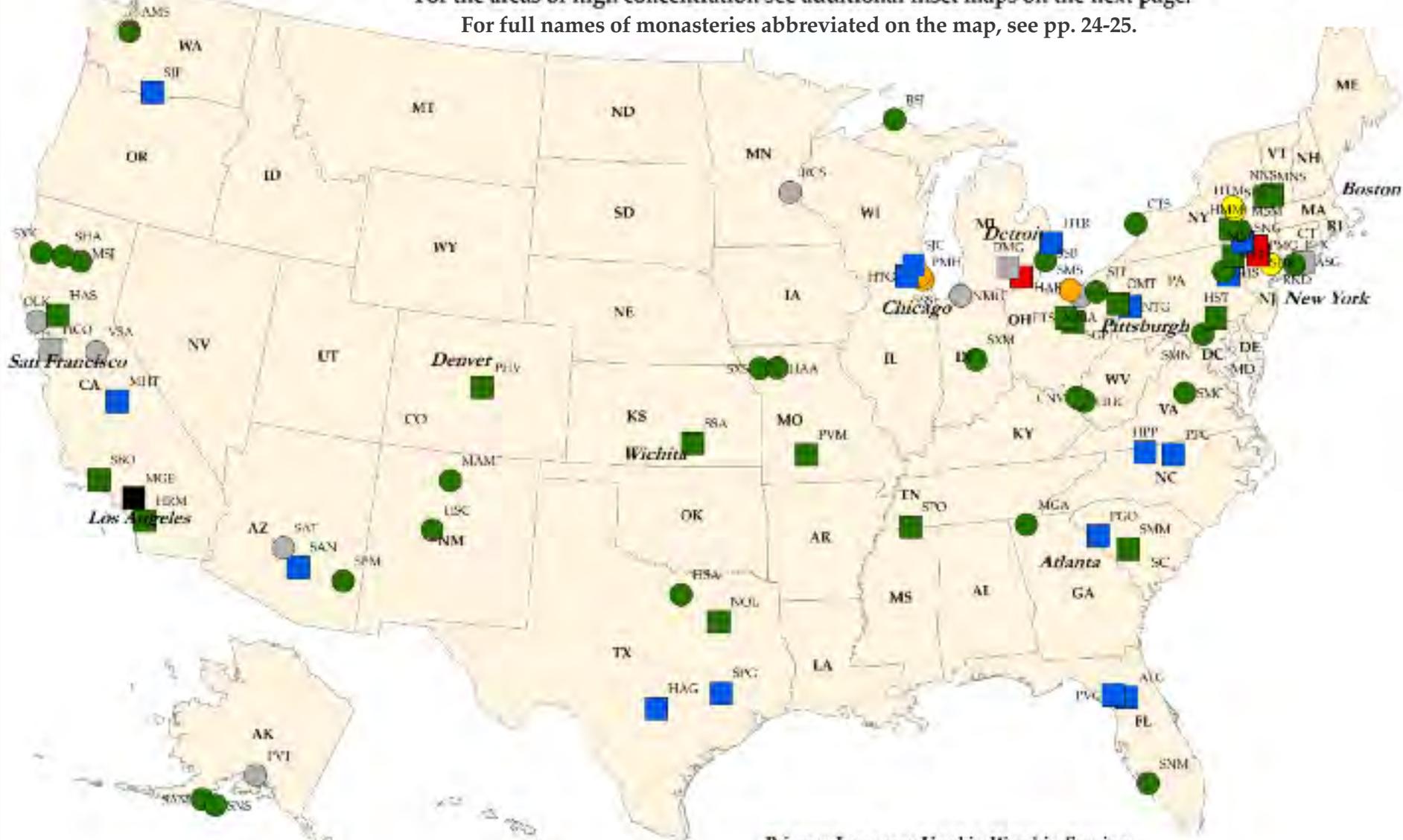
**Orthodox Church Jurisdiction (Affiliation) of Monasteries**

- Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
- Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese
- Georgian Orthodox Church
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
- Orthodox Church in America
- Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in the USA
- Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas
- Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia
- Serbian Orthodox Church

# Orthodox Christian Monasteries: Primary Language Used in Worship Services and Church Calendar Followed

For the areas of high concentration see additional inset maps on the next page.

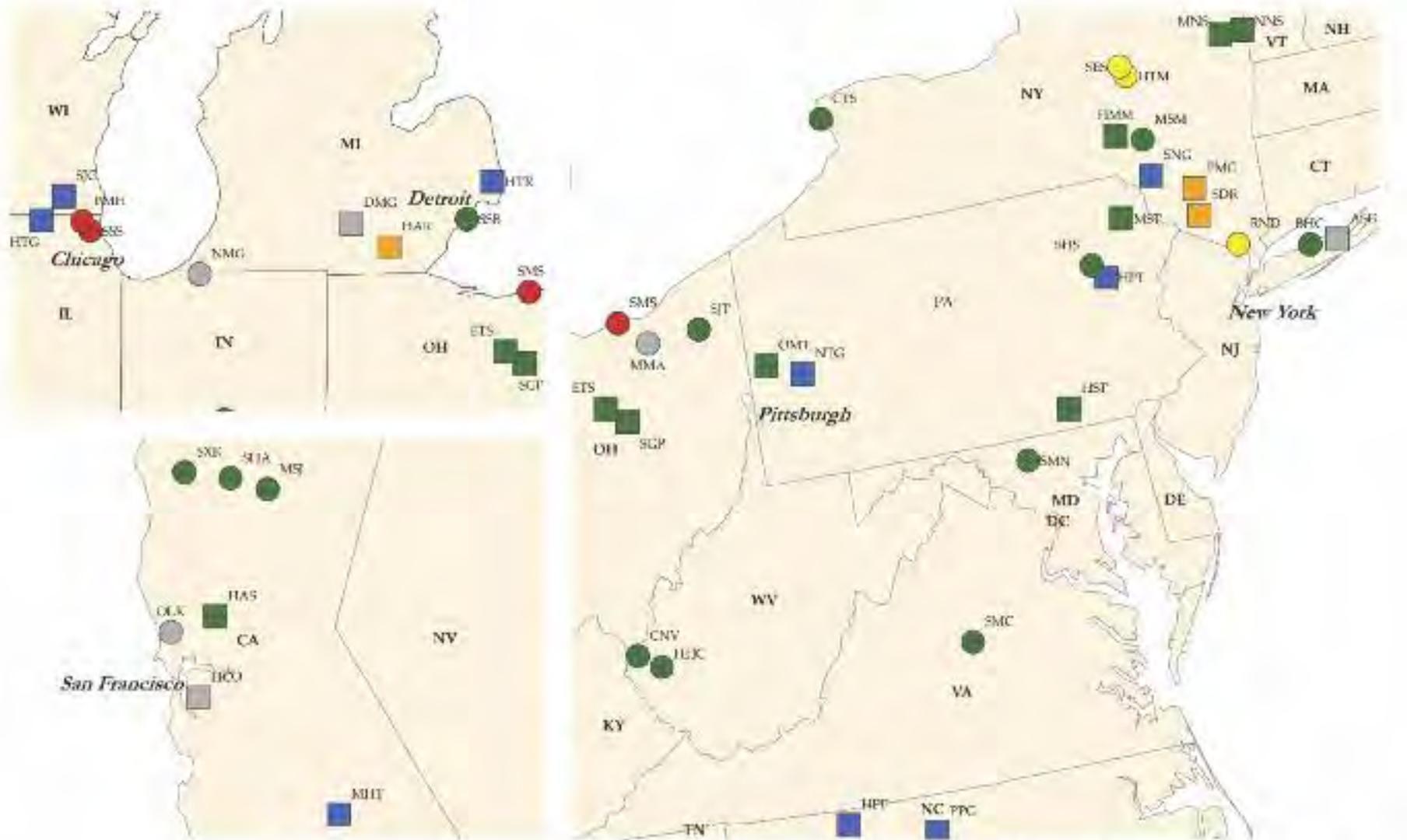
For full names of monasteries abbreviated on the map, see pp. 24-25.



|  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Church Calendar Used by Monasteries</b> |   | <b>Primary Language Used in Worship Services</b> |  |
| ■  | Monastery follows "New" (revised Julian) Calendar | ●  | English  |
| ●  | Monastery follows "Old" (Julian) Calendar         | ●  | Equally English and some other than English language |
|  |   | ■  | Greek  |
|  |   | ■  | Church Slavonic                                      |
|  |   | ■  | Serbian  |
|  |   | ■  | Romanian   |
|  |   | ■  | Arabic   |

## Orthodox Christian Monasteries: Primary Language Used in Worship Services and Church Calendar Followed

For full names of monasteries abbreviated on the map, see pp. 24-25.

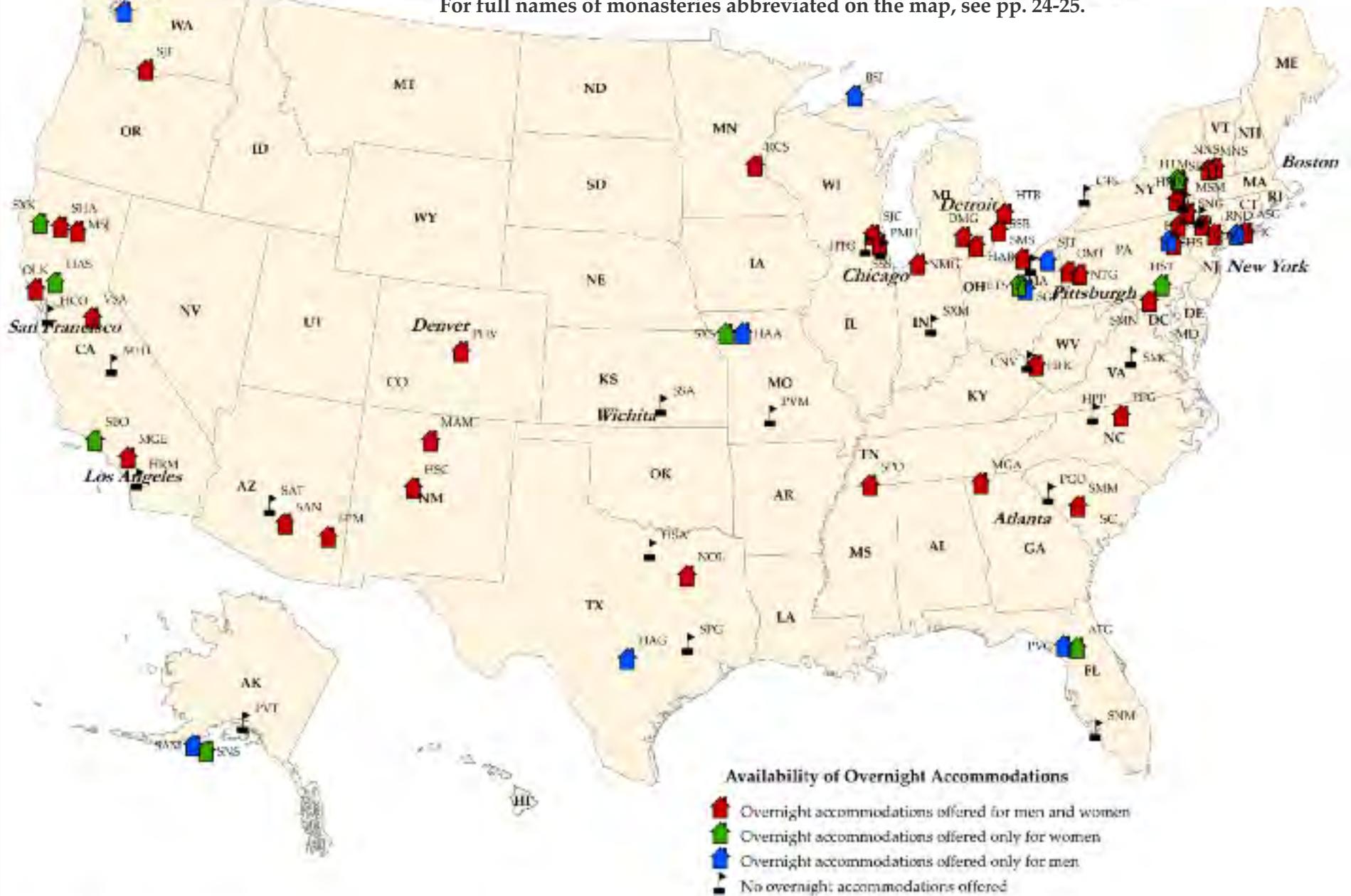


- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Church Calendar Used by Monasteries</b> |   | <b>Primary Language Used in Worship Services</b> |  |
| ■  | Monastery follows "New" (revised Julian) Calendar | ●  | English  |
| ●  | Monastery follows "Old" (Julian) Calendar         | ■  | Equally English and some other-than-English language |
|  |   | ■  | Greek  |
|  |   | ●  | Church Slavonic                                      |
|  |   | ●  | Serbian  |
|  |   | ■  | Romanian   |

# Orthodox Christian Monasteries: Overnight Accommodations Offered to Visitors

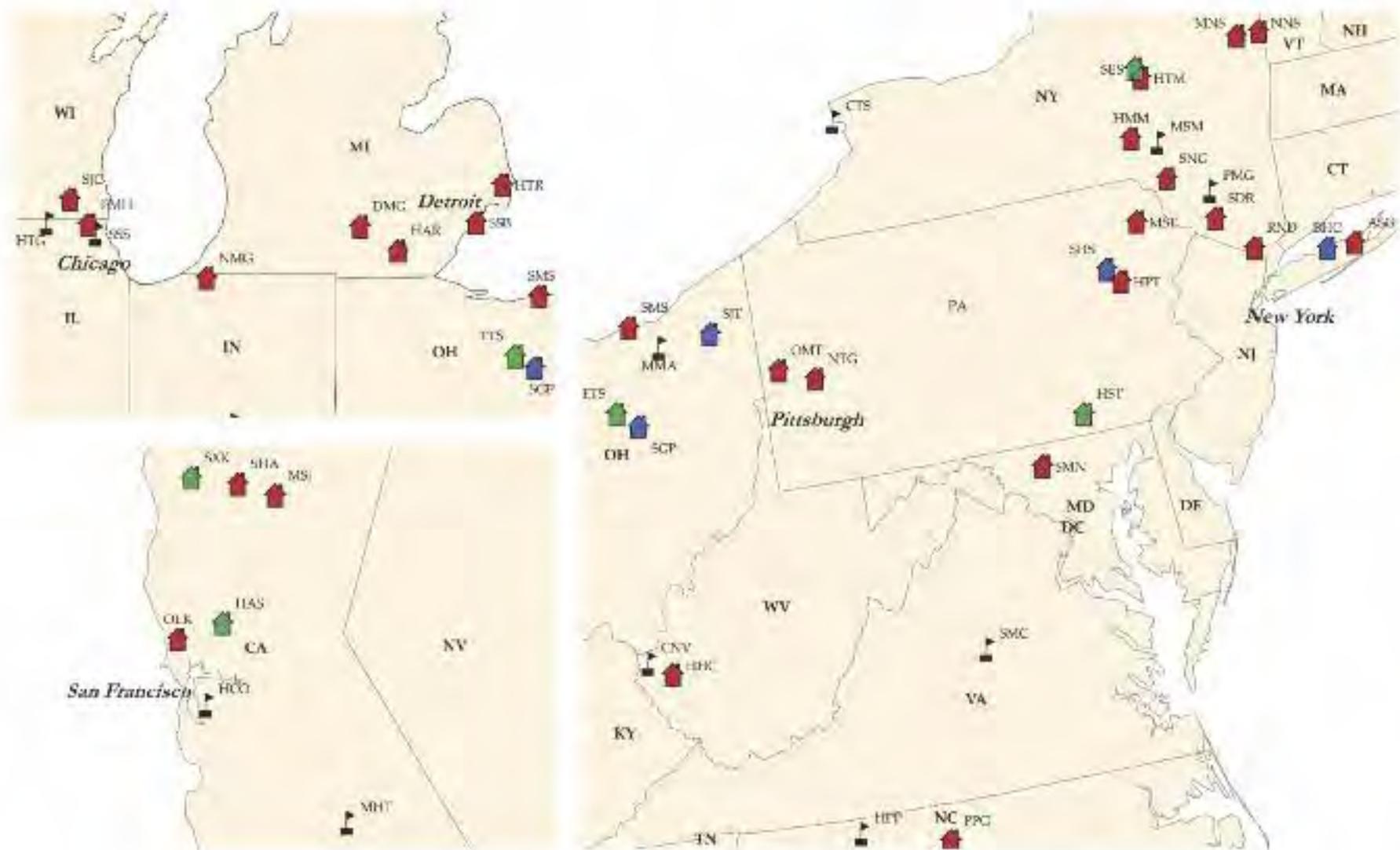
For the areas of high concentration see additional inset maps on the next page.

For full names of monasteries abbreviated on the map, see pp. 24-25.



# Orthodox Christian Monasteries: Overnight Accommodations Offered to Visitors

For full names of monasteries abbreviated on the map, see pp. 24-25.



## Policy for Accommodations of Overnight Visitors

-  Overnight accommodations offered for men and women
-  Overnight accommodations offered only for women
-  Overnight accommodations offered only for men
-  No overnight accommodations offered

# Directory

## Explanatory notes on some items included in this directory:

- a) Within each state the monastic communities are listed in alphabetical order by their names.
- b) **Orthodox Church Affiliation.** All Orthodox monastic communities included in this Atlas belong to one of the twelve Orthodox Church bodies that are part of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America ([www.assemblyofbishops.org](http://www.assemblyofbishops.org)). In the descriptive part of the entries on each monastic community, the readers will also frequently find the term “Orthodox Church jurisdiction.” The word “jurisdiction” is commonly used among American Orthodox Christians to describe a national Orthodox Church body (instead of the Protestant term “denomination”). The Atlas does not provide information on the so-called “uncanonical” (“unlawful”) monasteries: that is, those monastic communities that are not conforming to Orthodox Church canon law and, therefore, are not recognized as valid by the Orthodox Churches that are part of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America.
- c) **Church Calendar Followed.** In their liturgical and sacramental lives and annual cycle of worship services (i.e. how feast and fast days are reckoned), the Orthodox monasteries in America use two different Church calendars. One is the “Old” (also known as “Julian”) calendar, while another is the “New” (also known as “revised Julian” or “Gregorian”) calendar. Essentially, the “New” calendar fully corresponds with the “normal” civic calendar. Differently, the “Old” (“Julian”) calendar is thirteen days behind the New calendar. For instance, a monastery that uses the “New” calendar celebrates Christmas on December 25, while a monastery that follows “Old” calendar celebrates Christmas on January 7 (because according to their reckoning, it is December 25).
- d) **Feast Day** refers to major festive day(s) in the life of each monastery. Typically (but not always), a monastery’s feast day corresponds with the feast day of the saint who is regarded as the monastery’s patron. **Note: The dates of all feast days in this Atlas are given by the civic (i.e. “secular”) calendar regardless of whether a monastery uses the “Old” or “New” Church calendar.**
- e) **Name of Superior.** The name of the monastic (monk, nun) who leads the monastery. Various monasteries use different terms to describe the position of a monastery’s superior. Examples include: “abbot” (or “abbess” in monastery for women), “geronda” (“gerontissa”), “prior” (“prioress”). In monasteries for men, most of superiors (but not all) are ordained clergy. In this case and depending on their priestly rank, we refer to them as “Father” (“Fr.”) or “Igumen” or “Archimandrite.”
- f) **Number of Monks (Nuns) and Novices in Residence.** Total number of monastics residing in each monastery. The data are as of summer 2015.

# ALASKA

## St. Archangel Michael Skete

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** PO Box 90, Ouzinkie, AK, 99644

**Phone:** 907-654-2345

**E-mail:** alaskamonk@gmail.com

**Website:** No website

**Year of Founding:** 1983

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** September 19 (Miracle of Archangel Michael)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Andrew (Wermuth)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 3

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For men only

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 66): St. Michael Skete is a dependency of the St. Herman Orthodox Monastery in Northern California, and it is located on Spruce Island, Alaska. This island was the home of St. Herman, the member of the first Russian missionary team of eight monks who arrived on Kodiak Island in 1794, initiating the spread of Orthodox Christianity in then Russian-controlled Alaska. St. Herman was canonized as America’s first Orthodox saint in 1970. Since its inception St. Michael Skete has been a place for pilgrims to come for solitude and prayer at the grave of St. Herman in the midst of the virgin nature of Alaska. The two-level structure, adorned with a Russian-style dome, is built to withstand the harsh Alaskan storms. One of the inspirations for this building was the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras on Mount Athos. Over the years the monks have supported themselves in various ways: carving crosses, building domes for churches, and operating a sawmill that provides lumber for people in the area. The monks also teach classes to some of the local native children. In the last ten years, a number of Orthodox laypeople have bought property in Sunny Cove, and the monastery has become a center for this community. For visitors to St. Herman’s grave, the monks provide ferry service to Spruce Island, give tours of Monk’s Lagoon, and provide lodging for those who wish to spend more time on the island.

## St. Nilus Skete

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** (a) Physical location: Nelson island in Ouzinkie Narrow Straits; (b) Postal address: PO Box 18, Ouzinkie, AK, 99644

**Phone:** No phone

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** www.stnilus.org

**Year of Founding:** 1999

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** May 20 (Death of St. Nilus of Sora)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Nina (Hagopian)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 4

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For women only (one-room log cabin with three beds)

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 66): Nestled between Kodiak Island and St. Herman’s Spruce Island lies an emerald islet, forested by towering spruce trees. A myriad of birds—eagles, swallows, warblers, seagulls—find refuge here, and colorful tufted puffins nest each summer in its craggy black cliffs. Behind the trees is a wooden church modeled after the fifteenth-century Russian church of St. Nilus of Sora. Abbess Nina describes St. Nilus Skete as follows: “Our monastery is focused on the interior life of prayer as our life on an island is so conducive for this. We are very much a hermitage with a common life.” Known for his extreme simplicity, St. Nilus emphasized the inner life of the monastic—the inward self-trial and practice of the Jesus Prayer. With St. Nilus as their patron, the nuns seek to emulate the monastic ideals of poverty, asceticism, and interior prayer. According to ancient monastic practice, the nuns strive to support themselves by the labor of their own hands—primarily through making prayer ropes. The life of nuns at St. Nilus Skete can be described as truly “subsistence living,” with salmon fishing, smoking, and canning at the end of the spring and gardening, picking berries, and picking mushrooms in the summer. Nearby the skete is Monk’s Lagoon on Spruce Island, where St. Herman of Alaska lived at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Visitors to the skete come between May and September—when the seas are calmer—to venerate St. Herman and to pray at his grave.

## Protecting Veil of the Theotokos Monastic Community

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** PO Box 211271, Anchorage, AK, 99521-1271

**Phone:** 907-274-8001

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** No website

**Year of Founding:** 1996

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English, Aleut

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** October 14 (Protection of the Theotokos)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Capitolina (Buterin)

**Number of Nuns in Residence:** 1

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** Generally no, but special arrangements can be made for female visitors with advance notice.

**Description:** Mother Capitolina—the only member of this monastic community—is a social worker in Anchorage. Together with the local clergy, she visits elderly and sick people in hospitals and private homes. Only “reader’s” services are held in her small home chapel.

# ARIZONA

## St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 4784 N. St. Joseph's Way, Florence, AZ, 85132

**Phone:** 520-868-3188

**E-mail:** bookstore@samail.org, monastery@samail.org

**Website:** www.stanthonysonastery.org

**Year of Founding:** 1995

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English, Greek

**Feast Day:** January 17 (St. Anthony the Great)

**Name of Superior:** Archimandrite ("Geronda") Paisios

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 49

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 122): St. Anthony's is the largest Orthodox monastery in the United States: both by number of monks in residence and by the flow of visitors and pilgrims. The monastery is named after St. Anthony the Great, the renowned third-century ascetic of Egypt, also known as "the father of monasticism." The history of St. Anthony's Monastery began in the summer of 1995, when Elder Ephraim, a disciple of Elder Joseph the Hesychast, having restored and repopulated four Mount Athos monasteries, transferred six monks from Mount Athos, Greece, to the Sonoran Desert in Southern Arizona to start a new monastic community. Today the impressive monastic complex includes the main church building, living quarters for monks, a dining hall, guest facilities, several chapels, a vegetable garden, a small vineyard, citrus orchards, and an olive grove. An elaborate system of gardens, pathways, gazebos, and Spanish fountains makes St. Anthony's Monastery a true oasis in the Arizona desert. The monastery maintains "The Divine Music Project"—the website that contains more than six thousand pages of Byzantine music in Western and Byzantine notation in the style of chant used in the monasteries of Mount Athos. The words of the hymns are provided in Elizabethan English, Modern English, and Greek.

## St. Anthony the Great Stavropegial Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 3044 North 27th St., Phoenix, AZ, 85016

**Phone:** 602-957-3054, 602-952-7224, 505-434-5277

**E-mail:** geronta@saintanthonymonastery.com, admin@saintanthonymonastery.com

**Website:** No website

**Year of Founding:** 1982

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English and many other languages depending on circumstances

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** January 30 (St. Anthony the Great)

**Name of Superior:** Schema-Igumen Anthony (Agioantonides)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 4

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No

**Description:** Founded in 1982, St. Anthony was originally located on forty acres of property in a desert area in southern New Mexico. In 1987 Fr. Anthony (the monastery's current superior) was asked by the church hierarchy to temporarily move to Phoenix and establish a monastery presence in an urban setting. The hope was that eventually this new monastic community in Phoenix would evolve into a regular parish: married clergyman would be assigned, and so on. But this never happened. At the beginning of the 1990s, Fr. Anthony established close relations with Kievo-Pecherskaya Lavra, in Kiev (Ukraine)—one of the most famous Orthodox monasteries in the world. Fr. Anthony's previous work history includes several high-ranking positions with various American airlines, and he was asked to help to train Ukrainian pilots to fly Boeing aircraft. Fr. Anthony would go to Ukraine and stay for three to four weeks in Kievo-Pecherskaya Lavra while working with pilots. This was beginning of these special relations with Kievo-Pecherskaya Lavra. On February 23, 2011, the monastery was given the status of "stavropegial" monastery: that is, a monastic community that is under direct supervision of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, Metropolitan Hilarion.

## The Holy Monastery of St. Paisius

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** (a) Physical: 10250 S. Sky Blue Rd., Safford, AZ 85546;  
(b) Mailing: PO Box 1075, Safford, AZ 85548

**Phone:** 928-348-4900

**E-mail:** sisters@stpaisiusmonastery.org

**Website:** www.stpaisiusmonastery.org

**Year of Founding:** 1992

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** November 28 (the death of St. Paisius Velichkovsky)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Michaila (Reed)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 22

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 96): The monastery is named after Fr. (Schema Archimandrite) Paisius Velichkovsky, also known as Paisius of Neamt (1722–1794). St. Paisius is remembered for initiating the revival of monasticism in the late eighteenth century in Russia, Moldavia, and the Orthodox East, thus helping the Church recover from the decline in monastic life and

spirituality caused by the wars, troubles, and conflicts of the previous centuries. The monastic community of St. Paisius had its beginnings in Northern California in the early 1990s. At that time many young women began to gather around Mother Michaila. Due to the quickly growing number of sisters—all American-born—in January of 2001 the sisterhood purchased property in Southern Arizona. The desert terrain required much labor to subdue and cultivate. Today an impressive basilica-style katholikon stands as the jewel of the monastery in the midst of desert and is visible for many miles. Extensive olive and fruit orchards have been planted, along with a vegetable garden, to feed the sisters and the many guests. Many acres of land around the main buildings are adorned with beautiful desert landscaping, the work of the sisters' hands. To support themselves, the sisters make prayer ropes and maintain a well-stocked bookstore and gift shop. In the future the monastery will sell olive oil and pomegranates from its orchards. St. Paisius Monastery is also known for its publishing efforts. A full selection of the monastery's publications and prayer ropes can be found on the online store at [www.stpaisiusgiftshop.com](http://www.stpaisiusgiftshop.com). Hundreds of visitors are received each month. Liturgy is served several times a week, along with the full cycle of other church services.

## CALIFORNIA

### Holy Assumption Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 1519 Washington St., Calistoga, CA 94515

**Phone:** 707-942-6244

**E-mail:** [mother.melania@gmail.com](mailto:mother.melania@gmail.com),

[sisters.holyassumptionmonastery@gmail.com](mailto:sisters.holyassumptionmonastery@gmail.com)

**Website:** [www.holyassumptionmonastery.com](http://www.holyassumptionmonastery.com)

**Year of Founding:** 1941

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** August 15 (Dormition)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Melania (Salem)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 11

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For women only. Monastery can refer to some local B&Bs that have special rates for the monastery's visitors

**Description:** Set in the midst of wine country, on the banks of the Napa River, and in the heart of a tourist town, the Holy Assumption Monastery welcomes Orthodox pilgrims and visitors of all backgrounds. Holy Assumption is one of the oldest American Orthodox monasteries. It was founded in the early 1940s by a group of nuns who fled from Russia in search of freedom to practice their faith. After originally settling in San Francisco, they soon discovered the quiet town of Calistoga, eighty miles north of the city and purchased a property by the Napa River. The nuns built a small wooden chapel and began to hold services, to which all always were welcome. For various reasons the last nuns left in the early

1980s, and the monastery functioned as a parish church for years. An ambitious restoration project has begun in 1998 to make the monastery once again habitable for a community of nuns. The grounds were transformed into a beautiful garden—a tranquil place sought out for reflection and contemplation. The chapel underwent extensive renovation. The main building was rebuilt as a refectory (dining hall) and living quarters for the nuns. The grounds were graced with church bells and a koi pond. In October 2009 the first nuns arrived to the revived Holy Assumption Monastery from the community of St. Barbara Monastery in Santa Paula, California. The life of the Holy Assumption Monastery revolves around daily worship services. At the same time, the sisters are accustomed to and always welcome to their community numerous pilgrims, tourists, and local residents who are drawn by the stillness, beautiful gardens, and koi pond. To support itself economically the monastery produces and sells wooden caskets and runs a well-stocked gift shop (with such items as handmade wallets, tote bags, lavender sachets and essential oils, honey, olive oil, vinegar, and much more). On the second Sunday of each month, Holy Assumption holds the so-called "Friends Gatherings" that are open to the public. These afternoon events typically feature a lecture by a guest speaker, vespers in the monastery's chapel, and a communal potluck dinner.

### Holy Cross Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 34580 Palomares Rd., Castro Valley, CA 94552

**Phone:** 510-581-2778

**E-mail:** [cybermonk@holycrossmonastery.org](mailto:cybermonk@holycrossmonastery.org),  
[cybermonachus@gmail.com](mailto:cybermonachus@gmail.com)

**Website:** [www.holycrossmonastery.org](http://www.holycrossmonastery.org)

**Year of Founding:** 1979

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English, Romanian, Church Slavonic

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** May 7 (Appearance of the Venerable Cross of the Lord at Jerusalem)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Stephen (Scott)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 4

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 92): Only forty minutes from San Francisco and only few miles away from Silicon Valley, the Holy Cross Monastery feels entirely disconnected from the outside world. It sits on the nine acres of beautifully landscaped property, surrounded by hills and lush vegetation. A creek meanders through the monastery's land, and wildlife is abundant here, with deer, raccoons, squirrels, and wild turkeys being frequent "visitors" to the monastery. The origins of this monastic community are associated with the name of the late Archimandrite Theodor (Micka). When his mother died, she left him an inheritance with the purpose of founding a monastery. Fr. Theodore worked as a parish priest when he met his first disciple: a young man, now known as Fr. Stephen,

the current monastery's abbot. It was in 1970 that the two made their vow to build a monastery together. It took them nine years to save enough money to buy a property that would eventually be consecrated as Holy Cross Monastery. The monks performed most of the labor that transformed the rustic rural land into a frontier of paradise. The majestic redwood trees that tower today behind the main church building were planted by the fathers themselves. Holy Cross Monastery places a strong emphasis on hospitality and on serving the spiritual needs of Orthodox Christians of all cultural traditions. Orthodox faithful of various ethnic backgrounds come here not only for church services, but also for weddings, baptisms, and day retreats. Further, Holy Cross Monastery has many friends and supporters who are Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and from other non-Christian backgrounds. An elegant dining space and a covered portico are available for receptions. Holy Cross Monastery also provides space for seminars and conferences.

## Holy Resurrection Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 48600 Via Vaquero Rd, Temecula, CA 92590

**Phone:** 951-506-2890

**E-mail:** resurrectionmonastery@gmail.com,  
frdionisiemarian@gmail.com

**Website:** www.resurrectionmonastery.org

**Year of Founding:** 2014

**Church Calendar Followed:** New (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:**  
English, Romanian

**Feast Day:** Pascha (Easter), November 21 (Entrance into the Temple of the Mother of God)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Dionisie (Rodila)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 2

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No. Exceptions, however, can be made, and overnight accommodations can be provided to persons that are known to the monastic community.

**Description:** Holy Resurrection Monastery lies on a beautiful twenty-acre parcel of land in Southern California near the city of Temecula. The peaceful and serene property includes a house, a guesthouse, gardens, orchards, and undeveloped land that allows for future expansion. The small brotherhood consists of two monks from Romania. This is a very new monastic community, and according to the abbot, Fr. Dionisie: "Our Monastery desires, with God's grace, to share the gift we have received with others and to grow a monastic community from the seeds God has planted and those He will continue to plant. With God's mercy we will endeavor to share our Orthodox faith with all seekers of the truth and offer Holy Resurrection Monastery as a haven of prayer for all who enter with faith and love."

## Monastery of the Holy Theotokos the Life Giving Spring

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** (a) Physical: 38532 Dunlap Rd., Dunlap, CA 93621;  
(b) Mailing: PO Box 549, Dunlap, CA 93621

**Phone:** 559-338-3110

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** www.stnicholasranch.org/monastery.html

**Year of Founding:** 1993

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:**  
Greek

**Feast Day:** Bright Friday (i.e., first Friday following Easter)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Markela

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 22

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No. But visitors to the monastery can stay at the nearby St. Nicholas Ranch, which belongs to the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco (contact information for St. Nicholas ranch: 559-338-0065, info@stnicholasranch.org)

**Description:** The monastic community of the Holy Theotokos, "the Life Giving Spring," began in 1993 with two nuns who came from Greece. The late Metropolitan Anthony of San Francisco made a significant effort to build extensive facilities. In 2003 fourteen more nuns arrived and moved into these facilities. In 2010 the sprawling Byzantine-style katholikon (major church building) was consecrated. The nuns support themselves by farming, painting icons, and producing various handicrafts. The monastery is situated on a hill overlooking the nearby St. Nicholas Ranch and Retreat Center, which belongs to the GOA Metropolis of San Francisco. Visitors to the monastery can stay at St. Nicholas Ranch.

## Monastery of St. John of San Francisco

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** (a) Physical: 21770 Ponderosa Way, Manton, CA 96059;  
(b) Mailing: PO Box 439, Manton, CA 96059

**Phone:** 530-474-5964

**E-mail:** frinnocent@monasteryofstjohn.org,  
superior@monasteryofstjohn.org,  
office@monasteryofstjohn.org

**Website:** www.monasteryofstjohn.org

**Year of Founding:** 1996

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:**  
English

**Feast Day:** July 2 (St. John of San Francisco)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Innocent (Green)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 9

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see

article on p. 134): The Monastery of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco is located on forty-two acres of scenic Ponderosa forest in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains near Mt. Lassen National Park. The brotherhood seeks to live the traditional communal Orthodox monastic life as established by St. Pachomius and St. Basil in the fourth century. Most of the members of the monastic community are American-born, and all services are conducted in English. The brotherhood strives to earn a living by making 100-percent-natural beeswax candles, beekeeping (the monastery produces the so-called “Honeydew” honey with a very strong taste and rich mineral content), translating and publishing books (the monastery maintains its own publishing company: Divine Ascent Press), and operating a bookstore. The monks also grow some of their own food. The town of Manton is home to seven commercial wineries, and each year, on August 19 (the feast of the Transfiguration, according to the Julian calendar), the monks perform the ceremony of blessing the grapes and vineyards with holy water. The monastery is a popular destination for pilgrimage and visitation, where hospitality is offered to all: both Orthodox and non-Orthodox persons. A distinct feature of the Monastery of St. John of San Francisco is its regularly offered, guided spiritual retreats, typically held on weekends. For the schedule and subjects of these retreats, visit the monastery’s website.

## Monastery of St. Macarius the Great of Egypt

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 5395 Orchard St., Montclair, CA 91763

**Phone:** 714-398-7677

**E-mail:** Saints\_endurance@yahoo.com

**Website:**

**Year of Founding:** 2015

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (Revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Arabic

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** Arabic

**Feast Day:** January 19th (St. Macarius the Great of Egypt)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Thekla

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 9

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** The newly formed monastic community of St. Macarius the Great of Egypt was established by a group of former Coptic Orthodox Christians—the natives of Egypt. A core group of the members of this monastic community was received in the Orthodox Church by Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) in United Kingdom and then moved to the United States. Back in Egypt, they belonged to the so-called “Makarasat” lay movement which is known for its charity and education work within the Coptic community. Presently, the Monastery of St. Macarius the Great of Egypt uses the facility of the former Roman Catholic convent.

## Monastery of the Venerable St. Silouan the Athonite

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR)

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 21285 Old Sonora Columbia Road, Sonora, CA 95370-8807

**Phone:** 209-694-0391, 831-345-8719

**E-mail:** st.silouanmonastery@me.com

**Website:**

**Year of Founding:** 2015

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English, Church Slavonic

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** September 24 (repose of St. Silouan, elder of St. Panteleimon monastery, Mount Athos)

**Name of Superior:** Archimandrite Irenei (Steenberg)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 3

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** This new (consecrated in September 2015) US Orthodox Christian monastery is located in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains, not far from the historical Gold Rush town of Sonora, California. From the heights of the monastery’s 47-acre parcel of land one can glimpse parts of the renowned Yosemite National Park. Possessing both peaks and lowlands, and with a natural year-round water supply, the site is well suited for the monastic life. The fathers will live in individual cells that will dot the hillsides above the entrance and current complex. On the hills’ inclines, plans are being made for the construction of a chapel for daily prayers and a new refectory. Below, towards the entrance to the monastery, are existing structures currently serving the needs of the brotherhood. In this area, a monastery’s main church (“catholicon”) will be constructed. The core language of the monastery—regardless of the national or ethnic background of any individual monk—is English, following a practice observed at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Essex, England, which was founded by a close disciple of Saint Silouan the Athonite, Elder Sophrony (Sakharov). The language of the worship services may vary according to the preference, abilities and ease of prayer for a given member of the community (chiefly English and Church Slavonic), but the day-to-day affairs of monastery life are conducted in English, thus facilitating a vital unity among the brothers.

## Our Lady of Kazan Skete

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 2735 Victoria Drive, Santa Rosa, CA 95407

**Phone:** 707-542-7798

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** No website

**Year of Founding:** 1979

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English, Church Slavonic  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English  
**Feast Day:** July 21 (Kazan Icon of the Theotokos), November 4 (Kazan Icon of the Theotokos)  
**Name of Superior:** Mother Susanna (Paine)  
**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 5  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women  
**Description:** Our Lady of Kazan Skete is named after the famous sixteenth-century Russian icon depicting the Virgin Mary as the patroness of the city of Kazan (Russia). The icon was regarded and venerated as a protector of Russia (especially in the military context) until its theft and likely destruction in 1904. Besides a monastic life of prayer, the small sisterhood at Our Lady of Kazan Skete is always busy with receiving guests, baking prosphora for local parishes, gardening, and making prayer ropes.

## St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America  
**Male or Female:** Female  
**Address:** 15799 Ojai Rd., Santa Paula, CA 93060  
**Phone:** 805-921-1563  
**E-mail:** mothervictoria@gmail.com, sbmonastery@gmail.com  
**Website:** www.stbarbaramonastery.org  
**Year of Founding:** 1992  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English  
**Feast Day:** December 4 (Great Martyr Barbara)  
**Name of Superior:** Mother Victoria (Shnurer)  
**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 4  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For women only  
**Description:** Founded in 1992, St. Barbara Monastery was originally located in Santa Barbara, California. Later the monastery was able to purchase a sizeable property in the mountains near Santa Paula and relocated there in 2005. In this new location the community quickly expanded to sixteen members. However, when county zoning regulations—disallowing trailers, in which a number of sisters were temporarily housed—were enforced, ten sisters were obliged to move to the Holy Assumption Monastery in Calistoga, California. The remaining sisters at St. Barbara Monastery are engaged in the effort to build a proper monastery complex so that the monastery may grow once again. A relic of the monastery’s patron saint, the Great Martyr Barbara, taken from the principal relics, which lie in Kiev (Ukraine), is in the monastery’s chapel, as are relics of St. Anne, the mother of the Theotokos; St. James, the son of Zebedee; St. Victoria, martyr of Carthage; St. Herman of Alaska; St. Nektarios of Pentapolis; St. Elizabeth the New Martyr; St. Raphael of Brooklyn; St. John of San Francisco; St. Luke the Blessed Surgeon; St. Alexis of Ugine; and the Precious and Life-Giving Cross. St. Barbara Monastery is known for making and selling

the redwood caskets. Each casket is crafted at the monastery from solid redwood and is hand-oiled and finished by the sisters. The monastic community also earns its living by growing lavender and producing lavender products, giving retreats, and operating a small bookstore and gift shop where local honey is sold. Everyone is welcome to attend the liturgical services in the monastery’s chapel and to share the meals with the sisters.

## St. Herman of Alaska Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA  
**Male or Female:** Male  
**Address:** (a) Physical: 10 Beegum Gorge Rd., Platina, CA 96076; (b) Mailing: PO Box 70, Platina, CA 96076  
**Phone:** 530-352-4430  
**E-mail:** frdamascene@yahoo.com, stherman@stherman.com  
**Website:** www.sainthermanmonastery.org, www.sainthermanmonastery.com  
**Year of Founding:** 1970  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English  
**Feast Day:** August 9 (Glorification of St. Herman), November 28 (Repose of St. Herman), December 25 (St. Herman’s commemoration day)  
**Name of Superior:** Fr. Damascene (Christensen)  
**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 13  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women  
**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 126): Isolated on a forested mountain, the Monastery of St. Herman of Alaska is a world of its own. The snow-white adobe church is crowned with golden onion-like cupolas, and its interior is richly decorated with icons, paintings, and frescoes. The St. Herman brotherhood views itself as monastic community in the Russian tradition (with especially strong ties to traditions of monasticism in Northern Russia). At the same time, it is an entirely English speaking community, and all monks are American-born converts to Orthodoxy. St. Herman Monastery is primarily known through its publications. The brotherhood prints original books, translates major Orthodox works into English, and publishes the bimonthly English-language periodical *The Orthodox Word* and the annual *Saint Herman Church Calendar* (the last is regarded as one of the most comprehensive listings of saints associated with each day of the year). The monastery was founded in 1963 by two laymen, Gleb Podmoshensky (later Fr. Herman) and Eugene Rose (later Fr. Seraphim), with the blessing of St. John (Maximovitch), archbishop of San Francisco (Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia). Originally it was a lay brotherhood, dedicated to spreading the Orthodox Christian faith to American seekers. In 1969, with a vision of establishing a missionary monastery, the brotherhood acquired land near the town of Platina in the mountains of Northern California and moved there. The writings of Hieromonk Seraphim

(Rose)—one of the brotherhood’s cofounders—are greatly respected in Orthodox Churches throughout the world (especially his books *The Soul after Death* and *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*) and have been translated into twelve languages. Unlike most US Orthodox monasteries, St. Herman is a truly “rustic” and intentionally austere place. The only electricity source is solar batteries, and electric lights are installed only in the church and trapeza (dining hall). It is twenty-five miles from the nearest cell phone signal, and there is no Internet access. St. Herman of Alaska attracts significant number of Orthodox pilgrims and other visitors.

## St. Xenia Skete

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 40500 Hwy 36 West, Wildwood, CA 96076

**Phone:** 530-628-1034

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** No website

**Year of Founding:** 1980

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** February 6 (St. Xenia of Petersburg)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Dorothea (Vest)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 4

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For women only

**Description:** St. Xenia Skete was founded in response to requests by many women who came as pilgrims to the nearby St. Herman of Alaska Orthodox Monastery (Platina, CA) in search of a monastic life similar to that of the monks at St. Herman’s: far from the world, in the wilderness of the Northern California mountains. The monks at St. Herman Monastery asked the counsel of Schemamonk Nikodim of Karoulia, Mount Athos (Greece) about what they should do concerning these women interested in monastic life. He blessed them and also sent as a blessing his mantia (“robe”) for the first tonsured nun at the newly established skete. Fr. Seraphim Rose, the well-known Orthodox writer and theologian, was the first spiritual father of the skete and gave the skete the typikon that is still followed today. The life of the sisterhood is divided between the full cycle of worship services and numerous chores such as growing vegetables and flowers, hosting pilgrims and giving them tours of the monastery, making prayer ropes, and so on. Similarly to the nearby St. Herman Monastery, St. Xenia sisterhood is also involved in publishing books and other materials related to the Orthodox faith.

# COLORADO

## Protection of the Holy Virgin Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** (a) Physical: 2343 County Rd. 403, Lake George, CO 80827; (b) Mailing: PO Box 416, Lake George, CO 80827

**Phone:** 719-748-3999

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** No website

**Year of Founding:** 1993

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** October 1 (Protection of the Theotokos)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Cassiana (Petroff)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 2

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women. However, men are accepted for overnight visits only if: (a) they are accompanied by a female relative or (b) they are Orthodox ordained clergy.

**Description:** The Protection of Holy Virgin Monastery is located in the wilderness of the Pike National Forest at the altitude of nine thousand feet. Mother Cassiana (Petroff), the monastery’s superior, previously spent eleven years at Transfiguration Monastery in Pennsylvania and three years in Varatic Monastery in Romania. The changing demographics of the United States led the founding sisters to feel that the Rocky Mountain region would not only be an area conducive to the life of prayer, but would also be fertile ground to plant a new monastic community. Since its inception several women have tried to join the monastery but found the physical labor (gardening, grounds maintenance, collecting firewood for heating) too demanding and the high altitude too harsh. Thus, the community remains small; however, there is ample room in the buildings to house more sisters. In 2002 a guest wing was added, and the monastery always welcomes visitors, especially those who are willing to volunteer and help with various chores. The sisters strive to support themselves through mounting icon prints, making prayer ropes, speaking at retreats and conferences, as well as writing and publishing books. The monastery also has its own newsletter, *The Veil*, which is published three times a year. The sisters manage to raise a small garden in spite of the nine-thousand-foot elevation and the short growing season. The flock of hens has brought many neighbors to the monastery to purchase fresh eggs.

# FLORIDA

## Annunciation of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 13486 NW Hwy 225, Reddick, FL 32686

**Phone:** 352-591-1803

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** www.holyannunciation.org

**Year of Founding:** 1998

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English, Greek

**Feast Day:** March 25 (Annunciation of the Theotokos), September 3 (St. Nektarios of Aegina)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Agapia (Nestoras)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 2

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For women only

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 76): The nuns at Annunciation Monastery trace their spiritual heritage to the ancient Monastery of St. John the Forerunner in Serres (Greece), which was established in the thirteenth century and is one of the most frequently visited pilgrimage sites in northern Greece. The nuns at Annunciation Monastery make high-quality incense with different aromas (gardenia, myrrh, rose, poppy, cypress) using the ancient recipes from Mount Athos. The sisters also produce hand-crafted soaps and lotions. The monastery has extensive and well-manicured grounds.

## Panagia Vlahernon Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 12600 W. Highway 318, Williston, FL 32696

**Phone:** 352-591-1716

**E-mail:** fathers@panagiavlahernon.org, po@pvmail.org, gm@pvmail.org

**Website:** www.panagiavlahernon.org

**Year of Founding:** 1999

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English, Greek

**Feast Day:** July 2 (Deposition of the Sacred Robe of the Mother of God in Blachernae), fifth Sunday of Great Lent (St. Savvas the New of Kalymnos), December 25 (St. Savvas the New of Kalymnos)

**Name of Superior:** Monk Modestos (Alexopoulos)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 10

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For men only

**Description:** The Monastery of Panagia Vlahernon is named after the famous historical church of the Theotokos (Mary,

Mother of God) of Blachernae, which was built in the fifth century in Constantinople (current Istanbul). The monastic community of Panagia Vlahernon was founded by Elder Ephraim of Philotheou. The monks came from St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery in Florence (Arizona) and from the Monastery of Philotheou on Mount Athos. The monastery lies on a beautifully landscaped property with rolling hills, in an area of Florida known for its Spanish moss-covered oak trees, horse farms, and horse-training facilities. The monastery’s land was originally a sugar plantation. The monks support themselves by making beeswax candles and maintaining a bookstore and gift shop. All services are in Greek, and the monastery follows the cenobitic (communal) way of monastic life. Generally speaking, all things are common to all, and everyone follows the same daily schedule, under the discretion of the abbot.

## St. Nicholas Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** (a) Physical: 111 Evergreen Rd., North Fort Myers, FL 33903; (b) Mailing: 1340 Piney Rd., North Fort Myers, FL 33903

**Phone:** 239-997-2847

**E-mail:** motherandrea@earthlink.net, info@saintnicholasmonastery.org

**Website:** www.saintnicholasmonastery.org

**Year of Founding:** 2003

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English, Spanish

**Feast Day:** December 19 (St. Nicholas the Wonderworker)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Andrea (Nicholas)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 3

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No. Exceptions, however, can be made, and overnight accommodations can be provided to: (a) persons who are known to the monastic community, and (b) persons who are recommended by the parish clergy.

**Description:** The St. Nicholas Monastery lies on a beautiful eleven-acre property that, with the help of numerous volunteers and friends of the monastery, is being constantly transformed into a place of splendor and spiritual retreat. Among the treasures of the monastery are many holy relics, some of which are on display in the church for veneration by the faithful. The monastery has two chapels, dedicated to the Holy Prophet Moses and St. Nektarios the Wonderworker. The nuns at St. Nicholas Monastery speak English and Spanish, while the liturgical services are celebrated mainly in English with some Slavonic and Greek. The monastery maintains Archimandrite John’s Memorial Library, with more than ten thousand volumes. The library is dedicated to the founder of St. Nicholas Monastery, Schema-Igumen John (Lewis), whose personal collection of Eastern Orthodox texts comprises the core of the collection. Since Archimandrite John’s repose in 2007, the library has continued to grow through gifts and

bequests from individuals and from monasteries around the world. Of special interest in the collection are Eastern Orthodox service and liturgical books in multiple languages. The monastery operates a gift shop and a bookstore.

## GEORGIA

### Monastery of the Glorious Ascension

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church  
Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 5052 South Dixie Highway, Resaca, GA 30721

**Phone:** 706-277-9442

**E-mail:** sisterchristonymphi@gmail.com, info@monastery.org,  
gloriousascension@gmail.com

**Website:** www.motga.org

**Year of Founding:** 1977

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:**  
English

**Feast Day:** Feast of the Ascension

**Name of Superior:** Mother Christonymphi

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 2

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men  
and women

**Description:** The Monastery of the Glorious Ascension is situated on a picturesque 113 acres of wooded, rural land in northwest Georgia, on Highway 41, between Dalton and Calhoun, Georgia. It is committed to the traditional monastic life of liturgical worship, private prayer, and work. The monastery has a bookstore and a gift shop that offer a variety of books, CDs, jewelry, prayer ropes, icons, and clergy and church supplies. Of particular interest are the 100-percent-beeswax candles made by the monastery for use in church and in private homes. Another specialty is the 100-percent-natural soaps (with no any chemical or detergent additives) made in small batches by hand. The monastery offers guided retreats for clergy and laity. Many weekend retreats are also open to the wider public.

## ILLINOIS

### Holy Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese  
of America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 17906 Route 173, Harvard, IL 60033

**Phone:** 815-943-3588

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** www.holytransfigurationmonastery.org,  
www.htgom.org

**Year of Founding:** 1998

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:**  
English, Greek

**Feast Day:** August 5–6 (Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus  
Christ), May 7–8 (Feast of St. John the Theologian)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Akakios (Mantjos)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 4

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No

**Description:** In 1998 Fr. Akakios, current abbot of Holy Transfiguration Monastery, was sent from St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery in Arizona to establish the first Greek Orthodox monastic community in Illinois. The monastery is in a very quiet location and receives few visitors. The small chapel at the monastery is dedicated to St. John the Evangelist and Theologian. The small brotherhood is always busy with the upkeep of the grounds and making various handicrafts (including gifts for baptisms and weddings). The monastery also produces and sells custom-tailored clerical vestments and clothing as well as hand-crafted pure beeswax candles. All these items can be found on and ordered from the monastery's website. The gate is open daily between 6:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., and everyone is welcome to visit. There is currently no overnight stay available for pilgrims at the monastery, but within five to ten minutes away there are a hotel and a motel.

### Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God (New Gracanica) Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in  
the USA

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** (a) Physical: 35240 West Grant Ave, Third Lake, IL  
60046; (b) Mailing: PO Box 371, Grayslake, IL 60030

**Phone:** 847-223-4300

**E-mail:** eparhija@newgracanica.com

**Website:** www.newgracanica.com

**Year of Founding:** 1977

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Church  
Slavonic, Serbian

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:**  
Serbian

**Feast Day:** October 14 (Protection of the Mother of God)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Serafim (Baltic)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 6

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men  
and women

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 118): The Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God (New Gracanica) Monastery is a major spiritual center for Serbians living in the United States and one of the most-visited American Orthodox monasteries. Thousands of visitors come annually to the monastery not only to pray, but for various social and educational events, retreats, children's camps, baptisms, and weddings. The monastery also serves as the diocesan office and residence of Bishop Longin (Krcic), the bishop of New Gracanica/Midwestern American Serbian Orthodox Diocese. The impressive architectural complex

sprawls on sixty acres of land, and the main church (New Gracanica Church) is a replica of the medieval Church of Gracanica of Kosovo—the famous church that was built originally in 1321 in Serbia and subsequently was destroyed and rebuilt several times. The interior of the church is richly decorated with wooden furnishings, ornate gold and crystal chandeliers, imposing icons, and a terrazzo floor. Brightly colored Byzantine-style frescoes cover the church's walls, pillars, and domes. The monastery has set aside thirteen acres of land for a cemetery that has over five thousand gravesites. The monastery maintains Joe Buley Memorial Library, housing a collection of materials on Serbian history and culture, both in English and Serbian. The collection is especially strong in the areas of twentieth-century Serbian history and of the history of Serbian communities in the United States. Nearby Druce Lake with its beach is a scenic place to relax and picnic.

## St. Sava Serbian Stavropegial Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** (a) Physical: 32377 N. Milwaukee Ave, Libertyville, IL 60048; (b) Mailing: PO Box 519, Libertyville, IL 60048

**Phone:** 847-362-2440, 847-693-8865

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** <http://www.serborth.org/education.html>

**Year of Founding:** 1923

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Serbian, Church Slavonic

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** Serbian, English

**Feast Day:** January 27 (Burning of the Relics of St. Sava)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Serafim (Milojkovic)

**Number of Monks in Residence:** 1

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No.

**Description:** One of the oldest US Orthodox monasteries, St. Sava was founded in 1923 by Montenegrin Bishop Mardary as the theological school for the Serbian Orthodox Church. During World War II the Libertyville monastery became a refuge for the Orthodox Serbs fleeing from war-torn Yugoslavia. After World War II Peter II of Yugoslavia, the last Serbian king, lived at the monastery after being exiled by Joseph Broz Tito. He died in 1970 and—according to his will—was buried there. In 2013 his remains were repatriated to Serbia. Today St. Sava monastery is home to the St. Sava Serbian Orthodox School of Theology. St. Sava School of Theology provides a four-year bachelor's-level theological education for the priestly and religious education vocations. The classes are taught in both English and Serbian and are open to both male and female students. St. Sava Monastery also maintains a historical Serbian Orthodox cemetery.

# INDIANA

## Nativity of the Mother of God Serbian Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 32787 Early Rd, New Carlisle, IN 46552

**Phone:** 574-654-7994

**E-mail:** [nmgmonastery@yahoo.com](mailto:nmgmonastery@yahoo.com)

**Website:** [www.motherofgodmonastery.com](http://www.motherofgodmonastery.com)

**Year of Founding:** 1994

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English, Serbian.

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English.

**Feast Day:** September 21 (Nativity of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary).

**Name of Superior:** Mother Makrina (Zuck)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 4

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women.

**Description:** Nestled in the rolling hills of northwestern Indiana, far away from the noise and bustle of big cities, on a spacious piece of wooded land that resembles the fertile regions of Shumadija (in Serbia), lies the Serbian Orthodox Monastery of the Nativity of the Mother of God. Its foundation was a realization of a long-time dream of Mother Evpraksija (Paunovic), the first abbess, who searched for a way to build a monastic community in North America that would maintain the traditions of such holy places as Zhica, Studenica, and Ljubostinja, and other old Serbian monasteries. The monastery was consecrated on June 19, 1994. The Liturgy was served by His Holiness Pavle, the patriarch of Serbia. Over the years the monastery's complex continued to expand. Today it includes a Byzantine-style church (whose interior is painted with frescoes), bell tower, pavilion, “konak” (a big, palatial-style house used as official residence), and two guesthouses. The monastery's store boasts a variety of Orthodox books, manuals, prayer books, magazines, and other publications in English and Serbian, as well as icons and other religious items. The sisterhood strives to support itself by maintaining beehives and producing honey, raising chickens, and selling eggs. The quietness of the place combined with spacious and comfortable facilities make Monastery of the Nativity a popular destination for retreats and Serbian Orthodox youth conferences. Worship services are held daily according to the rules and traditions of the Serbian Church. The sisterhood of the Monastery of the Nativity of the Mother of God welcomes all Orthodox Christians to visit and to partake in the daily life and liturgical services of the monastery.

## St. Xenia Metochion (St. Xenia Monastic Community)

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA

**Male or Female:** Female  
**Address:** 1901 N. Pennsylvania St., Indianapolis, IN 46202  
**Phone:** 317-691-6672  
**E-mail:** No e-mail  
**Website:** No website  
**Year of Founding:** 1990  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English.  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English  
**Feast Day:** February 6 (St. Xenia of Petersburg).  
**Name of Superior:** Mother Katherine (Weston)  
**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 3  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No  
**Description:** In the late 1980s Christ the Savior Orthodox Brotherhood in Indianapolis, Indiana, founded a new parish: the Joy of All Who Sorrow. In 1990 Fr. Herman (Podmoshensky) sent several nuns there from St. Xenia Skete in Wildwood, California, so that they can live in the brotherhood’s house and assist the newly established parish in its spiritual growth and formation in the Orthodox faith. The duties of the nuns also included running the parish bookstore. What started as a temporary arrangement has become a permanent mission. St. Xenia’s superior, Mother Katherine (Weston), grew up in the Episcopal Church but became Orthodox while working in mid-1980s as a counselor at the Raphael House Family Shelter (sponsored by the Orthodox Church) in San Francisco, California. She has a master’s degree in pastoral care and counseling and is licensed as mental health counselor in the state of Indiana. Her small private practice helps support this small monastic community. St. Xenia Metochion offers weekly (Monday evening) icon-painting classes.

## KANSAS

### St. Silouan the Athonite

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese  
**Male or Female:** Male  
**Address:** 1328 N. Tallyrand St., Wichita, KS 67206  
**Phone:** 316-841-9575  
**E-mail:** silouanmonastery@gmail.com  
**Website:** No website  
**Year of Founding:** 2014  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English  
**Feast Day:** September 24 (St. Silouan the Athonite)  
**Name of Superior:** Bishop Basil (Essey); Contact person: Fr. Philip (Vreeland)  
**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 3  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** Not presently, but in the future overnight accommodations will be offered for male visitors  
**Description:** St. Silouan Monastery is the center of a monastic brotherhood that consists, at present, of seven members: one

bishop, two hieromonks, two hierodeacons, a nonordained schemamonk, and a nonordained rassophore monk. The brotherhood was canonically established by Metropolitan Philip (Saliba) on June 14, 2010. On March 7, 2014, very shortly before his final hospitalization and subsequent repose, the metropolitan gave his approval for the purchase of the house and property. These were blessed by Metropolitan Silouan of Buenos Aires and All Argentina, then patriarchal vicar, on the feast of St. George, April 23, 2014. Members of the brotherhood have been resident since fall of the same year. It is the first male monastic community in the Antiochian Archdiocese. St. Silouan Monastery is also the first and so far the only Orthodox monastery in the state of Kansas.

## MARYLAND

### Sacred Monastery of St. Nina

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Georgian Orthodox Church  
**Male or Female:** Female  
**Address:** 9002 Clemsonville Rd., Union Bridge, MD 21791  
**Phone:** 615-497-9789  
**E-mail:** saintnina@fhc.org  
**Website:** www.saintnina-monastery.org  
**Year of Founding:** 2012  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English  
**Feast Day:** January 27 (St. Nina), June 1 (Entrance of St. Nina the Enlightener of Georgia)  
**Name of Superior:** Mother Aemiliane (Hanson)  
**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 10  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women  
**Description:** The Sacred Monastery of St. Nina is located in Union Bridge, Maryland, near Washington, DC, and Baltimore. The sisterhood traces its spiritual origins to Greece. Elder Dionysios, abbot of the Holy Monastery of the Dormition in Petra, Greece, is regarded by the sisters as their spiritual father. Besides St. Nina Monastery proper, the nuns of the same sisterhood also reside in four other monasteries in Greece and Norway. Accordingly, St. Nina sisterhood is very “international,” with nuns coming from four different countries. The impressive monastery complex includes 131 acres of land with two ponds, a church, a refectory, a big barn, and five residential buildings (the oldest dating back to 1821). The sprawling and attractive grounds of St. Nina Monastery are used by local Orthodox parishes for day retreats. In the summer St. Nina hosts camps for youth ages eight to fifteen. It also offers icon-painting workshops. The monastery runs a well-stocked gift shop. Many of items sold there are hand-produced by the sisters, including: dried herbs (mint, rosemary, thyme), greeting cards, incense, and icons. The monastery maintains an Orthodox Christian cemetery. It offers burial sites, church and clergy for funeral services, a fellowship hall for the mercy meal, as well as perpetual care of graves and commemorations of the deceased.

# MICHIGAN

## Brotherhood of St. John Climacus

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia  
**Male or Female:** Male  
**Address:** (a) Physical: 17745 Erickson Dr., Atlantic Mine, MI 49905; (b) Mailing: PO Box 234, Atlantic Mine, MI 49905  
**Phone:** 906-487-7013  
**E-mail:** brotherhood@ss-sergius-herman-valaam.org  
**Website:** www.ss-sergius-herman-valaam.org/brotherhood.html  
**Year of Founding:** 2011  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English  
**Feast Day:** Fourth Sunday of Great Lent (Commemoration of St. John of the Ladder [Climacus])  
**Name of Superior:** Fr. Alexander (Reichert)  
**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 3  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For men only.  
**Description:** The monastic Brotherhood of St. John Climacus was established in 2012 by Bishop Peter of Cleveland (Diocese of Chicago and Mid-America, Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia). All monastics of the Diocese of Chicago and Mid-America are considered members of this monastic community. The Brotherhood is associated with and located at Sts. Sergius & Herman Valaam parish in Atlantic Mine on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The parish’s rectory is used by the brothers as their living quarters.

## Dormition of the Mother of God Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America  
**Male or Female:** Female  
**Address:** (a) 3389 Rives Eaton Rd., Rives Junction, MI 49277; (b) Mailing: PO Box 128, Rives Junction, MI 49277  
**Phone:** 517-569-2873  
**E-mail:** dormitionmonastery@dormitionmonastery.org  
**Website:** www.dormitionmonastery.org  
**Year of Founding:** 1987  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English, Romanian, Greek  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English, Romanian  
**Feast Day:** August 15 (Dormition of the Mother of God).  
**Name of Superior:** Mother Gabriela (Ursache)  
**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 8  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women.  
**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 80): The Dormition Monastery is in South Central Michigan, in the small farming community of Rives Junction. It sits on 220 acres of wooded land with an array of wildlife. The monastery was founded by three nuns from Romania, in a desire to pursue missionary work and to spread

the Orthodox faith in America. The original property had an old farmhouse and a pole barn: the former became the residence for the nuns, and the latter was turned into a chapel. As the years passed, the monastery expanded significantly to include a summer pavilion, a new house for the sisterhood, offices and work rooms, a library, a large garage, a cemetery, a prayer hermitage in the woods, a gift shop, and a museum building. Hospitality facilities include a twenty-four-bed guesthouse with spacious conference room. A large outdoor pavilion can be used for summer retreats. The monastery also has a “children’s garden”—an educational place that allows children to explore and learn about the Orthodox Faith. The children’s garden is in a large periwinkle area with trees and bushes separated by walking paths, all leading to areas of discovery. The garden contains shrines, rocks with passages from Holy Scripture, and images of an angel, a fish, or the Greek alpha and omega. A small church replete with an iconostasis and images of nuns and monks adorns the top of a mountain of rocks. The monastery hosts iconography workshops, conferences, and retreats. The sisterhood keeps busy by offering hospitality to visitors; sewing priestly vestments and altar covers; painting and mounting icons; and making prayer ropes, beaded eggs, and altar bread. The sisters also travel to parishes around the United States and Canada to conduct spiritual retreats for adult and youth groups. The most important event in the monastery’s life is an annual pilgrimage held on the feast of Dormition, on August 15.

## Holy Ascension Romanian Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America  
**Male or Female:** Male  
**Address:** 15143 Sheridan Rd., Clinton, MI 49236  
**Phone:** 517-456-4474  
**E-mail:** monastery@holy-ascension.org, ascension-monastery@yahoo.com  
**Website:** www.holy-ascension.org  
**Year of Founding:** 2001  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Romanian  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** Romanian  
**Feast Day:** Holy Ascension (40th day after Easter), October 1 (Protection of the Mother of God)  
**Name of Superior:** His Grace Bishop Ireneu (Duvlea).  
**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 3  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women  
**Description:** The Holy Ascension Monastery belongs to the Romanian Episcopate of the Orthodox Church in America. It was founded on February 23, 2001, the date when the Orthodox Church celebrates the Feast of St. Polycarp of Smyrna. This date is significant for Romanians living in the United States, because St. Polycarp was the patron saint of the first Romanian Orthodox bishop in North America, Bishop Polycarp (Morusca), who always had a dream “to bring the light of Romanian Orthodox monastic life to North America.” The monastery’s brotherhood is comprised of monks who

came from the Brancoveanu Monastery at Sâmbata de Sus, Brasov, Romania. The newly established monastery quickly became a place of pilgrimage and fellowship for the Romanian-American Orthodox community. The Ascension Monastery welcomes pilgrims and those who would like to spend several days in a spiritual and tranquil atmosphere. The guesthouse offers comfortable accommodations for forty people, a living area, and a large conference room.

## Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 125 Sturdevant Rd., Smiths Creek, MI 48074

**Phone:** 810-367-8134

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** No website

**Year of Founding:** 1998

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English, Greek

**Feast Day:** Pentecost (seventh Sunday after Easter)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Joseph (Mammis)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 8

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** This is a very "quiet" monastic community. Relatively few visitors come to monastery, but monks are always ready to offer hospitality and talk with the pilgrims. The brotherhood supports itself by gardening and making candles. The monastery's land is carefully landscaped and has large pond. Fr. Joseph (Mammis), the monastery's superior, grew up in a Greek family in Canada: he is fluent in Greek, English, and French. Most of the other brothers are also Greek Canadians.

article on p. 138): St. Sabbas Orthodox Monastery is located in the city of Harper Woods, northeast of Detroit, and only a few miles away from the shores of Lake St. Clair. When one approaches the monastery, blue onion domes that rise above surrounding rooftops first draw one's attention. The monastery's buildings have a distinct Russian flare and are surrounded by the graceful gardens. Fountains and mosaic shrines are tucked into the greenery, replicating the style of the ancient monasteries of Jerusalem, Russia, and Greece. St. Sabbas was originally founded as a center for liturgical arts. Highly qualified woodcarvers have created the wooden iconostasis, altar tables, shrines, and all church furnishings. Mosaic artists worked together with the monastery brotherhood to create traditional Orthodox masterpieces of inlaid glass and stones. The katholikon (main church) has interesting and valuable iconography, with over thirty icons adorning the walls and ceiling. A very distinct feature of St. Sabbas Monastery is that it is the only American monastic community with a gourmet restaurant, which is open to the public, on its premises. The Royal Eagle Restaurant serves traditional Eastern European cuisine, including favorite dishes such as chicken paprikash, Russian- and Ukrainian-style dumplings, potato pancakes, barley/mushroom kasha, pierogi, homemade sauerkraut, and salmon. The monks at St. Sabbas are American-born and English-speaking, but the brotherhood regards itself as being deeply rooted in the Russian monastic tradition. Further, the monastery maintains close ties with various monastic communities in Russia and receives many visitors from there. The monastery's brotherhood is proud to have a unique relic from its patron saint: the epitachelion (stole) that was removed from the body of St. Sabbas at the monastery near Jerusalem and given to Archimandrite Pachomy in 2012. The epitachelion is kept in the monastery church for monks and visitors to venerate.

## St. Sabbas the Sanctified Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 18745 Old Homestead Dr., Harper Woods, MI 48225

**Phone:** 313-521-1894

**E-mail:** stsabbasorthodoxmonastery@gmail.com

**Website:** www.stsabbas.org, www.theroyaleagle.org

**Year of Founding:** 1999

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English, Church Slavonic

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** December 18 (St. Sabbas the Sanctified)

**Name of Superior:** Archimandrite Pachomy (Belkoff)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 2

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see

## MINNESOTA

### Resurrection of Christ Skete

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 1201 Hathaway Ln., Fridley, MN 55432

**Phone:** 763-574-1001

**E-mail:** rusmnch@msn.com, frjohncavin@gmail.com

**Website:** www.resurrectionskete.org

**Year of Founding:** 1986

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English, Church Slavonic

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English, Russian

**Feast Day:** St. Thomas Sunday (first Sunday after Easter), August 1 (St. Seraphim of Sarov Day)

**Name of Superior:** Archimandrite John (Magram)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 3

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** This small monastic brotherhood serves as a nucleus for the local Orthodox parish, the Russian Orthodox Church of the Resurrection of Christ. Archimandrite John (Magram) is both the superior of monastery and this parish's priest. The membership of the parish is mixed: it includes both converts and cradle Orthodox, American-born persons and recent immigrants from Russia. The facilities of the monastery include two houses, both with chapels. The larger chapel serves as a church for the parish. Besides their parish duties, the brothers work as Russian-language translators and interpreters, and they also offer Russian language classes.

## MISSOURI

### Presentation of the Virgin Mary Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** (a) Physical: 224 Hospitality Rd., Niangua, MO 65706;  
(b) Mailing: PO Box 644, Marshfield, MO 65706

**Phone:** 417-473-1157

**E-mail:** presentationmonastery@yahoo.com

**Website:** www.presentationmonastery.org

**Year of Founding:** 1998

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** November 21 (Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Sergia (Renner)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 3

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No

**Description:** Nestled in the woods of south central Missouri, Presentation of the Virgin Mary is a monastery open to both visitors and those who are interested in trying to pursue the monastic life. According to Mother Sergia, the monastery's abbess, "Interest in the Orthodox Church is growing in the Springfield-Branson area of the country that is often referred to as the 'heart of the Bible belt.'" And this was the main reason for founding a new Orthodox monastic community. The land on which the monastery is built was generously donated by a local Orthodox Christian: it has a lake, natural wooded trails, ample space for future growth, and a location that is easily accessible for visitors. When the sisters arrived and construction work began, many of the local residents mistook them for Roman Catholic nuns and inquired about which order they belonged to. The sisters use these inquiries as a possibility to introduce the residents to the Orthodox Church and to invite them to visit the monastery. The practice of the continuous contemplative silent prayer is very central for the Presentation of Mary monastic community: most of the work at the monastery is done with minimal conversation between the nuns. The sisters at the Presentation of Mary Monastery have special talents in music. They assist local Orthodox parishes (especially newly founded mission

parishes) by providing musical instruction or traveling to the parishes and singing themselves for various church feasts and other special occasions. The monastery continues the work of landscaping and further development of its land. Visitors—whether Orthodox Christians or those from a different background—are received here with traditional monastic hospitality.

### Holy Archangel Michael and All Angels Skete

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** (a) Physical: 28650 105th Street, Weatherby, MO 64497; (b) Mailing: P.O. Box 434, Cameron, MO 64429

**Phone:** 660-749-5325

**E-mail:** holyarchmichael@gmail.com

**Website:** www.archangelmichaelskete.org

**Year of Founding:** 2014

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** November 21 (Holy Archangel Michael and All the Bodiless Powers)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Alexii (Altschul)

**Number of Monks in Residence:** 1

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For men only

**Description:** Located on eighty acres of land in Northwest Missouri, one hour away from Kansas City, this monastic community is divided between an established community of sisters (St. Xenia Sisterhood, which moved here from Kansas City) and a newly formed male monastic community. The property includes fourteen acres of farmable pasture land, one acre allocated for St. Gabriel's Cemetery, and sixty-five acres of forest and trails with two ponds. While this monastic community is very new, an increasing number of pilgrims are coming here from surrounding region. They enjoy the forest, ponds, wildlife, and sense of serenity of this place.

### St. Xenia Sisterhood

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** (a) Physical: 28650 105th Street, Weatherby, MO 64497; (b) Mailing: P.O. Box 434, Cameron, MO 64429

**Phone:** 660-749-5325, 816-621-5071

**E-mail:** motherbrigid@gmail.com

**Website:** No

**Year of Founding:** 1997

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** February 6 (St. Xenia of Petersburg).

**Name of Superior:** Mother Brigid (McCarthy)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 3

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For women only  
**Description:** Since its inception and until recently, the St. Xenia Sisterhood was situated in St. Moses the Black House in midtown Kansas City. From 1997 until 2014 the sisters were active and supportive in the outreach of St. Mary of Egypt Serbian Orthodox Church and Reconciliation Services to the poor in Kansas City. They paid special attention to the missionary efforts among African Americans. In early 2015 the sisterhood moved to the current location. The nuns share property with the newly formed men's monastic community: the Holy Archangel Michael and All Angels Skete. The newly acquired land provides the sisters an extensive opportunity for gardening and making organic household products. For more information, see the preceding entry on Holy Archangel Michael and All Angels Skete.

## NEW MEXICO

### The Hermitage of Saint Cornelius

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR)

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** (a) Physical: Pilgrim's Path (private road), Canyon del Rio, Belen, NM 87002; (b) Mailing: P.O. Box 250, Tome, NM 87060

**Phone:** 505-569-4405

**E-mail:** ocf.frjoshua@gmail.com

**Website:** www.hermitagenm.org

**Year of Founding:** 2010

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English and some Spanish

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** September 25 (Feast day of Saint Cornelius)

**Name of Superior:** Hieromonk Joshua (Anna)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 1

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women. It is family tent camping and RV/camper spots (no utilities).

**Description:** The Hermitage of Saint Cornelius is a very isolated place in the high desert of New Mexico at the foot of the Manzano Mountains (meaning "apple" in Spanish). It is situated as the only private property in an undeveloped tract of 14,000 acres. The Hermitage is presently composed of 50 acres, but the monastery is in the process of acquiring another 15 acres of grazing land for the rare New Mexico Dahl Sheep which the Hermitage raises. These sheep are a historic breed that came to New Mexico with the Spanish explorer Coronado. There is one distinct ministry of this small monastic community. The Hermitage works with veterans suffering with PTSD and mild TBI (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury). The plans for the future include building "Saint Demetrios Village" - a retreat center and place to stay for recovering veterans. The Hermitage collects and delivers nutritious "easy" foods for the veterans who live in various "camps" in the Albuquerque area or to

the homeless veterans on the streets. The Hermitage views itself as a "semi-eremetical" monastic community, where much time is devoted to solitude and private prayer in the individual monks' cells. The Brotherhood follows the Rule of Saint Columcille of Iona a Celtic saint.

### Monastery of the Holy Archangel Michael

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America  
**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** (a) Physical: 370 County Road 198, Canones, NM 87516; (b) Mailing: HCR 16, Box C-6, Canones, NM 87516

**Phone:** 575-638-5690

**E-mail:** monasteryofstmichael@gmail.com

**Website:** www.holyarchangelmichael.org

**Year of Founding:** 1993

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** September 19 (Holy Archangel Michael)

**Name of Superior:** Monk Silouan (Lightle)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 6

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** The Monastery of the Holy Archangel Michael sits on fifteen acres of land in beautiful New Mexico high desert country, in the foothills of the Jemez Mountain Range. It is located in a remote canyon several miles from the old village of Cañones. The monastery acquired its property from an abandoned ranch. The land was cleaned and the church built, but monastic community remains small. The brothers live simple lives: they try to grow their own food and be self-sustaining. The making and selling of 100-percent-pure hand-dipped beeswax tapers is their primary source of income. For visitors and pilgrims the monastery offers a guesthouse: the Holy Archangel's House of Ascent. It is fully furnished and has three separate rooms. One room is a double room with a bath. The other two share a bathroom that is accessible a few feet away up the breezeway. All guests share the common room, which contains a fully furnished kitchen, dining area, and living area with fireplace. The guests are expected to bring their own food for meals, though the superior may elect to invite guests to dine with the brotherhood at his discretion. The monks welcome both visitors and those who wish to stay with the brotherhood for a period of time and try the monastic way of life.

## NEW YORK

### All Saints Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** (a) Physical: 1676 Middle Rd, Calverton, NY 11933; (b) Mailing: PO Box 802, Calverton, NY 11933

**Phone:** 631-439-5603

**E-mail:** hagiopanton@gmail.com

**Website:** [www.allsaintsmonastery.org](http://www.allsaintsmonastery.org)

**Year of Founding:** 2009

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English, Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English, Greek

**Feast Day:** All Saints (first Sunday after the Feast of Pentecost which - in turn - is 7th Sunday after Easter)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Foteini (Brandenburg)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 10

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** The All Saints Monastery is on the eastern part of Long Island, New York. It was established and built thanks to the generosity of Mrs. Chrystala Petropolou (later known as the nun Ypomoni) and her two sisters: Mrs. Anna Orros and Mrs. Eleni Dimitriou. They contributed the majority of the funds to purchase the property and to construct the monastery’s church and residence for the nuns. The sisters at All Saints Monastery met originally as laywomen while studying at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology (Brookline, Massachusetts). Being spiritual children of the well-known Greek Orthodox priest Fr. Gerasimos Makris, they wanted to become nuns, and the newly established monastery provided them with an opportunity to fulfill their dream. The All Saints sisterhood is very active: the nuns help with the youth work in the nearby Greek Orthodox parishes, offer Byzantine chant classes and record music, and host retreats at the monastery. They also engage in social outreach by visiting patients in hospitals and shut-ins in private homes who are in need of spiritual care and support. The monastery’s gift shop offers a variety of handmade products such as scented soy candles, various soaps, and other natural cosmetic products.

## Brotherhood of the Holy Cross

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church  
Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 140 Main St., East Setauket, NY, 11733

**Phone:** 631-721-8150, 631-246-9020, 631-675-0450  
(monastery store)

**E-mail:** [frmaximos@gmail.com](mailto:frmaximos@gmail.com), [frparthenios@gmail.com](mailto:frparthenios@gmail.com)

**Website:** <http://holycrossmonasterysetauket.blogspot.com>,  
[www.monasteryproducts.org](http://www.monasteryproducts.org) (monastery store)

**Year of Founding:** 1974

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** September 27 (Exaltation of the Holy Cross)

**Name of Superior:** Archimandrite Maximos (Weimar)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 10

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For men only

**Description:** The monastery is situated in an “urban setting”: it is two miles east of Stony Brook University (SUNY) and two miles west of Port Jefferson.

## Christminster (Christ the Saviour) Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church  
Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 1910 Falls St., Niagara Falls, NY 14303

**Phone:** 716-545-5127

**E-mail:** [domjamesxmin@gmail.com](mailto:domjamesxmin@gmail.com), [info@christminster.org](mailto:info@christminster.org)

**Website:** [www.christminster.org](http://www.christminster.org)

**Year of Founding:** 1993

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** March 21 (St. Benedict’s repose), July 11 (St. Benedict’s feast)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. James M. Deschene

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 3

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No

**Description:** Christminster Monastery is the only Western Rite Orthodox monastic community in the United States. “Western Rite Orthodoxy” is a term used to describe parishes and monastic communities that are part of and in communion with Eastern Orthodox Churches but that employ various Western forms of liturgies rather than Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. “Western Rite Orthodoxy” refers to several ancient Christian rites that originate from the Churches of Western lands (such as Ireland, Britain, Rome, etc.) and from the period preceding the Great Schism of 1054. That is, these rites originate from a time when the Christian Church in the East and the West was united in faith. The modern Western Rite movement within Orthodoxy sees itself as a restoration of the ancient Western expression of the Orthodox Catholic faith, which existed in communion with the Orthodox Churches of the East in the first millennium of Christian history. The historic roots of Christminster Monastery go back to 1910, when the Benedictine monastic community of Mount Royal was founded. In 1962 the community joined the Russian Orthodox Church. For several years the monks of Mount Royal prayed in the Russian Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Manhattan. In 1993 the former superior of Mount Royal, Fr. James (Deschene), formed Christminster Monastery. Since their beginnings the life and mission of Christminster monastic community have been guided by the spirit of St. Benedict and his Holy Rule. The full Divine Office is prayed at Christminster as set forth by St. Benedict in the sixth century. The ancient chants of the Western Church are sung in traditional, liturgical English, and occasionally in Latin.

## Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 144 Bert Washburn Rd, Otego, NY 13825-6625

**Phone:** 607-432-3179

**E-mail:** [myrrhbearers@aol.com](mailto:myrrhbearers@aol.com)

**Website:** [www.holymyrrhbearers.com](http://www.holymyrrhbearers.com)

**Year of Founding:** 1977

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** Myrrhbearers Sunday (second Sunday after Easter)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Raphaela (Wilkinson)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 4

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 100): Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery is in Otsego County in the scenic upper Catskill region of New York State. It has 220 acres of pastures, woods, wetlands, and a four-acre mill pond that has been in commercial operation since 1803. A number of marked trails allow hiking in good weather and cross-country skiing for those who enjoy winter exercise. The monastery's chapel was built by volunteers—the members of several local Orthodox parishes. And the outcome of this labor of love is remarkable: the chapel is truly beautiful, with many windows and skylights, as well as the French doors, oak parquet floors, and knotty pine paneling. Fifty cedar trees were planted in a rectangle, and they form natural walls of what the sisters call the “memorial prayer garden.” It is used as a quiet place for prayer and reading or sometimes as an “outdoor chapel” for Vespers or Memorial Services. The old mill house was renovated into a comfortable guesthouse for visitors. An important integral part of Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery—and source of income for sisters—is its farm and garden. The nuns keep sheep, dairy goats, chicken, and ducks, and maintain greenhouses. The fleece from the sheep is used to manufacture a fine wool yarn and a variety of woven goods (the monastery's handmade rugs and scarves are in particular demand). The herd of purebred and American Saanen and Sable goats provides the sisterhood and friends of the monastery with home-produced milk and cheese. Many of the monastery's visitors volunteer to help out in the barns and fields. The Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery is well known through its publishing activities: especially for translating liturgical books from Old Greek and Church Slavonic into modern English. On Saturday of the third weekend after Easter, the monastery sets aside a special pilgrimage day to open wide its doors and invite all to join the sisters for prayer and fellowship.

## Holy Trinity Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** (a) Physical: 1407 Robinson Rd., Warren Town, NY 13361; (b) Mailing: PO Box 36, Jordanville, NY 13361

**Phone:** 315-858-0940

**E-mail:** info@jordanville.org

**Website:** www.jordanville.org

**Year of Founding:** 1930

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Church Slavonic, English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** Russian, English

**Feast Day:** Pentecost (7th Sunday after Easter)

**Name of Superior:** Archimandrite Luke (Murianka)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 21

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 108): Situated on nine hundred acres of farmland and forest, Holy Trinity is one of the oldest and most prominent Orthodox monasteries in the United States. It is also the biggest landowner among all US Orthodox monastic communities. The monastery's extensive complex includes a cathedral, theological seminary, museum, publishing/printing facilities, candle-making factory, vegetable gardens, apiary (honey bees), and large historical cemetery. The history of Holy Trinity Monastery is intertwined with the history of Russian immigration to America as a result of religious and political persecutions in the former Soviet Union. It was established in 1930 by Hieromonk Panteleimon (Nizhnik). After World War II Holy Trinity Monastery became home for the part of the brotherhood from St. Job of Pochaev Monastery that was originally situated in the village of Lodomirova in Slovakia. In 1944, in order to escape Communist oppression, this monastery moved to Germany. In 1946 the monastic community split. Some of the monks stayed in Germany and formed the Monastery of St. Job of Pochaev near Munich, while fourteen monks came to Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville. Over the years the monastery has increased in size and has become one of the largest Orthodox monasteries in the United States. Starting in 1947 the monastery began both printing and publishing books and the periodical Orthodox Russia (“Pravoslavnaya Rus”). It operates its own printshop of St. Job of Pochaev. Since then some five hundred works have been published in both Russian and English. Holy Trinity played an important role in providing spiritual literature to religious believers in Russia during the years of Communist rule. The Jordanville Prayerbook continues to inspire the religious lives of Orthodox Christians of various ethnic backgrounds. The monastery is also well known for its icon-painting studio, and it is home to the Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary, which prepares clergy for the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

## Monastery of St. Mary of Egypt (Treadwell Abbey)

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in the USA

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** (a) Physical: 8495 County Highway 16, Treadwell, NY 13846; (b) Mailing: 8495 County Highway 16, Delhi, NY 13753

**Phone:** 607-829-2838 (Savior's Desert Skete /Treadwell Abbey), 212-533-5140 (St. Mary Mercy House in New York)

**E-mail:** treadwell.abbey@gmail.com

**Website:** www.mercyhousenyc.org

**Year of Founding:** 1993

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** August 29 (Transfer from Edessa to Constantinople of the Icon of Our Lord Jesus Christ Not-Made-by-Hands)

**Name of Superior:** Archimandrite Joachim (Parr)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 6

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No

**Description:** The brotherhood of St. Mary of Egypt Monastery is affiliated with four geographically different communities: (a) The brotherhood operates Mercy House in the city of New York; (b) the brotherhood serves at the St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Cathedral in New York City; (c) the brotherhood supports a small Our Lady of Kazan mission parish in Spokane, Washington; and (d) the brotherhood resides at the Savior's Desert Skete (Treadwell Abbey) in the Catskill region of Upstate New York. In 1993 Fr. Joachim (Parr), the monastery's abbot, purchased a four-story townhouse in New York City (on Third Street, between Avenues C and D) and established what would later become Mercy House. Originally, the purpose of this community was to serve homeless people. Over time it became apparent that the physically homeless were not the only ones in need. More and more seekers from different walks of life began to come here. In 1995 an in-house chapel was built on the second floor, and was dedicated to St. Mary of Egypt, an ascetic of the fifth century. With the completion of the chapel and introduction of a full cycle of daily worship services, a vibrant community started to grow. They were people who were seeking a radical change of life and who felt they were "spiritually homeless." The men within the group aspired to create a community that would enable them to live the Gospel life every day. The original aim of Mercy House was expanded, and the monastic brotherhood of St. Mary of Egypt was formed. Mercy House has become known as the Monastery of St. Mary of Egypt. In 2008 the Monastery of St. Mary of Egypt purchased land in the Catskill region of Upstate New York in the tranquil farming community of Treadwell. The property's original farmhouse was renovated. An old hay barn from the late 1700s was beautifully restored for use as a church dedicated to the Icon of the Savior Not-Made-By-Hands. The brotherhood of the Monastery of St. Mary of Egypt now spends most of its time in this new location, known as the Savior's Desert Skete (or Treadwell Abbey), alternating clergy and monks to serve in the Mercy House and at St. Nicholas Cathedral in New York. The skete has become a desirable destination for its lay parishioners in New York City, who frequently visit in order to find spiritual respite in this natural paradise.

## Monks of New Skete

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** (a) Physical: 273 New Skete Lane, Cambridge, NY 12816; (b) Mailing: PO Box 128, Cambridge, NY 12816

**Phone:** 518-677-3928

**E-mail:** nscom@newskete.org, monks@newskete.org, brchristopher@newskete.org, bgregory@newskete.org

**Website:** www.newskete.org

**Year of Founding:** 1966

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** August 6 (Transfiguration)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Christopher (Savage)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 10

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women.

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 112): New Skete is located on the eastern edge of the gentle Taconic Mountains, close to the Vermont border and about forty-five miles northeast of Albany. Its history began in 1966, when twelve Byzantine Rite Franciscan monks separated from their community in New Canaan, Connecticut, and established a new monastic brotherhood. They sought to live a more authentic monastic life within the Eastern Christian tradition. In 1979, after years of studying and practicing Orthodox theology and liturgy, New Skete joined the Orthodox Church. The monks settled in a very agrarian community and learned diverse farming skills, including smoking meats and cheeses. But the most unique feature of their "monastic economy" is their internationally known German Shepherd breeding and dog training programs. The brothers also offer "The Art of Living with Your Dog" seminars. The monks' dog training series, Divine Canine, first aired on the Discovery Channel's Animal Planet in 2007. The brotherhood authored several books related to the lives of monks with the dogs (New Skete Shepherds), a spiritual study of their monastic life (In the Spirit of Happiness), and a book of meditations (Rise Up with a Listening Heart). The monastery is well known for its study, translation, and adaptations of ancient Byzantine liturgical texts and practice, in order to make a more contemporary liturgical experience, including the creation of new musical settings of hymns. The brothers at New Skete pay great attention to ecumenical outreach as a way of putting the Gospel into practice. They host different social, school, and church groups, as well as numerous ecumenical conferences and events. The nave of the monastery's church features iconographic portraits of prominent non-Orthodox such as Pope Paul VI, Archbishop Michael Ramsey, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and it celebrates the feast of the Roman Catholic saint Francis of Assisi. People from various religious backgrounds visit New Skete to make a spiritual retreat, seek spiritual guidance, become dog customers, or simply enjoy the skete's lovely grounds (especially its multitiered meditation garden with ponds and waterfall). The most important regular events at New Skete include an open house (in June), annual pilgrimage (in August, in conjunction with the Feast of Transfiguration), and the annual ceremony of animal blessing (in October). New Skete's churches, gardens, bell tower, and hiking trail are open for self-guided tours, Tuesday through Sunday (closed Monday). Overnight accommodations are available but typically need to be booked several weeks in advance.

## Nuns of New Skete

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 343 Ashgrove Rd, Cambridge, NY 12816  
**Phone:** 518-677-3810  
**E-mail:** nuns@newskete.org, srcecelia@newskete.org  
**Website:** www.newskete.org, www.newskete.com  
**Year of Founding:** 1969  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English  
**Feast Day:** Last Sunday of October (Feast of Our Lady of the Sign)  
**Name of Superior:** Mother Cecelia (Harvey)  
**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 5  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women  
**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 112): The Nuns of New Skete is a monastic community affiliated with the Monks of New Skete (see previous entry). It is a contemplative monastery under the patronage of Our Lady of the Sign, a symbol of the entire praying church. The community was formed in 1969 when seven Poor Clare (Roman Catholic) nuns from Indiana came to Cambridge, New York. With the help of the Monks of New Skete (who had settled there a year earlier), they built their own monastery. It is situated on a rolling hillside that offers a sense of solitude without an enclosed cloister. The goal and vision of the Nuns of New Skete was to live out the values of the monastic life in a way that fits into modern American culture. For example, rather than using a strict translation of ancient texts, the nuns work at making the language of prayers and hymns accessible to contemporary American understanding. While remaining in the Catholic Church in their early years, the sisters always followed the Eastern Rite in their liturgical lives. In 1979 the Nuns of New Skete officially joined the Orthodox Church. The Nuns of New Skete consider themselves ecumenical in terms of their religious backgrounds, experience, and understanding. The sisterhood maintains an open stance regarding ecumenical contacts with other Christian groups. The Nuns of New Skete are nationally known for their gourmet cheesecakes that are produced in the monastery’s bakery and shipped nationwide. The sisters also paint icons, make liturgical vestments, host retreats, and help the Monks of New Skete with their dog breeding and training programs. Offering hospitality is an important part in the life of the sisterhood. Persons of diverse Christian backgrounds come here to visit and make retreats.

## Protection of the Mother of God

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese  
**Male or Female:** Female  
**Address:** 164 Frog Hollow Rd., Ellenville, NY 12428-5513  
**Phone:** 845-210-4657  
**E-mail:** No e-mail  
**Website:** No website  
**Year of Founding:** 2000  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Romanian  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** Romanian  
**Feast Day:** October 1 (Protection of the Mother of God)  
**Name of Superior:** Mother Sinclitichia (Trifan)  
**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 2  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No  
**Description:** The monastery is near the village of Ellenville, in the Rondout Valley, at the eastern base of the Catskill Mountains, about ninety miles northwest of New York City. The sisters at Protection of Mother of God Monastery paint icons. This monastic community has significant property and is still in the process of formation. The new monastery’s church and a guesthouse are in the process of construction. The currently small sisterhood plans to have more nuns in the future.

## Russian Orthodox Convent Novo-Diveevo

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia  
**Male or Female:** Female  
**Address:** 100 Smith Rd., Nanuet, NY 10954  
**Phone:** 845-356-0425  
**E-mail:** office@novo-diveevo.org, info@novo-diveevo.org  
**Website:** www.novo-diveevo.org  
**Year of Founding:** 1949  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Church Slavonic  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** Russian  
**Feast Day:** August 28 (Dormition of the Mother of God)  
**Name of Superior:** Mother Makaria (Fadin)  
**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 4  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women  
**Description:** The Russian Orthodox Convent Novo-Diveevo lies on fifty acres of land, twenty-three miles north of New York City, in a rural wooded setting. It is one of the historically important US Orthodox monasteries. Founded in 1949 by Fr. Adrian Rimarenko (later Archbishop Andrei of Rockland), Novo-Diveevo was named after Serafimo-Diveevsky Monastery in Russia. Serafimo-Diveevsky Monastery is famous because St. Seraphim of Sarov (one of the most beloved Russian saints of the nineteenth century) served as elder for the nuns, and his relics are kept at the monastery. The Orthodox Convent Novo-Diveevo has two churches: the main church dedicated to St. Seraphim of Sarov and a small church in honor of the Dormition of the Mother of God. The convent is home to several sacred relics, including a full-length portrait of St. Seraphim of Sarov painted during his lifetime, a cross from Ipatiev House (the place of execution of the last Russian tsar, Nicholas II), and a “Vladimir” icon of the Holy Theotokos that belonged to St. Amvrosii of Optina (another popular Russian saint). Novo-Diveevo is home to the historic and largest Russian Orthodox cemetery outside of Russia. It has more than eight thousand graves, and many prominent Russian persons are buried there. The convent also

operates a senior citizens' ("old age") home with seventy-two beds. There are several dining facilities with meals cooked in a traditional Slavic style. The home has a full medical staff, on call twenty-four hours a day. The residents of the senior citizens' home are invited to attend religious services at the convent (twice daily).

## St. Dumitru Romanian Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 1572 Mountain Rd., Middletown, NY 10940

**Phone:** 845-386-3998

**E-mail:** sfdumitru\_ny@yahoo.com

**Website:** www.sfdumitru.org

**Year of Founding:** 2001

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Romanian

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** Romanian

**Feast Day:** October 26 (St. Demetrius [Dumitru, in Romanian] of Thessalonika)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Vincent (Temirov)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 2

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** St. Dumitru Monastery is located seventy-five miles northwest of from York City, in Orange County, the Lower Hudson Valley region of New York State. It has forty-three acres of woods and wetlands. Fr. Archimandrite Vasile Vasilache and a group of Romanian Orthodox Christians from New York City founded the monastery. The brotherhood is currently comprised of two priests from Romania. The monastery's church has the architectural characteristics of old Romanian churches, with a dome and arches, and is painted in the Byzantine style. The old house that served originally as living quarters for the monks is now a guesthouse for pilgrims. The guesthouse has a chapel where the pilgrims can gather together for prayer and meditation, and a memorial room dedicated to Fr. Vasile Vasilache. The circle of services and daily life of the monastery are organized according to the traditions of the monasteries in Romania.

## St. Elizabeth Skete

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 1520 State Rte 167, Mohawk, NY 13407

**Phone:** 315-858-2208

**E-mail:** info@saintelizabethskete.org

**Website:** www.saintelizabethskete.org

**Year of Founding:** 1987

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Church Slavonic

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English, Russian

**Feast Day:** July 18 (New Martyr Abbess Elizabeth [Romanova])

**Name of Superior:** Mother Elizabeth (Czwickla)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 7

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For women only  
**Description:** Surrounded by farmlands, hills, and forests, and far removed from the clamor of mass culture, St. Elizabeth Skete is a monastic community for women, located adjacent to the male Holy Trinity Monastery (Jordanville, New York). In 1984 Ioanna Pomazansky (†2011) came to Holy Trinity Seminary to teach Russian language and history. She was joined a year later by a young German woman, Elizabeth Czwickla (the current abbess), who worked at the monastery's cemetery and helped the brotherhood with sewing vestments. Both women felt a calling to the monastic life. In 1987 they were made novices, and a new monastic community was planted. The current sisterhood of seven sisters is multiethnic, with nuns of both Russian and non-Russian backgrounds. Their community occupies four houses on a small parcel of land. To support themselves the sisters produce an amazing variety of handmade goods that are sold in their gift shop: art-photography by Abbess Elizabeth, natural cosmetics (soaps, creams, bath salts), healing salves and ointments, incense for church and home usage, herbal teas, jams, and various textile products (mittens, aprons, handbags, embroidery). All of the skete's products can be purchased online or at the gift shop. In the summer the sisterhood maintains flower and vegetable gardens. Besides daily church services and various chores, the sisters spend significant time with visitors. In particular, women of various backgrounds looking for spiritual advice, help, and consolation come here often either for a short retreat or to stay for a more extended period of time.

## St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 100 Anawanda Lake Rd., Roscoe, NY 12776

**Phone:** 607-498-5285, 845-798-5544 (bookstore)

**E-mail:** bookstore@stnektariosmonastery.org

**Website:** www.stnektariosmonastery.org

**Year of Founding:** 1999

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English, Greek

**Feast Day:** September 3 (Translation of the relics of St. Nektarios, Metropolitan of Pentapolis), November 9 (Dormition of St. Nektarios), Sunday of the Myrrhbearers (second Sunday after Easter)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Joseph (Voutsas)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 22

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** St. Nektarios Monastery was founded in 1999 by Elder Ephraim with the blessing of the Greek Orthodox

Archdiocese of America. The monastery is dedicated to St. Nektarios, metropolitan of Pentapolis (†1920). He is frequently referred to as “the saint of our century” or “the wonder-worker of Aegina” on account of the many miracles that he performed. The monastery’s main chapel is dedicated to the miraculous icon of the Archangel Michael of Mantamados. The services at the monastery are conducted in Greek. The brotherhood of monks and novices follows a common daily schedule of prayer and work under obedience to the abbot. The daily program begins at midnight with personal prayer time and spiritual reading, followed by the Divine Liturgy. After a rest period and a light breakfast, the monks begin their day, attending to prayer and their chores until evening. Tasks include construction, ground-keeping, gardening, publishing, food preparation, and offering hospitality. The day ends with evening Vespers, followed by dinner and Compline. The monastery’s bookstore has a wide selection of religious literature, recorded Byzantine music, and incense.

## NORTH CAROLINA

### Holy Monastery of Panagia Pammakaristos

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 1631 Greasey Rd., Lawsonville, NC 27022

**Phone:** 336-593-9760

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** No website

**Year of Founding:** 1999

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English, Greek

**Feast Day:**

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Nektarios

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 3

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No

### Panagia Prousiotissa Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 404 Warner Rd., Troy, NC 27231

**Phone:** 910-572-3331

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** www.panagiaprousiotissa.org

**Year of Founding:** 1998

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** Greek

**Feast Day:** Sunday of the Holy Myrrhbearing Women (second Sunday after Easter)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Agne (Nikolaidae)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 4

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** The nuns at Panagia Prousiotissa Monastery came to the United States from the Monastery of Archangel Michael on the island of Thasos in Greece. The monastery’s land is covered with trees and has a large pond. The monastery’s complex includes a residence and dining hall for the nuns, a guesthouse with a chapel, and a candle-making shop. Most visitors to Panagia Prousiotissa Monastery come here to venerate a unique icon of Panagia Prousiotissa after which the monastery is named. This icon is the only accurate replica of the miraculous icon of Panagia Prousiotissa, which—according to tradition—was painted by St. Luke the Evangelist. The original icon is kept in the ancient (its complex dates back to 829 AD) Monastery of the Mother of God of Prousiotissa near the town of Karpenisi in Greece. The Sunday following the feast of Dormition (August 15) is a day of the major pilgrimage to Panagia Prousiotissa Monastery in North Carolina, and it is considered the second feast day of the monastery.

## OHIO

### Entrance of the Theotokos Skete

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** (a) Physical: 2278 County Rd. 775, Perrysville, OH 44864; (b) Mailing: PO Box 25, Hayesville, OH 44838

**Phone:** 419-368-4421

**E-mail:** info@theotokos-skete.org

**Website:** www.theotokos-skete.org

**Year of Founding:** 2000

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** November 21 (Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Theadelphi (Reid)

**Number of Nuns in Residence:** 1

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For women only

**Description:** This monastic community was founded by the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh in 2000. The skete is situated on the fifty acres of a former “frontier homestead” that dates back to when Ohio was still a wilderness (before the War of 1812). There is an old cemetery with the graves of the soldiers from the Revolutionary and Civil Wars and the graves of many old pioneer families. The old Methodist chapel, built in 1802, was acquired and restored for monastic use. Mother Theadelphi hopes to convert this abandoned land into a working farm. She says, “We raise hay and alfalfa on the arable land. We need to rebuild the eroded topsoil before any future crops can be planted, and manage the woods for firewood and lumber. We sell or

trade the hay, and some firewood, for our needs. God willing, we hope to raise sheep on it when the pastures have been restored to better health. We also keep bees, for our own needs, to pollinate the fields, and to barter." A new katholikon (church) was built in 2014.

## Monastery Marcha

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 5095 Broadview Rd., Richfield, OH 44286

**Phone:** 330-659-3809

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** No website

**Year of Founding:** 1975

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English, Serbian

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** July 26 (Synaxis of the Holy Archangel Gabriel)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Anna (Radetich)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 2

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No

**Description:** Monastery Marcha was established as a women's monastery by the diocesan bishop at that time, His Grace Sava, in 1975. It is dedicated to the Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel, who was protector of the original Monastery Marcha, built in the sixteenth century near Zagreb (Croatia). The original monastery was twice destroyed (during World War I and World War II) and twice rebuilt. The abbess of Monastery Marcha, Mother Anna (Radeich), has been with the monastery's sisterhood from its very inception, and she is the first American-born Serbian Orthodox nun. In 2001 a new monastery church was constructed. Monastery Marcha maintains an Orthodox cemetery and produces candles used for liturgical purposes.

## Skete of St. John the Theologian

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 5862 Allyn Rd, Hiram, OH 44234

**Phone:** 330-274-2052

**E-mail:** frnektarios@stjohnskete.com, store@stjohnskete.com

**Website:** www.holycross-hermitage.com/the-skete-of-st-john-the-theologian

**Year of Founding:** 1981

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** October 9 (Repose of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Nektarios (Merry)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 3

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For men only

**Description:** When the monastic community of St. John the

Theologian was originally founded (1981), it belonged to the Orthodox Church in America. For more than two decades, St. John's community has played an active role in the "Orthodox presence" in Northeast Ohio: it served as a home for the elderly, retreat center, and monastery. However, as the years passed, the members of brotherhood aged and moved out. By 2012 there were no monastics in residence. In 2013 the monastery was transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, and it has become a dependency of the vibrant and growing monastic community of the Hermitage of the Holy Cross (Wayne, West Virginia). A few monks from the Hermitage of the Holy Cross moved to the Skete of St. John the Theologian to restore monastic life there. A significant amount of cleanup and renovation work needs to be done after the years of abandonment. Still, a number of visitors come here and join the small brotherhood for Sunday Liturgies. While the Skete welcomes pilgrims, the accommodations are extremely limited, and one should contact the fathers as far in advance as possible in order to arrange a pilgrimage.

## St. Gregory Palamas Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 934 C.R. 2256, Perrysville, OH 44864

**Phone:** 419-368-5335

**E-mail:** monastery@palamasmonastery.org

**Website:** www.sgpm.goar.org/Monastery

**Year of Founding:** 1982

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** November 14 and the second Sunday in Great Lent (both days commemorate St. Gregory Palamas)

**Name of Superior:** Archimandrite Joseph (Morris)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 8

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For men only

**Description:** St. Gregory Palamas is the oldest of the currently existing Greek Orthodox monasteries in the United States. It is named after St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), who was a monk on Mount Athos in Greece (later the Archbishop of Thessaloniki) and was known as a preeminent defender of hesychasm. The monastery is located in the agricultural country of Northeastern Ohio, about fifteen miles east of Mansfield. The relics of St. George the Great Martyr, St. Boniface of Friesland, and one of the martyred monks of the Sinai are sealed into the altar of the monastery's church. The monastery has sizeable property and maintains a vegetable garden that provides monks and visitors with fresh produce. The brotherhood supports itself by candle-making, mounting icons, and running an online gift shop and bookstore. Orthodox men can stay in the limited guest facilities for a few days to participate in the life of the monastery: prayer, work, and silence, following the directions of a monastic confessor. All visitors are expected to follow the monastery's schedule and fasting customs.

## St. Mark Serbian Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 1434 Lake Breeze Rd., Sheffield, OH 44054

**Phone:** 440-949-7719, 440-212-2017

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** No website

**Year of Founding:** 1988

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Serbian

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** Serbian

**Feast Day:** May 8 (Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark)

**Name of Superior:** Archimandrite Leontije (Alavanja)

**Number of Monks in Residence:** 1

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** The site of St. Mark Orthodox Monastery is primarily used to host winter and summer Orthodox children's camps.

## PENNSYLVANIA

### Holy Convent of St. Thekla

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 5409 Allison Mills Rd., Glensville, PA 17329

**Phone:** 717-630-8298

**E-mail:** schema\_nun@hotmail.com,  
protomartyrthekla@hotmail.com

**Website:** www.antiochian.org/sainttheklaconvent

**Year of Founding:** 2013

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English, Arabic

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English, Arabic

**Feast Day:** September 24 (Protomartyr and Equal-to-the-Apostles Thekla of Iconium)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Justina

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 2

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For women only

**Description:** Located in Glensville, Pennsylvania, the Convent of St. Thekla has a main monastery house, a barn, a pond, and fifty-one acres of farm and woodlands. It is one hour from both Harrisburg and Pittsburgh airports. Alternatively, the monastery can be reached by a three-and-a-half-hour drive from the New York metropolitan area. This monastic community was founded only recently, and it is still in the process of establishing of its life. All who would like to be blessed by St. Thekla, pray in tranquility, help the nuns with their chores, or simply ask questions and seek spiritual advice, are welcome to come.

## Holy Protection of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 1 St. Joseph's Way, White Haven, PA 18661

**Phone:** 570-443-2220

**E-mail:** agiaskepi@verizon.net

**Website:** www.holyprotectionmonastery.org

**Year of Founding:** 1993

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** Greek

**Feast Day:** October 1 (Protection of Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Olympiada (Voutsas)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 25

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 104): The Holy Protection Greek Orthodox Monastery was founded in 1993 by Elder Ephraim, former abbot of Philotheou Monastery on Mount Athos (who also established sixteen other monasteries throughout the United States and Canada). The monastery's "mother house" (from where original nuns came to the United States) is the Archangel Michael Monastery on the island of Thasos in Greece. With twenty-five sisters the Protection of the Theotokos Monastery is the second-largest US Orthodox monastic community (after St. Anthony's in Arizona), and it is the largest American monastery for women. The monastery's complex sits on a top of a hill overlooking the Lehigh River Valley in the Pocono Mountains region of Pennsylvania. A white cross indicating the monastery's location can be seen afar from Interstate Highway 80. The extensive facilities include a main building with monastic cells, the main church dedicated to the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, two chapels dedicated to St. Nektarios and St. Paraskevi, a bakery, an icon-painting studio, a woodworking shop, a candle-making shop, and a guesthouse. The sisters maintain vegetable gardens and fruit orchards. The daily cycle begins at midnight with communal prayer services and spiritual reading. After a rest period and breakfast, the sisters begin their work, until evening, when they retreat to their cells for rest. Holy Protection Monastery is known for its tradition of icon-painting.

### Monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 175 St. Tikhon's Rd., Waymart, PA 18472

**Phone:** 570-937-4067

**E-mail:** abbotsergius@gmail.com, abbot.sergius@stots.edu

**Website:** www.sttikhonsmonastery.org

**Year of Founding:** 1905

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:**

English

**Feast Day:** August 13 (Commemoration of St. Tikhon, bishop of Voronezh, wonderworker of Zadonsk)**Name of Superior:** Archimandrite Sergius (Bowyer)**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 17**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see article on p. 142): St. Tikhon's Monastery is named after St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, a beloved eighteenth-century Russian bishop and spiritual writer who was an inspirer of Dostoyevsky. Founded in 1905, it is the oldest extant Orthodox monastic community in the United States. Its establishment is associated with such prominent figures in the history of American Orthodox Christianity as Bishop Raphael (Hawaweeny) and Archbishop (later Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church) Tikhon (Belavin). Both of them were later canonized as American Orthodox saints. Fr. Alexis Toth (1854–1909), who has been called the father of the Russian Orthodox Church in America because of his success in leading the so-called “Uniates” back to the Orthodox Church, was buried in the monastery's cemetery. He was canonized in 1994 as St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre. Orthodox Christians and their spouses (even if not Orthodox Christian) are eligible for burial at St. Tikhon's historical cemetery. The detailed history of the Monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk is provided in the chapter “The Historical Development of Orthodox Monasteries in the United States.” St. Tikhon's Monastery is home to St. Tikhon's Orthodox Seminary (established 1938)—one of the three accredited Orthodox theological schools in the United States. The John S. and Lucille J. Guzey Collection of Russian Icons and Antiquities is also housed at the monastery. The bookstore at the monastery sells various artwork made by the members of brotherhood. The monastery's church and grounds are open for general public from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays and from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekends. Tours of the monastery and its museum of liturgical arts are available upon request. For those interested in longer stays or personal retreats, the monastery offers overnight accommodations in two guesthouses: one for men and one for families and women.

## Nativity of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America**Male or Female:** Female**Address:** 121 St. Elias Lane, Saxonburg, PA 16056**Phone:** 724-352-3999**E-mail:** info@nativityofthetheotokosmonastery.org**Website:** www.nativityofthetheotokosmonastery.org**Year of Founding:** 1989**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English, Greek**Feast Day:** September 8 (The Nativity of Our Most Holy Lady

the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Theophano**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 15**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** Founded in 1989, the Nativity of the Theotokos is the first Greek Orthodox women's monastery in the United States. The monastery follows the so-called Athonite tradition: a monastic life centered on the liturgical cycle, in which one dedicates one's life to continuously praying the Jesus Prayer (“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner”). The sisterhood supports itself through various handiworks, including hand-painted icons; decoupage icons on marble, agate and wood; vestments and ecclesiastical items, embroidery; and so forth. The grounds of the monastery provide a very peaceful environment for visitors. There is a playground for children. Pilgrims can also visit St. Seraphim Chapel, nestled in a wooded area of the property. There are also many sitting areas where visitors can enjoy a view of the grounds and pray or read.

## Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America**Male or Female:** Female**Address:** 321 Monastery Lane, Ellwood City, PA 16117**Phone:** 724-758-4002**E-mail:** omtsec@gmail.com, omtgust@gmail.com**Website:** www.orthodoxmonasteryellwoodcity.org**Year of Founding:** 1967**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English**Feast Day:** August 6 (The Holy Transfiguration of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ)**Name of Superior:** Mother Christophora (Matychak)**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 10**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** Orthodox Monastery of Transfiguration sprawls on one hundred acres of meadow and wooded land, and its grounds are adorned with several flower gardens. The main building consists of a beautiful chapel richly painted with icons; a large dining room; a hospitality room where visitors can relax and enjoy fellowship; a library with an extensive collection of books, videos, and magazines; and a gift shop that sells books, icons, and various religious items. The monastery's complex also includes two guesthouses, a playhouse for children, a pavilion for outdoor worship, a large picnic gazebo, and sunny field paths and forest trails for walking. Mother Alexandra (the former Princess Ileana of Romania) founded the community in 1967. Her dream was to create a place where American Orthodox women of all ethnic backgrounds could come and lead a monastic life and worship in English. This vision was fulfilled: the nuns, many of whom are converts to Orthodoxy, span a variety of backgrounds. Always seen as a “missionary monastery,” the sisterhood of Transfiguration Monastery is known for its hospitality, various retreats, educa-

tional events, speaking engagements in the local Orthodox parishes, and publications (including the monastery's own journal *Life Transfigured*). The monastery also video-streams online many of its worship services. The main annual events in the monastery's life are feast day celebrations and the pilgrimage on August 5 and 6, dedicated to the Transfiguration of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. A distinct feature in the liturgical life of Transfiguration Monastery is that in their singing the nuns employ a great variety of Orthodox music traditions. Founded originally as a "pan-Orthodox" multicultural monastic community, the monastery welcomes guests and visitors of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. The monastery's guesthouses are comfortably furnished with living rooms, dining areas, private bedrooms, as well as a fully equipped kitchen and laundry facilities. Guests make their own breakfast and supper from food provided by the monastery. They join the sisters for a buffet lunch in the refectory.

## Sacred Monastery of the Holy Spirit

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Georgian Orthodox Church

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 62 Charles St. Ashley, PA 18706

**Phone:** 202-696-7662, 570-822-5798

**E-mail:** holyspirit@fhc.org

**Website:** www.holyspirit-monastery.org

**Year of Founding:** 2012

**Church Calendar Followed:** "Old" (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** Monday of the Holy Spirit, also known as Pentecost Monday." (Monday after the feast of Pentecost which - in turn - is 7th Sunday after Easter Sunday)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Christophoros (Khadasok)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 7

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For men only

## SOUTH CAROLINA

### Paracletos Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 790 Gin House Rd., Abbeville, SC 29620

**Phone:** 864-348-7545

**E-mail:** paracletos@wctel.net

**Website:** www.greekorthodoxmonastery.org

**Year of Founding:** 2005

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** Greek

**Feast Day:** Pentecost (seventh Sunday after Easter Sunday)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Pavlina (Giannapoulou)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 4

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No

**Description:** One of the newest US Orthodox monastic commu-

nities, Paracletos Monastery is located in a peaceful rural setting, south of the town of Anderson, South Carolina. It is dedicated to the "Paracletos" (also spelled "Parakletos"), a Greek word referring to the Holy Spirit, the third person in the Holy Trinity. The monastery's abbess, Mother Pavlina, came here with two other founding nuns from a monastery in Greece upon invitation from the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta. For many years Abbess Pavlina has been visiting America making many friends and contacts. This gave her the opportunity to see their compassion and desire to have their own American Orthodox monasteries. The monastery's chapel is dedicated to Panagia Soumela (or "the Lady of Pontos"). "Panagia" is one of the Greek terms used for the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus. According to legend, the original icon of Panagia Soumela was painted by St. Luke the Evangelist and presented to the Virgin Mary to be blessed. This original icon of the Panagia Soumela is kept in the small village near Veria in Northern Greece. The nuns of Paracletos Monastery have committed themselves to this religious task, to build a chapel honoring Panagia and naming it Panagia Soumela. The monastery strives to be not only a place for prayer and contemplation but also the cultural and spiritual center for all American Pontian Greeks (that is, those Greeks from the Black Sea region of Pontus, in today's northeastern Turkey). The monastery runs an online store that sells icons and many other religious items. There are no facilities for an overnight stay at the moment, but everyone is welcome to visit during the day (visiting hours to the monastery are 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. to sunset every day except Friday). The nuns ask, however, that visitors call in advance, because the nuns travel sometimes and may not be at the monastery to receive pilgrims.

### Saints Mary and Martha Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 65 Spinner Lane, Wagener, SC 29164

**Phone:** 803-564-6894

**E-mail:** Mary\_MarthaM@pbtcomm.net,  
Mary\_MarthaM@comporium.net

**Website:** www.saintsmaryandmarthaorthodoxmonastery.org

**Year of Founding:** 1989

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** June 4 (Sts. Mary and Martha of Bethany, sisters of St. Lazarus); Lazarus Saturday (the Saturday before Palm Sunday); Myrrhbearers Sunday (second Sunday after Easter Sunday).

**Name of Superior:** Mother Thecla (Ecroyd)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 2

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women.

**Description:** This small monastic community occupies 60 acres of land in a lovely pine forest in the region known as "Sand Hills of South Carolina" ("Sand Hills" is a strip of ancient

beach dunes and the evidence of a former coastline when the ocean level was higher). It is about two miles from Wagener, South Carolina and about 30 miles southwest of Columbia, the state capital. The nuns describe themselves as a “monastic community of Orthodox Christian women whose primary focus is prayer and hospitality.” The the monastery’s main building has a chapel, dining room and the living rooms of the sisters. Another building called “St. Brigide of Kildare Barne Shoppes” houses the bindery, gift shop, a small icon studio, and a screened-in front porch that doubles as a greenhouse in the winter and a quiet place for prayer and reflection. A small guesthouse is available for those who are seeking a few days of solitude and prayer. The sisters cleared part of their land from the woods and planted what they call the “Perennial Garden.” The garden has benches and a variety of plants (Spirea, Azalea, Japanese Quince, Mutabilis Rose): it is a good place for reading or quiet conversation. A gazebo is built in the forest and provides another possibility for prayer and reflection. The the monastery hosts several organized retreats through the year as well as individual (or small group) retreats upon request. Organic gardening occupies much of the sisters’ spare time. They maintain a vegetable garden and small but diverse fruit orchard. Indian Runner Ducks keep the insect population in check, while providing fertilizer for the plants, and eggs for the nuns. The nuns publish the quarterly newsletter “One Thing Needful” that is mailed to the monastery’s many friends and supporters.

## TENNESSEE

### St. Paul Orthodox Skete

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese  
**Male or Female:** Female  
**Address:** (a) Physical: 1855 Park Swain Rd., Grand Junction, TN 38039; (b) Mailing: PO Box 35, Grand Junction, TN 38039  
**Phone:** 731-764-0085  
**E-mail:** monektaria@gmail.com  
**Website:** No  
**Year of Founding:** 2004  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English  
**Feast Day:** June 29 (The Holy Apostles, Sts. Peter and Paul).  
**Name of Superior:** Mother Nektaria (Velloff)  
**Number of Nuns in Residence:** 1  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women  
**Description:** Mother Nektaria was a nun at Holy Dormition Monastery in Rives Junction, Michigan (see separate article on this monastery). She came to Tennessee to establish a monastic presence there upon invitation from Bishop Basil of Wichita and Mid-America. In 2004, after leasing a house in midtown Memphis for several years, the skete purchased forty acres of land and moved to its present location. Prayer is the main focus of life at the skete. Visitors are welcome to

join daily services. For those seeking a quiet time of solitude and reflection, overnight accommodations (eight beds) are available in the St. Elizabeth guesthouse. The Divine Liturgy is typically served twice a month by a priest from one of the local Orthodox parishes. Mother Nektaria travels sometimes to the Orthodox parishes for retreats and presentations.

## TEXAS

### Hermitage of St. Arsenius of Konevits

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia  
**Male or Female:** Male  
**Address:** (a) Physical: 319 County Rd. 2535, Decatur, TX 76234; (b) Mailing: PO Box 1683, Decatur, TX 76234  
**Phone:** 214-226-8032  
**E-mail:** monkggz@gmail.com  
**Website:** www.panagiaquicktohear.com  
**Year of Founding:** 2010  
**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English  
**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English  
**Feast Day:** June 25 (St. Arsenius, the founder of Konevits Monastery in Russia)  
**Name of Superior:** Igumen Gregory (Zaiens)  
**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 2  
**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No  
**Description:** Tucked away from the distractions of the “secular world,” the Hermitage of St. Arsenius is nestled in the woods on twenty acres of farmland between Greenwood and Decatur, Texas. It is about seventy miles northeast of Dallas. A wooden cross by the county road is all that marks entry to the hermitage. Fr. Gregory describes his tiny monastic community as follows: “My aim is to be as self-sufficient as possible and as low maintenance as possible.” The main building is insulated by square hay bales coated with a clay mixture from the land. It is powered by solar panels that were donated. Rainwater is collected from the roof and filtered for bathing and laundry. The hermitage grows its own vegetables, fruit and nut trees, and different herbs. The latter are used for food, medical purposes, and natural antibacterial and fragrant soaps. A few goats and chickens provide milk and eggs. The hermitage produces and sells a variety of jams and jellies as well as very popular soaps made from natural sheep milk. The Hermitage of St. Arsenius is an English-speaking monastic community, but it worships in a “Russian style” in terms of its liturgical traditions and hymnology. In addition to the daily cycle of prayer services, two Divine Liturgies are served each month in the small chapel in the woods. Several simple chairs sit on a plain plywood floor. Images of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Apostles, and a host of saints adorn the walls. Fr. Gregory also serves as a substitute priest in local Orthodox parishes. The hermitage maintains its own blog, titled “The Panagia: She Who Is Quick to Hear.”

## Holy Archangels Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** (a) Physical: 2191 Twin Sisters Dr., Spring Branch, TX 78027; (b) Mailing: PO Box 422, Kendalia, TX 78027

**Phone:** 830-833-2793

**E-mail:** info@holyarchangels.com

**Website:** www.holyarchangels.com

**Year of Founding:** 1996

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English, Greek

**Feast Day:** November 8 (Synaxis of the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Salaphiel, Jegudiel, Barachiel, and Jeremiel and the Other Bodiless Powers)

**Name of Superior:** Archimandrite Dositheos (Maroulis)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 10

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For men only

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see the article on p. 88): One of the most architecturally stunning US Orthodox monasteries, Holy Archangels Monastery is located in the heart of Texas: north of San Antonio and west of Austin. The Texas Hill Country is a desert of its own, and this rugged, wind-swept, and arid area is a good home for an Orthodox monastery. Holy Archangels Monastery came into existence in 1996, when three monks from the Athonite monastery of Philotheou (Greece) arrived in Kendalia, Texas. They brought with them the heritage of the late Elder Joseph the Hesychast, whose spiritual children helped reinvigorate the spiritual life of the Holy Mount Athos in the second half of the twentieth century. The brothers purchased and began converting the 140 acres of abandoned Muslim property (the land used to belong to a Sufi colony) into a Greek Orthodox Christian monastery. They rebuilt a former mosque into the katholikon (the monastery’s main church), dedicated to Archangels Michael and Gabriel and all the angels. Traditional Byzantine design inspired the outline of the church. The church has an ornate, elaborately carved iconostasis. As the years passed, the growing brotherhood built a trapeza (dining hall) and a forty-two-thousand-square-foot main building (it consists of monks’ cells, guest rooms, a library, offices, an infirmary, a bookstore, and other facilities). The monastery maintains an Orthodox cemetery where the faithful may choose to lay to rest their loved ones in the peaceful and prayerful surroundings. The names of those buried on the monastery grounds are commemorated at every Divine Liturgy. Holy Archangels Monastery is the only US Orthodox monastery that has a commercial winery and produces award-winning wines from many sustainably grown grape varieties. Today the Holy Archangels brotherhood has monks from many walks of life and from different countries. Accordingly, since its founding, the monastery has provided hospitality to a great variety pilgrims and visitors. Greeks, Antiochians, Russians, Romanians, Serbians, American converts to Orthodoxy, or persons simply interested in the Orthodox

faith are equally welcomed at Holy Archangels. The monastery is conveniently located between the two major metropolitan hubs of Austin and San Antonio, and it is only a few hours’ drive from both Dallas and Houston. The Holy Archangels brotherhood follows the Athonite typikon (monastic rule), which directs each of the monks to keep both a private prayer and reading rule in the early morning hours and attend daily communal services of Hours, Orthros (Matins), Divine Liturgy, Vespers, and Compline.

## Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Orthodox Church in America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** (a) Physical: 17671 County Road 4057, Kemp, TX 75143; (b) Mailing: PO Box 426, Kemp, TX 75143

**Phone:** 903-498-4474

**E-mail:** nativitymonastery@gmail.com

**Website:** www.nativitymonastery.com

**Year of Founding:** 2009

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** December 25 (Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Barbara (Morais)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 2

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** The original planning of this monastic community began in 2000, but it was not until 2009 that the property of thirteen acres with a small pond was acquired and the monastery was finally established. The house—part of the purchased property—was renovated, and a chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas was erected. In addition to the daily cycle of worship services, the Divine Liturgy is served each Saturday morning, followed by an Agape meal. Visitors are welcome to attend all worship services. Through the year the monastery hosts many retreats (with a special emphasis on retreats for women and youth), educational events with invited guest speakers, and a summer youth camp. The Blessed Xenia Cemetery at the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Monastery is an Orthodox cemetery with an outdoor chapel dedicated to St. Herman of Alaska. Plots are offered for both Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians. The monastery’s main ongoing project is the construction of the St. Seraphim of Sarov Retreat Center. It will allow the monastery to accommodate more visitors and guests, plus more retreats and seminars, and will also provide a better work facility for candle-making (the sisterhood produces beeswax and soy candles).

## St. Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 6855 Little York Lane, Washington, TX 77880

**Phone:** 936-878-2390

## WASHINGTON

### All-Merciful Saviour Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church  
Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** (a) Physical: 9933 SW 268th St., Vashon Island, WA 98070; (b) Mailing: PO Box 2420, Vashon Island, WA 98070

**Phone:** 206-463-5918

**E-mail:** frtryphon@vashonmonks.com,  
frpaul@vashonmonks.com

**Website:** www.vashonmonks.com

**Year of Founding:** 1986

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** August 14 (Procession of the Life-Giving Cross of the Lord)

**Name of Superior:** Fr. Tryphon (Parsons)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 5

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For men only

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see the article on p. 72): All-Merciful Saviour Monastery is located on scenic Vashon Island in the central Puget Sound, near Seattle, Washington. It is about a twenty-minute ferry ride from West Seattle or a fifteen-minute ferry ride from Tacoma. Although the island is in a major metropolitan region, it remains very rural and heavily forested (about 85 percent of the island is undeveloped forest). Just south of the small village of Dockton, the monastery sits on a hill surrounded by fir, hemlock, and madrona trees. The monastery’s complex includes a chapel dedicated to St. John the Wonderworker of Shanghai and San Francisco, a katholikon (main church) dedicated to the Holy Protection of the Theotokos, seven monastic cells, the Metropolitan Laurus Memorial Library, The “Way of a Pilgrim” gift shop and bookstore, and the trapeza (i.e., dining hall and kitchen). The small monastic community aspires to maintain a subsistence lifestyle: large organic garden, beehives, and chickens for eggs are part of monastic “economy.” To the outside community the All-Merciful Saviour Monastery is well known for the high-quality teas and coffees that are sold under the trademark “Monastery Coffee Blend.” Fr. Tryphon, the monastery abbot, is respected for his missionary effort to promote and explain the Orthodox faith to the non-Orthodox. He travels frequently to speak for variety of audiences, writes a daily blog that is translated into four languages, and also broadcasts a daily devotional on Ancient Faith Radio. The brotherhood welcomes visitors but requests that pilgrims call and inform the monastery before taking the ferry.

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** www.saintparaskevi.org

**Year of Founding:** 2004

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English, Greek

**Feast Day:** July 26 (Nun-Martyr Parasceva of Rome)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Paraskevi (Emmanouilidou)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 9

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No

**Description:** The monastery is located near the historic town of Washington (also known as Washington-on-the-Brazos), which is frequently nicknamed “the birthplace of Texas” because it was the site of the 1836 convention that announced the separation of Texas from Mexico and the creation of the Republic of Texas. The monastery’s complex sprawls on sixty-five well-landscaped acres. The katholikon (main church) is an imposing and elaborate Byzantine-style basilica. In addition to the katholikon, two more chapels serve the sisterhood and visitors to the monastery. The monastery has the store Byzantion Monastery Clothing. The monastery maintains a full daily cycle of worship services and welcomes visitors and pilgrims every day from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

## VIRGINIA

### Skete of the St. Maximos the Confessor

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** (a) Physical: 14054 James Madison Hwy, Palmyra, VA 22963; (b) Mailing: PO Box 356, Palmyra, VA 22963

**Phone:** 434-589-8530

**E-mail:** sketestmaximos@embarqmail.com

**Website:** No website

**Year of Founding:** 2000

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** August 26 (St. Maximos the Confessor)

**Name of Superior:** Igumen Mefodii (Juli)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 3

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No

**Description:** This is small and very “quiet” monastic community. Those who come here to visit are typically attracted by the skete’s icon studio dedicated to St. Alypij the Iconographer. The Skete offers six-day-long iconography workshops (the workshop’s program and duration can also be adjusted depending on personal needs and interests).

## St. John the Forerunner Greek Orthodox Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 5 Timmer Lane, Goldendale, WA 98620

**Phone:** 509-773-7141 (office), 509-773-6650 (bakery and cafe, open to the public)

**E-mail:** stjohns@stjohnmonastery.org, bakery@stjohn-monastery.org

**Website:** www.stjohnmonastery.org

**Year of Founding:** 1995

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** Greek

**Feast Day:** June 24 (Nativity of St. John the Baptist, also known as Nativity of St. John the Forerunner)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Epraxia (Kralli)

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 22

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see the article on p. 130): The Monastery of St. John the Forerunner was founded in 1995, when a local doctor, Gerald Timmer, donated his forty-eight-acre property to the Greek Orthodox Diocese of San Francisco with the goal of establishing a women’s monastic community. Three nuns came here from the Holy Orthodox Monastery of the Panagia Hodigitria in Volos, Greece. Today the sisterhood has increased from the three founding sisters to more than twenty monastics, thus becoming one of the largest Orthodox monasteries for women in America. St. John the Forerunner Monastery follows the cenobitic way of life, meaning that the sisters hold all things in common and follow a daily schedule under the direction of the abbess. The sisters’ day begins at 2 a.m. with personal prayer time, followed by common services in the chapel at 4.30 a.m. The nuns practice the traditional arts of the Orthodox Church, including painting Byzantine icons, knotting prayer ropes, making incense, and dipping beeswax candles. They also make natural soaps and lotions. The St. John’s bakery (located off the monastery’s grounds) is open to the public. The bakery is very popular for traditional Greek dishes and pastries, all made without preservatives and from scratch by the sisters. A full espresso bar is another feature of the bakery. A number of entrees and desserts are available for taking home from the bakery freezer case. The sisters also provide catering service for dinners, parties, luncheons, and so forth. The monastery’s gift shop carries a great variety of goods: packaged pastries, homemade jams and toppings, pure raw honey, beeswax candles, handmade lotions and natural soaps, original artwork and prints, Christian books, Byzantine music, icons, crosses, key chains, geo rocks, and more. The monastery welcomes all visitors, though advance arrangements are strongly recommended. Orthodox Christians may stay at the monastery for a personal retreat for up to two days for a time, at the discretion of the abbess.

## WEST VIRGINIA

### Convent of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** (a) Physical: 395 Holy Cross Rd., Wayne, WV 25570; (b) Mailing: PO Box 698, Wayne, WV 25570

**Phone:** 304-849-4697

**E-mail:** info@nativitycandles.com

**Website:** www.nativitycandles.com

**Year of Founding:** 1986

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** September 21 (Nativity of Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Theodora

**Number of Nuns in Residence:** 1

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** No

**Description:** The Convent of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary was founded in 1986 in House Springs, Missouri. In 2000 it moved to its current location. From the beginning this small female monastic community has been affiliated with and is under the spiritual guidance of the Hermitage of the Holy Cross Monastery (Wayne, West Virginia). The convent produces a variety of high-quality hand-dipped beeswax candles.

### Hermitage of the Holy Cross

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

**Male or Female:** Male

**Address:** 505 Holy Cross Rd., Wayne, WV 25570-5403

**Phone:** 304-849-2072, 304-849-4726 (gift shop)

**E-mail:** info@holycross-hermitage.com, guestmaster@holycross-hermitage.com

**Website:** www.holycross-hermitage.com

**Year of Founding:** 1986

**Church Calendar Followed:** “Old” (Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** September 27 (Elevation of the Holy Cross)

**Name of Superior:** Archimandrite Seraphim (Voepel)

**Number of Monks and Novices in Residence:** 25

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description** (for detailed description of this monastery, see the article on p. 84): The Holy Cross Monastery is located on 180 acres in the beautiful foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in West Virginia. The surrounding hills and forests create a sense of full seclusion from the distractions and temptations of the world. The brotherhood of the Holy Cross Monastery is a very pan-Orthodox and culturally mixed community. Its members represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds, with

some being American-born and some coming from foreign countries. Many of the brothers are converts to the Orthodox faith. Holy Cross is also a growing monastery, with more than two dozen monks, novices, candidates, and layworkers. The monastic community is comprised of both seasoned monks, who have lived very full monastic lives for decades, and many younger monks who have brought a youthful vigor and energy to the monastery. The average age of the monks at the hermitage is thirty-nine. English is used both as the language of worship and the language of everyday communication. The monks support themselves by manufacturing incense in the Athonite tradition (a wide variety of fragrances are available) and handmade soap products (bar and liquid soaps with different natural fragrances). The monastery's other products include honey, creamed honey, room sprays, and lip balms. The monastery's goods have grown very popular in the past years, and they are shipped daily to many customers both in the United States and around the globe. All products can be ordered online on the monastery's website. The farm run by the brothers provides their community with fresh goat and cow milk, vegetables, and eggs. The monastery also has an apiary that produces wild mountain honey. The monastery's guesthouse has three bedrooms (four beds in one room and two in the others, with a total of eight beds), two full bathrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and a washer and dryer. Holy Cross is a popular destination that attracts a variety of visitors, so it is advisable to book accommodations well in advance. The monastery provides overnight visitors with three meals each day. Lunch and supper are formal meals with the brotherhood. Breakfast is optional and informal and may be taken at the monastery trapeza (refectory) in silence, or on one's own at the guesthouse. Guests are expected to attend the two formal meals and to help with cleanup if asked. Holy Cross Monastery is a "working community": the guests to the monastery are encouraged to help the brothers with their numerous obediences, chores, and work projects.

women (but a letter of recommendation from an Orthodox priest is requested)

**Description:** In 1994 two founding nuns came from the Greek Orthodox monastery in Thasos (Greece) and helped with the establishment of the monastery of St. John Chrysostom. Today the St. John Chrysostom Monastery is known for a great variety of religious arts and crafts that can be purchased either by visiting the monastery or through its website.

## WISCONSIN

### St. John Chrysostom Monastery

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Male or Female:** Female

**Address:** 4600 93rd St., Pleasant Prairie, WI 53138.

**Phone:** 262-694-9850

**E-mail:** No e-mail

**Website:** [www.stchrysostomoscrafts.com](http://www.stchrysostomoscrafts.com)

**Year of Founding:** 1994

**Church Calendar Followed:** "New" (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** Greek

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery's Everyday Life:** Greek

**Feast Day:** November 13 (St. John Chrysostom)

**Name of Superior:** Mother Melanie

**Number of Nuns and Novices in Residence:** 21

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and

## Chapter 4

# The Way They Live: the Stories of Some American Orthodox Christian Monasteries

# The Alaskan Monastic Communities: St. Michael Skete on Spruce Island and St. Nilus Skete on St. Nilus Island

(Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA)  
www.stnilus.org

By Alexei Krindatch

Upon disembarking in Monk's Lagoon on Spruce Island after a rough forty-minute boat ride from Kodiak Island, one is immersed in the sounds of myriads of birds that nest on the island from May to September. But there is absolutely no "worldly noise" here: only rugged cliffs, dense spruce forest, bright green moss covering everything, salmon jumping in the lagoon's waters, and the occasional fox and deer roaming the black-sand beach. It could be said that this place is the cradle of Orthodox monasticism in America. Indeed, St. Herman of Alaska, the member of the original Russian missionary team from Valaam Monastery and America's first canonized Orthodox saint,<sup>1</sup> had lived here for more than twenty years, until his death in 1836. Today two monastic communities—St. Michael Skete for men and St. Nilus Skete for women—live in close proximity to St. Herman's hermitage and strive to follow St. Herman's example of prayer, simplicity, and living off the land and sea. The attached map shows the local "monastic geography."

Monk's Lagoon lies on the eastern edge of Spruce Island. This is a primary destination for pilgrims from around the world who come to visit the site of the home and grave of St. Herman, the Wonderworker of Alaska.

<sup>1</sup> St. Herman of Alaska was an Orthodox Christian monk who first lived in Valaam Monastery in Northern Russia. In 1794, along with nine other monks, he was sent to Alaska to evangelize the natives there. In time he would become the sole survivor of the original mission. Throughout his long life (1751–1836), he cared for the natives of the Kodiak area, nursing them in their illnesses, educating them, and defending them from the abuse of the Russian fur traders. Sometime after 1811 he settled on Spruce Island and established an orphanage for native children. He was canonized as a saint by the Orthodox Church in America and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 1970. For more on his life and the history of Russian monastic mission to Alaska, see the chapter on the history of Orthodox monasticism in America.



Map of Spruce and St. Nilus Islands.

A footpath at the south end of the beach leads to the Meeting of the Lord Chapel. Fr. Herman's favorite feast was the Meeting of the Lord, and it was to this event that he chose to dedicate his chapel. Time and nature have left nothing of the original building, but on the site of the first chapel is a small church, modeled after the original drawings. The chapel's walls are covered with beautiful frescoes depicting the life of St. Herman. At the opposite end of the beach, another footpath leads deep into the woods. On this trail Fr. Herman would walk from the beach to his cell in the moss-laden emerald forest. The Kaluga Icon of the Mother of God Chapel indicates the place where the saint's cell was. The icon to which this chapel is dedicated was painted by monks in the monastic republic of Athos in Greece. The Virgin Mary is depicted here reading the prophecy of Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Is. 7:14). The path continues to the St. Herman's spring—the source of drinking water for Fr. Herman and the place where he kept a small garden. After his death a number of miraculous healings were reported by those who drank the water of this spring. Many pilgrims

often take some water back home as a blessing from St. Herman. Walking deeper in the forest, one comes to the Sts. Sergius and Herman of Valaam Chapel. Built in 1894 (to commemorate the centennial of the arrival of Valaam monastic mission), it is erected over the grave of St. Herman. This chapel is home to several notable icons: the icon of Sts. Sergius and Herman of Valaam (painted on canvas and brought from Valaam in Russia); the seventeenth-century icon of the Mother of God (also known as the “Spruce Island Icon of the Mother of God”) that existed from St. Herman’s time; the icon of Christ Enthroned; and the icon of the Mother of God, “Abbess of Mount Athos,” that was painted by monastics on Mount Athos.<sup>2</sup>

Beneath the chapel is the former grave of St. Herman. In 1935 the foundation of the chapel was restored, and the relics of St. Herman were unearthed and placed in a new coffin in the church. In 1970, after the canonization of St. Herman, the relics were transferred to the Holy Resurrection Church on Kodiak Island. Nevertheless, the pilgrims still crawl to the saint’s original grave beneath the chapel to pray there and to ask for direction and help in their lives.

The main, official pilgrimage to St. Herman’s hermitage in Monk’s Lagoon is held each year around August 9, the date of his canonization, but hundreds of visitors also come to this place individually throughout

<sup>2</sup> The Sts. Sergius and Herman Icon and the Spruce Island Mother of God are now kept in the Holy Resurrection Church in Kodiak.

Steel cross on the top of Mount St. Herman on Spruce Island. Elevation 1,600 feet.



the year (provided that weather permits crossing the strait between Kodiak and Spruce Islands). Many of them combine the pilgrimage to St. Herman’s sites with the visits (and possible overnight stays) to St. Michael and St. Nilus Sketes.

The St. Michael Skete for men was founded in 1983, thus reestablishing the tradition of permanent monastic presence on Spruce Island. It takes about an hour and a half of hiking (approximately four miles) from Monk’s Lagoon to reach St. Michael Skete. Alternatively, one can arrive by boat at Sunny Cove on the southern shore of the Spruce Island and follow a short but steep path to the skete. The skete’s main building (with chapel, trapeza, and cells for monks and guests) is situated high on the slope, offering a magnificent view of the sea and surrounding islands and islets. One of the inspirations for this building was the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras on Mount Athos. The skete and its Russian-style onion-shaped dome can be easily seen by travelers aboard ferries and private boats en route to Kodiak. A terraced vegetable garden extends from the skete down the slope.

To reach St. Nilus Skete<sup>3</sup> for women, one needs to take a short boat ride of approximately half a mile, from Sunny Cove on Spruce Island to the neighboring tiny islet of St. Nilus. However, “short” does not always mean

<sup>3</sup> It is named after the fifteenth-century Russian ascetic St. Nilus of Sora. Known for his extreme simplicity, St. Nilus emphasized the inner life of the monastic: spiritual warfare, interior vigilance, and the practice of the constant saying of the Jesus Prayer (“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”).

Monk’s Lagoon on Spruce Island is the site of the home and grave of St. Herman of Alaska.



“easy.” Stormy weather can make the narrow strait between Spruce and St. Nilus Islands impassable for days. Similarly, when bad weather arrives, both monastic communities are completely cut off from the main town of Kodiak on Kodiak Island.

The St. Michael and St. Nilus monastic communities live a true subsistence life, which involves a lot of harsh physical work. Both communities rely on each other’s help and support. The monks go fishing for salmon, grey cod, and halibut, whereas the nuns smoke and can the fish brought by the monks. To survive the long Alaskan winters, the monks help nuns to collect and chop firewood (the sole source of heating in both sketes), while the nuns maintain a greenhouse, growing potatoes, beets, kale, cabbage, and turnips. In the summer months both monks and nuns collect mushrooms and wild berries (especially salmonberries) and make various preserves for the winter-time. The monks help the nuns with getting their mail from the post office in the small village of Ouzinkie on Spruce Island and with transportation to Kodiak Island when necessary. Both sketes are “off the grid” (although

solar panels provide a limited amount of electric power). Neither skete has indoor plumbing.

Yet, the lives of monks and nuns here are not simply about physical survival; they are first of all about constant inner prayer and maintenance of the full daily (in the case of the nuns, even nightly) cycle of worship services. The natural surroundings can make this challenging. For example, in order to come to the chapel from their cells, the nuns have to hike in the forest along narrow footpaths, which can be dangerously icy in the wintertime, especially when they gather for their middle-of-the-night services.

With St. Nilus as their patron, the nuns seek to emulate the monastic ideals of poverty, asceticism, and interior prayer. Mother Nina, abbess of St. Nilus Skete, describes the life of her community as follows: “We are strong in our communal life, but there is a lot of space for solitude. The greatest thing that we have to offer is actually silence and solitude. We love it here, because there is absolutely no interference from the outside world: the whole island belongs to the skete.” When asked if there were anything special about liturgical services at the skete, Mother Nina

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The nuns going to church during winter time.



replied, “As a sisterhood, we came to the Orthodox faith through the Russian liturgical tradition, but now we are part of the Serbian Church yet maintain close relations with various US Greek Orthodox monasteries. Accordingly, our services are in English, but the prayer rule is close to Greek tradition, while in our singing we combine the Russian and Byzantine styles.”

Whereas silence and solitude are at the very heart of the St. Nilus monastic community, the sisters are also known for their hospitality. With love and warmth, they receive day-guests on their secluded island. For women pilgrims the nuns also offer overnight accommodations in a one-room log cabin with windows facing soaring ocean waves (the cabin can lodge up to three persons at a time). Pilgrims to St. Nilus Skete are encouraged to help the sisters in their daily chores. As Mother Nina says, “We love our pilgrims very much, but we have a lot of work to do. This is a very busy community: ‘boredom’ is not a word in our vocabulary.”

Compared to the nuns on St. Nilus Island, the monks at St. Michael Skete are somewhat more exposed to the outside world. In the last decade several Orthodox families (one with six children) have bought land and built their houses nearby, thus becoming regular attendees of worship services at the monastery. In many ways St. Michael Skete serves today as a “connecting point” for this small local Orthodox community.

Each of three monks at St. Michael Skete brings unique skills and experience into the life of their small brotherhood. In his past secular life, Fr. Andrew, the skete superior, spent significant time doing various construction, landscaping, and gardening works. Once a devoted surfer, he found it easy to become a fisherman and good skipper

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Monks setting out to go fishing.



of the monastery’s small motorboat. He also likes to joke that “surfers make good monastics, because they are well-balanced persons.” Fr. Adrian, the senior monk at the skete, has degrees in economics and photography. Before becoming a monk, for a time he lived outside the United States while working for IBM in London and teaching English in Japan. Fr. Lawrence, the junior member of brotherhood (he joined St. Michael about three years ago), served several years in the navy, where he learned land surveying before eventually earning a degree in engineering.

Being Orthodox monastics does not mean that the monks and nuns at St. Michael and St. Nilus separate themselves from the local wider non-Orthodox community. This is, after all, Alaska—the place where neighbors must be able to rely on each other’s help and support. When word got out that a summer gale had destroyed the nuns’ newly planted garden, a surprise work party of Kodiak locals arrived on the nuns’ beach, with new seedlings in hand, as well as materials for additional garden beds.

The town of Kodiak is also home to a Baptist mission, where young interns stay while preparing themselves to become religious missionaries. The mission directors frequently bring these interns on day visits to St. Michael and St. Nilus to expose them to the Orthodox faith and to community life; the interns help the nuns with various homesteading chores such as digging springs, chopping firewood, and so forth.

Some of St. Michael’s non-Orthodox neighbors occasionally attend worship services at the monastery and contribute to the skete’s communal meals on Sundays. On the Fourth of July, there is a potluck party for the local community on the beach at Sunny Cove, with readings on American history and the singing of traditional American

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St. Michael Skete offers a magnificent view of the sea and surrounding islands.



songs. The monks always participate in this event.

There are also so-called “dinner boat tours” from Kodiak that sometimes include St. Nilus Island on their itinerary. The nuns welcome their non-Orthodox visitors and talk with them about monastic life.

In conclusion, a few words must be said about the local natural surroundings. The major geographic landmark on Spruce Island is the sixteen-hundred-foot-tall peak of St. Herman Mount. A climb to the peak via the steep and loose trail is possible only for the physically fit. A wrong step could lead to a fall through dense salmonberry bushes and alder patches. Generally, hikers should not go to the peak alone, and it is a good idea to bring a VHF radio or cell phone in case of emergency. Atop the peak a breathtaking 360-degree view of Spruce, Kodiak, Afognak, and Marmot Islands awaits. In 2006 the Kodiak community, with the help of a Coast Guard, erected a twenty-four-foot steel cross on the top of Mount St. Herman.

As the name suggests, Spruce Island is covered with Sitka spruce trees, sometimes reaching two hundred feet

in height. Whether precariously balanced on the edge of a cliff or creating a forest canopy with their moss-covered branches, the spruce trees present a majestic picture. The beautiful but thorny devil’s club (known sometimes as “Alaskan ginseng”) is also prolific here. The bad news is that an encounter with it could be very painful, as its tiny spikes imbed easily in the skin, causing minor irritation. The good news is that an invigorating tea can be made from the roots of Alaskan ginseng, and naturalists claim that it can be used to treat many illnesses. When spring comes, the island turns into a verdant mosaic of irises, ferns, petrushki (beach lovage), sour dock, and many other plants. In July salmonberries cover the island, followed later by blueberries, elderberries, and high bush cranberries. In the past Alaskan natives used to mix berries with seal oil and reindeer fat to make a high-energy food. Known as aquataq, it was used by hunters as a portable food source (think of modern energy bars). For mushroom lovers the end of summer and the early fall are the best times for a visit. A multitude of mushrooms emerge from beneath

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Fr. Andrew, abbot of the Skete, is an experienced boat captain and fisherman.



the thick moss of Spruce Island—including brown velvets, hedgehogs, angel wings, and chicken-of-the-woods. The last ones grow on the sides of trees in the huge, bright orange clusters of up to fifty pounds!

Spruce and St. Nilus Islands are havens for birds and bird watchers. Bald eagles, oystercatchers, and hermit thrushes are some of the many birds that can be seen. In May the puffins return for the summer, nesting on the cliffs of St. Nilus Island. As for marine wildlife, various types of salmon return to the Kodiak region to spawn throughout the summer: sockeye salmon from late May through early July, pink salmon from July through August, and coho salmon from late August through September. The waters here offer abundant fishing, and a charter boat can also take visitors fishing for halibut and king salmon. In spring and fall grey and humpback whales pass Spruce Island as they follow their migration patterns. Summer visitors are almost guaranteed to see sea otters and seals. The land animals that inhabit Spruce Island include red foxes, black-tailed deer, beavers, and snowshoe hares.

Most people come to St. Michael and St. Nilus Sketes from May through September, when the air is warm and the seas are calmer, thus making the passage from Kodiak easier. Yet, even then trips are difficult to plan in advance because the weather is always unpredictable here. For visitors to St. Herman's sites, the monks can help with transportation by boat from Kodiak to Spruce Island and can give a tour of Monk's Lagoon. For those who wish to have a longer respite from the noise and stress of the modern world, both St. Nilus and St. Michael Sketes welcome guests into their secluded homes, in which they share common prayer, labor, and meals.

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Nuns make "salmon candy" by smoking the fish caught by the monks.



# All-Merciful Saviour Monastery, Vashon Island, Washington

(Russian Orthodox Church Outside of  
Russia)

www.vashonmonks.com

By Alexei Krindatch

“Smiles are contagious. Ever notice how a room brightens when someone walks in who is always smiling, always happy, always extending a warm greeting to others? What better gift can you give another than a sincere smile?”—this is a quote from *The Morning Offering*<sup>1</sup> by Fr. Tryphon, the abbot of All-Merciful Saviour Monastery. These words open the essay titled “A Good Place,” but they are also very reflective of the nature of this monastery’s brotherhood, where everything is done with a genuine smile and true warmth. And, indeed, the All-Merciful Saviour Monastery is a very “good place” to be, to visit, and to stay in touch with.

All-Merciful Saviour Monastery is located on Vashon Island, a little piece of natural paradise (about 85 percent of the island is undeveloped forest) just west of Seattle. Roughly the size of Manhattan, Vashon is only about a twenty-minute ferry ride from West Seattle or a fifteen-minute ferry ride from Tacoma. Yet, the island has no bridge connection to the mainland, and this makes all the difference: the quiet and serenity seize everyone who comes here. The feeling of being “forgotten in time” is especially strong in the southeast corner of the island, where the monastery is located. Just south of the tiny historical village of Dockton, the monastery complex is fully surrounded by fir, hemlock, and madrona trees. The main church of

<sup>1</sup> Abbot Tryphon (David M. Parsons), *The Morning Offering* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2014).

the Holy Protection of the Theotokos, a small chapel dedicated to St. John the Wonderworker of Shanghai and San Francisco, the cozy and inviting library, the gift-shop and bookstore, the trapeza (i.e., dining hall), a few monks’ cells, and a small (two-bedroom) guesthouse are interspersed with many colorful flower beds and patches of vegetable gardens. A small fountain splatters soothingly in the middle of a courtyard.

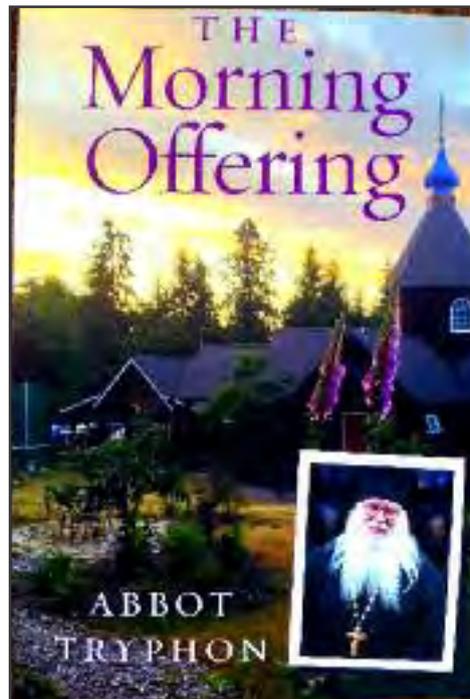
The natural surroundings combined with the architecture of the main church make visitors feel as if they are somewhere in Scandinavia or Northern Russia. And there is a good reason for this: Abbot Tryphon is of Norwegian descent and traces his ancestry to the legendary Norwegian king Olaf (960s–1000 AD), who is credited with the conversion of Norway to Christianity and building the first church there. Thus, it was natural for Fr. Tryphon to design the Holy Protection of the Theotokos church in the so-called “stave” style, which was typical for medieval churches in Norway.<sup>2</sup> Inside one will find a small but exquisite iconostasis with icons painted by Matushka

Anna Margitich, who was one of the last students of the famous Russian iconographer Leonid Ouspensky (1902–1987). Unlike many contemporary icons painted with acrylic paints, the icons of the Holy Protection church were painted in the old style, using egg tempera. The colors, therefore, are more subdued and less “flashy.” Together with sublime shades, they convey better the sense of time and sacredness.

The history of All-Merciful Saviour Monastery began in the spring of 1988, when the two founding monks, Brother Tryphon and Brother Paul (then simple nonordained monks), came to Vashon Island and rented a house: first for a month, then for another, and then . . . they stayed for good. Both were from the American Northwest, and both were tired from many years of living and working (Fr. Tryphon as a college professor, and Fr. Paul as landscape designer) in

the busy Bay Area. They felt instant connection with Vashon Island, especially its nature and small residential

<sup>2</sup> A “stave” church is a medieval wooden church style once common in northwestern Europe and northern Russia. The name derives from the buildings’ structure of post and lintel construction, a type of timber framing where the load-bearing posts were called *stafr* in Old Norse, or *stav* in modern Norwegian.



*The Morning Offering* is a popular collection of essays by Fr. Tryphon.



Aerial view of All-Merciful Saviour Monastery.

community, and knew that this would be a good place to build a monastery. For the next four years, however, the newly formed monastic community was “homeless,” as the monks did not have money to buy any property. The year 1992 was a turning point because the popular actor John Ratzenberger,<sup>3</sup> who had significant property on the island and whose wife was Greek Orthodox, donated five acres of land to the monastery.<sup>4</sup>

The next good luck was finding a stable source of income. From his years of studying and living in Berkeley in the 1960s and ‘70s, Fr. Tryphon had developed an “addiction” to a good cup of coffee.<sup>5</sup> When the monks moved to Vashon, they realized that their new home lacked a “coffee culture” and that boutique coffee roasting could become a good industry for the monastery. Today, to the wider outside community (both Orthodox and non-Orthodox), All-Merciful Saviour Monastery is well known for the artisan coffee blends and high-quality teas<sup>6</sup> that are

<sup>3</sup> He is best known for his role as Cliff Clavin in the sitcom *Cheers* and for his recurring supporting roles in Pixar films.

<sup>4</sup> Later the monastery was able to purchase neighboring parcels and increased its property up to the current sixteen acres.

<sup>5</sup> His favorite coffee shop, Caffe Mediterraneo, on Telegraph Ave. in Berkeley, still exists.

sold under the “Monastery Coffee Blend” and “Orthodox Monks Teas” trademarks. The road into a successful coffee business was not without bumps, however. In the late 1990s, Starbucks intended to sue the monastery for using the name “Christmas Blend,” which—allegedly—was owned by “Starbucks.” The response of the monks was firm: “Christmas belongs to everybody.” The chances to win a legal fight were slim, but, luckily, the battle of a small monastic community with the coffee giant stirred a lot of public interest. The outcry in the local and regional mass media, an interview on National Public Radio, and an avalanche of e-mails supporting the monastery forced Starbucks not only to drop the charges against the monastery but also its overall claim of ownership of the “Christmas Blend” name.

The external beauty of the monastery’s grounds and the popularity of its coffees and teas are only a thin external shell covering the intense spiritual life and missionary efforts of this small monastic community. The brotherhood consists today of five members: Abbot Tryphon and Fr. Paul were eventually joined by Brother Moses, Brother Martin, and Brother Peter. Liturgically, the brotherhood

<sup>6</sup> Most of the monastery’s teas are varietals coming from Taiwan, including highly valued oolong teas.

sees itself as being steeped in the Russian Orthodox tradition. Abbot Tryphon likes to say, “I embraced the Russian Orthodox tradition, because, as a Scandinavian, I feel better the ‘earthiness’ of Russia rather than Greek-Mediterranean ‘flavor.’ And, by the way, the prince Vladimir who converted Russia to Christianity was a Viking himself.” He adds, “And I am deeply touched by Russian iconography, by the tenderness of the faces of saints on Russian icons. They look like real humans.” Throughout the year All-Merciful Saviour Monastery maintains full cycle of worship services. On a typical day the monks gather in church at 5:30 am for Midnight Office, Matins, and First Hour. After breakfast at 8:00 a.m., the workday begins. Tending to the monastery’s gardens and chickens, building the new guest house, fulfilling online orders for coffee and teas, and receiving Orthodox pilgrims and non-Orthodox “religious tourists” always leaves more to do than five monks can accomplish. Five-thirty p.m. is time for Ninth Hour and Vespers. Then there is supper, and, at 8:00 p.m., Compline service, which completes the day. Divine Liturgy is celebrated once a week (on Sundays at 9:00 a.m.), and it always attracts a good number of visitors (although there are very few Orthodox Christians who live on the island). But no matter how many people come, everyone is invited to share a good meal with the monks afterward.

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The monastery’s brotherhood. From left to right: Fr. Paul, Fr. Tryphon (Abbot), Brother Peter, Brother Martin, Brother Moses.

All five brothers at All-Merciful Saviour monastery are American-born converts to Orthodoxy, and they envision their monastery’s primary mission as witnessing the Orthodox faith to mainstream America in a language (English) and manner that would be understandable and appealing for a “typical twenty-first-century American.” Abbot Tryphon is very clear about this vision; he says, “A very big part of this monastery’s life is hospitality, and I mean ‘hospitality’ in a missionary way. Many people in America have negative feelings about Christianity based on what they know about Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Once they discover Orthodox Christianity, both their feelings and they themselves begin to change. The Orthodox Church sees herself as being hospitable for the souls. We, priests and monks, are therapists.”

After many years of college teaching, Abbot Tryphon developed a strong affinity with and love for working with students. He admits, “It is not always easy, but we put a lot of effort in being welcoming especially to young people. And yes, we are very intentional about exposing young people to Orthodox Christianity. Why? Because they have everything in material terms, but many of them are starving spiritually and have ‘nowhere’ to go. It is as if they embraced (unintentionally, of course) the philosophy of Nietzsche, Camus, or Sartre, which leads to self-destruction. When they come here, they have a good chance to see something that they did not know



exists. Orthodox worship and faith are fulfilling and nourishing for the souls of the young folks.” Fr. Tryphon is regularly invited to speak in a number of schools in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>7</sup> The subjects of these classes vary greatly, from theology to creative writing, but this does not matter, because, as Fr. Tryphon explains, “My real specialty is to talk about Orthodoxy to people who never heard about Orthodoxy.” These speaking engagements provide a good opportunity to invite students to visit the monastery. And they do: either in organized groups with professors, or individually. The proliferation of social media has created new windows of opportunity for religious outreach, and Fr. Tryphon fully embraces these new mission “tools.” First came the blog that he writes daily: 365 days a year, with no exceptions. The daily contribution to the blog is essentially a short essay of spiritual self-reflection on whatever appears to be important for this particular day. The blog started as a private communication of Fr. Tryphon with some of his spiritual children, but then more and more people asked about possibility of subscribing to these daily messages. Today thousands of people around the globe (the blog is translated into several languages) read his essays. The high popularity of the blog caused Ancient Faith Radio to approach Father Tryphon and ask him to do daily devotional podcasts. Sure enough, he agreed. The collection of online essays grew rapidly, and it did not take very long before the best of them were selected and published as a book under the title *The Morning Offering*.

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<sup>7</sup> These schools are Northwestern University, Seattle Pacific University, Pacific Lutheran University, Evergreen State College, Tacoma Community College, and Trinity Lutheran College.

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The monastery church was built in a medieval Norwegian stave style.



Vashon Island has about eleven thousand residents, but only a handful of them are Orthodox Christians. Yet, it is not uncommon to hear the locals talking to the tourists and referring to the All-Merciful Saviour brotherhood as “our monks.” Fr. Paul has no doubt that “the people on the island fully adopted us.” And the people on Vashon appreciate the monastery for a much more serious reason than that it is simply an exotic addition to the local cultural and religious scene. Indeed, for the past twelve years, Father Tryphon has served as the island’s only chaplain for firefighters and police. This position includes a number of highly sensitive and typically not “very happy” duties, such as counseling in domestic violence situations, delivering death notifications, and comforting people who have lost family members through accidents or suicides. Why take this—unpaid—job in addition to all his duties as the abbot of monastery? The answer comes very naturally to Fr. Tryphon: “I see chaplaincy as a way of bringing hope to those who have no hope. And I see our monastery as an extension of this hope-bringing mission.”

Everyone is welcome to visit All-Merciful Saviour Monastery, but visitors are asked to call in advance before taking the ferry in order to make sure that the monks are available to give a tour and spend time with them. Overnight accommodations (for men only) are limited to three persons per night. The guests stay in a very cozy cabin situated right next to the monks’ cells. In summertime the monastery permits camping on its grounds so that more people can stay for a few days.

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Abbot Tryphon is the only chaplain for firefighters and police on Vashon Island.



# Annunciation of the Theotokos and Panagia Vlahernon Greek Orthodox Monasteries, Reddick and Williston, Florida

(Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America)

[www.holyannunciation.org](http://www.holyannunciation.org) and  
[www.panagiavlahernon.org](http://www.panagiavlahernon.org)

By Alexei Krindatch

The official motto of Marion County in North Central Florida is “Kingdom of Sun.” Besides its abundant sunshine, this area is mostly known for breeding award-winning racehorses. Indeed, when driving through the lush rolling hills between Ocala and Gainesville and passing ranch after ranch, one is much more likely to see dozens of these gracious animals than people. Nevertheless, many Orthodox Christians who come on vacation to Florida “swing by” for a reason very different than seeing the horses. They come to visit two nearby Greek Orthodox monasteries: the female monastic community of the Annunciation of the Theotokos and the male monastery of Panagia Vlahernon. Both were founded at roughly the same time (1998 and 1999), and both were established through the efforts of Elder Ephraim, a person who has exerted a very strong influence on contemporary Orthodox monasticism in America.<sup>1</sup> The founding nuns of the Annunciation of the Theotokos Monastery came to America from the ancient monastery of St. John the Forerunner in Serres, Greece,<sup>2</sup> while the first brothers at the Panagia

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<sup>1</sup> Elder Ephraim (b. 1927 in Volos, Greece)—also known as Archimandrite Ephraim of Philotheou—is rightfully credited with transplanting to American soil the traditions of authentic Athonite monasticism: that is, the way of monastic living and worshiping as practiced in the monasteries on Mount Athos in Greece. Elder Ephraim founded fifteen Greek Orthodox monastic communities in the United States from 1989 to 2005. He resides at St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery in Florence, Arizona. For more on Elder Ephraim, see the article on St. Anthony’s Monastery in this atlas.

<sup>2</sup> It was established in the thirteenth century and is one of the most frequently visited pilgrimage sites in northern Greece.

Vlahernon Monastery were partially from St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery in Florence, Arizona,<sup>3</sup> and partially from the Monastery of Philotheou on Mount Athos (Greece). As the years passed, some of the original brothers and sisters left, while new monks and nuns joined these monastic communities.

Besides being only ten minutes apart from one another, the Annunciation of the Theotokos and Panagia Vlahernon Monasteries share much else in common. Their similarities began with the difficulties that occurred when the monks and nuns originally arrived and settled in their new home community. Most of the local residents belong to various Protestant denominations and had never heard about “Orthodox” Christians. The fact that both monks and nuns wore black robes, the monks had long beards, and the nuns covered their heads and necks entirely with black scarves was not helpful either—especially after September 11, 2001, when some people mistook the monks and nuns for members of some sort of Islamic sect (despite the fact that they always wore crosses). The tensions came to its peak when the monks tried to change the zoning status of the monastery’s land. This change was necessary for a permit to have an Orthodox cemetery. The angry local residents gathered in the Reddick town hall to express their opposition. Emotions were so heated that when the monks came to explain the situation, the sheriff’s deputies recommended they leave the hearing. The disputed case went to court, and, suddenly, support came from local religious leaders, such as Protestant preachers and Jewish rabbis. Being more aware of different religious backgrounds, these leaders publicly supported the monks. They argued that having an Orthodox cemetery was part of the monks’ religious freedom that they are fully entitled to enjoy anywhere in America. The monks won the case, but most importantly, this was also the turning point in relations with the locals, who slowly but surely accepted the monks and nuns “the way they are.”

Both monasteries have the same heavenly patron: the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.<sup>4</sup> Panagia Vlahernon Monastery is named after the famous church of the Theotokos of Blachernae that was built in the fourth century in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey). For many centuries this ancient church was the home to the miracle-working icon of the Panagia Vlahernitissa as well as the holy robe of the Virgin Mary that had been brought

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<sup>3</sup> See the separate article on this monastery in this atlas.

<sup>4</sup> In Greek Orthodox tradition the words “Theotokos” and “Panagia” are both used as synonyms for “Mother of God.”

from Palestine to Constantinople in 473.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the Mother of God, both Annunciation of the Theotokos and Panagia Vlahernon monastic communities have a second patron saint. In both cases they are contemporary Greek Orthodox saints. St. Nektarios of Aegina (1846–1920; canonized as a saint in 1961) was chosen by the sisterhood of the Annunciation of the Theotokos as their protector,<sup>6</sup> whereas the monks at Panagia Vlahernon commemorate St. Savvas of Kalymnos (1862–1947; canonized as a saint in 1992) as their heavenly sponsor. St. Savvas of Kalymnos is also recognized as the patron saint of the Greek island of Kalymnos, where he lived during

<sup>5</sup> After the fire of 1434 and the fall of Constantinople in 1453, nothing remained of the once-famous shrine except for the site of the sacred spring. In 1867 a small church was built on the site, with the *hagiasma* (holy water fountain) inside. The four wall paintings by Eirenarchos Covas (1964) above the *hagiasma* are reminders of some great moments in the history of the Orthodox Church.

<sup>6</sup> Many people regarded St. Nektarios as a saint during his lifetime because of his prayerful life, humility, purity, and gift of prescience. He died at the age of seventy-four, following hospitalization for prostate cancer. The first posthumous miracle took place when the shirt of St. Nektarios was accidentally placed on the neighboring bed: a paralyzed man who was lying there was suddenly healed. Thousands of miracles have been attributed to his intercession, particularly cases of cancer or other serious illnesses being cured.

The main church at Panagia Vlahernon Monastery.



the last twenty years of his life. Not surprisingly, when the brotherhood of the Annunciation of the Theotokos celebrates the feast of St. Savvas of Kalymnos (on the fifth Sunday of Great Lent), hundreds of Greek American families who trace their ancestry to this island come to the monastery and join the monks for two days of festivities.<sup>7</sup>

The land of the Annunciation of the Theotokos Monastery was previously a horse ranch. From the former owners, the nuns inherited an elaborate Mediterranean-style building with tiled roof, brick arches, and an inviting courtyard. It houses the sisters' cells and their workshops. Visitors to the monastery spend most of their time in the second, newly constructed building: it has a chapel dedicated to St. Nektarios of Aegina, a dining hall (where everyone is invited after communal worship services<sup>8</sup>), a spacious reception area, and a well-stocked gift store. Another building offers simple dormitory-style overnight

<sup>7</sup> Most of them come to the monastery from the city of Tarpon Springs, Florida. Tarpon Springs is regarded by many as the Greek American "capital," and it has a claim of having the highest percentage of Greek Americans of any city in the United States. The Greek community of Tarpon Springs was formed in the early twentieth century when the booming local sponge industry attracted divers and crew members from the Dodecanese islands of Kalymnos, Symi, and Halki.

<sup>8</sup> Liturgy is celebrated once a week (on Saturday morning) by one of the priests from the Panagia Vlahernon Monastery.

accommodations. It has four rooms with fifteen beds and a commonly shared bathroom. The monastery accepts only female overnight visitors (including mothers with boys up to fifteen years old).

The small sisterhood (presently only two nuns in residence) is fully self-supporting and produces an impressive variety of handmade items such as natural soaps, lip balms, lotions, jams, and preserves. But the real “specialty” of the Annunciation of the Theotokos Monastery is high-quality incense. It comes in five fragrances (gardenia, myrrh, rose, poppy, and cypress) and is made following the ancient recipes brought from Mount Athos, Greece. As busy as they are with various industries, the sisters also find time to plant colorful flower beds in front of their Mediterranean “palazzo.” When asked how they manage to accomplish everything—labor in the monastery’s workshops, take care of the grounds, and welcome visitors—while maintaining a full cycle of personal prayer and communal services in the chapel, Mother Agapia, the abbess, answers, “Yes. We are a very small sisterhood. And the only reason that we continue to exist is Panagia [i.e., the Mother of God]. It is her—not us—that people come to visit and support.” She adds, “Besides, the entire life of monastics is the life of obedience. This life is not about what you ‘want,’ but

about what you ‘truly need’ for salvation. It is a difficult, but very fulfilling, life.”

With ten monks and novices, the monastic community of Panagia Vlahernon has more manpower, but then it also has more land to take care of (140 acres), plus more projects and visitors. The monastery’s property used to be a sugar plantation, and it still has a Southern feel. The stately mansion (dating back to the 1820s), a pond with a fountain, and majestic oak trees covered with Spanish moss could easily have been used as a movie setting for *Gone with the Wind*. Yet, at the same time, a snow-white chapel dedicated to the Archangel Michael, with blue cupolas and surrounded by palm trees makes one instantly think about village churches on a Greek island. The main Byzantine-style church, with its walkway bordered by white columns, also looks more like part of the old Mediterranean world than of a Southern plantation.

Similar to the nuns at Annunciation of the Theotokos, the monks at Panagia Vlahernon spend much of their time laboring in the monastery’s workshops. Among the products handcrafted by the brothers are beeswax candles, natural soaps, honey (the monastery has beehives), and various herbal teas blended from the plants gathered on the monastery’s grounds. Vegetable gardens supply the

The chapel of Archangel Michael at Panagia Vlahernon Monastery.



monks with peppers, tomatoes, and eggplants, but generally the local climate and soils are not very conducive to efficient agriculture. This is why the monks were very happy when they discovered one particular plant that, unexpectedly, connected very well with their land and that has outstanding nutrition qualities: the tree called moringa. Moringa originates from the foothills of Himalayas in northwestern India, and its edible leaves and stems are very high in protein, potassium, calcium, and vitamins A and C. This plant also has a strong anti-inflammatory effect. Different parts of moringa trees are used by the monks to prepare salads, broths, and teas.

The location of the Panagia Vlahernon Monastery is definitely “off the beaten path”: that is, one is unlikely to walk in simply by chance. And yet, the brothers think of themselves as an “Orthodox outreach.” Brother Ephraim, who has lived at the monastery for more than ten years, says, “There are very few Orthodox parishes in this part of Florida. Having our monastic community definitely helps Orthodox Christians who live here to stay connected with the Church. Besides, some people prefer to pray with us, in the seclusion and quietness that regular Orthodox parishes simply cannot provide.” The Liturgy is served at the monastery four times a week: on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. On any of these days, one is likely to see at least a few visitors worshiping with the brotherhood. After services, everyone is invited to share a meal with the monks in the monastery’s trapeza (dining hall). There is also one well-established tradition: on Sundays, people bring various homemade dishes that are served buffet-style after Liturgy, thus providing everyone an opportunity to sample various ethnic foods.

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Kolyva, a traditional dish of wheat berries, served at the Feast of the Annunciation of the Theotokos.



Annunciation of the Theotokos Monastery.

Overnight accommodations at the Panagia Vlahernon Monastery are offered only for men (women can stay at the nearby Annunciation of the Theotokos). They are simple and very limited: several beds in one dormitory. It is advisable to reserve in advance, especially for weekends. Those staying more than one night are expected to help the brothers in their various work projects on the monastery’s vast grounds. Fr. Michael, the monastery’s gardener, is especially notorious for spotting new people at the monastery and putting them straight to work with his crew.

All services at the Panagia Vlahernon (and at the Annunciation of the Theotokos) Monastery are in Greek, but the visitors to the monastery have very different ethnic backgrounds: not only Greeks, but also Russians, Romanians, Bulgarians, and “simply American Orthodox” are equally likely to be found here. When asked if the language is a problem for non-Greek visitors, Brother Gabriel, the monastery’s guest-master, says, “No, because most our Orthodox visitors know the service anyway by heart.” Also, in their everyday lives (i.e., not in the church), both the monks at Panagia Vlahernon and the nuns at Annunciation of the Theotokos converse equally in Greek and English. Therefore, visitors are able to have a conversation with the monks and nuns without any “linguistic barrier.” Discussions (especially in the case of the non-Orthodox visitors) often revolve around the same subject: “What is it like to be a monk, to live at a monastery, and to lead a monastic life?” Fr. Ephraim has his own short formula to address this question: “Monasticism is the spiritual art of giving up your personal freedom to acquire a true freedom from your passion.”

# Dormition of the Mother of God Monastery, Rives Junction, Michigan

(Orthodox Church in America)

[www.dormitionmonastery.org](http://www.dormitionmonastery.org)

By Alexei Krindatch

When visitors describe their impression of Dormition of Mother of God Monastery, two words are used most often: “hospitality” and “icons.” This monastic community is located in the old farming community of Rives Junction near the city of Jackson (south central Michigan). It is about an hour drive from Detroit airport. The monastery sits on 220 acres of wooded land that is home to an array of wildlife.

Dormition of the Mother of God was founded in 1987 by three nuns from Varatec Monastery, the largest women’s monastery in Romania (it has over four hundred nuns in residence). When the sisters came to the United States, they first joined the well-known Monastery of Transfiguration<sup>1</sup> in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania. After staying there for nine years, they felt a strong desire to pursue missionary work and to spread the Orthodox faith in America. Mother Gabriela (current abbess of Dormition of the Mother of God) remembers the exact words of the late Mother Benedicta, the most “senior” of the three founding sisters: “America needs more monasteries.” The nuns purchased an old and dilapidated farm in Rives Junction township, Michigan: an area where missionary Baptist churches always maintained a very strong presence. In a relatively short period of time, the sisters were able not only to establish a monastic community, but also to build a committed group of Orthodox faithful—the “friends of the monastery”—who provided support and encouragement.

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<sup>1</sup> The monastic community of Transfiguration was founded in 1967 by Mother Alexandra (the former Princess Ileana of Romania). Her dream was to create a place where American Orthodox women of all ethnic backgrounds could come and live together, leading the monastic life and worshipping in one English language. This vision was fulfilled: the nuns, many of whom are converts to Orthodoxy, span a variety of backgrounds. Always seen as a “missionary monastery,” the sisterhood of Transfiguration Monastery is known for its hospitality, various retreats, educational events, speaking engagements in the local Orthodox parishes, and publications (including the monastery’s own journal, *Life Transfigured*). The monastery also videostreams online many of its worship services.

The original farm property had only an old farmhouse and a pole barn. Less than three decades later, the Holy Dormition Monastery has become what some people describe as a “landmark for North American Orthodoxy.” The main monastery complex is in the form of a big “U” shape. One side includes a chapel; a nicely appointed, large reception room featuring antique furniture; and the dining hall. At the bottom of the “U” are the nuns’ living quarters. The other side contains a comfortable, twenty-four-bed guesthouse with a spacious conference room, a museum, and a gift shop. The middle of the “U” is occupied by an impressive stone church dedicated to the Dormition of Mother of God. It is the only Orthodox church in the United States built in the style of the Moldavian<sup>2</sup> monastery-churches, a style typical of the era of the Stephen the Great.<sup>3</sup> The former farmland was gradually converted into a carefully landscaped park with forests, meadows, and ponds. Well-maintained hiking trails allow visitors to explore the monastery’s grounds or to find a secluded place for prayer, intimate conversation, and simple relaxation. There is a prayer hermitage in the woods and a large open outdoor pavilion that is used in the summer for worship services, public events, and festive meals.

With the aspiration of making their monastery a “family-friendly” place where not only adults but even small children feel engaged and involved, the nuns created a “children’s garden.” It is simultaneously a garden, a play-

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<sup>2</sup> Moldavia is one of the historical provinces of Romania.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen III of Moldavia (1433–1504), commonly known as Stephen the Great, was the ruler of the Principality of Moldavia (part of today’s Romania). During his reign Moldavia achieved the peak of its strength as a state. Within the wider European context, Stephen the Great was famed for his long resistance against the Ottoman Empire.

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The monastery’s church was built in a style typical of 15th century Moldavian monastery churches.





Sunset at the Dormition of the Mother of God Monastery.

ground, and an educational space that allows children to explore and learn about the Orthodox faith. The children's garden is in a large periwinkle area, with trees and bushes separated by walking paths, all of which lead to areas of various "discoveries about the faith." The garden has shrines; rocks with passages from Holy Scripture; and images of an angel, a fish, and the Greek alpha and omega. A small church containing images of nuns and monks adorns the top of a mountain of rocks. The children explore the garden on their own, or one of the nuns can give them an introductory tour in which she explains, in an entertaining and accessible manner, what various parts of the garden symbolize. The children's garden is also popular destination for the local Orthodox parishes that bring their Sunday school classes here in the summer.

For many years the Dormition Monastery was the home of Archimandrite Roman Braga. A humble monk, respected priest, talented musician, and fervent preacher, Fr. Roman was the resident priest and spiritual father of this monastic community from 1990 until his death in 2015. When remembering Fr. Roman the sisters often compare him to "a nourishing rain on the seed of Orthodoxy in North America." Fr. Roman offered his priestly, intellectual, and spiritual support not only to Orthodox, but to non-Orthodox as well. His presence at the Dormition Monastery was very important in the development of the spiritual oasis the Dormition Monastery is today.

To the outside world, Dormition Monastery is perhaps best known for the regularly held iconography workshops. At a certain point one of the nuns, Mother Olympia, dis-

covered herself to be a talented iconographer. The work and books on icon-painting techniques by Theophanes the Cretan—a sixteenth-century Greek iconographer—inspired Mother Olympia to try her hand at creating images. Being mostly self-taught, she felt a call not only to paint (the whole interior of the monastery's main church was painted by Sister Olympia), but also to help others to learn this art. And so, for the past fifteen years, the monastery offers weeklong icon-painting classes (twice a year).<sup>4</sup> Mother Gabriela, the monastery's abbess, says, "There are two distinct features of our icon classes. First, most of our students are amateurs who learn icon writing not for professional purposes but by simply answering their internal need to create. Second, those who come here for the classes are also fully 'immersed' into the monastery's everyday life: they stay at the monastery, share meals with us, and participate in all worship services."

And there is an entire philosophy of why the teaching is done in a such manner. Mother Olympia strongly believes that "iconography is not like a 'job' where you do something and then you are done for the day. Working on icons takes a good chunk of you and your spiritual strength. In fact, icon painting is similar to going to confession. The state of your soul is inevitably depicted in the icon you create. If your soul is troubled, your icon will come out troubled as well. Therefore, learning iconography and writing icons is impossible without a lot of prayer." Mother

<sup>4</sup> In her work and icon-painting classes, Mother Olympia focuses on Byzantine-style icons created with acrylic paints.

Olympia sometimes receives invitations from Orthodox parishes to paint their churches, but she declines because this would require traveling, thus, depriving her of the cycle of personal prayer and worship services at the monastery.<sup>5</sup>

Besides painting and teaching how to paint icons, two other industries of the Dormition of the Mother of God monastery should be mentioned: mounting icons on wood and granite, and making prayer ropes. The monastery also runs a small publishing company: HDM (i.e., Holy Dormition Monastery) Press. Among the press's various titles, the most important is *The Psalter* (an annotated collection of church hymns) by Fr. Roman Braga. The other bestselling titles are two illustrated books for children: *Lent! Wonderful Lent* and *Glorious Pascha* (both by Debra Sancer). The monastery also publishes its own bilingual journal, *Burning Bush*.

The attractive setting and the sister's hospitality make Dormition of the Mother of God a place where many spiritual retreats are being held. Orthodox teens, Orthodox college students," and Midwest clergy wives are examples of groups that gather and spend time here every year. Another group that meets annually at the monastery and attracts significant public attention is "Women in Healing Ministries"—an informal association of Orthodox women

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<sup>5</sup> Dormition of the Mother of God is one of the few female Orthodox monasteries that have full-time resident priests, which allows the monastery to maintain a full cycle of liturgical services throughout the year. Divine Liturgy is served three times a week.

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The monastery's sisterhood at an evening worship service.



who are professionals in various health services, such as medical doctors, nurses, caregivers, and so forth. Various non-Orthodox groups (including local Protestant congregations, Catholic parishes, and those interested in gardening and landscaping) also come here for the daylong visits and retreats. The monastery is close to Spring Arbor University, a private Christian college affiliated with the Free Methodist Church. Many students from this school come to Dormition of the Mother of God to get a better understanding of the Orthodox Church and faith.

In addition to the annual pilgrimage held on the feast of Dormition (August 15), the events attracting a great numbers of visitors are the so-called "workdays" and "caroling day." The workdays are organized twice a year (in spring and fall). On these days, anyone is invited to visit and to help nuns with various work projects. The day begins with Liturgy, followed by work, and then lunch and some more work. But the real reason why people come is for fellowship and to simply have a good time together. As Mother Gabriela says: "This is all about bringing together people who otherwise would never meet each other." The caroling day occurs on the second day of Christmas—a day when the churches typically do not have services and most people are done with festive meals, exchange of presents, and so on. On this day people of all cultural backgrounds, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, literally pack the monastery and sing Christmas carols from various ethnic traditions and in different languages. This is a unique

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One of the Orthodox shrines in the children's garden.



opportunity to hear traditional American, Greek, Russian, Serbian, Romanian, and even Ethiopian Christmas songs performed in one place.

The sisterhood of the Dormition of the Mother of God Monastery leads a very intense internal life, but the nuns pay also great deal of attention to being good neighbors in the local community. This is important because most of the families here lived for generations. Hence, it takes a certain effort to “fit in.” The sisters help to distribute food baskets for people in need and to raise money for various not-for-profit associations. Whenever possible, they hire locals for various work projects. Once a year, as an expression of gratitude and appreciation, the nuns serve dinner for neighbors and the people with whom the monastery does business.

Eight sisters live together today under one roof at the Dormition of the Mother of God Monastery. Some of them are quite young (in their mid-twenties), while some have

much longer life experiences. Half of them grew up in Romania, while half are American-born. Some are “professional monastics” and spent most of their lives living in monastic communities, while some were accomplished professionals (including a former engineer, an English language teacher, and a realtor). The monastery has Romanian cultural “roots” and the founding sisters came from Romania, but today it can be described as an “all-American” Orthodox monastic community. English is used both as the primary language of worship and everyday life.

Visitors should keep one thing in mind when visiting the Dormition of the Mother of God Monastery. The sisterhood welcomes everyone for both short and multiday visits, but this is a relatively small community, and the sisters cherish the atmosphere of tranquility and peace at the monastery. Those coming here would benefit greatly by “fitting” into this atmosphere and being sensitive to the established routines of the everyday life at the monastery.

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The interior of the monastery's main church was painted by Mother Olympia.



# Hermitage of the Holy Cross, Wayne, West Virginia

(Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia)

[www.holycross-hermitage.com](http://www.holycross-hermitage.com)

By Alexei Krindatch

When John Denver wrote the lyric “Almost heaven, West Virginia . . .” in his iconic song “Take Me Home, Country Roads,” he hardly thought about this beautiful albeit rustic state as a particularly “sacred” place. Yet, there is at least one spot in West Virginia’s westernmost Wayne County that could be qualified as a “gate to heaven”: welcome to the Hermitage of the Holy Cross Orthodox Monastery! It is situated on 180 acres of forested land in secluded valleys that until recently were home only to deer, bobcats, squirrels, foxes, owls, and hawks. But not anymore: walk through the thick hardwood forest and you are likely to find an icon placed on a rock or a tree. These are the places where the monks and pilgrims come to pray and seek peace for their souls in the bosom of nature and solitude. The Hermitage of the Holy Cross monastic community was originally founded in 1986 in Home Springs, Missouri. However, the brotherhood grew quickly to the point where it needed larger facilities and more land. In 2000 this parcel in West Virginia was donated by good friends of the monastery, Nadezhda and Maurice Sill.

When the Orthodox monks moved to their new home, they were met with certain reservations by those who lived here for many generations: rugged mountain people,

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Aerial view of the monastery.



country Baptist and Pentecostal preachers, snake handlers, and many other “colorful” types. But after a short “trial period,” the brothers were fully accepted and welcomed into the local community. Fr. Alexander, the monastery’s dean, remembers a day when the head of one local influential family showed up unexpectedly at the monastery and asked one question: “So, folks, do you believe in Jesus Christ?” The simple question was responded with simple answer: “Yes.” In turn, the man simply pointed to his truck that was full of fruits and vegetables: a welcome gift. The monastery was truly built from scratch and some monks lived initially in the storage sheds, without electricity or running water. And, again, the locals lent a hand to the brothers by teaching them basic farming and other survival skills. Today, fifteen years later, the firmly established monastic community tries to pay back and help those who are in need whenever possible. It is not uncommon for the brotherhood to take care of someone’s overdue electric bills, hire locals for various jobs on the monastery’s grounds, and even cover the costs of funerals for some poor families.

The quintessential aspect of the Holy Cross monastic community is the atmosphere of unity, unconditional mutual love, and full acceptance of each other the way each person is: with all human weaknesses and shortcomings. “We are a band of brothers,” the monks like to say. And this is probably the best explanation for why the brotherhood doubled in size within less than ten years, growing from twelve monks and novices in 2007 to twenty-five in 2015, and thus becoming one of the largest Orthodox monastic communities in the United States.

Not surprisingly, in its typikon (the monastery’s bylaws), the brotherhood has chosen to be what is called a “cenobitic” (also spelled “coenobitic”) monastic community. This type of monasticism stresses the importance of communal—versus “individualistic”—life. In practical terms, this means a set of many rules that everyone follows, the absence of private possessions such as cars or bank accounts, and the expectation that everyone be present at all church services and formal meals.

Many of the brothers are fairly young (the average age of the community members is forty-one), and most of them have college degrees. And yet, in many ways they came from quite different walks of life, thus bringing diverse life experiences and skills into their community. Former registered nurses, a Roman Catholic priest and Roman Catholic monks, a geologist, musicians, army veterans, factory workers, a principal of a private Christian school, a video producer, and managers and businessmen all live, work, and worship together at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross. Nearly all the monks and novices here are

American-born converts to the Orthodox faith. Accordingly, English is the language of both worship and everyday communication. However, although they are demographically an “all-American” community, in liturgical terms the brothers think of themselves as being deeply rooted in the Russian Orthodox monastic tradition.<sup>1</sup> The way Liturgy is served, how people give and receive blessings, what type of prayers or readings are used at mealtimes, the ringing of church bells, the particular images on the monastery’s many icons, the look of priestly vestments—everything makes one feel as though he or she is in a traditional Orthodox *pustyn*<sup>2</sup> somewhere in a rural Russian province. And even “worship sounds”—despite the monastery’s usage of English—have a Russian feel because

<sup>1</sup> In order to provide all brothers with “firsthand” experiences of life in Russian Orthodox monasteries, the leadership of the Hermitage of the Holy Cross tries to arrange regular trips to Russia and visits with Russian monks for all members of the monastic community.

<sup>2</sup> “Pustyn” in Russian literally means “desert.” In the Russian Orthodox Church, this word is also used instead of “hermitage” to describe a secluded monastic community located in some remote place.

Brother David with the monastery’s famous Nubian goats.



of the musicology and hymns used. It is common to hear the same question from first-time visitors: “What was that melody you sang tonight? I’ve never heard that before.” The chant at the Hermitage services is primarily an adaptation of medieval Russian Orthodox liturgical singing, known as Znamenny chant. Other types of chant, such as Valaam, Georgian, Byzantine, and even Gregorian are occasionally used as well. As lovers of church hymns and religious songs in general, the monks especially enjoy visits by those people who are willing to share their own Christian musical tradition (and not only Orthodox). A special musical time for the monastery is Christmas. On the first three days of the feast, song books are opened each evening after meals, and the brothers sing many of the most beloved Western Christmas carols, such as “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” “Good King Wenceslaus,” and “Silent Night.” In tribute to the Appalachian setting of the monastery, the brothers also sing American spirituals with great gusto.

Living in close proximity to nature, the monks appreciate having all four seasons. Each passing month in the mountains of West Virginia brings different church feast



Ringling the bells for church services.

days, thus giving spiritual meaning to the natural cycle of earthly life. The birth of the new goat kids<sup>3</sup> after Easter reflects the new life given by the risen Christ. For Pentecost the brothers gather branches and small trees and use them to decorate the church. The waxen green leaves complement beautifully the shimmering green vestments of the clergy. On August 9 the Hermitage of the Holy Cross celebrates the feast of its patron saint, St. Panteleimon. A fourth-century Christian doctor, St. Panteleimon was martyred for his faith. He is commemorated for his intercession before God on behalf of all the sick and suffering. A special shrine to this saint stands in the monastery's church. Every morning there is a worship service asking St. Panteleimon's aid for all those in need of healing. People can visit or simply call the monastery and ask the monks to mention the names of their relatives and friends who need St. Panteleimon's help in the service. The monastery's abbot, Archimandrite Seraphim, says often that St. Panteleimon is the brotherhood's "primary care



Liturgy at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross.

physician." He should know: being himself a former registered nurse, he was healed of cancer after appealing to St. Panteleimon for help.

The exquisite fall foliage of West Virginia, with its myriad hues of color, is at its peak at the end of September. And this is the time of the monastery's major feast, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, celebrated on September 27. On this day dozens of Orthodox clergy and hundreds of lay pilgrims gather on the monastery's grounds. Liturgy is served in the outdoor gazebo-style chapel. It is followed by a procession with icons and the sprinkling of holy water, and then there is a picnic lunch and later a vigil under the stars.

From the very inception of the Hermitage of the Holy Cross, the idea of being fully self-sustainable was at the very heart of the brotherhood. Growing their own vegetables in the monastery's gardens and greenhouses, maintaining an apiary and collecting honey,<sup>4</sup> having chickens for eggs, and milking a herd of Nubian goats provide a good share of the food that is served in the trapeza (dining hall). Yet, not everything can be produced on the premises, and there are also many other bills to pay. Two major pillars support the economy of the Hermitage of the Holy Cross. One is the production of incense, while the other is the making of various natural soaps and related cosmetic products.

The traditional Athonite-style incense produced at the monastery comes in as many as twenty-six fragrances: "Honeysuckle," "Lavender Wood," "Amber," "Flowers of Cyprus," "Orange Blossom," "Burning Bush," and "Damask Rose," to name a few. Although the incense is mostly purchased by various American churches and

<sup>3</sup>The Hermitage of the Holy Cross has a herd of Nubian goats.

<sup>4</sup>This part of West Virginia is generally well known for its honey production.

monasteries (both Orthodox and non-Orthodox), more and more individuals approach the Hermitage of the Holy Cross and buy it for home use. The method of incense preparation is faithful to that used for centuries on Mount Athos. The pure frankincense tree resin is ground into a fine powder, which is then saturated with various rich fragrant oils (each gives a particular fragrance). Then, kneading brings this mixture to a dough-like consistency. The “dough” is rolled into thin sheets and cut into small grains. The grains are covered with a clay powder to mitigate stickiness and are cured for at least one month. The most important “ingredient,” however, is the constant prayer that accompanies the whole physical act of preparing the incense. Because prayer is central to the process, the incense is considered to be something holy even before being used in church services.

The natural soap products are another mainstay at the Hermitage. This venture began from the donation of a herd of Nubian goats that was given to brotherhood in order to help to start the monastery’s farm. The “problem” was that the goats produced too much milk for the brotherhood. Not helping things was the fact that the monks abstain entirely from dairy products during many fasting periods, as required by the church calendar. The question of how to use the oversupply was resolved by production of handcrafted goat milk soaps. Unlike most commercial products, the handmade natural soaps retain all glycerin, which is a byproduct of the soap-making process and which attracts and holds moisture in the skin, making it feel soft, healthy, and rejuvenated. After some experimentation but

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Spring at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross.



with quick success, the new monastic industry, a whole line of various soap-related products, was born. Not only US residents but also people living in South America, Europe, Australia, and Japan seek out the monastery’s bar and liquid soaps (offered in more than a dozen fragrances), hand and body lotions, skin moisturizers, and lip balms. Incense and soap-products can be ordered online and shipped domestically and internationally.

Offering hospitality has always been a priority for the brothers at the Hermitage of the Holy Cross. Abbot Seraphim often quotes St. Benedict, who said, “Let every guest be received as Christ.” He adds, “We try to be welcoming to everyone and give, at least, a quick tour to all guests. Many of our visitors have very little knowledge about monastic life, and we are happy to talk with them about what does it mean to be a monk and live at a monastery.” On Sundays (or whenever they have some spare time), the brothers often lead visitors on hikes to the caves, ridge tops, and rocky outcrops in the hills surrounding the monastery. These moments spent together in spiritual talks and prayer are beneficial for both pilgrims and monks. The peace and solitude of the forest creates a good atmosphere for self-reflection and mutual support in loving fellowship. Fr. David, the monastery’s guest-master, believes that “people who live in cities are very disconnected from nature. In fact, many of our guests simply do not realize how much noise and clutter can invade one’s soul in day-to-day contemporary life until they find themselves in the silence of the forest or praying in a cliff-side cave with one of the brothers.” Predictably,

many pilgrims to the Hermitage of the Holy Cross prefer to stay for a few days rather than come for a short day visit. The monastery offers overnight accommodations in a large and very comfortable log cabin. It is located about quarter of a mile from the monastery’s main complex. The guesthouse has three bedrooms, with eight beds total; two full bathrooms; a large living area; a fully equipped kitchen; and nice porches on which to sit, watch sunsets, and listen to the sounds of birds.

# Holy Archangels Greek Orthodox Monastery, Kendalia, Texas

(Greek Orthodox Archdiocese)

[www.holyarchangels.com](http://www.holyarchangels.com)

By Alexei Krindatch

Upon first seeing Holy Archangels Monastery, visitors are often struck by the combination of two very divergent styles: Mediterranean elegance and Texan grandiosity. One of the most architecturally stunning US Orthodox monasteries, Holy Archangels has an impressive array of buildings and facilities spread over 140 acres of land. The monastery's grounds also include a large pond (visitors are allowed to fish there), a creek, and even a natural waterfall. Holy Archangels is located in the Texas Hill Country, north of San Antonio and west of Austin. The surrounding rugged, wind-swept, and arid landscape feels like a very good place for an Orthodox monastery. However, according to Archimandrite Dositheos, the monastery's abbot, the main reason for founding a monastic community here was different: the monks wanted to establish an Orthodox presence and witness the Orthodox faith in the heart of Texas—an area they describe as “spiritual desert.” In fact, the monastery's land could be seen by some as the most unlikely place for Orthodox monastics because it once belonged to an Islamic Sufi center and included a mosque and a Muslim cemetery.

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The monastery's newly built complex: main church (center), trapeza (right) and monks' residences (left).

The monastery's three founding monks (including Archimandrite Dositheos) arrived here in 1996 from the Philotheou monastery on Mount Athos in Greece. Their first task—not the easiest one—was to deconstruct the abandoned mosque so that they could later use its foundations for a magnificent Byzantine-style basilica. But the brotherhood kept and even continued to tend to the Sufi cemetery, and the relatives of the deceased still visit the graves.

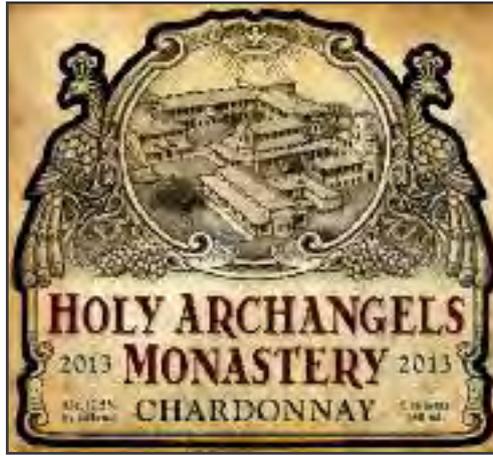
When recalling the early years of building the monastery, the brothers like to tell about a miraculous event that has become commonly known as the “front gate incident.” They hired several Mexican day laborers, one of whom was asked to paint the front gates. When he climbed atop the gates and started to work on the crucifix, he felt that someone was intently observing him from behind. He turned and saw what he described as “two very tall beings wearing white robes and smiling at him.” The worker was not a religious person and definitely did not know anything about the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, to whom the monastery is dedicated. Hence, the monks believe that the worker did not make up the story and these “beings” were their two heavenly protectors appearing in person.

Today, the monastery's grounds are divided in two parts: the newly constructed monastery complex and the so-called skete area. The latter is the place where the monks resided while working on the new facilities. Besides the monastic residences, the skete also has dormitory-style guesthouses for overnight visitors, a large chapel, and a dining hall with kitchen. The newly built monastery complex includes a majestic main church that is flanked by two Mediterranean-style buildings: the trapeza (dining hall), which can seat up to five hundred persons, and the three-story main building. The latter contains a variety of offices and rooms: a spacious reception area, where visitors





Night skies in summertime.



The monastery's winery produces award-winning wines.



Children enjoy fishing in the monastery's pond.

can comfortably sit and socialize; private en-suite rooms (some with nice exterior balconies) for up to fifty monks; a bishop's residence (for visiting church hierarchs); three chapels; an iconography studio (an iconography teacher comes to the monastery from Greece); a sewing room; a laundry; and much more. A distinct feature (rather uncommon in other US Orthodox monasteries) is own medical facilities: Holy Archangels has a small clinic, a pharmacy, an infirmary, and rehabilitation/exercise rooms. One of the brothers, Fr. Panteleimon, is a licensed medical doctor. When designing the building, the brothers considered that the monastery may need some basic medical services for both the numerous visitors and the aging members of the brotherhood.

The high-ceilinged main church, dedicated to the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel, features an exquisite wood-carved iconostasis.<sup>1</sup> The Bible-related personalities and scenes are intertwined here with various decorative ornaments. Both the iconostasis and all furnishings in the church (stools for monks, stands for painted icons, etc.) are made of solid oak. The colorful marble floor is made of stone brought from Greece, and it beautifully reflects the solid-brass chandeliers and candlesticks that adorn the church walls and ceilings. Most of the icons in the church were painted by masters from Greece, but the brotherhood is especially proud of an eighteenth-century Russian icon of the Synaxis of the Archangels that was given to the monastery as a gift. The entire monastery complex was

<sup>1</sup> Wood-carved iconostasis are typical of the monasteries on Mount Athos. The work on the iconostasis at Holy Archangels Monastery was commissioned to a pair of brothers, Lazarus and George Eleftheriadis.

constructed using a remarkable variety of natural materials: local Texan white limestone for the walls, marble from Greece and travertine from Mexico for the floors. The woods used for various interior elements include oak from Russia, Douglas fir from Oregon, redwood from Northern California, and teak from South America. Remarkably, most of the construction projects were accomplished either by the monks themselves or by Orthodox volunteers.

The monastery has an Orthodox cemetery with up to nine hundred plots available where the faithful may choose to lay to rest their loved ones in the peaceful and prayerful surroundings. Upon request from relatives, the names of those buried on the monastery's grounds are commemorated at worship services.

Even while working full-time to build the monastery, the brothers always maintained a strict regimen of monastic life<sup>2</sup> and the full cycle of worship services as required by the Athonite typikon (i.e., the rules of monastic life and prayer as adopted by monasteries on Mount Athos in Greece). This cycle of worship has attracted a significant flow of both Orthodox pilgrims and non-Orthodox visitors who seek a first-hand experience of authentic Orthodox monasticism. Some non-Orthodox visitors have eventually converted to Orthodoxy, and some have even become members of the Holy Archangels brotherhood. One of the first to embrace Orthodoxy through the Holy Archangels monastic community was the architect who helped to

<sup>2</sup> A small yet telling detail about the monastery's lifestyle is that one will not find any mirrors here (or in any other US Greek Orthodox monastery). The monks believe that a person does not need to look much at himself or herself because this contributes to vanity. Rather, they believe that the whole life at the monastery should be seen as a "spiritual mirror."

design the monastery: Gilberto (“Eusebios”) Lopez. Later, his son and daughter-in-law also converted to Orthodoxy, and over the years all six of the couple’s children were baptized at the monastery.

Overall, Holy Archangels Monastery is a family-friendly place with many things to do for children, including fishing in the pond (bass is the most desirable catch), fossil hunting (there is one particular area on monastery land that is good for this), playing with the monastery’s three golden retrievers, or simply exploring the vast grounds. Archimandrite Dositheos believes that there is much in common between the life of a good family and the life of a good monastic community. “A good monastic could have been a good spouse and a good spouse could have been a good monk, because both should be able to lead the lives of sacrifice and dedication,” he says.

The brotherhood of ten monks and novices at Holy Archangels Monastery is quite diverse. Half are of Greek descent, and half are of other ethnic backgrounds; half were raised in the Orthodox Church, and half are converts

to Orthodoxy. Some were born in America, while others grew up abroad. As for the brothers’ former secular lives and occupations, there is a great deal of variety as well. The brotherhood includes an ex-Marine, an accountant, two musicians (piano and harpsichord players), a chemist, a physician, and an academic with two PhDs in classics.

Despite significant ethnic diversity among the monks and the visitors to the monastery, the language of worship is not English but Greek. While this could be challenging for some non-Greek pilgrims, the monks feel that praying in Greek helps them to stay in tune with the traditions of monasticism on Mount Athos that the monastery strives to follow as much as possible. Abbot Dositheos also believes that Greek language used in monastery’s church, even if not understood by visitors, helps them to fully disconnect from their everyday lives in modern American society.

Besides Orthodox pilgrims and friends who regularly come to the monastery, Holy Archangels provides hospitality to a variety of other visitors. The Society of Orthodox Philosophers in North America (SOPHIA) holds its annual

Lighting chandeliers in the monastery’s main church.



gatherings at the monastery. Several colleges (including Baylor University, University of Texas at Austin, and Texas Lutheran Seminary) and many private local Christian schools bring their students to the monastery for field trips when teaching classes on world religions or Byzantine art.

A unique feature of Holy Archangels Monastery is that it is the only US monastic community with a commercial winery. It produces outstanding Merlot, Syrah, and Chardonnay wines (the monks plan to expand the variety of grapes in the future), which have won numerous awards in the prestigious San Francisco Chronicle and Finger Lakes competitions. Current production is limited to about four thousand bottles a year, and there is a waiting list to purchase the monastery's wines: that is, most of the wine is sold before it is even bottled. Because grapes are bought from Carneros vineyards in Napa, California, the monks describe their wines as "California born, but Texas raised." Fr. Michael, the monastery's winemaker, had an outstanding teacher: John Kongsgaard, the world-renowned Chardonnay and Syrah producer from Napa. The original

contact between the monks and the Kongsgaard family was established simply by a fluke: the children of one of the monastery's friends and Kongsgaard's children attended the same college. When the monks asked John Kongsgaard to help with their winery, not only did he lend his knowledge pro bono, but he and his wife, Maggie, also offered their home to several brothers when they came to Napa to pick up grapes. Soon a tradition was established: during each annual "grape pilgrimage" of brothers to Napa, the local winemakers and winery owners would gather at John and Maggie Kongsgaard's place and have supper together with the monks.

Encouraged by their success with wine, the brotherhood plans to also create a microbrewery and make dark, Trappist-style beers. Other projects for the future include the production of incense and candles, creating an iconography workshop, starting a bakery, investing in windmills and solar batteries to self-supply electric power, and planting a vegetable garden and fruit orchards so that the brotherhood will be able to lead a self-sustainable lifestyle.

The wood-carved iconostasis in the monastery's main church.



# Holy Cross Monastery, Castro Valley, California

(Orthodox Church in America)

[www.holycrossmonastery.org](http://www.holycrossmonastery.org)

By Alexei Krindatch

When people think about the San Francisco Bay Area, the notion of cultural and ethnic diversity is one of the first things that comes to mind. Holy Cross Monastery in Castro Valley fits ideally in this image because of its strong emphasis on openness to visitors and serving the spiritual needs of Orthodox Christians of all cultural traditions and ethnic backgrounds. English, Church Slavonic, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Greek are interchangeably used in the monastery's services depending on who has come to worship with the monastic brotherhood. Orthodox faithful come often to Holy Cross Monastery not only for liturgical services, but also for weddings, baptisms, and other sacramental blessings.

The small brotherhood of Holy Cross Monastery is as diverse as the people who visit this community. Fr. Stephen, the monastery's abbot, has a PhD in Byzantine and medieval Slavic history. He grew up in a military family with an Evangelical Protestant religious background but converted to the Orthodox Faith at the early age of eighteen. Fr. Peter, the second priest at the monastery, is from the city of Lviv in western Ukraine. Brother Lubomir was born in Bulgaria, while Brother Michael grew up in a Romanian family in Southern California.

Despite being a mere forty-minute drive from San Francisco and literally just a few miles from Silicon Valley, Holy Cross Monastery feels entirely disconnected from the outside world. It sits on nine acres of carefully landscaped property at the bottom of a small canyon surrounded by hills covered with lush vegetation. A creek meanders through the monastery's land, and wildlife is abundant, with deer, raccoons, squirrels, and wild turkeys being frequent "visitors." Every spring the same family of ducks returns to the monastery to raise their ducklings, so that the monks eventually nicknamed them the "Ortho-ducks." Fr. Stephen likes to say, "Normally monks venture out into the wilderness, but in our case the wilderness has come to us." And this is very true, because the monastery's land is sandwiched between two natural preserves: Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park and Garin/Dry Creek Regional Park. It is hard to imagine, but there is no cell

phone reception here, even though the monastery is located on the edge of Silicon Valley.

The history of Holy Cross Monastery is intertwined with the name of the late Archimandrite Theodor (Micka), the monastery's first abbot. He was a young parish priest when his mother died in 1965 and left him an inheritance for the purpose of founding a monastery. In 1970 Fr. Theodor met his first disciple, Stephen Scott (now known as Fr. Stephen). The young man shared with Fr. Theodor his zeal to pursue the monastic life. He also asked if there were any monasteries in the San Francisco Bay Area, because he wished to live in one while pursuing his university education. Fr. Theodor explained that there were very few Orthodox monastic communities in North America at that time. It was then that the two made their vow to found a monastery together dedicated to the Holy Cross. It took nine more years to save enough money to buy a property that would eventually be consecrated as Holy Cross Monastery. The monks performed most of the labor that has transfigured the rustic land into a beautifully appointed frontier of paradise. One of Archimandrite Theodor's mottos was: "If we make this place beautiful enough, it will reach people's hearts better than a hundred sermons."

In the mid-1990s the monks found themselves in a difficult situation when a lot of work on the monastery's land and buildings still needed to be done, but their financial resources were nearly exhausted. Those were, however, the years of the "Dot-Com Boom" and the rapid growth of Internet services. Fr. Stephen completed two university extension programs to earn certificates in Internet and legal studies. In 1998 he was hired by a major Silicon Valley law firm, "Wilson, Sonsini, Goodrich & Rosati," which helped Google to become a publicly traded company. His skills in using the Internet for obtaining crucial information related to securities class actions enabled him to become the manager of new business development for the firm's litigation department. Fr. Stephen's lucrative income was used to acquire two adjacent properties and to further develop the monastery. Reflecting upon his years of working incognito in the secular world, Fr. Stephen also recalls a story about his first job interview. He did not have proper business attire, and showing up for an interview in either a monastic habit or in outdoor work clothes was not an option. Luckily, because of his involvement with the local community, he was seated at one social occasion with the former mayor of Hayward, Mr. Alex Giuliani. Fr. Stephen told him about this problem. Mr. Giuliani happily offered one of his numerous suits to Fr. Stephen to use for the interview.

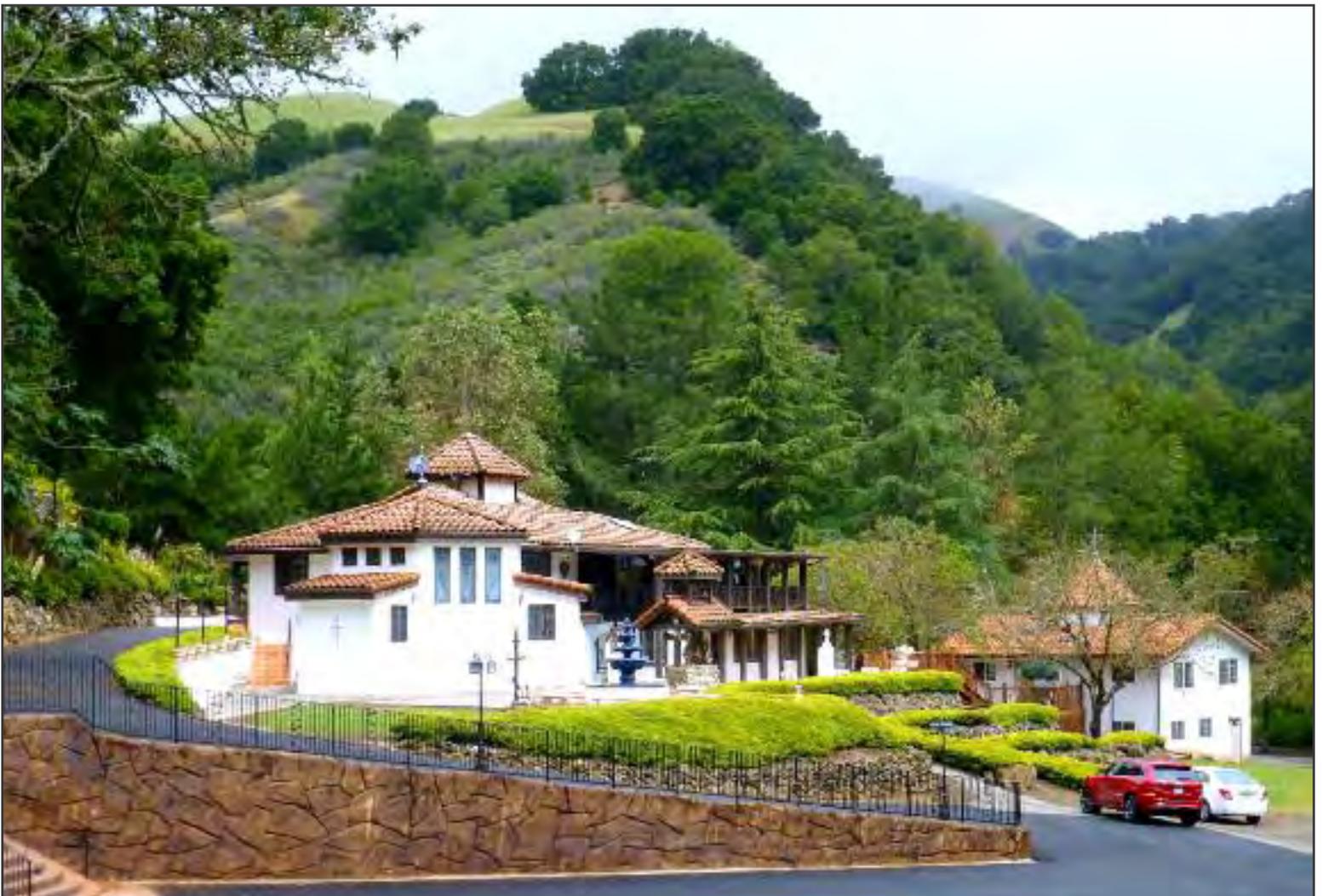
In 2000 a young seminary graduate, now known as Fr. Peter, joined Archimandrite Theodor and Fr. Stephen. After that time the three of them became affectionately known to friends of the monastery as “the Three Monks-keteers.” From the time of its inception, Holy Cross Monastery has always maintained good relations with its non-Orthodox neighbors, the owners of the adjacent properties. One of them is Jim Martin, the former lead guitarist in the rock band Faith No More. When Fr. Stephen first met this new neighbor, he walked over, introduced himself, and suggested that if Mr. Martin ever felt like having “Faith Some More,” then the monastery was right next door.

Archimandrite Theodor, of blessed memory, fell asleep in the Lord in 2014, but his thirty-five years of strong leadership and vision are evident in all aspects of the monastery’s life. “He was an extraordinary priest,” says Fr. Stephen, the monastery’s current abbot. “He had an astute intuition and a supernatural ability for remembering people’s names and faces. He loved people, and people

knew it. They could feel his warmth and could sense his genuine concern for them. He also had a keen eye for beauty and a gift for making order out of chaos. He used to say that we were ‘building ourselves into this monastery’ and that, even long after we leave this earthly life, people will still see us in the monastery’s stone walls and in the majestic redwoods that we planted here. I used to tease him, saying that someday people would remember him as ‘St. Theodor the Tree Lover’—to which he would modestly reply, “Well, I doubt the ‘saint’ part, but I’m certainly a lover of trees.”

Fr. Stephen explains further that welcoming visitors was always important for Archimandrite Theodore: “Fr. Theodor loved to receive visitors and always taught us that kindness and hospitality to visitors were to be cornerstones and hallmarks of our life here as a monastery. He often used to quote the words of Christ to St. Peter in the Gospel: ‘Peter, do you love Me?’ To which Peter replied: ‘Yes, Lord. You know I love You.’ ‘Then feed My sheep . . . Take care of My sheep.’”

The monastery’s main building and chapel.



Several distinct features of the Holy Cross monastic community should be mentioned.

One is the monastery's special effort to welcome and accommodate the spiritual needs of Orthodox Christians of all cultural traditions and ethnic backgrounds. Holy Cross views itself as a pan-Orthodox monastic community, but not in a sense that is used by some local Orthodox parishes. That is, instead of becoming an "all-American" and entirely English-speaking monastery, Holy Cross strives to be a place that cherishes a variety of ethnic cultures and uses many different languages (English, Church Slavonic, Bulgarian, Romanian, Greek) in its worship services.

Another distinctive feature of Holy Cross Monastery is its attempt to reach out to Orthodox Christians who have recently immigrated to the United States, and, therefore, are new to American Orthodox church life. Accordingly, many of the monastery's friends and visitors are immigrant professionals from San Francisco, Silicon Valley, and the Bay Area in general. Fr. Stephen describes

the situation as follows: "There is a small core group of monastery friends who come to worship with us every Sunday, but then we never know how many new people will show up and what their ethnic background will be."

Holy Cross Monastery is also sought after by many Orthodox parishes as an ideal place for day retreats—a place that provides a sense of solitude, spiritual nourishment, and natural beauty. Moreover, not only Eastern Orthodox parishes, but also Oriental Orthodox communities (Copts, Ethiopians, etc.), and even non-Orthodox Christians, use Holy Cross Monastery for day retreats. An elegant dining space and a covered portico are available for receptions. In short, welcoming visitors is an important dimension of the monastery's life, and the monks are often very happy to spend a few minutes talking about the Orthodox faith and monastic life with those who visit them.

There is one serious challenge, however, that Holy Cross faces today: the current monastic community is too small to accomplish many of the monastery's plans and

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Fr. Stephen, the monastery's abbot, performs the sacrament of baptism.



projects. While the monastery complex can comfortably accommodate up to twelve monks, there are only four brothers at present.

Nevertheless, Holy Cross Monastery has a clear vision for its future, which is summarized by the abbot, Fr. Stephen, in just one sentence: “Our goal is to create a spiritual lighthouse for people in the San Francisco Bay Area.”



The monastery grounds have a Mediterranean character.

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Bulgarian families are frequent visitors to the monastery.



# The Holy Monastery of St. Paisius, Safford, Arizona

(Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA)

[www.stpaisiusmonastery.org](http://www.stpaisiusmonastery.org)

By Alexei Krindatch

The original early Christian form of monasticism was the solitary life in the “desert”—the places far removed from the centers of population and civilization. Situated in the High Sonoran Desert in southeastern Arizona at the base of Mount Graham, the Holy Monastery of St. Paisius fits into this tradition as much as is possible in twenty-first-century America. It takes effort to get here: the monastery is two hours away from Tucson and over three hours from Phoenix. But those who decide to come (either for a few hours, or an overnight visit, or a multiday personal retreat) are rewarded by the rugged beauty of the surrounding landscapes. Zillions of stars glisten in the night, and magnificent colors light the skies during monsoon

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A small herd of goats supplies the sisters with milk, yogurt and feta cheese.



season. A lush oasis of tranquility has been created here by the nuns amidst the Arizona desert. The Monastery of St. Paisius places strong emphasis on authentic spiritual and liturgical practices adopted from monastic communities on Mount Athos in Greece.

Demographically, the St. Paisius sisterhood is distinct from the other US Orthodox monasteries in two ways. First, it is the largest entirely English-speaking female monastic community in America. Second, most of the nuns came to the monastery when they were young: in their teens.

The Holy Monastery of St. Paisius is named after Schema-Archimandrite Paisius (Velichkovsky) (1722–1794), also known as Paisius of Neamt. He was born and received his original theological training in the Ukraine. Yet, it was his time spent on Mount Athos—living in solitude, constant prayer, and extreme poverty—that shaped his spirituality and made him one of the most influential promoters of the renewal of hesychastic monasticism.<sup>1</sup> When he moved away from the strictly solitary life, he became a renowned leader of monastic revival in late eighteenth-century Moldavia, Romania, and Russia, the countries that suffered from the secularization reforms of Peter I and Catherine II. St. Paisius revived an ancient teaching on the importance of the Jesus Prayer<sup>2</sup> and put enormous effort into translation of original Greek patristic ascetic texts into the Church Slavonic language. In many ways, the life of this saint is reflective of the spiritual journey of the sisterhood at the Holy Monastery of St. Paisius.

The monastic community of St. Paisius had its beginnings in northern California in the early 1990s. At that time several young women—all American-born and all converts to Eastern Orthodox Christianity—began to gather around Mother Michaila, the monastery’s current abbess. Originally, Mother Michaila and other founding

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<sup>1</sup> “Hesychasm” can be described as a particular mystical tradition of prayer in the Orthodox Church that, in several different ways, focuses on the process of retiring inward by ceasing to register the “outside senses” with the goal to achieve an experiential knowledge of God. A renowned modern Orthodox theologian, Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware), offers several related meanings of the term “hesychasm”: (a) the practice of constant inner prayer, aiming at union with God on a level beyond images, concepts, and language; (b) the quest for such union through the so-called “Jesus Prayer”; (c) a particular psychosomatic technique in combination with the Jesus Prayer; (d) the “eremical” (i.e., solitary) life (in which sense the term has been used since the fourth century); and (e) the theology of St. Gregory Palamas.

<sup>2</sup> The Jesus Prayer is a short prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” It has been widely taught and discussed through the entire history of the Church. However, the importance of the continuous saying of the Jesus Prayer (either aloud or silently) is especially emphasized as a fundamental integral part of hesychasm. The Jesus Prayer is revered by the spiritual fathers of this tradition as a method of opening a person’s heart and soul to God.

sisters were primarily influenced by the Russian and, more broadly, Slavic Orthodox religious traditions. Yet, the newly formed sisterhood continued its quest for their most authentic and fitting place: both spiritually (within the wide spectrum of Orthodox religious practices) and geographically.

In 2000 the growing community (it had already about twenty sisters) purchased 320 acres of what used to be Sky Blue Ranch, a private residence and bird sanctuary in southern Arizona, about ten miles away from the agricultural town of Safford. There was very little to begin with: an old ranch house and barn, and some odd “Wild West”-style buildings surrounded by creosote bushes and mesquite trees. Remarkably, however, the property had a private Baptist chapel made out of logs and with a huge wooden cross erected by the entrance. Apparently, the couple who owned the property were very pious Christians. This chapel was refurbished into a small Orthodox church and was dedicated to St. Anastasija of Serbia<sup>3</sup>—the first church in the world named after this twelfth-century saint. There is a particular reason why the sisters chose St. Anastasija as the patron for their church. In the past they had traveled to various Orthodox countries, and one of their destinations was the medieval Serbian Studenica Monastery that has the relics of St. Anastasija. The sisters prayed at her tomb about the establishment of their monastic commu-

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<sup>3</sup> St. Anastasija is best known as the wife of the great Serbian ruler Stefan Nemanja (the future St. Simeon), who began the Nemanjic Dynasty, the royal family that over the centuries produced many Orthodox saints. St. Anastasija had personally raised two saints: her sons Rastko (Sava the Enlightener) and Stefan (whose monastic name was Simon) were canonized as saints by the Serbian Orthodox Church.

St. Paisius Monastery is situated in the high Sonoran Desert.



nity, and, once their dream was fulfilled, it seemed fitting to dedicate the monastery’s first church to her. Today all worship services are held in the newly built Byzantine-style basilica, the church of the Dormition of Mother of God, though visitors are welcome to ask sisters for the keys and to pray privately in the St. Anastasija Chapel. Its walls are adorned with a number of ancient Russian icons.

The move from California to a new setting was also a turning point in the sisterhood’s spiritual journey. Here, in southern Arizona, the nuns came into contact with the fathers of St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery in Florence, Arizona (see separate essay on this monastic community) and met Elder Ephraim, a person they regard as their spiritual father. Through this new relationship they discovered and embraced the Athonite monastic traditions (i.e., as practiced in monasteries on Mount Athos in Greece). When asked why the Athonite version of Orthodox monasticism has become their spiritual home, Mother Michaila explains, “Here, at St. Paisius Monastery, we are ‘Americans’ by our birth and upbringing, and Orthodox Christians by faith. But we are not bound to any particular ‘ethnic’ culture. Athonite tradition, in our view, is the most universal expression of the monastic way of life. We find that our visitors and pilgrims—whether they be American converts to Orthodoxy, Russians, Romanians, or Serbs—all feel equally at home here. And even Greeks feel the same way, although our worship services are 100 percent in English.”

Today many acres of land around the monastery’s buildings are adorned with beautiful desert landscaping. However, the fifteen years of converting the old ranch into this serene oasis were years of extremely harsh physical

labor. Learning how to live and work under constant, extreme heat (while wearing black monastic robes at all times) and mastering the art of gardening in the desert were only a few of the many challenges that the nuns have had to overcome. All construction and landscaping projects were done on a shoestring budget, forcing the sisters to do many jobs that not every man would be able to handle. When the basilica-style church was being built, the nuns uploaded and transported the bricks by hand. For several weeks, thirty thousand pounds of brick, on average, were carried per day: that is, fifteen hundred pounds per sister. Each year was dedicated to a particular new project. In 2007 a vineyard was established to make liturgical wine; in 2008 eight hundred olive trees were planted to produce oil and cured olives; and in 2009 two hundred pomegranate trees were added to the monastery's already existing organic vegetable gardens and fruit orchards. Combined with chickens and ducks (which provide eggs for the sisters) and goats (whose milk is used to make yogurt and cheese), the nuns produce about three-quarters of the food that they need for themselves and their guests.

The time of the physical construction of the monastery was also a period of intense spiritual shaping of the St. Paisius community. According to Abbess Michaila, several monastic practices are at the very heart of the life of the sisterhood. One is a rigid regimen of daily worship. Every night—with no exceptions—the sisters rise in their cells

Gathering for evening worship services.



for individual vigil at 2:30 a.m., and they pray for about three hours. This is followed by several hours of communal worship in the church. The liturgy is served four times a week (unlike many female monasteries in America, St. Paisius has two resident priests). The workday is concluded by another (although shorter) session of worship. Another distinct feature of St. Paisius Monastery is constant saying of the Jesus Prayer (either aloud or silently) by the nuns. This practice is perceived by the sisterhood as fundamental for creating a very peaceful, tranquil, and prayerful environment in their monastery that everyone can feel. While these practices can be seen by some as unnecessarily austere, the nuns feel that they create a special unifying bond among them. They think of themselves as one big loving family. The tradition of daily revelation of the sisters' thoughts to their abbess, Mother Michaila, is also important for the atmosphere of strong mutual support within the St. Paisius community.

The emphasis on personal and communal worship at St. Paisius (along with the practice of the constant saying of the Jesus Prayer) can also be witnessed in two of the monastery's major industries: publishing the series of Akathists<sup>4</sup> and the production of prayer ropes. The ropes can be custom-ordered, and most of them are sold via the monastery's online gift shop ([www.stpaisiusgiftshop.com](http://www.stpaisiusgiftshop.com)). Making a single prayer rope is time-consuming, and the nuns cannot keep up with the growing demand. St. Paisius Monastery also offers one more "service" that has no

<sup>4</sup> An Akathist (Greek, *akathistos*) is a hymn dedicated to a saint, holy event, or one of the persons of the Holy Trinity. In many cases a particular akathist is associated with a strong prayer for something in a person's private life. For instance, among the Akathists published by St. Paisius Monastery are such titles as *Akathist to the Mother of God, Nurturer of Children; Akathist to Mother of God, Healer of Cancer; Canon to the Lord for a Sick Child; Akathist to the Righteous Joachim and Anna for Blessed Married Life; Akathist to Almighty God for Help in Trouble; Akathist of Repentance for One Who Has Aborted a Child; and so forth.*

monetary value, though the sisters take it very seriously as part of their monastic mission. There is a special box at the entrance into the monastery's main church. Anyone can take a piece of paper and write the names of those in need of prayers: those with cancer, or addicted to drugs, or children who are either ill or in some sort of trouble. These notes are then distributed among the sisters, and they will pray for these people privately in their cells.

Until recently the St. Paisius sisterhood ran a rather unique monastery-based Holy Protection private school for Orthodox teenage girls. After graduation the students were issued the high school equivalency diploma. On any given year, six to seven girls aged ten to seventeen lived with the nuns and studied at the monastery. Only those who truly wanted to experience daily life in a monastic community were accepted in this school: that is, the nuns would always make sure that it was the personal desire of the girls to live and study at the monastery and not just the wish of their parents. Overall, more than one hundred students went through this largely successful program. A few of them even eventually joined the St. Paisius monastic community, while most became successful professionals or happy "full-time mothers." But in 2010, Holy Protection School ceased to exist because the growing number of other monastery projects and an ever-increasing flow of pilgrims did not allow the nuns to have sufficient quality time with their students. Today the monastery offers another opportunity for teenage girls to have a firsthand experience of monastic life. Orthodox parishes from across the country send to the monastery organized groups of young women from their parishes, accompanied by the wife of the parish priest. They stay at St. Paisius for up to a week and partake fully in the monastery's daily pattern of life and are able to spend time with the nuns.

More than three thousand day and overnight visitors<sup>5</sup> come to St. Paisius Monastery every year. Mother Michaila observes that "people come here for various reasons: some look for a place where they can participate in the full daily cycle of divine services; some need spiritual healing and direction; some want to unburden themselves from the stress in their lives; some simply enjoy the tranquility and peacefulness of our monastic community." The sisterhood welcomes everyone and considers offering hospitality as one of the monastery's main priorities. There are two simple rules that visitors (especially overnight guests) are expected to obey. First, everyone is encouraged to attend all scheduled worship services. This means rising early (the first service begins at 5:30 a.m.) and spending several hours



Barbera grapes are well suited to the dry and rocky soil.

a day in the church. Yet, as noted previously, creating an atmosphere of constant prayerfulness is essential to the nature of the St. Paisius community. Therefore, pilgrims benefit greatly from their visit if they are able to fully participate with the sisters in this effort. Second, despite the nuns' strong emphasis on hospitality, "casual" conversations with the nuns are to be avoided so as to not disturb the sisters' focus on the constant saying of the Jesus Prayer. Mother Michaila explains, "There is no need for worldly 'socializing' to feel welcomed at our monastery. Our guests are spiritually with us all the time. They share meals, prayer, and, if they desire, various physical labors with the sisters." But for those in need of advice and spiritual direction, Mother Michaila always finds time for personal spiritual counseling or simply conversation.

The nuns landscaping the monastery's grounds.



<sup>5</sup> The monastery can accommodate up to twenty-five persons per night.

# Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery, Otego, New York

(Orthodox Church in America)

[www.holymyrrhbearers.com](http://www.holymyrrhbearers.com)

By Alexei Krindatch

**H**oly Myrrhbearers Monastery for women is located in the scenic northern Catskill region of New York State, and near the popular tourist towns of Oneonta and Cooperstown.<sup>1</sup> This is a decidedly “nonethnic” Orthodox monastic community that strives to witness to the Orthodox faith in a manner and language that is understandable for everyone. Cradle Orthodox of various ethnic backgrounds, American converts to Orthodoxy, and non-Orthodox “religious tourists” feel equally welcome here.

Holy Myrrhbearers has 220 acres of pastures, woods, and wetlands, as well as a four-acre mill pond that has been in commercial operation since 1803. The creek runs through the monastery’s land, and beavers (they are in abundance here) have built a remarkable dam. A number of marked trails allow hiking in good weather and cross-country skiing for those who enjoy the winter sport.

The monastery is on the site of the former small town called Otsdawa. In the epoch of traveling by horse and wagon, it was an important stagecoach station. But when the railroads came into the area, the town slowly disappeared. One landmark is left from those times: the 1840s Otsdawa Baptist Church, which is listed on the National Registry of Historic Buildings as a “gem of vernacular architecture.” When the nuns bought the property in 1983, they “inherited” this chapel. One of the plans for the future is to fully restore it and to use as a place for the local community gatherings and Christian outreach.

The monastery’s current chapel was built by volunteers, the members of several local Orthodox parishes. And the outcome of their labor of love is remarkable: the chapel feels very homey, with many windows and skylights, plus French doors, oak parquet floors, and knotty pine paneling. Fifty cedar trees were planted in a rectangle, and

they form natural walls of what sisters call a “memorial prayer garden.” It is used as a quiet place for prayer and reading or, sometimes, as an “outdoor chapel” for Vespers or memorial services. The old mill house was renovated into a comfortable guesthouse for visitors.

An important part of the monastery’s economy is its farm and garden. The nuns keep sheep, dairy goats, chickens, and ducks, and they maintain greenhouses. Another industry is the publication of Orthodox greeting cards. Designed for various occasions (Easter, Christmas, etc.), each of them features some religious image and English translations of the ancient monastic texts. A great variety of these cards can be purchased online through the monastery gift shop.

The Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery is well known through its publishing activities and translations of liturgical books (i.e., texts of various church services) from ancient Greek into modern English. Several books authored by Abbess Raphaela have become genuine “Orthodox best-sellers” (examples include *Living in Christ*, *Growing in Christ*, and *Becoming Icons of Christ*). Yet, the monastery’s most popular publication is the series *Essays and Notes*, which has been published continually for nearly twenty-five years, usually two issues per year. Each issue contains essays on the Christian life, written based on one of the sisters’ vision on monasticism; “Notes for Readers,” which brings attention to newly published and interesting books; and, finally, the “Notes” on the life of Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery. The popularity of *Essays and Notes* has helped the Holy Myrrhbearers community to build a strong family of the monastery’s friends. More and more readers began to come to the monastery in person,

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Mother Katherina takes the monastery’s sheep for a walk during winter.



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<sup>1</sup> This old lake resort is best known as the home of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, opened in 1939.

offering the nuns their help and support. In general, many of the monastery's visitors volunteer to help out in the barns and fields.

Before moving to their current location in 1983, for a number of years the nuns resided near St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary (Crestwood, New York). A strong bond was established at that time between the Holy Myrrhbearers community and renowned Orthodox scholars Fr. Alexander Schmemmann and Fr. Thomas Hopko, both of whom taught at the seminary. These friendships played a crucial role in shaping the sisterhood's vision on the mission of Orthodox monasteries in modern America. Speaking about traditions of Orthodox monasticism being planted into American "cultural soil," Mother Raphaela says, "In our society people increasingly lose the sense of commitment. Monasteries teach people about commitment. In a long run we, monastics, have to teach and emphasize the free will that should lead everyone to choose and embrace commitment. I hope for men and

women willing to face their own need for the Great Physician, and in Christ, allowing themselves to be healed throughout a lifetime's commitment of living with others, that they may truly to love and to heal others." This emphasis on teaching about importance of commitment and love to others has attracted a number of young women to Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery, who come and stay for a while with the sisters in order to better prepare themselves for marriage. Mother Raphaela thinks that "marriage, in fact, is not that different from monastic vocation. If you are a good Christian, through your marriage, you make a life commitment. And this is similar to the life commitment that people make when they choose to be monastics." On a practical level, the sisters also teach these young women various basics of "home economics": how to cook, how to clean, how to organize house, how to tend to the garden or house animals, and so forth. Somewhat similar to this "marriage boot camp," the Holy Myrrhbearers community offers another unique opportunity for women: the so-called

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The sisterhood of Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery. From left to right: Mother Michaela, Mother Anna, Mother Raphaela (Abbess) and Mother Katherina.



Apprentice Program. Those who are interested can apply online and—if approved—come and live with the sisters for couple of weeks or a month. At the beginning each apprentice discusses with the nuns her spiritual or other needs and what she hopes to achieve by staying at the monastery. An individual program is then designed, and one of the sisters is assigned to each apprentice to supervise and to help her. Both Orthodox and non-Orthodox women can be part of the Apprentice Program.

Living in an Orthodox monastic community does not mean that the sisters separate themselves from their local neighborhood. On the contrary, the nuns try to be the best neighbors that they can be. The monastery is an active member of the chamber of commerce of Oneonta town, and the monastery's various goods are sold in the town's Artisan Guild shop. The sisters are always invited and participate in the town meetings of the town of Otego. A few years ago the nuns joined efforts with a group of environmentalists who protested against possible fracking<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Fracking is short for hydraulic fracturing, which is the process of drilling down into the earth before a high-pressure water mixture is directed at the rock to release the gas inside. Water, sand, and chemicals are injected into the rock at high pressure, which allows the gas to flow out to the head of the well.

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A participant in the monastery's apprentice program.



of lands in search of natural gas. Because of the monastery's various farming activities, the nuns have a good network of contacts with the local farmers.

The sisterhood of Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery is small, but each of the four nuns has very different background and brings some unique skills into their community. Mother Raphaela, the abbess, has education in classics, languages, and music. She is a talented violin player and vocalist. She was a nun (and teacher of Scripture) in an Anglican convent but embraced the Orthodox faith being attracted by the richness and historical continuity of the Orthodox liturgical tradition. Besides her duties as the abbess, Mother Raphaela oversees the monastery's publishing program. She is also a good speaker and is frequently invited to make presentations on various subjects in local Orthodox parishes. Mother Anna grew up in a very pious family of Lutheran clergy. In the past she was a businesswoman and co-owner of a construction company. Logically, she takes care of the monastery's greeting card business. Mother Katherina was brought up as a Baptist. She worked as a registered nurse and professional musician (including playing French horn in the Bangor Symphony Orchestra). Now she is in charge of the monastery's various animals: guard dogs, chickens, ducks, sheep, goats. This includes not only tending to goats and sheep (all of them are called by and recognize their individual names), but also making yogurt and cheese (ch`evre, feta, farmer cheese) and crafting the monastery's various sheep-fleece goods.<sup>3</sup> With regard to the latter, the "bestselling" items

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<sup>3</sup> The monastery's herd of over fifty sheep includes several breeds: Icelandic, Churro, Babydoll, and Romney. Their fleece is different and—depending on the breed—is used for various products. The monastery also produces sheep-wool yarn.

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The monastery's guest house is a refurbished old mill house, built originally in 1791.





Mother Raphaela, the monastery's abbess, takes care of the goats.

include warm wool insoles, rugs, and scarves. The fourth member of community, Sister Michaela, is a truly “professional” monastic. She was an Anglican nun for forty-four years but became disillusioned with the numerous innovations and modernizations in her religious community and joined the Orthodox Church and Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery ten years ago. Sister Michaela welcomes and cares for the guests and visitors to the monastery.

Offering hospitality is among the top priorities in the life of the Holy Myrrhbearers community. The sisterhood has a constant flow of “returning friends” and first-time visitors. This includes both Orthodox pilgrims and a variety of non-Orthodox spiritual and religious “seekers.” Some people visit for a couple of hours, while some stay for a multiday personal retreat. When asked what is it that attracts such a diverse constituency to their unpretentious monastic community, Sister Michaela, the monastery’s guest-master, says, “We love our place, because it is so peaceful and quiet here. I guess our guests come simply because they feel happy here.” Yet, this is a small community, and the sisters prefer to keep the flow of visitors to

more like a “trickle” rather than a “stream.” This way they can maintain their normal daily cycle of work and worship and, at the same time, have enough quality time for each guest. For overnight visitors Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery offers accommodations in a very homey three-bedroom house. This guesthouse is a renovated former mill house. Built originally in 1791, it sits on the edge of the monastery’s pond, with the outside porch offering a perfect sunset view.

# Holy Protection Orthodox Monastery, White Haven, Pennsylvania

(Greek Orthodox Archdiocese)

[www.holyprotectionmonastery.org](http://www.holyprotectionmonastery.org)

By Chrysanthe Loizos

On an unassuming two-lane road just off the interstate, tall wrought-iron gates are a traveler's first indication that Holy Protection Monastery is something out of the ordinary. Visitors who pass through the gates and up a wooded, winding road will eventually see the monastery's buildings in a clearing. With its ceramic tile roofs, stucco and stone facades, and carefully tended grounds, it looks like it might have been built in Greece and dropped neatly into this sliver of the Pocono Mountains.

The monastery was established by Archimandrite Ephraim (Moraitis), commonly known as Elder Ephraim. The former abbot of Philotheou Monastery on Mount Athos, Greece, Elder Ephraim has founded fifteen monasteries in the United States since the late 1980s and is credited with bringing Athonite monasticism to the United States.<sup>1</sup> In 1993, at the invitation of Bishop Maximos of Pittsburgh of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, two nuns came from Greece to form the initial community Holy Protection Monastery.

How they chose this section of northeast Pennsylvania is attributed in part to Bishop Maximos's eagerness to welcome monasteries to his diocese, as well as to the proximity to major metropolitan centers like New York and Philadelphia. Both cities are close, about two hours, but not so close that travelers can make the trip without a second thought. That is, the founders wanted a place that required some sacrifice on the part of visitors.

The monastery was originally situated on a 15-acre property not far from the current location. The sisters eventually outgrew that space—eighteen of them shared eight rooms—and tried for years to expand, without

success. And then, in the late '90s, the sisterhood was approached about a 360-acre property for sale nearby. Initially the abbess ruled it out, sight unseen. But the sellers kept returning and asking her to reconsider. Over time it became clear that the property was meant to be the monastery's new home: the sellers reduced the price by half, the bank approved the loan, and the local community welcomed the sisterhood with open arms.

The monastery welcomes visitors who seek a prayerful retreat and rest from the hectic pace and spiritual struggles of everyday life. Abbess Olympiada is careful to say that the sisters themselves aren't the ones providing help. "Panagia [i.e. the all-holy Mother of God] herself comforts everyone who takes the effort to come here. We've seen this happen many times," she says.

Overnight visitors are accommodated in shared rooms in a long, two-story guesthouse with its own kitchen and dining room. At lunch and dinner the sisters bring meals prepared largely from food grown on the land, and the guests eat together in the kitchen or dining area. The shared meals allow for fellowship between pilgrims who come from near and far. Those who visit just for the day don't need to notify the monastery in advance, but overnight guests must first receive the blessing of the abbess. Guests may be asked to devote a few hours each day to assisting the sisters in their work.

And although visitors are welcome, the sisters are careful not to break their so-called "hesychast" tradition: that is, the emphasis on keeping silence, inward stillness, and constant repetition of the Jesus Prayer—"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." With their monastic life rooted in hesychasm, the sisters struggle to protect and maintain that tradition alongside the competing demands of hosting visitors. That means keeping a strict schedule. The sisters wake at 1 a.m. every morning to recite the Jesus Prayer. Depending on the day of the week, they gather in the candlelit church for Divine Liturgy at 3:30 a.m. or for a supplicatory service to the Mother of God at 4 a.m. That's followed by a brief rest and then breakfast. The sisters work until lunchtime and then return to their work until 4 p.m. Evening prayer services follow, and then dinner and rest for the night.

Services are mainly in Greek, as the monastery sees itself as helping to establish the Greek monastic tradition in a country already blessed with many Orthodox monasteries using English, Russian, Serbian, and other languages.

<sup>1</sup> For more on Elder Ephraim, see the article on St. Anthony's Monastery in Florence, Arizona.

At right, the monastery's main church.



The sisterhood currently utilizes about fifty of the monastery's 360 acres. The sisters are eager to share with visitors their love and care for the land. They have become increasingly enthusiastic about organic gardening, and about what they see as their responsibility to preserve the land given to them. They have started using microorganisms in their gardening as a way to restore a natural balance to the earth and garden without pesticides or fertilizers. Much of what they eat is grown on the property, and their goal is to be entirely self-sustaining. A large greenhouse is home to different varieties of tomatoes, as well as cucumbers, peppers, leeks, and garlic. They also grow herbs, potatoes, onions, and spinach. Chickens supply eggs, and goats provide milk that is used for different Greek cheeses and soaps. The sisters intend to plant a variety of fruit trees in their future orchard.

Their enthusiasm for the land has made the nuns inquisitive. They collect and study plants and experiment with edible plants and weeds. They make tinctures and salves from berries and herbs. Their love and respect for

the land stems from a belief that it isn't theirs but belongs to God and the Mother of God. Their role, they believe, is simply to serve.

In order to see the animals and gardens, visitors need to be accompanied by one of the sisters. The other sections of the monastery can be walked on one's own. A path leads to a cemetery and a small log chapel dedicated to St. Seraphim of Sarov. There is also a larger stone chapel dedicated to St. Paraskeve, the only structure that is original to the property. An outdoor stone enclave dedicated to the Dormition of the Theotokos offers visitors a place for quiet prayer and reflection.

The main monastery building is flanked on one end by the church, dedicated to the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and on the other end by a smaller chapel dedicated to St. Nektarios. In between is a large bookstore and the sisters' living quarters, including their cells and a dining hall.

Visitors will want to make a point of seeing the icons produced by the sisters. Icons are painted in the traditional

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Making prosfora in the monastery's bakery.



manner, using egg tempera and natural colors derived from minerals. The wood for the icons is cut and sanded on site. Decorative features, such as beads and painted flowers, are added to both hand-painted icons and mounted icon prints. Some of the mounted print icons are finished with epoxy, lending them a beautiful shine. The process requires teamwork and patience. Approximately half the sisterhood is involved in icon making in some way. An ever-growing appreciation of hand-painted icons means that buyers may wait over a year to have an order fulfilled. Those who don't want to wait so long can purchase very affordably priced high-quality prints of original icons from a large selection in the monastery bookstore.

The sisters also make traditional baptism and wedding items, including Jordan almonds wrapped in tulle; small, delicately painted icons to be given as favors at baptisms; decorative candles; and wedding crowns.

The monastery is also known for its traditional Greek sweet breads, which it bakes and sells twice a year to

celebrate the feast of St. Basil (celebrated on January 1) and Pascha. An entire two-story building is dedicated to baking. The process requires most of the sisters: one team to make the dough, another to roll it out into traditional braids, a third team to bake and decorate, and a fourth to package the baked goods. It's a time-consuming and deadline-bound task, the success of which the sisters attribute to Panagia.

"Panagia" is a common answer to questions here. The sisters say that with each passing year they are more and more certain that this land was chosen for them by the Mother of God and that through her intercessions their efforts are blessed.

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Gathering herbs from the monastery's garden.



# Holy Trinity Orthodox Monastery, Jordanville, New York

(Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia)

[www.jordanville.org](http://www.jordanville.org)

By Alexei Krindatch

There is a haven of carefully preserved Russian traditional culture in the southern foothills of the Adirondack Mountains: welcome to Holy Trinity Orthodox Monastery! It is situated about ninety minutes west of Albany, New York, near the tiny village of Jordanville.<sup>1</sup> The lush rolling hills, patches of mixed forest, and myriads of small lakes are reminiscent of landscapes in the west-central part of Russia. This scenery provides a perfect background for the beautifully built monastery's ensemble with its churches, bell towers, and golden onion-like domes. Holy Trinity is one of the oldest and most prominent Orthodox monasteries in the United States. With nearly nine hundred acres of farmland and forest, it is also the biggest landowner among all US Orthodox monastic communities. The monastery's sprawling complex includes a cathedral, several chapels, a theological seminary, administrative and residential buildings, a museum, publishing offices, a retail bookstore, a candle-making factory, vegetable gardens, an apiary, icon-painting and mounting studios, and a historical cemetery with almost five thousand graves.<sup>2</sup> Monks work in all these areas alongside with over thirty paid employees.

The surrounding area is mostly occupied by dairy farms. Beginning in 1980s there was an influx of Amish families who were attracted by cheap land and abandoned farms. The brothers at Holy Trinity like to tell the story of how the newly arrived Amish were initially interested in the monks because they (like the Amish) wear black clothes and have beards. But after visiting the monastery's

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<sup>1</sup> Curiously, the village of Jordanville was named after mass baptisms that took place in the local creek during period of "religious revival" in America in 1820s. This creek was likened to the biblical river of the Jordan.

<sup>2</sup> For Orthodox Christians, Holy Trinity Monastery offers a full range of funeral services: from burial plots to perpetual care and commemoration of the names of deceased during the monastery's worship services.

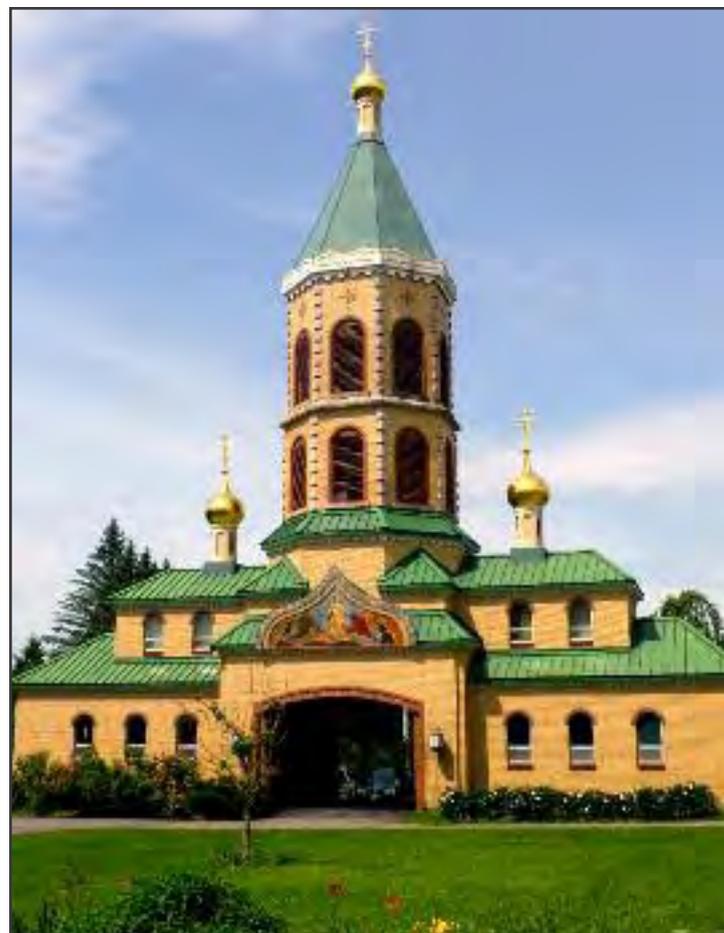
churches and attending services, they realized that this was not "their religion."

The history of Holy Trinity Monastery is intertwined with the history of the Russian emigration to America. Just two men founded it in 1930: Fr. Panteleimon (Nizhnik) and his spiritual son Ivan Kolos. Born in 1895 in western Byelorussia, the future Fr. Panteleimon came to America in 1913 searching for a better life. In 1918 he joined St. Tikhon's Orthodox Monastery in Pennsylvania (see separate article on this monastery), where he met his "disciple," Ivan Kolos. While already a priest-monk, Fr. Panteleimon worked for several years at the Sikorsky plane-building factory in Connecticut. This allowed him to save enough money to buy a sizeable amount of land and to establish Holy Trinity Monastery. In 1946 Holy Trinity was joined by a group of monks from the Monastery of St. Job of Pochaev in Slovakia,<sup>3</sup> which in turn drew its origins from

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<sup>3</sup> Until World War II the Monastery of St. Job of Pochaev was situated in the village of Lodomirova in eastern Slovakia. In 1944, in order to escape approaching Soviet troops and Communist oppression, the monks from the Monastery of St. Job of Pochaev fled to Germany. In 1946 the monastic community split. Some of the monks stayed in Germany and formed the monastery of St. Job of Pochaev near Munich, while fourteen monks came to Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville.

Bell tower and entrance gate to the monastery.



the renowned Pochaev Lavra in western Ukraine. Because it was on a geographic frontier of Orthodox religious culture, facing Roman Catholic Poland and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Pochaev Lavra had been seen for centuries<sup>4</sup> as a “mission monastery.” Building a printing press as early as 1618 and supplying all Galicia and Volyn<sup>5</sup> with Orthodox theological literature further contributed to this missionary identity. The press in Pochaev Lavra continued to function until 1924, when it was taken to the newly formed monastery of St. Job of Pochaev in Slovakia, then (together with fleeing monks) to Germany, and finally to the Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, from the very beginning the Holy Trinity brotherhood carried over these two fundamental characteristics of the original Ukrainian Pochaev Lavra: the strong sense of being missionary monastic community and expansive publishing work. More than eight hundred titles in the English and Russian languages have been published by the monastery<sup>7</sup> from the late 1940s until now. Some of them became truly Orthodox religious “bestsellers” both in America and abroad. Among the books that were reprinted many times and remain in high demand are *The Law of*

*God: For Study at Home and School* by Seraphim Slobodskoy and the *Prayer Book*.

As the decades passed, the understanding of the monastery’s distinct mission evolved significantly. Archimandrite Luke, Holy Trinity’s abbot, joined the monastic brotherhood more than forty years ago. He explains, “In the past, when Russia was under Communist rule, we saw ourselves mostly as the safeguards of Russian traditional culture and Orthodox faith. Our goal then was to preserve the Orthodox Faith ‘in exile’ and—to the extent possible—to also keep it alive in Soviet Russia. Year after year, we printed and smuggled underground Orthodox religious and spiritual literature into the Soviet Union. We maintained contacts with some Russian Orthodox religious dissidents and helped others to escape to the West. After the fall of Communism, this goal became irrelevant. Our focus shifted to our flock here: the recent Russian immigrants and people of Russian descent living in the United States. Also, today, we think about bringing the Orthodox faith to the non-Orthodox in America.” Indeed, while the monastery still has a very Russian “look and feel,” English is used more and more both in the church services (especially on weekends) and as the language of everyday communication among the monks.<sup>8</sup>

Another sign of the monastery’s growing interest in building stronger relations with the “outside world” is the recently established tradition of “open house.” Once a year Holy Trinity invites everyone to come for a day-visit

<sup>4</sup> A first record of Pochaev Lavra dates back to 1527.

<sup>5</sup> Geographic regions in western Ukraine.

<sup>6</sup> There is one member of pre-World War II monastic community who still lives with the monks at Holy Trinity. He is a layman named Lev. Born in 1917 in Russia, he emigrated with his parents to Yugoslavia. After the death of the father, his mother was unable to support the family. She put Lev on a train to Slovakia with a simple sign attached: “To monastery.” The monks picked him up from the train, and he stayed with the brotherhood for his entire—now nearly one-hundred-year-long—life.

<sup>7</sup> The monastery has its own publishing house, Holy Trinity Publications.

<sup>8</sup> Along with brothers of Russian descent, Holy Trinity monks represent a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including brothers from Brazil, Australia, and the United Kingdom, as well as American-born converts to Orthodoxy.

Fr. Theophylact inspects the vegetable gardens at neighboring St. Elizabeth Orthodox Skete.



The nuns at St. Elizabeth Orthodox Skete.



filled with various events. Two lectures (“History of Orthodoxy” and “History of Holy Trinity Monastery”) are presented; food is served; and the monks give tours of the monastery’s grounds, churches, museum, and cemetery.<sup>9</sup>

What remains unchanged, however, is the monastery’s strong emphasis on being a very “liturgical” community. Holy Trinity maintains a complete cycle of church services throughout the year, with the Liturgy being celebrated seven days a week. Furthermore, Holy Trinity is one of the very few places that celebrates not only the Liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil (which are most common to the Orthodox Church), but also—several times a year—the Liturgies of St. James and St. Mark.

Holy Trinity Monastery operates the Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary, which is accredited by the New York State Board of Regents. It awards the bachelor of theology degree (requiring five years of full-time studies) and certificates in Orthodox pastoral and theological studies (these programs can be completed via distance learning). Most of the full-time seminarians are young, and not all of them plan to be ordained. But, as Archimandrite Luke says, “it is good for them to spend a few formative years here. The monastery offers an atmosphere of spirituality, but also provides some structure in their personal lives. It is a little bit like being in the army.” The brotherhood, in turn, benefits from the presence of the young people, who bring fresh energy into the monastery’s life and share with the monks all the everyday chores and obediences. The seminary also hosts two interesting summer programs. One is the summer music school for directors of church choirs and other singers. The second is the “Summer Boys” program, which could be likened to “Orthodox scouting”: Each summer, a group of twelve- to seventeen-year-old boys come here for camp. They attend church services and do some work for the monastery, but they also go swimming and boating and explore local nature.

For those interested in icons and frescoes, Holy Trinity has much to offer. For many decades the monastery was home to the renowned master iconographer Fr. Kyprian (Pyzhov). Born in 1904 in St. Petersburg, Russia, he immigrated to France after the Communist revolution of 1917. In 1933 he joined the monastic brotherhood of St. Job of Pochaev in Slovakia, eventually moving with the other monks first to Germany and then on to the United States. Fr. Kyprian painted many Orthodox churches both in the United States and abroad. He worked tirelessly until his death in 2001. Many of Holy Trinity’s buildings have

<sup>9</sup> In general, with advance notice, the monastery can always organize a tour for all who are interested.

paintings by Fr. Kyprian. During his tenure at the icon studio of Holy Trinity Monastery, Fr. Kyprian educated a generation of iconographers who continue his work. Today, the masters at the monastery’s studio of Russian iconography paint in a style that they describe as “ancient Byzantine.” The demand for their works is high, and there is a wait list for those who desire to have an icon produced by the Holy Trinity monks. In addition to the in-house created icons, Holy Trinity acquired many masterpieces as bequests from the Russian immigrant families. Most of them are displayed in the monastery’s churches and chapels.

Not only icons, but also thousands of other precious artifacts (documents, rare manuscripts, jewelry, vestments, and various ecclesiastical items) were given to the monastery by the generations of Russian immigrants living in America including representatives of many old aristocratic families. To make this collection accessible to a wider audience, in 2014 Holy Trinity opened a public museum. Of particular interest is a set of artifacts that were in possession of the last emperor, Nicholas II, and his family and that were collected as material evidence when the Bolsheviks executed the royal family in 1918. The museum also provides a good glimpse into the history of civil war in Russia after the revolution of 1917. Holy Trinity Monastery maintains a library that is open to the general public and holds over forty-five thousand volumes. Materials in the library’s collection date back to the sixteenth century.

Predictably, Holy Trinity is a popular pilgrimage destination for many Russians living in America. But not only Orthodox pilgrims and non-Orthodox “religious tourists” come here. Fr. Theophylact, the monastery’s accountant and a resident monk for thirty-five years, says, “Monasteries are like ‘hospitals’ for those in various spiritual needs. People come to us with all possible personal problems. Many also come here for confessions instead of going to their parish priests, because the monastery’s atmosphere is more conducive for sincere conversation and ‘opening hearts.’ We receive a lot of people who are ‘in search of something’ in their lives.”

The Russian-style architecture of Holy Trinity Monastery blends perfectly with the landscape of upstate New York.



The trip to Holy Trinity Monastery would be incomplete without a visit to the nearby St. Elizabeth Orthodox Skete, a female monastic community affiliated with Holy Trinity Monastery. In 1984 a woman named Ioanna Pomazansky (†2011) came to Holy Trinity Seminary to teach Russian language and history. She was joined a year later by a young German woman, Elizabeth Czwikla (the current abbess of the skete), who worked at the monastery's cemetery and helped the brotherhood with sewing vestments. Both women felt a calling to the monastic life. In 1987 they were made novices, and a new monastic community was planted. The current sisterhood of seven sisters is multiethnic, with nuns of both Russian and non-Russian backgrounds. Their community occupies four houses on a small parcel of land. To support themselves the sisters produce an amazing variety of handmade goods sold in their gift shop: art photography by Abbess Elizabeth (who is a talented photographer), natural cosmetics (soaps, creams, bath salts), healing salves and ointments, incense for church and home usage, herbal teas, jams,

and various textile products (mittens, aprons, handbags, embroidery). Besides daily church services and various chores, the sisters spend significant time with visitors. In particular, women of various backgrounds who are looking for spiritual advice, help, and consolation come here often, either for a short retreat or to stay for a more extended period of time.

Some people see Holy Trinity Monastery and St. Elizabeth Skete as the "Russian culture center." But for the monks, nuns, and numerous friends of the monastery, this is a living and loving community. Fr. Theophylact says, "We are a 'no-nonsense' monastery. We do not pretend to be great ascetics, but we do live a traditional monastic life. Our community is both a working monastery and a missionary monastery. We talk to people who come to us and this is why so many come back after their first visit."

Holy Trinity Monastery has a guesthouse and offers overnight accommodations (mostly dormitory-style) for up to forty persons. Both Orthodox and non-Orthodox visitors are welcome to spend a few days here.

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The lower church of the monastery's cathedral. All churches and chapels at Holy Trinity are richly painted and adorned with icons.



# Monks of New Skete and Nuns of New Skete, Cambridge, New York

(Orthodox Church in America)

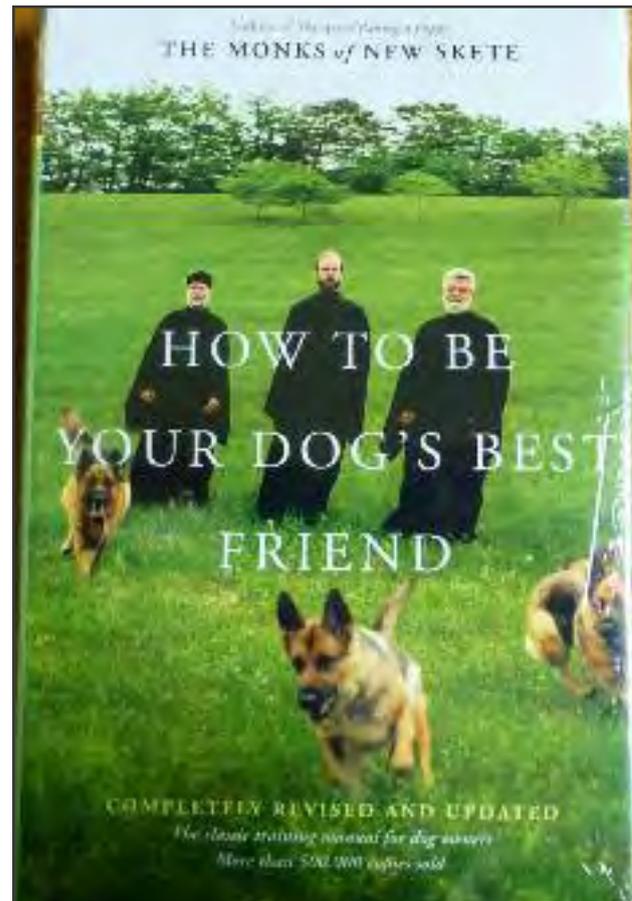
www.newsquete.org

By Alexei Krindatch

The words “Orthodoxy” and “innovation” do not appear compatible at all. Yet, if there are any American Orthodox monasteries that can be described as “innovative,” it would have to be the Monks and the Nuns of New Skete. This is true about their liturgical lives, their monastic “industries,” and, most importantly, their understanding of their mission.

Located on the eastern edge of the gentle Taconic Mountains, about forty-five miles northeast of Albany, close to the Vermont border, the Monks and the Nuns of New Skete are two affiliated monastic communities that were founded by former Catholic monks and nuns. The community of Monks of New Skete was founded 1966, when twelve Byzantine rite Franciscan brothers separated from their monastery in New Canaan, Connecticut, and established a new monastic brotherhood. They sought to live a fuller monastic life within the Eastern Christian tradition. The Nuns of New Skete is a female monastery under the patronage of Our Lady of the Sign, a symbol of the entire praying church. This community was formed in 1969, when seven Catholic nuns from Indiana came to Cambridge, New York, and—with the help of the Monks of New Skete who had already settled there—built their own monastery. The sisters left their Poor Clares Order (officially the Order of Saint Clare<sup>1</sup>) because they felt that this order’s strong emphasis on the cloistered living (i.e., the life that is fully disconnected from the outside world) was out of date and did not correspond with their vision for the mission of an American monasticism. In 1979, after years of studying and practicing Orthodox theology and liturgy, the Monks and Nuns of New Skete joined the Orthodox Church.

<sup>1</sup> The Order of St. Clare (also known as Order of Poor Ladies or simply Clarisses) is the second Roman Catholic Order of St. Francis; it was established for women in 1212, as compared to the first Franciscan Order of Friars Minor for men.



One of the bestselling books written by the monks of New Skete.

From the very beginning, the goal of the New Skete’s communities was to live out the values of monastic life and Orthodox faith in a way that fits with modern American culture.

New Skete is known for the study and translation of ancient Byzantine liturgical texts and practice. The Monks and Nuns of New Skete focused on the experiences of the early (then undivided) Christian Church because these were the times when Liturgy was more immediate and understandable to ordinary people. Through the careful restoration and adaption of early Christian worship practices, the New Skete community seeks to renew and rejuvenate current Orthodox services. Brother Stavros, one of the Skete’s founding members, explains, “We use ancient traditions to bring fresh breath into our church and our spiritual lungs. The distinct mission of our community is to make Orthodox worship a living reality that is accessible and understandable for everyone. For instance, we simplified the Offices of Vespers and Matins, and the Divine Liturgy, to better emphasize the more scriptural elements (i.e., Psalms, Prophets, New Testament) and to facilitate more ritual clarity. Rather than using a strict

translation of ancient texts, we work at making the language of prayers and hymns accessible to contemporary American understanding. In the ancient Christianity there was much more intimacy between people and the Church. Today clergy and ‘people in the pews’ are somehow more distant from each other. In our practices we try to close this gap.”

Those who are familiar with how typically Orthodox worship is conducted and how the church looks like will find that the brothers and sisters have introduced a number of elements, with the goal of making their services more inclusive and participatory. Weather permitting, they begin Sunday Liturgy with the gathering of monks, nuns, and laypeople outside the church; everyone then enters jointly into the nave at the time of the Small Entrance.<sup>2</sup> Most of the services are conducted not from the altar area but from the middle of the church, so that the clergy are surrounded by the laypeople: that is, the centrally located ambo is used as the place from which Scripture is read, before the clergy members enter the altar. The altar is “open” (i.e., the iconostasis does not form a wall) so that everyone can see what happens inside (as was the iconostasis of the ancient Hagia Sophia church in Constantinople). When it is time to venerate icons or to kiss the cross, there is no particular order as to who comes first, whereas more traditional practice would be: clergy, followed by the nonordained monks, followed by nuns, followed by the laity. The nave of the monastery’s main church features iconographic portraits of both Eastern and Western saints of the early undivided Church, as well as portraits of prominent Christians who are not officially canonized (including Fr. Alexander Men, Patriarch Athenagoras, Pope Paul VI, Archbishop Michael Ramsey, Dorothy Day, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta) all of whom are depicted without halos.

This attempt to make Orthodox worship services more participatory and inclusive is a manifestation of the New Skete’s overarching mission: to be a contemplative monastic community and to live out the wealth of Orthodox monasticism, but, at the same time, to stay well connected to a society at large with the goal of bringing people to the Gospel in their everyday lives—not just in church.

Brother Luke (former superior of the Monks of New Skete) says, “Our vocation as monastics is to offer a place of quiet and prayer to anyone who comes. We hope that visitors, guests, and even people who may only know of us through the Internet may experience some of God’s healing in their lives through our life in community. Yes,

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<sup>2</sup> This practice of New Skete is in conformity with the practices of the stationary Liturgy of the early Church.

the Eastern monastic life is contemplative at its core, but this does not mean a rejection of the secular world. Rather, we see it as a pathway to live life fully aware of God’s presence in everyone and everything. Especially today, monastics should keep close relations with the ‘outside reality’ and not perceive the secular world as inherently ‘evil.’ Monks of the Christian East have always welcomed visitors and offered spiritual guidance to those who seek it. We hope that others might see by the way we live that some aspects of the monastic way can be life-giving in their lives too.”

In their internal governance, the Monks and Nuns of New Skete are also distinct from most of US Orthodox monasteries. Both communities elect their priors<sup>3</sup> for a six-year term. They also emphasize an equality between nuns and monks in their everyday lives, administration, and—to the extent possible—in the church. All significant decisions at New Skete are made by the “synaxis”: the

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<sup>3</sup> “Prior” or “prioress” are the terms used by Monks and Nuns of New Skete instead of the more common “abbot” and “abbess.”

Sister Cecelia, the prioress of the nuns of New Skete, is a talented icon painter.



gathering of all members of both communities. At the joint worship services, nuns give scriptural reflections and read the scriptural lessons along with the monks.

Both the Monks and Nuns of New Skete have developed some interesting and very successful industries that allow their communities to be fully self-sustainable. When monks first settled in this very agrarian area, they learned diverse farming skills and tried for a while to make a living by smoking meats and cheeses. What made them internationally known, however, are two quite unique dog-related services: the Dog Training and German Shepherd Breeding Programs. Dog owners interested in the Training Program can apply online, and all types of dogs are eligible to participate. Training lasts two and a half weeks and during this time the dogs stay at New Skete's training center. When asked what is special about this program, Fr. Christopher, New Skete's prior and head trainer, explains, "We mostly work with dogs who, for various reasons, do not behave well. When we take a dog for training, the focus is on building a quality relationship between the dog

and its owner. Our goal is not simply to 'train,' but to achieve a transformed relationship between the owner and their dog. Our philosophy is threefold. First, a good owner needs to be a benevolent leader. Second, a good owner should understand what his or her dog's particular needs are. Third, in order to stop a dog's bad behavior, you need to replace it with good behavior. How we do this? Pretty much like with children: we provide dogs with a healthy and positively structured environment. Partially, this is done through food-based rewards, but there are many other tools as well. And, by the way, our 'training' is not only for dogs. When the owners come back to pick up their dogs, we carefully explain to them what they should (or should not) do, if they want to have lasting results."

The monks also give their clients what they call a "lifetime guarantee" of the training. If any problem appears, the owners can communicate with the brothers, and they will be provided with follow-up consultations and—in the worst-case scenario—they can even bring dogs back for additional training.

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Sunday Liturgy at New Skete. Most of the service is conducted from the middle of the church. Monks, nuns and lay people gather together in one group.



The roots of the German Shepherd Program are closely intertwined with the very beginnings of the brotherhood. When monks first moved into their present location, one of the original brothers brought with him a German shepherd named Kyr. The community's formative years were a time of many hardships and uncertainties, but the brothers noted that the presence of Kyr had an extremely unburdening and relaxing impact on them. When Kyr died, they bought as a replacement two purebred-quality German shepherds, Becky and Jessie. At a certain point the monks decided to try to supplement their meager income with the selling of puppies. The first attempt was unexpectedly successful: the buyers (mostly locals) loved an idea of getting a puppy who was born and spent first weeks of its life at a monastery. And so the German shepherd breeding business was born. There is an interesting twist, however, in how this is done. Each monk cares for a particular dog (or two, or three), who lives with and recognizes him as an owner, thus forming a strong personal bond with this brother. A certain philosophy stands behind such an approach. The brothers admit that living monastic life presents a potential danger of an excessive focus on oneself. The presence of a dog in each brother's life helps to deal this danger. Furthermore, as Fr. Christopher says, "Our dogs are mirrors of our emotional state and behavior. One of the very human weaknesses is that oftentimes we don't pay attention to how we behave: the dogs allow us to have better self-reflection. Working and living with dogs help us to be better monastics."

For some people, the brothers' philosophy and approach toward the dogs may appear somewhat strange. But the fact is that New Skete's books about the breeding, the training and living with dogs have gained national and international recognition. *How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend* (published originally in 1978) and *The Art of Raising a Puppy* (1991) have been reprinted many times. The most recent titles (*I and Dog*, *Dogs and Devotion*, and *Bless the Dogs*) explore spiritual dimensions in human-dog relations. The monks' dog training series, "Divine Canine," was aired on the Discovery Channel's *Animal Planet*. The brotherhood also authored a book on spirituality from a monastic perspective (*In the Spirit of Happiness*) and a series on meditations in everyday life (*Rise Up with a Listening Heart*).

An interesting connection exists between the "dog industry" and New Skete's religious outreach into the wider (Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike) community. Hundreds of people of all religious backgrounds come to the monastery every year for the Dog Training or German Shepherd Programs, or simply to watch the animals. The

monks use this occasion to invite their visitors to see New Skete's richly decorated churches and meditation gardens. And some of the visitors return for worship services and eventually become good friends of the monastery, while some even join the Orthodox Church.

As for the Nuns of New Skete, to the "outside world" they are primarily known for the exquisite cheesecakes<sup>4</sup> that are produced in the monastery's bakery and can be ordered online and shipped nationwide (with the option of overnight delivery). The cheesecakes are available in a variety of flavors (including Kahlua, amaretto, orange cream, maple, apple walnut, Irish cream, and even bacon) and sizes (two slices, two pounds, four pounds). Another part of the "economy" of the Nuns of New Skete is painting icons (two sisters are talented iconographers) and sewing liturgical vestments. The sisters also host retreats and help the Monks of New Skete with their dog breeding and training programs.

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<sup>4</sup> Along with the cheesecakes, the other gourmet items produced by the sisters include various cheese spreads, brandied fruitcakes, and pancake mix.

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Fr. Christopher, the prior of the monks of New Skete, works with a dog enrolled in the monastery's dog training program.



The grounds of New Skete are very inviting and worthy of exploration. The monastery complex sprawls on the slopes of the gently rolling hills, which are covered by forest. Many people take advantage of the bursting foliage colors and come here in the fall to take pictures and hike on the monastery's many nature trails. But even those who visit during other seasons are rewarded by the interesting architecture and landscaping of New Skete. The monastery has two churches: the Russian-style Temple of the Transfiguration of Christ and the Byzantine-style Temple of Holy Wisdom (both are open to visitors). The first (smaller) church was designed and built by the monks in 1970. Its rough-hewn exterior has gold onion-like domes, and it is very reminiscent of village chapels in northern Russia. The floor is laid with gray-green slate from nearby quarries, and the walls and pillars are covered with cedar and ash. The interior is decorated with numerous mural icons, while the wood-carved iconostasis is made of ash. This church is presently used mostly for personal prayer and meditation. The newer and larger Church of Holy Wisdom is more basilica-like. Its light-filled openness and U-shaped altar screen are inspired by the early churches of Constantinople. Inlaid in the tiles of the Italian marble floor are pieces of mosaic from the Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) basilica in Constantinople, built in the mid-sixth century AD by the Emperor Justinian. The ceiling of the nave dome is painted with the large icon of Our Lady of the Sign, the patron saint of the Nuns of the New Skete. The second altar dome has ancient symbols for the four evangelists inspired by the book of Ezekiel: Matthew is depicted as a human/angel; Mark as a lion; Luke as an ox/calf; and John as an eagle. Most of the interior details (candle stands, altar screen, wall paneling, the scene of Golgotha, chairs, and pillars)

are hand-carved out of variety of woods including walnut, ash, zebra, and English brown oak. A great variety of icons are mounted on the walls and ceilings or placed on stands throughout the church. The eternal lamp in the sanctuary signifies the divine presence.

The monastery's separate standing bell tower has seventeen bells; its design was inspired by the wooden bell towers of the Carpathian Mountains in Eastern Europe. The art of tolling bells has been handed down within Orthodox monasteries by unwritten traditions; here at New Skete the bells are rung three times daily as a call to prayer. The most recent addition to the monastery's main complex is a meditation garden laid out between the two churches. The garden has three levels of terraces surrounded by lush, flowering plantings with many benches for reading, reflection, or conversation. The rustic stone steps, gently sloping pathway, and cascading pools teeming with fish add to the sense of a sacred space.

Although they are very busy with their dogs and cheesecake industries and with maintaining the daily cycle of worship services, the Monks and Nuns of New Skete still manage to host a variety of interesting public events that attract wide audiences: Orthodox and non-Orthodox, young and old, families and single persons.

One of the highlights in the monastery's life is the annual celebration of the Blessing of the Animals. It is held in the autumn, on a weekend closest to the Feast of St. Francis (October 4), the saint who is regarded as the patron saint of animals. This event is dedicated to spiritual connection between human beings and God's creatures. Everyone is invited to come and to bring any pet (or its picture) for the special ceremony, church service, and blessing with holy water. The festival is accompanied by a short presentation on the history and present life of the New Skete communities. Adults and children alike love this event, when, for a day, the monastery's grounds transform into a small zoo (with animals ranging from horses to a rock python and lots of resident frogs who pipe up for the occasion).

The Monks and Nuns of New Skete maintain very good relations with their local community, the town of Cambridge. The monastery's annual open house is held on the first weekend in June, in conjunction with the famous Cambridge Valley Hot Air Balloon Festival. On this day the New Skete community invites everyone to come for tours of the monastery grounds and bakery, a dog training demonstration, and "socialization" with the German shepherd puppies. The event is accompanied by the sales of plants and baked goods made by monks and nuns.

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Fr. Mark performs a blessing of the animals ceremony.



Those interested in more in-depth knowledge on living with dogs come to the monastery's popular "Art of Living with Your Dog Seminar." It is held twice a year (May and July), lasts three days, and requires advance booking and online reservation.

In August (in conjunction with the Feast of Transfiguration), people come here for the annual New Skete pilgrimage. Typically, this full-day event includes the celebration of Divine Liturgy, a tour of the monastery's churches, a presentation by monks or nuns on their communities, and a lecture by an invited speaker. The day concludes with guided hike and dog training demonstration. A variety of "ethnic" (Greek, Lebanese, Russian) foods are offered for purchase. Twice a year (including once in the Lenten season) New Skete holds one-day guided group retreats for self-reflection and deep examination of our relationships with God.

For those considering a vocation to monasticism, the New Skete offers a unique opportunity to firsthand expe-

rience monastic living within the New Skete community. The program is called "Seekers Week," and it is held once a year. Those who are interested can communicate and apply in advance and—if approved—come and stay for a week, during which they share with the monks and nuns their daily cycle of worship, work, meals, and socialization.

For those who simply wish to spend a few days in nature, surrounded by peace and quiet, the Monks of New Skete community offers the very comfortable Emmaus Guesthouse. Both men and women can stay here.<sup>5</sup> It has a large communal kitchen, a spacious communal sitting area, a library, and several en-suite accommodations. Each has a bedroom and a small living room with glass sliding doors, thus, allowing guests to step out "straight into nature" and sit on the outside porch. The guesthouse is surrounded by woods with many hiking trails. New Skete's churches, gardens, bell tower, and hiking trails are open for self-guided tours Tuesday through Sunday (closed on Monday).

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Main complex of the New Skete Monastery.

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<sup>4</sup> Along with the cheesecakes, the other gourmet items produced by the sisters include various cheese spreads, brandied fruitcakes, and pancake mix.



# Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God (“New Gracanica”) Monastery, Third Lake, Illinois

(Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA)  
www.newgracanica.com

By Alexei Krindatch

Third Lake, Illinois, a northern Chicago suburb, is home to the Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God Monastery. The sixty-five acres of lakeshore property were purchased by the Holy Mother of God Serbian Association for the establishment of a monastery in 1977. The monastery, also known as “New Gracanica,” is a major spiritual center for Serbians living in the United States. “This is a gathering place for all Serbian people,” says Bishop Sava (Juric), who was at the monastery when construction first began and returned to retire here after many years of living abroad. Indeed, thousands of Serbian families come annually to the monastery not only to pray, but for various social and cultural events, children’s camps, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. The monastery also serves as the diocesan office of Bishop Longin (Krcic), the head of the Midwestern American Serbian Orthodox Diocese.

The monastery’s main church is dedicated to the feast of the Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God. The church was constructed as a detailed and slightly enlarged replica of the medieval church of Gracanica Monastery in Kosovo, hence the name “New Gracanica”. Bishop Sava explains that “for many of us, Kosovo is like Serbian Jerusalem.” The original Gracanica Monastery was built by Serbian king Stefan Milutin in 1321 on the ruins of a sixth-century Christian basilica and was one of his last monumental endowments.<sup>1</sup> Architecturally, the Gracanica



The monastery’s church is a detailed replica of the medieval church at Gracanica Monastery in Kosovo.

Monastery in Kosovo represents the culmination of the Serbian medieval art of building in the Byzantine tradition.<sup>2</sup>

The wooden entrance doors to the Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God Church in Third Lake are hand-carved and depict twenty-three monasteries and churches from various regions of Serbia. The interior is richly decorated with wooden furnishings, ornate gold and crystal chandeliers, imposing icons, and a terrazzo floor. But the most unique feature of the church is its Byzantine frescoes. Fr. Theodore Jurewicz<sup>3</sup> was commissioned to paint the entire church, a project that took three years. Today brightly colored religious scenes cover the walls, vaults, pillars, and dome of the church.

One particular icon displayed in the church is especially noteworthy. It is called “Bogorodica Trojerucica” (in Greek, “Panayia Tricherosa”), which means “Three-Handed Mother of God.” Its prototype is a famous wonderworking icon in the Serbian Orthodox Monastery of Hilandar on Mount Athos, Greece. The icon portrays the Virgin Mary holding the young Jesus. A distinct element of this icon is a third hand (wrist) depicted in the lower left corner.

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes this style is referred to as “Kosmet style,” a development of the Macedonian style or cross-in-square.

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Theodore Jurewicz (b. 1949) is a Polish-American Orthodox old-rite (“Old Believer”) priest and artist specializing in Byzantine icons and frescoes. He was a student of the late Archimandrite Cyprian, the founder of the school of iconography at the Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York (see separate article on this monastery). Fr. Theodore is regarded as one of the most renowned icon painters in North America today.

<sup>1</sup> Today the original Gracanica Monastery’s cultural and historical significance are recognized by its placement on UNESCO’s World Heritage List. Through the centuries Gracanica Monastery became a symbol of Serbian spirituality and national unity for the Serbian people worldwide.

According to tradition, the icon was in the possession of St. John of Damascus (a Syrian monk and priest of the early eighth century) and is associated with his miraculous healing around the year 717 AD. According to the story of St. John's life, prior to his ordination as a Christian priest he served as vizier (chief administrator) to the local Muslim ruler, Caliph Al-Walid I. St. John was falsely accused of treachery, and his hand was cut off. The accusation was allegedly made by Byzantine emperor Leo the Isaurian. The emperor was an Iconoclast (i.e. a person strongly opposed to the use of icons in the church), a great opponent of St. John, and a friend of Al-Walid I. After having his hand cut off, St. John prayed fervently in front of an icon of the Virgin Mary, and his hand was miraculously restored. To express his gratitude, he made a silver replica of his hand and attached it to the icon. Thus, the icon depicts three hands: two of the Virgin Mary and one "attached" by St. John. The Bogorodica Trojerucica icon in New Gracanica Monastery was painted

in Thessaloniki, Greece, and then spent time in Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos, where it sat side by side with the original icon. Eventually the new icon was brought to New Gracanica personally by the abbot of the Hilandar Monastery. Many people come to New Gracanica to venerate Bogorodica Trojerucica and to ask for healing from various illnesses.

New Gracanica Monastery maintains the Joe Buley Memorial Library, which houses a collection of materials on Serbian history and culture, both in English and Serbian. The collection is especially strong in the area of twentieth-century Serbian history and the history of Serbian communities in the United States. Also noteworthy is the monastery's cemetery, which encompasses thirteen acres of land and contains over five thousand graves.

Every July New Gracanica organizes a camp for children and teenagers aged six to sixteen. They come for one-week sessions, and each group has about one hundred participants. Fr. Serafim, the monastery's abbot, says,

Interior of the monastery's church.





The miraculous icon Bogorodica Trojericica (Three-handed Mother of God) attracts many visitors to the monastery.

“We think about these camps as our inside mission work. Most of our campers are third-to fourth-generation American-born. The idea is to bring kids together so that they can have fun, but also learn about their Orthodox faith and Serbian history and culture.” The schedule of the camp is fairly full. Each day includes two church services,<sup>4</sup> three thirty-minute classes (one related to Orthodox religion, one dealing with Serbian culture and history, and one on church singing), and a variety of afternoon activities (visits to the nearby Six Flags amusement park and swimming pool, sports games, bonfires, craft classes, etc.). For many campers, however, the favorite part of the day is the evening gatherings, when the youth are divided by age group and each group is allocated a window of time with Fr. Serafim. He reads a Bible story, and then the floor is open for questions and answers and discussion.

While regular church services at the monastery are mostly in Serbian and Church Slavonic, the summer camp uses English as the main language of communication and instruction. This allows the children from Serbian families to bring with them their non-Serbian friends, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox.

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<sup>4</sup> Those who desire are given opportunity to learn how to help with church services in the capacity of altar boys.

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Hand-carved entrance doors to the church depict twenty-three monasteries and churches from various regions of Serbia.



The monastery's grounds are open every day, and many Serbian families come here throughout the year for various events: picnics, weddings, and social and cultural activities. Several times a year New Gracanica hosts folklore parties. They are typically organized on Friday afternoons by one of the local Serbian Orthodox parishes. Serbian traditional dishes are enjoyed, and young people wear ethnic clothes and perform Serbian dances.

But the events that attract the largest crowds—thousands of people—are the Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day picnics. These events are open to the wider public. In the morning, the Divine Liturgy is served in the monastery's church, followed by speeches given by the bishop and an invited speaker. In the afternoon a variety of Serbian foods and drinks are available for purchase (the highlights include roasted pig and lamb along with *slivovitz*, Serbian plum-brandy), while the vendors sell various arts and crafts.

For large groups and private events, the monastery has a dining hall where meals can be prepared and which can accommodate up to eight hundred persons. There is also a soccer field for the athletically inclined. Picnic benches and tables are scattered throughout the monastery's grounds. Nearby Druce Lake, with its beach, is a scenic place to relax and commune with friends and nature. New Gracanica Monastery offers overnight accommodations in eight simple but comfortable family rooms.

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Fr. Serafim, the monastery's abbot.



# St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, Florence, Arizona

(Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America)

[www.stanthonysmonastery.org](http://www.stanthonysmonastery.org)

By Alexei Krindatch

The monastery is named after St. Anthony the Great (ca. 251–356 AD), the renowned Egyptian ascetic and saint, who is often referred to as “the father of monasticism.” In the constellation of various American Orthodox monastic communities, St. Anthony’s can be described as a “superstar:” both because it is by far the largest US Orthodox monastery (with about fifty monks and novices in residence) and because of the huge flow of pilgrims and tourists who come to visit. Some even claim that St. Anthony’s is the second most popular “attraction” (by the number of visitors) in the state of Arizona, after the Grand Canyon. Most importantly, St. Anthony’s Monastery is home to Elder Ephraim, a person who has exerted a very strong influence on contemporary

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The first crop of tomatoes in the monastery’s garden.



Orthodox monasticism in America. In short, Elder Ephraim is rightfully credited with transplanting on American soil the authentic Athonite monasticism: that is, the way of monastic living and worshiping as practiced in the monasteries on Mount Athos in Greece.

Elder Ephraim (b. 1927 in Volos, Greece)—also known as Archimandrite Ephraim of Philotheou—is a disciple of Elder Joseph the Hesychast (1897–1959). Elder Joseph is revered for reviving hesychasm<sup>1</sup> in Greek Orthodox monasteries on Mount Athos. Hesychasm is an ancient Christian spiritual and mystical practice involving rhythmic repetition (either silently or aloud) of the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.”<sup>2</sup> Hesychasm also places great emphasis on austere and ascetic living.

In 1973 Elder Ephraim became the abbot of the Philotheou Monastery on Mount Athos, and, thanks to his reputation, the monastery’s brotherhood grew rapidly. He also played a crucial role in reviving and expanding several other Greek monasteries that were in decline, both spiritually and in the number of monks. This renewal in monasticism did not stop at the borders of Greece. In the late 1970s Elder Ephraim began traveling to Canada and the United States. He became known within the Greek community for reviving the practice of confession as a necessary preparatory step for receiving Holy Communion, a practice that had been largely abandoned at that time in the North American Greek Orthodox parishes. His reputation as a grace-filled confessor and zealous missionary attracted to Elder Ephraim many young North American Greeks. Some of these young people traveled to Mount Athos and other Greek monasteries as pilgrims, and some stayed there to become monks and nuns. Later, in the 1990s, a number of them returned to America and helped Elder Ephraim to found Athonite monastic

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<sup>1</sup> “Hesychasm” can be described as a particular mystical tradition of prayer in the Orthodox Church that, in several different ways, focuses on the retiring inward by ceasing to register the “outside senses” with the goal of achieving an experiential knowledge of God. The renowned modern Orthodox theologian Bishop Kallistos (Ware) offers several related meanings of the term “hesychasm”: a) the practice of constant inner prayer, aiming at union with God on a level beyond images, concepts, and language; (b) the quest for such union through the so-called “Jesus Prayer”; (c) a particular psychosomatic technique in combination with the Jesus Prayer; (d) the “eremetical” (i.e., solitary) life (in which sense the term is used since the fourth century); (e) the theology of St. Gregory Palamas.

<sup>2</sup> The Jesus Prayer has been widely taught and discussed throughout the entire history of the Church. However, the importance of continuous repetition of the Jesus Prayer is especially emphasized as a fundamental integral part of hesychasm. The Jesus Prayer is revered by the spiritual fathers of this tradition as a method of opening a person’s heart and soul to God.

communities in the United States and Canada.<sup>3</sup> Fifteen Greek Orthodox monastic communities were founded by Elder Ephraim in the United States between 1989 and 2005. St. Anthony's Monastery can be seen as the informal spiritual center of this group of monasteries.<sup>4</sup>

Archimandrite Paisios, the abbot of St. Anthony's Monastery, is a native of Canada. After living for more than ten years in the Monastery of Philotheou on Mount Athos—the home monastery of Elder Ephraim—he returned to America in 1995 and (with five other monks) established St. Anthony's Monastery in the Sonoran Desert in southern Arizona.

Today a vast monastic complex sprawls on 365 acres of former desert, which have been converted into a lush oasis with an impressive architectural ensemble. An elab-

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<sup>3</sup> The first North American monastery established by Fr. Ephraim and his disciples was the Nativity of the Mother of God in Saxonburg, Pennsylvania, in 1989.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to St. Anthony's Monastery, five more Greek Orthodox monasteries founded by Elder Ephraim are described in this section of the atlas: Holy Archangels in Texas, St. John the Forerunner in Washington, Annunciation of the Theotokos in Florida, Panagia Vlahernon in Florida, and Holy Protection of the Theotokos in Pennsylvania.

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The chapel of St. Panteleimon the Healer, built in the Russian style.



orate system of gardens, pathways, gazebos, and Spanish fountains surround the monastery's various buildings. A vegetable garden, citrus orchards, and five thousand olive trees contribute to the monastic "economy." The monastery has a small vineyard and a winery that produces both sacramental wine and small quantities of various table wines (the grapes that connected well with the dry and rocky soils are Barbera, Sangiovese, Syrah, Aleatico and various types of Moscato). The guest quarters (mostly dormitory-style) can accommodate up to sixty-five men and one hundred women for overnight stays.<sup>5</sup> The monastery's bookstore carries a wide array of the titles on Orthodox Christianity published in various languages. The bookstore also doubles as a "tourist information center" (where visitors can obtain a map of the monastery's extensive grounds) and a gift shop.

The monastery's liturgical architecture includes the main church (or *katholikon*) dedicated to Sts. Anthony and Nektarios the Wonderworker (the latter saint is especially popular among Greeks) and six separate standing chapels. All of them are built in very different styles. The Chapels

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<sup>5</sup> In the high tourist season (October through April), St. Anthony's receives up to three hundred visitors a day, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox.

of St. Panteleimon the Healer and St. Demetrios of Thessalonika are crowned with the onion-like cupolas, which gives them a “Russian-like” look. Visiting Romanian families claim that the Chapel of St. George the Martyr is very similar to churches in Romania. The Chapel of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker is a classical Byzantine-style basilica. The Chapel of St. Seraphim of Sarov is an open-air gazebo without walls. Finally, sitting on a hilltop, the blue-white Chapel of the Prophet Elijah makes one think about village churches on Greek islands. A short climb to this chapel rewards visitors with a breathtaking 360-degree view of the entire monastery and surrounding mountains.

This external splendor, however, is only a vessel for the very intense (and rigid) spiritual and worship life of St. Anthony’s monastic brotherhood. Of the nearly fifty monks and novices residing at the monastery, nearly two-thirds are of Greek descent (mostly American-born). The rest are divided between American converts to the Orthodox

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The chapel of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, built in the style of a classical Byzantine basilica.



faith and “cradle” Orthodox Christians of other-than-Greek ethnic ancestry. The monks’ daily cycle of life begins an hour or two before midnight with personal prayer and spiritual reading. This is followed by worship services in the church (including Midnight Hour, Matins, and Divine Liturgy) that typically last from 1:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m. After a light breakfast and rest period, the monks begin their work day, attending to various chores such as grounds keeping; tending the gardens, orchards, and vineyard; doing various construction and wood-working projects; preparing food; and offering hospitality to the visitors. A short break for lunch occurs at 11:30 a.m. The workday ends at 3:30 p.m. with Vespers, followed by dinner and Compline. Overall, each brother at St. Anthony’s devotes about six hours a day (and more on feast days) to personal prayer and communal worship in the church.

All services at the monastery are in Greek. When asked whether this presents a challenge to the numerous non-Greek visitors and pilgrims, Archimandrite Paisios says, “Common prayers unite those present in a service

on a spiritual level. As our Lord said: ‘Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.’ And so words and language become irrelevant at this point. We must remember, however, that all the books of the New Testament, with the exception of the Gospel according to St. Mathew (which was originally in Aramaic), were written in Greek. Most of the Fathers of the Church wrote in Greek, and it is very important to us to keep the Greek language in the church. There is still a plethora of patristic writings in Greek that have yet to be translated. To translate from Greek you must understand the language. Reading it and hearing it on a daily basis helps tremendously in this respect. What is more important, though, is to be more or less in the spiritual state of the saint whose works you are translating. Only then can one convey the saint’s teaching or message. This is where the necessity of having an illumined Elder comes into play.”

St. Anthony’s and other affiliated Greek Orthodox monasteries established by Elder Ephraim have two important practices around which their lives revolve. The first is the constant repetition (either verbally or silently) of the Jesus Prayer, the tradition handed down by Elder Ephraim and all the Fathers of the Church. Unlike Athonite monasteries, many other monastic traditions prefer lengthy services but with less emphasis on the Jesus Prayer.

“The second practice,” Abbot Paisios says, “is the need to be under absolute spiritual obedience to an experienced Elder who has empirical knowledge of the prayer and can help others to progress in the Jesus Prayer. Regardless of your monastic or ethnic tradition, you have to have such an Elder who has found God’s grace and can convey this to you. Without experienced Elders, monasteries would not have any future. Genuine monastic life cannot be learned from books.”

As many other monasteries, St. Anthony’s has witnessed several miraculous, or at least difficult-to-explain, events. The most frequently reported situations are when people near the monastery—either visitors approaching the monastery, or local hunters—heard the bells although the monastery actually was not ringing any bells at that moment. As the story is told, Elder Ephraim himself was driving through the Arizona desert when he heard heavenly bells. This, he knew, was the place for a new monastery, and so St. Anthony’s—a kernel of Mount Athos—was planted in the American Southwest.

St. Anthony’s welcomes all visitors, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox. Each year thousands of day visitors and overnight guests use this hospitality as an opportunity for spiritual growth and internal rejuvenation. Many come here for confession and a blessing from Elder Ephraim



A new monk is accepted into the monastery’s brotherhood.

or Archimandrite Paisios. However, there are a few rules that all visitors are expected to follow. The first is a strict dress code. Men are required to wear long trousers and long-sleeved shirts. Women should have long skirts (well below the knee), long-sleeved blouses, and head scarves. A limited supply of “to borrow” clothing is available at the monastery’s bookstore, located by the entrance gates. The second rule is the observance of “quiet hours”: after 7:00 p.m. no day visitors are permitted on the monastery’s grounds, while overnight guests are asked to stay in their rooms. Finally, overnight guests (Orthodox and non-Orthodox pilgrims alike) are expected to attend all the monastery’s worship services, especially midnight Liturgy.

Elder Ephraim brought to the United States the traditions of Orthodox monasticism of Mt Athos in Greece.



# St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, Platina, California

(Serbian Orthodox Church)

[www.sainthermanmonastery.org](http://www.sainthermanmonastery.org)

By Alexei Krindatch

Isolated on a forested mountain and accessible only by a narrow dirt road, the Monastery of St. Herman of Alaska is a world of its own. Upon entering through the gate, one almost feels like he or she is in a small Russian town. The snow-white church, dedicated to St. Herman of Alaska, is crowned with golden onion-like cupolas, and

its interior is richly decorated with icons, paintings, and frescoes. A separate lower chapel inside the main church is named after St. Sergius and St. Herman of Valaam; its blue-colored walls are beautifully painted with the images of many saints whose lives were related to the history of medieval Valaam Monastery in northern Russia. Adjacent to the church is the trapeza, a long dining hall, where monks and visitors to the monastery share their meals. The monks' cells and other buildings (some of them also adorned with the Russian-style onion domes) are scattered over 140 acres of land: a small part of it is carefully landscaped, but most is left "untouched" and is covered with thick forest. Right next to the church, there is a small walled garden called "Gethsemane." The plants inside the garden (Japanese maple, apple, cherry, and bamboo) surround simple wooden table and several chairs; this is a spot that calls for intimate and unhurried conversations.

Two aspects are quintessential for the nature of St. Herman brotherhood: its missionary zeal and its austerity.

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The monastery's main church and adjacent *trapeza* (dining hall).



The St. Herman monastic community began originally as a missionary lay brotherhood. It was cofounded in 1963 in San Francisco by Eugene Rose (later known under his monastic name as Fr. Seraphim) and Gleb Podmoshensky (who would become Fr. Herman) with the blessing of Archbishop John (Maximovitch) of San Francisco and Western America (later glorified as St. John of San Francisco). The brotherhood's particular call was (and remains) to bring the depth, beauty, and spirituality of the Orthodox faith to English-speaking America, and to do so primarily through the printed word. It was not an accident, then, that the founders chose as their patron a Russian missionary monk of the American land who is glorified as a saint of the Orthodox Church: St. Herman of Alaska.

The brotherhood began by opening a bookstore called Orthodox Christian Books and Icons, the first city storefront in the United States that sold exclusively Orthodox materials and items. Yet, the founding brothers always thought about moving from San Francisco to some remote location so that they could continue their mission amidst the wilderness, in the tradition of the early monastic forest-dwellers of northern Russia. In 1969 their dream became a reality: land was purchased, and the brotherhood moved to its current location near the tiny former mining town of Platina, in Northern California (about a four-hour drive from San Francisco). The only building on the property was a primitive hunters' shelter that was remodeled and used as both living quarters and chapel (this original "monastery" still exists). The next year Eugene Rose and Gleb Podmoshensky were tonsured as monks (and later ordained as priests), with Eugene receiving the name Seraphim (to honor the saint of Sarov), and Gleb receiving the name Herman (to honor the saint of Alaska).

Frescoes cover the walls of the chapel dedicated to St. Sergius and St. Herman of Valaam.



Since its inception the St. Herman Monastery has primarily been known for its publications. The brotherhood produces and prints original books; translates major Orthodox works into English; and publishes a bimonthly English-language periodical, *The Orthodox Word*, and the annual *Saint Herman Church Calendar*. The last is regarded as one of the most comprehensive listings of saints associated with each day of the year. This work is done through the monastery's publishing company, St. Herman Press ([www.sainthermanmonastery.com](http://www.sainthermanmonastery.com)). Among more than one hundred titles published by St. Herman Monastery, two books written by Fr. Seraphim Rose have had an especially strong influence on contemporary Orthodox spiritual literature: *The Soul after Death* and *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*. Furthermore, Fr. Seraphim has become one of the best-loved Orthodox writers not only in the United States but also in Russia, Serbia, and other Eastern European countries. Translated into many languages, his books had significant impact on the religious life in these countries during years of Communist oppression (at that time, they were brought in and distributed illegally as "underground literature"). The monastery has a bookstore that offers great selection of literature on various aspects of the Orthodox faith and church life.

By 1982, when Fr. Seraphim died suddenly at age forty-eight (his grave on the monastery's land is sometimes used as an altar for open-air worship services), St. Herman evolved into a thriving monastic community that attracted and continues to attract a strong stream of visitors, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox. For some of them, a pilgrimage to the monastery would become a life-changing experience. In fact, dozens of US Orthodox priests

One of the monastery's guest houses, popularly known as "Hilton." It was built by the monastery's founder, Fr. Seraphim (Rose).



“discovered” the Orthodox faith and become Orthodox Christians (and later clergy) through their original contacts with the St. Herman brotherhood.

The St. Herman Monastery has played a pivotal role in reviving Orthodox monasticism in Alaska. Two monastic communities were established there as dependencies of St. Herman’s: St. Michael’s Skete for men (in 1983; on Spruce Island, near Kodiak) and St. Nilus Skete for women (in 1999; on St. Nilus Island, near Kodiak). See the separate essay in this book about these Alaskan monastic communities.

The St. Herman brotherhood views itself as monastic community in the Russian tradition and with especially strong ties to monasticism in northern Russia. At the same time, all thirteen brothers at St. Herman Monastery are American-born converts to Orthodoxy. With an age span from twenty-six to sixty-eight years old, they bring into the brotherhood different life experiences and talents. Some of them worked in their previous secular lives as “blue-collar” workers, while some were highly skilled IT specialists. One of the brothers was a deputy sheriff. Some of them have special talents in languages (which is help-

ful in the monastery’s publishing work), some are good at painting icons, some are devoted gardeners, and some are “handymen” who can build or fix anything.

St. Herman Monastery is a truly “rustic” and intentionally austere place. The only source of electricity is solar batteries, and electric lights are found only in the church and the trapeza (dining hall). There was no indoor plumbing until recently; the first flush toilet was constructed only this year (2015). The monastery is twenty-five miles from the nearest cell phone signal, and there is no Internet access (although the monastery maintains a website and an e-mail account from an offsite location). And, of course, there is no television or radio. Fr. Damascene (Christensen), the monastery’s abbot, says, “We will bring ourselves into the twenty-first century, but slowly: we are not in a hurry.”

A pilgrimage to St. Herman isn’t a vacation. People journey here for more serious reasons: to attain a spiritual “booster shot,” to receive counseling from one of the brothers, to take temporary refuge from the world, or to experience the monastic life firsthand. Pilgrims are expected to attend all the scheduled services (typically, about six hours a day) and to dine in silence with the

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Brother Donnan is a dedicated and talented gardener.



monks while listening to spiritual readings. They are also urged to read a book on Orthodox spirituality and are discouraged from worldly activities such as listening to “secular” music or playing video games. Those staying longer than a day or two are encouraged to work alongside the monks.

Overnight visitors to the monastery (it can accommodate up to twenty persons) stay in three very simple cabins: one is for men; one, for women; and one, for a couple (or a family). The latter is nicknamed the “Hilton” (apparently, it is the nicest) and was constructed out of wood materials from a hundred-year-old former mining cabin. It is many people’s favorite because it was built by Fr. Seraphim himself and because its porch offers a great view. The cabins do not have electricity or running water and are heated by wood-burning stoves. A flashlight or head lamp is needed in the darkness to hike down the slope from the monastery to the cabins.

For some, the many hours of church services and rustic accommodations at St. Herman can be exhausting and intolerable, but for others, the impact of immersing oneself in the monastic life can be an incredibly powerful and sometimes life-changing experience.

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Fr. Damascene, the monastery’s abbot, in Gethsemane garden.



# St. John the Forerunner Greek Orthodox Monastery, Goldendale, Washington

(Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of  
America)

[www.stjohnmonastery.org](http://www.stjohnmonastery.org)

By Alexei Krindatch

When wine lovers drive from Portland to Yakima Valley<sup>1</sup> along Highway 97, many of them put their feet on the brake at a sign that says “St. John’s Bakery, Coffee, Gifts.” It is pretty much “in the middle of nowhere” (about ten miles north of small Goldendale town), and the temptation is great to stop for a picnic lunch at the outdoor tables, set under majestic Ponderosa pines. Upon entering the small store, a couple of surprises await hungry visitors.

The first surprise is an amazing variety of Greek dishes prepared “from scratch.” Spanakopita, tyropita, dolmadakia, mousaka, pastitsio, gyros, Greek salad, hummus, tzatziki, freshly baked pita bread, and Greek yogurt are only some of the items that appear on a daily menu written on a chalk board. Those who are interested simply in a cup of coffee or something sweet will not be disappointed either: they can enjoy a full espresso bar and homemade baklava, galaktoboureko (phyllo dough filled with vanilla custard with lemon zest), biscotti, a variety of cheesecakes and pound cakes, and much more. After indulging in this “food paradise,” many guests may be tempted to take some of the dishes back home, and they are perfectly able to do so because most of the menu items are also available in neat packages, either fresh (pastries, sweets) or frozen (savory dishes).

But the second surprise is much greater and, more importantly, points to the nature of this place. The cafe and adjacent store are operated by Orthodox nuns. Wearing black robes and crosses, their heads covered with long scarves, they cook and serve and are happy to answer the same question over and over again: “What is this place



Road sign by the entrance to the monastery’s bakery.

about?” The answer is simple: St. John’s Bakery is the gateway to St. John the Forerunner Greek Orthodox Monastery. After satisfying their hunger, many customers continue to browse through the store as they admire a variety of religious books, icons, crosses, beeswax candles, incense, and CDs of spiritual music.<sup>2</sup> The impact of this roadside Orthodox Christian cafe and store on some people’s lives is impressive. The nuns remember a rough-looking, tattoo-covered truck driver (truck drivers are frequent customers here) who ate and then purchased, out of simple curiosity, one of the music CDs. Named *Virtue: The Door of Heaven*, the CD was a collection of Greek Orthodox Christian songs translated into English and performed by the nuns and a group of Orthodox girls. A few weeks later the nuns received a letter from this truck driver that simply said, “I keep driving. Through your store God came back to my life after thirty years of absence. Thank you.” Big packs of motorbikers stop frequently here, and—according to the nuns—they behave extremely well and politely. Moreover, in a certain sense, St. John’s Bakery serves as an Orthodox religious outreach mission. Indeed, the sisters maintain an expansive network of contacts with Orthodox priests and parishes throughout the American Pacific Northwest. When customers at the cafe and store appear to be genuinely interested in learning more about Orthodox Christianity, the nuns are

<sup>1</sup> The Yakima Valley in Washington State is one of the fastest-growing wine-producing areas in the United States.

<sup>2</sup> Also included in the store is a gift section where the nuns’ handiwork is available, including their handmade cosmetic products such as natural bar and liquid soaps, lotions, and facial creams.



The monastery's newly built church.

always able to provide their guests with contact information so that they can explore further when they are back home. Many of them do, and some eventually embrace Orthodox Christianity and join the Orthodox Church.

The monastery's property begins immediately behind St. John's Bakery. Situated on sixty acres of land in a dense pine forest, with twenty-two nuns and novices in residence, St. John the Forerunner is one of the largest Orthodox monasteries for women in America. It was founded in 1995, when a local doctor, Gerald Timmer, decided to donate his property to the Church as a tribute to his wife, who was a pious Episcopalian Christian and had died from cancer. The original sisterhood was formed through the efforts of Elder Ephraim, a person who has exerted a very strong influence on contemporary Orthodox monasticism in America.<sup>3</sup> Elder Ephraim brought here three nuns from the Orthodox Monastery of the Panagia Hodigitria in Volos, Greece. The founding nuns,

Mother Evpraxia, the monastery's abbess, and Sisters Parthenia and Agni, were experienced monastics and talented icon painters. Yet, they had little knowledge of American culture and society and were not prepared to find themselves in this rural community whose residents knew nothing about Orthodox Christians. Luckily, generous support came from the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Portland, Oregon, whose parishioners helped the nuns to settle in their new home and supported them in many ways during the first years. Then the Holy Cross Antiochian Orthodox Church in Yakima, about sixty miles away from the monastery, extended its help as well. Fr. Joseph Copeland and his parishioners became close friends with and frequent visitors to the newly established monastic community. Fr. Joseph's love for Orthodox monasticism and his many personal contacts with the Orthodox parishes in Alaska resulted in several families from Alaska moving to live in the nearby town of Golden-

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<sup>3</sup> Elder Ephraim (b. 1927 in Volos, Greece), also known as Archimandrite Ephraim of Philotheou, is rightfully credited with transplanting on American soil the traditions of authentic Athonite monasticism: that is, the way of monastic living and worshipping as practiced in the monasteries on Mount

Athos. Elder Ephraim founded fifteen Greek Orthodox monastic communities in the United States from 1989 to 2005. He resides at St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery in Florence, Arizona. For more on Elder Ephraim, see the article on St. Anthony's Monastery in this atlas.



Parish picnic hosted by St. John the Forerunner Monastery.

dale so that they could be close to the monastery. Furthermore, some of the young women from these Alaskan parishes decided to explore a monastic vocation and joined the sisterhood. A few local residents also eventually converted to the Orthodox faith, including Mark Sigfrinus, the three-term mayor of Goldendale.<sup>4</sup> The next occurrence of “good luck” was finding Fr. Michael Dunaway, who became the monastery’s resident priest, thus enabling the sisterhood to have the Divine Liturgy served regularly and frequently.<sup>5</sup> Fr. Michael also contributed significantly to the monastery’s food business because he has a small coffee-roasting company that produces coffee blends and ice coffee under the “Father Michael’s” label. They are available and quite popular at St. John’s Bakery.

As the sisterhood of St. John the Forerunner Monastery continued to grow, it has also become more and more diverse. Today it includes the three original nuns from Greece and three sisters from Greek American families, with the rest being “simply Americans.” Remarkably, most of the nuns are fairly young (in their twenties and thirties), and the average age of the sisters is only thirty-three years old. Their youthful energy, combined with full devotion to monastic living, is the only explanation of how the sisters maintain and balance their various chores and obediences with the rigid cycle of personal prayer and communal worship services, all while offering

<sup>4</sup> Recently, a new Orthodox mission parish was formed in Goldendale; it has about forty-five members, and visiting Orthodox clergy celebrate the Liturgy biweekly.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to various church feasts, the Divine Liturgy is celebrated four times a week: on Tuesdays and Thursdays (at 4:30 a.m.), on Saturdays (at 7:00 a.m.), and on Sundays (at 9:00 a.m.).



The monastery’s grounds.

warm hospitality to many day visitors and overnight guests to the monastery.

When working on the monastery’s various projects, the nuns are divided into several teams. Some of them prepare the food served in the bakery, some tend to goats and make cheese,<sup>6</sup> some make natural soaps and lotions, and some work with customers in the cafe and gift store. Besides the founding nuns, three younger sisters also have a particular talent in iconography. In the past they created many custom-ordered icons, but presently they are fully focused on painting the newly built katholikon (main church). Besides the main church dedicated to St. John the Forerunner, the monastery also has a smaller St. Nektarios Chapel.

In its liturgical life the St. John the Forerunner is similar to the other Greek Orthodox monasteries founded by Elder Ephraim,<sup>7</sup> who transplanted traditions of Athonite monasticism (i.e., the way of monastic living as practiced on Mount Athos in Greece) onto American soil. The nuns rise at 2:00 a.m. in their cells for the personal prayer, which is followed by communal worship services in the church at 4:30 a.m.<sup>8</sup> After a short rest, breakfast is served at 8:15 a.m., and then the workday begins. While working on their obediences and chores, the nuns constantly repeat the Jesus Prayer.<sup>9</sup> Lunch is served at 1:00 p.m., after which there is a rest period until 3:00 p.m. The work

<sup>6</sup> The monastery has eight Nubian goats and produces raw-milk feta cheese.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to St. John the Forerunner Monastery, five more Greek Orthodox Monasteries founded by Elder Ephraim are described in this section of the atlas: St. Anthony’s in Arizona, Holy Archangels in Texas, Annunciation of the Theotokos in Florida, Panagia Vlahernon in Florida, and Holy Protection of the Theotokos in Pennsylvania.

<sup>8</sup> With the exception of Saturday and Sunday, when the Liturgy is celebrated at 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. respectively.

<sup>9</sup> The Jesus Prayer is a short prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” It has been widely taught and discussed through the entire history of the Church. However, the importance of the continuous saying of the Jesus Prayer (either aloud or silently) is especially emphasized as a fundamental integral part of hesychasm. The Jesus Prayer is revered by the spiritual fathers of this tradition as a method of opening a person’s heart and soul to God.

continues until 6:00 p.m., when the sisters gather again in the church for Vespers and Compline. Dinner time for the sisterhood is at 7:45 p.m.<sup>10</sup> At 9:00 p.m. quiet time at the monastery begins. As in Elder Ephraim's other monasteries, almost all worship services are in Greek. The nuns believe firmly that keeping Greek in the church is essential, not only because it was the language of the Fathers of the Church, but also because the original Greek conveys the meaning of the services in a much more accurate and deeper manner than English translations do. Sister Ephremia, one of the younger nuns, says, "Once you learn Greek, English in the church sounds poor. It simply does not have the same richness as Greek does. We love to hear Greek in the Church." Accordingly, while English is the mother language of most of the sisters, they all were eager to learn and become fluent in Greek. Sister Agni, one of the founding nuns, thinks, "Learning Greek by our American sisters was a gift not only for them, but also for all our English-speaking visitors, because now all our sisters are able to explain the depth of Orthodox Liturgy and full meaning of spiritual writings to others."

Each year the monastery sponsors two public spiritual retreats. One is a weekend retreat during Great Lent. It is organized together with Holy Cross Antiochian Orthodox parish. Participants stay in cabins at the nearby Brooks Memorial State Park. The second is a one-day retreat at the monastery with invited speakers that is typically held in October. Some people think that St. John the Forerunner

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<sup>10</sup> For overnight visitors to the monastery, dinner is served at 5:30 p.m.

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Church service on the eve of Easter, Holy Saturday.



should have more public events or educational programs, but they do not realize that the sisters already feel nearly "overrun" by the flow of their cafe customers, combined with many tour groups who visit the monastery.<sup>11</sup> Most importantly, the sisterhood of St. John the Forerunner Monastery has a strong emphasis on welcoming and hosting individual pilgrims: those who come here for personal retreats, to stay with and to help the sisters, to unwind from the stressful life in the "outside world," and to seek spiritual guidance and counseling from the Gerontissa Evpraxia, the abbess. Sister Agni quotes St. Seraphim of Sarov by saying, "If you find peace with yourself, a thousand of people around you will find this peace." She continues, "If we, as a sisterhood, can help each other to find this peace within our own hearts, then, as a monastery we can help others. In the modern world people are not willing to listen to each other. We nuns listen to everyone, and this is why people come here."

The monastery welcomes all visitors, but advance arrangements are strongly recommended so that the sisters can plan their time and provide a tour of the monastery's grounds and churches. Overnight accommodations are offered only to Orthodox Christians, who may stay at the monastery for a personal retreat up to two days for a time, at the discretion of the abbess. The monastery has two guesthouses (with thirty beds total): one is for women only and another for men and families. The accommodations range from dormitory-style to private en-suite rooms.

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<sup>11</sup> They include groups organized by various Christian churches, groups of seniors, and groups of college students who are enrolled in various art study programs.

# St. John of San Francisco Orthodox Monastery, Manton, California

(Orthodox Church in America)

[www.monasteryofstjohn.org](http://www.monasteryofstjohn.org)

By Alexei Krindatch

Upon entering the grounds of St. John Monastery (it is situated on forty-two acres of land in a dense pine forest) a feeling of great stillness and deep peace transcends everything else. Tourists often overlook this northeast corner of California near Lassen National

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The monks perform the ceremony of the blessing of the grapes at local vineyards.

Park, but for those who set upon “the road not taken,” the quiet loneliness of the Cascade foothills brings great refreshment and renewal of spirit. The landscapes here bear the marks of recent volcanic activity. Bowl-like calderas are visible on the tops of the nearby buttes. The scattered rocks are often full of holes—like Swiss cheese. Manton, the small town near the monastery, has a thriving wine industry, and its success is largely due to the well-drained volcanic soils and nighttime mountain breeze (which slows the maturation process of grapes).

The Monastery of St. John of San Francisco was originally established in 1996 near the coastal town of Point Reyes in Marin County, California, about thirty-five miles northwest of San Francisco. However, the facilities there were limited, and the property too small to accommodate a growing brotherhood. In 2006 the current location was found and purchased.

When the monks moved here, they were first met with a certain degree of suspicion by their non-Orthodox



neighbors. The pastor of a community church in Manton personally rode his motorbike to the monastery to make sure that the Orthodox monks are “okay people.” But it did not take very long time for the brothers to become fully integrated into their new home area. In fact, thanks to the monastery, a number of new local traditions have been established. The town of Manton is home to seven commercial wineries, and each year on August 19 (the Feast of the Transfiguration, according to the Julian Church calendar), the monks perform the ceremony of blessing of the grapes and vineyards with holy water. Each Christmas the brothers are invited to partake in the Christmas tree lighting, and they sing Christmas carols for the locals. The most important annual fair in Manton is its “apple festival,” celebrated on the first Saturday in October, and the brotherhood is always there with a stand from which they sell the monastery’s handmade beeswax candles and honey. On its part, on the first Sunday in June, the monastery holds an open house, when it welcomes all local residents and organizes for them a “small party” (typically, salmon burgers are served).

The teachers of a nearby private Anglican school, St. Andrew Academy in Chester, regularly bring their students to the monastery. But St. John also receives visitors who travel significant distances to come here. For instance, each year during their spring break, a group of students from Eckerd College in Florida come to the monastery to help with gardening, candle making, and other chores.

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The silent Jesus Prayer is an important part of the monastery’s worship services.



The brotherhood of St. John of San Francisco consists of nine monks and there is a great deal of diversity among them. The youngest is thirty-four, and the oldest seventy-six years old. Some of the brothers were born into the Orthodox Church, while some discovered and joined the Orthodox faith in the later stages of their lives. Some of them have been monks (or parish priests) for the most of their lives, while some became monastics after being professionals in the secular world. Fr. Innocent, the monastery’s superior, has a degree in agricultural studies from the University of California in Riverside. He grew up in Alaska in a very religious evangelical Christian family. His parents, teachers in a private Christian school, have always emphasized an importance of spreading the Gospel. In the early 1990s his family went on a mission trip to Russian Siberia and lived for almost two years in the harsh region of Yakutia. The time spent in post-Communist country and entirely different culture was a turning point for Fr. Innocent: it made him reevaluate the previous life experiences and question many of his beliefs. And this was the beginning of the journey that eventually brought him into the Orthodox Church.

In the American Orthodox community, the St. John monastic brotherhood is well known for translating into English and publishing literature on the Orthodox faith and spirituality (the monastery maintains its own publishing company, Divine Ascent Press). The monks also support themselves by beekeeping. In fact, the monastery’s honey

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The monastery has an excellent choir.



is quite special: it is the so-called “Honeydew” honey (also known as “Forest” honey). Honeydew honey is made not from blossom nectar but from the honeydew excreted by plant-sucking insects (such as aphids), and it is typically produced from trees. This type of honey is highly appreciated by connoisseurs for its strong savory flavor and mineral-rich content. Honeydew flow is strong in late dry summers. Therefore, in August and September the monks take their hives to the national forest covering the slopes of Mount Lassen. The result is the dark, sticky, and strong-tasting cedar honey from the sap of the incense cedar trees that grow in abundance there.

Culturally, the monks at St. John of San Francisco view themselves as being rooted in the monastic tradition of the famous Valaam Monastery in northern Russia. Yet, the brothers also admit that they have borrowed a number of elements and aspects of the monastery’s liturgical life from Greek Orthodox monasteries.

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The monks use a talanton to summon everyone to church for worship services.



Two spiritual practices are very central for the life of the monastery’s brotherhood. The first is a strong emphasis on mutual spiritual nourishment and encouragement. Sharing thoughts, doubts, questions, joys, and anxieties is encouraged here. The monks gather regularly for “synaxis,” the communal reading of Scripture and spiritual books with follow-up reflection on feelings and thoughts caused by the reading. This practice of “sharing in everything” includes also how decisions are typically made at the Monastery of St. John of San Francisco. Fr. Innocent, the monastery’s superior, says, “Many monasteries have ‘monarchs,’ but we do not. Rather, we rely on open discussion and the spirit of consensus.” The second important spiritual practice here is the tradition of the silent Jesus Prayer<sup>1</sup> that precedes all liturgical services at the monastery. The monks believe that these twenty minutes of silent worship help them to enter into the state of full stillness,

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<sup>1</sup> The Jesus Prayer is a short prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.” It is revered by many as a method of opening a person’s heart and soul to God.

thus quieting all thoughts and allowing the mind to enter the heart.

The Monastery of St. John runs a very interesting program: regularly held, three-day-long guided spiritual retreats that are led either by invited guest speakers or by one of the brothers. The subjects of these retreats always focus on the issues that connect everyday life with the Orthodox faith and spirituality. Among the most popular is the so-called “Gardening Retreat” that is offered in the spring by Fr. Innocent, the monastery’s superior. During this retreat, the participants discuss and examine the various meanings of “planting” and “growing.”

Another—rather unique—monastery project is the “Summer Novice Program.” It allows Orthodox men to

experience the life at the monastery firsthand and to be a full-fledged part of the brotherhood for a period of time ranging between two and six weeks.

While some American Orthodox monasteries tend to be enclosed (sometimes even “insular”), silent, and contemplative communities, the brothers at St. John feel that their calling is to be open to the world and to bear witness to the Gospel. Accordingly, the monastery is a popular destination for pilgrimage and visitation, where hospitality is offered to all: both Orthodox and non-Orthodox persons.

For overnight visitors the monastery offers a guest-house for families and individuals (both male and female). It has four bedrooms with fourteen beds, a fully equipped kitchen, and a nicely appointed living room with library and fireplace.

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Fr. Innocent, the monastery’s abbot, inspects a beehive during springtime.



# St. Sabbas the Sanctified Orthodox Monastery, Harper Woods, Michigan

(Russian Orthodox Church Outside of  
Russia)

[www.stsabbas.org](http://www.stsabbas.org)

By Alexei Krindatch

If there is one American Orthodox monastic community where the words “art” and “beauty” are truly quintessential for its nature, this would be St. Sabbas the Sanctified Monastery. Archimandrite Pachomy, the monastery’s abbot, likes to quote the classic Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky by saying, “Beauty will save the world,” adding afterward that “everything should reflect this: arts, gardens, people’s conversation, church services—everything!”

The location of St. Sabbas Monastery is rather unusual. It occupies eight acres of land in a mixed residential neighborhood in the city of Harper Woods, only a few

miles northeast of Detroit and very close to the shores of Lake St. Claire. When one approaches the monastery, its blue onion domes, elaborate architecture with a distinct Russian flare, and abundant gardens create a stark contrast to the surrounding “all-American” family homes. The history of the foundation and distinct ministries of St. Sabbas Monastery are unusual as well. In the late 1990s, Fr. Pachomy—then a priest in a local Orthodox parish—was looking for a property to purchase in order to form a small monastic community. One day he was driving through this neighborhood with his parishioner’s family when one of the parishioner’s children noted the “For Sale” sign. The boy encouraged Fr. Pachomy to stop and to “explore the opportunity” despite the fact that Fr. Pachomy was not exactly excited about this location. The boy then further pushed Fr. Pachomy by saying that he was simply afraid to get out of the car and show up to see the sellers in his monastic black cassock. However, when Fr. Pachomy approached the couple selling the property, they immediately recognized and greeted him as an Orthodox priest. It turned out that they were pious Roman Catholics who were about to leave for a trip to the Holy Land, to Jerusalem. The property and the house were actually much better than Fr. Pachomy originally thought, but the asking price was too high, and so the deal did not go through. Fr. Pachomy, nevertheless, helped this couple to make various additional trip

Archimandrite Pachomy at work in the monastery’s garden.



arrangements through his extensive network of personal contacts in Jerusalem. Their journey was so successful and pleasant that upon their return, they lowered the price substantially, and so St. Sabbas Monastery was born in 1999.<sup>1</sup> As the years passed, additional neighboring parcels of property and houses were bought and added to the monastery.

Today the monastery's various buildings are surrounded by graceful flower gardens. Fountains and shrines are tucked into the greenery, replicating the style of the ancient monasteries of Jerusalem, Russia, and Greece. The intention of the St. Sabbas monastic community is to also develop itself into a center for liturgical arts. Highly qualified woodcarvers have designed the wooden iconostasis, altar tables, shrines, and all church furnishings. Mosaic artists worked together with the monastery brotherhood<sup>2</sup> to create traditional Orthodox masterpieces of inlaid glass and stones that decorate both the monastery's gardens and the church interiors. The katholikon (main church) has interesting iconography, with over thirty icons adorning the walls and ceiling. The monastery's own ceramic studio will be open in the very near future. Through the years St. Sabbas Monastery also amassed an impressive art collection, including icons dating back to the fifteenth century, liturgical jewelry, items that belonged to the Russian royal Romanov family, and much more. The monastery's brotherhood is proud to have a unique relic from its patron saint: the epitachelion (stole) that was removed from the body of St. Sabbas at the monastery near Jerusalem and given as a special blessing to Archimandrite Pachomy. The epitachelion is kept in the monastery's church for monks and visitors to venerate.

St. Sabbas Monastery sees its primary mission as opening its doors wide and introducing the Orthodox faith and culture to mainstream America. The monastery receives about eight thousand visitors a year, most of whom are non-Orthodox. Twice a week (on Tuesdays and Thursdays), a one-hour lecture on the "History of Orthodoxy" is presented in the monastery's main church, followed by a question-and-answer session. The lectures require advance group booking.<sup>3</sup> The main reason for this requirement is that, depending on the type and particular interest of a visiting group, the content of the presentation



Peter Belcerovsky, the lay member of St. Sabbas' monastic community. He is the chef at Royal Eagle, the monastery's gourmet restaurant.

is customized so that the audience will benefit most from the visit. After the lecture a multicourse Russian-style lunch is served in the monastery's own gourmet restaurant, Royal Eagle. On Thursdays, Royal Eagle also offers à-la-carte dinners. The traditional Eastern European cuisine includes everyone's favorites, such as chicken paprikash, the famous Russian soup called borscht, Ukrainian-style dumplings, potato pancakes, barley and mushroom kasha, pierogi, homemade sauerkraut, various salmon-based dishes, and much more. St. Sabbas maintains vegetable gardens, and much of the fresh produce used in the restaurant comes from the monastery's grounds. During the six weeks of Great Lent that precede Easter, the restaurant offers two menus: a regular and a vegan (for those who strictly observe all the Orthodox fasting require-

Elaborate gardens at the monastery.



<sup>1</sup> The monastery was named after the ancient Great Lavra of St. Sabbas Monastery in Jerusalem which was founded in the fifth century and which is a favorite pilgrimage destination of Archimandrite Pachomy.

<sup>2</sup> A renowned Greek-American iconographer and mosaic artist, George Papastematiou worked with and taught the St. Sabbas brotherhood.

<sup>3</sup> A minimum of fifteen and a maximum of sixty-five persons must attend.

ments). In addition to indoor seating, in the summertime, tables are placed in the monastery's gardens so that the guests can enjoy not only the excellent meal, but also the colorful flowers, the sounds of the fountains, and star gazing as night falls. Both lunches and dinners at the Royal Eagle are wildly popular and should be booked well in advance (up to four months ahead in summer). The monastery plans to open its own public bakery.

Once a year (typically in November), St. Sabbas Monastery organizes a two-week pilgrimage tour to the Holy Land. Both Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians go together on these trips; they stay at ancient monasteries and visit important Christian sites in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas.

The effort of St. Sabbas brotherhood to make the Orthodox Church and faith better known in the wider American society has born its fruits. The monastery has become a popular destination for the various study groups and field trips. Students enrolled in the world history and world religion classes at Wayne State University (Detroit) are required to visit St. Sabbas as a part of the curricula. Private Christian high schools bring their students here for day-long study trips. Groups studying or teaching liturgical theology in local Catholic parishes come to St. Sabbas to learn more about the history of liturgics. A variety of literary and garden clubs choose St. Sabbas Monastery as the place for the day retreats or seminars.

Most importantly, many of those who come to the monastery (either for lectures, or dinners at restaurant, or simply out of curiosity) later return, bringing more people, who then become regular "friends of monastery"; some have converted to the Orthodox faith. Fr. Pachomy estimates that about ten to fifteen persons a year join the Orthodox Church through their visits to St. Sabbas Monastery. And many of them volunteer for various works at the monastery or help at the Royal Eagle restaurant.

Interesting places inevitably attract interesting people. Two of St. Sabbas Monastery's friends and major benefactors are Michael and Mariane Ilitch, an American-Macedonian Orthodox couple who own the Little Caesars Pizza restaurant chain and two of Detroit's sport teams: the Detroit Tigers (baseball) and the Detroit Red Wings (hockey). Although they are in their eighties, both Michael and Mariane remain actively involved in social and economic life, and they are at the center of Detroit's recent downtown redevelopment effort. St. Sabbas Monastery is one of the places where they come to unwind and relax.

The current brotherhood at St. Sabbas Monastery is small—only three persons in residence—but its members make an amazingly efficient working team. Archimandrite Pachomy, the monastery's abbot, is originally from Michigan. Born in a family with both Russian and British roots, he took his first art lessons from his parents. Both of them were artists: his father was a woodcarver, and his mother was an oil painter. Later he studied arts at

Father Zosima and one of the monastery's mosaic icons.



Oakland University (Rochester, Michigan). However, from childhood, the future Fr. Pachomy felt a priestly calling that eventually brought him to St. Tikhon's Orthodox Seminary in Pennsylvania. Before founding St. Sabbas Monastery in 1999, Fr. Pachomy served as a priest in a number of Orthodox parishes in the Midwest. Although he was born and brought up in America, Fr. Pachomy regards himself and his monastery as being deeply rooted in Russian monastic traditions. Not surprisingly, St. Sabbas maintains close ties with various monastic communities in Russia and receives many visitors from there. Fr. Pachomy is in charge of all the monastery's art projects and undertakings.

Fr. Zosima, the second monk at St. Sabbas, had a long secular career before taking monastic vows. For a number of years he was in the military, and then he worked in various administrative positions at Harvard University. He helps to take care of the monastery's numerous visitors and to keep the grounds in order, and he sings in the monastery's church choir.

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In the monastery's main church.



The third member of St. Sabbas monastic community is a layperson. Peter Belcerovsky was born in Moravia (part of the Czech Republic) and was raised in a Roman Catholic family serving as an altar boy in his local parish. He left his country, studied culinary arts, and then worked in prestigious restaurants in France and United States. Peter first came to the monastery simply as visitor during a personal life crisis. What started as a short visit evolved into a life-changing experience. He stayed at St. Sabbas and became an Orthodox Christian. Observing the throngs of the monastery's guests, who were hungry after attending the lectures and other events, Peter came up with an idea of opening the Royal Eagle restaurant. All dishes served at the restaurant are products of Peter's culinary talents and skills.

St. Sabbas Monastery has limited but very comfortable overnight accommodations. Guests (men, women, and families) stay in the former private homes that the monastery acquired when it purchased several land parcels from the local residents.

# St. Tikhon's Orthodox Monastery, South Canaan, Pennsylvania

(Orthodox Church in America)

[www.sttikhonsmonastery.org](http://www.sttikhonsmonastery.org)

By Chrysanthe Loizos

After driving on a two-lane county road in the rolling hills of northeastern Pennsylvania, visitors will know they've found the monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk when they see the onion-domed arch just off the roadway, inscribed with the words "Blessed is He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord." The monastery is located twenty-five miles northeast of Scranton and two and a half hours by car from Philadelphia and New York City.

Founded in 1905, St. Tikhon's is the oldest Orthodox monastery in the United States. For those interested in the history of Orthodoxy in America, there is perhaps no better place to visit. The monastery's rich history is interwoven with the lives of many notable Orthodox figures of the twentieth century. "Where saints have walked" is a popular refrain here, and with good reason. Six twentieth-century Orthodox saints had close affiliations with the monastery.<sup>1</sup>

The monastery was founded by Archbishop Tikhon (Belavin), a Russian missionary bishop to the United States who would later be canonized as St. Tikhon of Moscow.<sup>2</sup> It was his vision that the monastery would serve as a "mother house" for Russian monastic missionaries, who by the turn of the twentieth century had been coming

<sup>1</sup> The six saints are St. Tikhon of Moscow (1865–1925), St. Raphael of Brooklyn (1860–1915), St. Nikolai (Velimirovich) of Zhicha (1880–1956), St. Alexis (Toth) of Wilkes-Barre (1854–1909), St. Alexander (Hotovitsky; 1872–ca. 1937), and St. John (Kochurov; 1871–1917).

<sup>2</sup> In 1907 Archbishop Tikhon returned to Russia. After serving as bishop in Yaroslavl and Lithuania, he became the ruling bishop of Moscow in 1917. That same year he was elected patriarch of Russia. He led the Russian Church through the Communist revolution of 1917 and following years of great upheaval, as clergy were being persecuted and church properties confiscated. He himself was imprisoned from April 1922 to June 1923. He reposed in 1925 and was glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1989.

to North America for more than one hundred years. Archbishop Tikhon believed that a monastery was necessary for the firm establishment of the Orthodox Church in the United States and that an American Orthodox Church could not and would not thrive without a monastery.

Today, St. Tikhon's identifies itself as an "American" monastery. Its Russian heritage is still evident though in its liturgical traditions and hymnology. But all services are in English, and the monastery's fifteen brothers are a diverse lot, hailing from Greek, Slavic, and other traditions.

The monastery shares three hundred bucolic acres with St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary; their buildings sit a stone's throw from one another. It is impossible to speak of one without the other, as their lives are linked in prayer and scholarship. Some of the brotherhood teach at the seminary, and the students share in the liturgical life of the brothers. Though the seminary was not established until 1938, the idea for one can be traced to the monastery's founders. The seminary draws students from across the United States and abroad for its intensive three-year master of divinity program. The majority of graduates go on to serve the Church in an ordained ministry (i.e., as parish priests), while a smaller number work in a lay capacity, as choir directors, youth ministers, and missionaries.

In short, the monastery sees its relationship to the seminary as an important part of its ministry, helping to train future priests of the Orthodox Church. The brother-

Annual pilgrimage at St Tikhon's Monastery.



hood is engaged in other activities too, perhaps most notably the running of the monastery's publishing company, which was founded in the 1950s. Visitors will want to make time to stroll the bookstore, which sells the St. Tikhon's publications (including two of its most well known books, the *Lenten Triodion* and *Festal Menaion*), as well as other Orthodox books, icons, and items of interest, including CDs of the seminary's renowned choir.

The monastery's founders chose to situate the monastery in this region of Pennsylvania in part because of the population of Orthodox Rusyns who had settled here.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, then, the monastery's church has always served as a community church since its founding drawing Orthodox faithful from surrounding areas who consider the church to be their parish.

Despite its outward orientation and the offering of pastoral care, the brotherhood is clear that what is most central to its life is the maintenance of the monastic rule and the daily schedule of collective and personal worship. For the past 110 years, Divine Liturgy has been served at the monastery daily.

Father Sergius, the abbot of the monastery, compares St. Tikhon's to an archaeological dig, where each layer of stratum gives way to one beneath it. To begin to discover the layers, one should request a guided tour of the church and the monastery's museum by calling or e-mailing in advance or stopping by the bookstore. Even after several narrated hours, visitors will have the sense that they've

only scratched the surface of the monastery's rich history.

Highlights of the monastery tour include two miracle-working icons: of St. Anna, and of the Virgin Mary and Christ. The icon of St. Anna streamed myrrh for five years and continues to emit a sweet-smelling fragrance. Many miracles have been attributed to the icon, including the healing of people who suffered from cancer. The icon is housed in the brothers' private chapel, so visitors need to be escorted to see it. The icon of the Virgin Mary and Christ is on the iconostasis in the main church. It is a copy of a miracle-working icon on Mount Athos and was given to the monastery as a gift from Mount Athos in 1906.

The monastery also has the distinction of housing the relics of St. Alexis (Toth) of Wilkes-Barre.<sup>4</sup> His large, wooden reliquary is in the church, to the left of the altar. A reliquary room to the right of the church contains icons and relics of many saints, including St. Nikolai (Velimirovich), St. Raphael of Brooklyn, and St. Panteleimon.

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<sup>4</sup> Fr. Alexis (Toth) was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1854 into a family of Eastern rite Catholics. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1878. In 1889 he was appointed to serve as a pastor at an Eastern rite Catholic parish in the United States, in Minnesota. Not long thereafter, future St. Alexis was received into the Orthodox Church, the Church of his ancestors. Through his efforts thousands of Eastern rite Catholics of Carpatho-Russian and Galician descent in the United States returned to the Orthodox Church. He reposed in 1909 and was canonized in 1994.

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Lakeside chapel.



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<sup>3</sup> Rusyns, also referred to as Carpatho-Russians, are a Slavic people from the Carpathian region of Central Europe (including parts of modern-day Ukraine, Slovakia, and Poland).

The monastery's museum was established in 2005 and houses a vast and wide-ranging collection of Orthodox artifacts. The icon collection is especially impressive; it includes icons of various styles and time periods. These include Greek icons that predate the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, a unique three-dimensional Russian icon, and hand-beaded icons. There are rare Faberge pieces; gold and silver-encased Gospels (including the original Romanov imperial family Gospel, which dates to the seventeenth century) and a hand-bound and handwritten Psalter from the 1500s. There is also an assortment of vestments and miters, liturgical items, and scenes displaying Orthodox traditions.

In addition to the main church, dedicated to St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, there is a newer All-Saints chapel, which the monastery uses when accommodating large numbers of guests, as with its annual pilgrimage held on Memorial

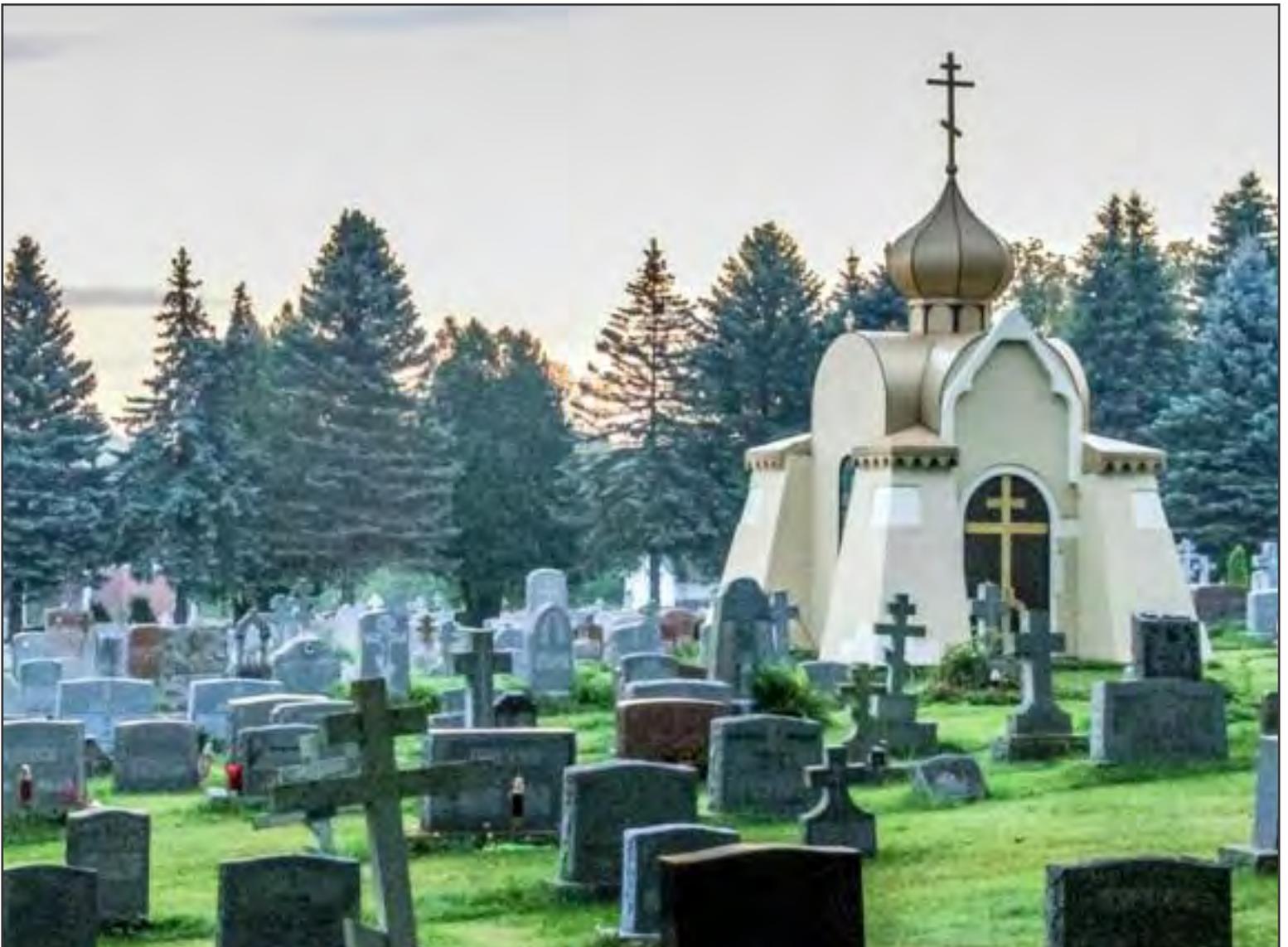
Day weekend each year. The tradition of a pilgrimage began in 1905 and has continued every year since, drawing pilgrims from near and far. The weekend's events include hierarchical liturgical celebrations, tours, and an opportunity for fellowship with fellow pilgrims.

The quiet grounds are ideal for walking. There are more than a dozen outdoor shrines and chapels, lakes, and two cemeteries.

The monastery offers two guesthouses for overnight visitors. One house accommodates up to five male guests; the other two-bedroom house is reserved for women and families. Those wishing to stay overnight must contact the monastery in advance to make arrangements.

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One of two cemeteries on the grounds.





The choir of St Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary.

# If You Decide to Go: A Few Simple Rules to Follow When Visiting an Orthodox Christian Monastery

Orthodox monasteries in America are as diverse as Orthodox Christianity in America is diverse, and as America itself is diverse. Each monastic community has certain ways of living and established rules and traditions. Some monasteries have more requirements for their visitors, while others are more relaxed. But in all cases, the most important thing to keep in mind is that each monastery is a close-knit community of people who live, worship, and work together and who have dedicated their entire lives to witnessing their faith. In this regard, all visitors—Orthodox pilgrims and non-Orthodox “religious tourists,” day visitors and overnight guests—should keep in mind that they are really “visitors only.” Their presence at the monastery should not disturb the established rhythm in the monastery’s life, and they should conform with all the monastery’s rules, whatever those rules are. Think of how you might be a good guest in someone’s private home, especially if you are visiting this home for the first time in your life. Below are a few basic suggestions to keep in mind that will help to make your visit to an Orthodox monastery a rewarding and fulfilling experience:

- Nearly all US Orthodox monasteries maintain websites, and many of these websites have special pages with information for visitors. It is a good idea to take a few minutes and to read carefully all provided information prior to your visit.
- Most American Orthodox monasteries offer overnight accommodations for visitors, but not all. Also, some monasteries host only men, while others host only women. Information on the overnight accommodations is provided in the state-by-state directory of US Orthodox monasteries included in this Atlas. In addition, while all Orthodox monasteries welcome both Orthodox and non-Orthodox persons as day visitors, some

of them offer overnight accommodations to Orthodox pilgrims only.

- Nearly all monasteries ask that you communicate with them in advance and obtain their approval beforehand if you intend to stay overnight. But even if you go only for a short day visit, it is still advisable to check with the monastery in advance to confirm that the community will be open to visitors on the day that you intend to visit. There is an additional reason for following this rule. If you communicate about your visit in advance, many monasteries are able and willing to provide you with a guide—a monk or a nun—who will give you a tour of a monastery and answer all your questions.
- Most monasteries (but not all) have a strict dress code for visitors. Men are required to wear long trousers and long-sleeved shirts. Women should have long skirts (although generally pants are also accepted), long-sleeved blouses, and head scarves.
- Typically, only some parts of the monastery’s grounds and buildings are open for visitors, whereas certain areas are off limits and reserved for monastics only. Please respect this rule.
- As a general rule, all overnight guests (Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike) are expected to attend all of the monastery’s scheduled worship services and communal meals. At some monasteries guests eat together with monks and nuns; at others they eat separately. In many monasteries communal meals are accompanied by spiritual reading and guests are asked to refrain from idle conversations at the table.
- When attending worship services at an Orthodox monastery, the most important rule to keep in mind is that only Orthodox Christians are permitted to partake in Holy Communion (Eucharist). Non-Orthodox guests can still venerate icons and relics, kiss the cross, and receive a blessing from the priest at the end of the worship services.
- At the worship services some (but not all) monasteries ask male and female visitors to stand on the different sides of the church (men on the right side and women on the left). Some monasteries ask non-Orthodox visitors to stay at the back of the church sanctuary (in the so-called narthex). When it is time to venerate icons or to kiss the cross, many monasteries have a particular order as to who comes first. The typical sequence would

be: ordained clergy, followed by non-ordained monks, followed by nuns, followed by laypeople. When you come for the first time to a monastery's church, simply observe how things are done or, even better, ask one of the monks or nuns.

- When you prepare yourself for an overnight or multiday visit to a monastery, don't think about it as a vacation, because it is not. Think about it as a spiritual journey and a rare opportunity for self-reflection and, in some cases, counseling and spiritual guidance from the monks and nuns. For some people the long church services and (typically) simple accommodations at Orthodox monasteries can be exhausting and intolerable, but for others the impact of immersing oneself in the monastic life can be an incredibly powerful and sometimes life-changing experience.

And, again, if you are unclear about something, never hesitate to ask one of the monks or nuns. Their chosen lifelong mission is to witness the Orthodox faith to the world, and they would be happy to answer all of your questions and help with your visit.

## Addendum to the Directory of Orthodox Christian Monasteries

### COLORADO:

#### Holy Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence

**Orthodox Church Affiliation:** Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese (Western Rite Vicariate)

**Male or Female:** Both Monks and Nuns (“dual” monastery)

**Address:** 4076 Cabin Creek Road, Canon City, CO 81212

**Phone:** [719-371-6345](tel:719-371-6345) (messages can be left on this number, they are checked periodically)

**Email:** [priory@saintlaurenceosb.org](mailto:priory@saintlaurenceosb.org), [monk.theodore@gmail.com](mailto:monk.theodore@gmail.com)

**Website:** [www.saintlaurenceosb.org/monastery.html](http://www.saintlaurenceosb.org/monastery.html)

**Year of founding:** 2013

**Church Calendar Followed:** “New” (revised Julian)

**Primary Language(s) Used in Worship Services:** English

**Primary Language(s) Used in Monastery’s Everyday Life:** English

**Feast Day:** August 15th (Assumption/Our Lady of Glastonbury)

**Name of Superior:** Rev. Dom Theodore (Phillips), Prior

**Number of Monks/Nuns in Residence:** 4

**Overnight Accommodations for Visitors:** For both men and women

**Description:** The monastery is situated on a sprawling 600-acre campus in the Colorado Rockies at an altitude of over 7,500 feet and about 150 miles SW from Denver, CO. The monastery’s grounds extend through a narrow valley flanked by the slopes of the mountains. Only a small portion of the land is developed; most of it remains an untouched wilderness. Tallahassee Creek runs through the property and flows westward through a scenic gorge until, some 8 miles on, it empties into the Arkansas River. There is plentiful wildlife including deer, elk, turkeys and various species of birds, bobcats, foxes, and bears. It is a good place for a pilgrim seeking a refuge of prayer and closeness to the heart of God.

The monastery is a Western Rite Orthodox monastic community. “Western Rite” is a term used to describe Orthodox parishes and monasteries that are part of the Eastern Orthodox Churches but employ various ancient Western forms of the Divine Liturgy and the Hours as they developed in places such as Italy, Ireland and Britain during the time when the Christian Church in the West and in the East was united in faith. The Monastery of Our Lady and St. Lawrence follows the rite and worships the Western Liturgy of St. Gregory (also known by many as “Tridentine Mass”). In its everyday life and order, the monastery observes the *Holy Rule* of Saint Benedict of Nursia (d. 547 A.D.). It is worth noting that the Monastery of Our Lady and St. Lawrence is the only American Orthodox “dual” monastic community: that is, it has both monks and nuns. The monastery’s founder and superior, Prior Theodore, was formerly a monastic in both the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches.

The monastery offers ample facilities for overnight visitors and can accommodate up to 35 pilgrims. Both individual and group retreats can be arranged. There are two main buildings on the monastery’s grounds: St. Herman’s Lodge and the monastery itself. St. Herman’s Lodge is a two-story log cabin that was built originally as a hunting lodge and converted into the retreat center. It is surrounded on three sides by a spacious veranda. The three-story Monastery building has the Church of St. Laurence, an icon and book-store, bright library, conference room, monastic cells, additional guest rooms, and a small kitchen and refectory. It is surrounded by a covered walkway suitable for processions.

The monastery maintains two cemeteries. The Cemetery of St Laurence has two sections: a consecrated Orthodox Christian section and a section for the burial of Catholics and Protestants with plots that may be blessed on an individual basis. Plans are being developed for the construction of a Mortuary Chapel and mausoleum that will house 30+ vaults (for above-ground burial). The second cemetery is a Pet Cemetery. It is named for St Seraphim of Sarov, who among his other wonders, befriended a large bear who used to come to his forest hermitage and eat bread from the Saint's hand, responding meekly to the Saint's words. Although relatively new, the monastery has already developed a number of traditions. The annual summer "Plein Air" week-end workshop attracts both Orthodox and non-Orthodox artists. But the most important event in monastery's life is the annual pilgrimage that occurs every August on the weekend closest to the feast of St. Laurence.

# Notes

Drawing on extensive research, as well as stories and anecdotes, the *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries* reveals the surprising spiritual appeal of monastic life in and for 21st century America.

Simultaneously, this book is:

- A scholarly introduction into traditions of Eastern Christian monasticism,
- A comprehensive directory of American Orthodox Christian monasteries and
- An enticing travel guide for those seeking to visit monasteries and to "sample" or just better understand monastic life.

In addition, twenty-three selected monastic communities share their "insider stories" with the readers and offer a glimpse into realities of everyday life in an American Orthodox monastery.

The Atlas includes a wealth of graphic materials: geographic maps and photographs.

Whether used as a scholarly introduction into Eastern Christian monasticism or researcher's directory or a travel guide, Alexei Krindatch brings together a fascinating collection of articles, facts, and statistics to comprehensively describe Orthodox Christian Monasteries in the United States. The careful examination of the key features of Orthodox monasteries provides solid academic frame for this book. With enticing verbal and photographic renderings, twenty-three Orthodox monastic communities scattered throughout the United States are brought to life for the reader. This is an essential book for anyone seeking to sample, explore or just better understand Orthodox Christian monastic life.

**Scott Thumma, Ph.D.**

Director  
Hartford Institute for Religion Research

A truly delightful insight into Orthodox monasticism in the United States. The chapters on the history and tradition of Orthodox monasticism are carefully written to provide the reader with a solid theological understanding. They are then followed by a very human and personal description of the individual US Orthodox monasteries. A good resource for scholars, but also an excellent 'tour guide' for those seeking a more personal and intimate experience of monasticism.

**Thomas Gaunt, S.J., Ph.D.**

Executive Director  
Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)

This is a fascinating and comprehensive guide to a small but important sector of American religious life. Whether you want to know about the history and theology of Orthodox monasticism or you just want to know what to expect if you visit, the stories, maps, and directories here are invaluable.

**Nancy T. Ammerman, Ph.D.**

Professor of Sociology of Religion  
Boston University

The *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries* contributes in a significant way to making Orthodox monasticism accessible to the wide—Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike—American public. This book is worthy of every American Christian's personal library.

**Fr. Tryphon (Parsons)**

Abbot  
All-Merciful Saviour Orthodox Monastery, Vashon Island, Washington



**Alexei Krindatch** is a research coordinator for the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America. The Assembly consists of all the active, canonical US Orthodox bishops representing various Orthodox Churches. Alexei is a leading researcher on American Orthodox Christian Churches. He lives in Berkeley, California. *The Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries* is a sequel to the *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Churches* (2011).

