



# STAVROS<sup>©</sup>



Contemporary Monasticism  
within the  
Orthodox-Catholic Church of America

Fall Quarter 2009

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## ***From the keyboard***

by: hieroschemamonk Barb

Fall has finally arrived. I am just wondering what type of weather we will experience. The El Nino is developing so that could really mean trouble for some of us. I hope not since I now have a longer -- though a fairly enjoyable commute to work! And the towns don't have enough money to do a good job of snow removal. Oh well, we just deal with whatever is handed us.

By now, you know that we no longer have the Skete available to us as a permanent residence, but we can stay for short visits. Actually I was not surprised by the decision of the Community of the Cross. It was really Archbishop Skip's dream to have a monastic house, but we could never get monastics to go and live there permanently. Locating a job in the local areas was part of the problem for those wanting to live there. Given that we have to support ourselves and our housing, jobs are very important to have. But in all of this, there are really no changes for the monastics. We continue to live our lives of prayer and work as we have in the past as monastics. We continue to serve all those we come into contact with in our daily lives.

One thing though that needs to change is that we need to communicate with one another on a regular basis. I

would recommend that monastics communicate with the mentors at least once a month. A simple email about what is happening in our lives to both of the Mentors is all that is required at this point. It is important that we all know what is happening with each other and even how we can emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually support one another. Yes, most of us live at great distances from one another, but that should not keep us from staying in contact with each other. It is even more important that both Fr. Francis and I hear from everyone so that we know

where we can help you in your spiritual walk. We should not allow ourselves to get into the



space of being hermits and thus not communicating with the rest of our monastic family. Yes, we might live as solitaires since we are not living within a monastic house, but we really are not living a true life as solitaires. We are “struggling” within this world each and every day. I would expect each of us to “hit the wall” spiritually at times as we grow. It is at these times we are growing in our spirituality and need support. If you are not “hitting the wall”, then you need to take a good look at your spiritual life and strengthen it. The “hitting the wall” is what is also known as the “dark night of the soul”, where you feel lost, alone, and just

downright struggling with your spirituality. Some describe it as “you feel as though God has turned his back on you for some reason”. I have hit that wall several times over the years as I progressed within my spiritual walk. There is nothing wrong to have this happen to you. In fact it is a very normal process within your spiritual walk. It always helps to have someone to talk to so that you can get through the process with much less “pain”. Your mentors also need to know what ministry you are doing, what your personal daily rule is and if you are western tradition, what Order’s Rule (Benedictine, Franciscan, etc.) you are following. We are here to help you grow as monastics, support you in your spiritual walk, and be there to help pick you up when you accidentally fall due to the stones in the pathway. Archbishop Peter has stipulated that we will all have a ministry and at least pray Morning and Evening Prayers, attend Liturgy and communicate. Archbishop Peter is really not asking a lot of us in the long run!

In other words, let us start sharing openly with one another. Silence is no longer acceptable from the monastics. It really is not healthy physically, mentally and spiritually in the long run. You have mentors to talk/share with and you have each other. I would like to see you sharing also for the newsletter. You might think you have nothing to write, but you really do....I know for some of you, it is hard to openly share. It takes time to be able to share your spiritual path. Start by sharing with your mentors and with those who live fairly close to you. Part of what the church as a whole has taught is that you should never walk the spiritual pathway without a companion walking with you so that you will learn and be “protected” as you learn.

## **Welcome!**

Let us welcome Bishop Larry Terry to our monastic family. He is a monastic within a Pan-Orthodox monastic community and receives his training and rank through them. The monastic movement continues to grow!!!! We now number 18 total.

## **Straight and Gay Alliance Ministry Activities**

*By: Br. Michael Oboza*

*Dear Br. Michael,*

*I was getting wasted the night before my seventh DUI court date. I left the last bar after my fight. You kept on eye on me as my condition worsened. You spent the night listening to me with*

*stillness that I can't forget. I remember Morning Prayer which helped relax me. You went to court with me.*

*I was hung over and peed my pants. You suggested we go to a changing room. You knew I was facing life in jail, so you invited me to exchange pants with you. "You wore my dirty and wet pants." No one is like a foot soldier for God like you. Because of you, I only got probation and community service.*

*Today, I am 3 months sober. I am back with my wife. I am not drinking away my excuse to cover my own gay hatred.*

*Sincerely,  
Harvey Lott*

*Hello Br. Michael,*

*It's Amanda from the Marin Foundation meetings. I just wanted to write you and tell you what a wonderful job you did in sharing the other night, you are an amazing story teller you should think about writing a book. I just wanted to let you know how valuable your life is. Don't give up on it. God keeps saving you for a reason. Know that he never slumbers and his eye is upon you and He loves who you are. Keep going if you need support lean on the community. We are building thru Living in the Tension. I know people really care about you there. You have touched my life and helped me to see Jesus and that is overwhelming!  
Amanda Kay*

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## **A Monastic Committee Formed:** *by: hieroschemamonk Barb*

Archbishop Peter asked me at the end of July to put together a committee to study the future of monasticism within OCCA and what the form of that monasticism within OCCA should take. The committee is comprised of Eastern and Western Monastics along with one non-monastic clergy. They all come from different ranks within OCCA. I wanted to be sure it was a very diverse committee so that we had input from all "levels". We have been meeting via email since August 10<sup>th</sup> trying to hash out ideas for the monastics that are not attached to an OCCA charter monastic house – and that is all of us that receive this newsletter. What we are trying to do is put together what I call a "blueprint" for the monastics. In this, it will give us all the basics expected of each of us as monastics. Actually it is nothing really different from what we are already doing. What I have done is take everything I know all of you are doing within your respective traditions (eastern and western) and put together an outline of ideas. I am not pushing for really any major changes but to take what we are doing and formalize it – just trying to add some foundation in areas that foundation was needed. Progress is being made very nicely within the committee as presently we have almost completed the process. Once everything is worked out, you will all receive a copy of the document to review and comment on. You will have 30 days from the time it is set out to read and send your comments/suggestions to me. I will then put the comments/suggestions together for the Monastic Committee to review and decide on. Then the document will be presented to the Archbishop who will take it to the

Synod of Bishops. We are hoping to have everything in place long before the General Synod in 2010. The committee is working hard to make this project very positive for everyone and something that we all will be proud of. It is a very important task since monasticism is still a new venture within OCCA. Many of us have been monastic for a period of time but never had a “formal” recognition within OCCA until +Skip developed the concept of the Skete. +Skip worked with +Lynn and me to lay out much of the information on the eastern tradition monasticism. The western tradition, during +Skip’s time, was mostly through ecumenical monastic orders. But over the past couple of years, we are only left with one monastic within the ecumenical monastic orders, but other monastics that identify themselves as western. So we need to now put together the western tradition information. In +Skip’s memory, we are taking his concept of monasticism and moving it away from the monastery idea into a 21<sup>st</sup> century concept – Monastery without walls.

### **Announcements:**

Fr. Jim Donadio has decided not to remain a monastic. We all wish him well on his spiritual search.

Fr. Donn Mielke has declared himself as an eastern tradition monastic. He will assume the rank of Stavrophor since he has been a fully professed western monastic for years. Welcome to the eastern tradition, Donn+.

Br. Michael Oboza will be moving up the monastic rank from novice to Riassophor. He has elected to move from western to eastern tradition. Congrats Br. Michael! May God continue to bless your monastic walk!

### **Open Letter**

*By: Br. Michael C. Oboza*

*After a decade of prayer, my ministry has been given an answer from God in the form of a letter. The letter reflects other parts of my life's work such as fellowship and civil activism. I share the letter to share celebration of the Holy Spirit, a depth of untouched mystery where God is in the when not the what.*

To Those Concerned with Equality,

From Compton Cafeteria riots of 1966 to today, there happens to still be discrimination within our Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender community. For years, the same people who have gotten away with using the “B” not for equal representation, but a credit to fill a quota still use such tactics. Also, there are people who still degrade bisexual people as going through a phase. As if to judge one of the apostles are going through a gospel phase.

In other words, between the Dyke march, Matthew Shepard march, and Transgender Day of Remembrance, Bisexual people have been forgotten. We have lessened August Provost and Bill Clayton as we have remembered more of Matthew Shepard, Brandon Teena, and others.

Life has many more aspect then merely a rainbow.

The bisexual community has their own flag, because their voices have finally been heard and respected. Any further bias from within our community will no longer be tolerated. Even though, we are all of worth by breathing the same air. Never the less, bisexual people will humbly continue to fight any bigotry within our own Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender community.

Much Peace,  
Br. Michael C. Oboza  
Straight and Gay Alliance ministry  
"Voice for the Forsaken"

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### ***Had a Thought***

*by: hieroschemamonk Barb*

I was thinking the other day, as I was trying to put together some of the ideas being “discussed” within the Monastic Committee, that the Eastern tradition monastics do not have a patron saint. Part of what brought this to mind was my reading/researching ideas for the committee. The Western tradition monastics have as their patron saint the saint that “founded” the religious order they are following, example: St. Francis or St. Benedict. If you look at the Orthodox monastics, they have as their patron saint the patron saint of the monastery. We do not live within monasteries, so that means we do not have a patron saint. So, I am recommending that we break tradition a little and have a patron saint “elected” - one that really represents just who we are as monastics!

I talked with Bishop Lynn seeking her thoughts about a patron saint for the Eastern tradition monastics. Usually, good things happen when you start to share with your other monastic brothers/sisters. It turns out that Bishop Lynn and I both are drawn to the same Orthodox Saint! In our discussions we were looking for a saint that really represents the “type” of monasticism we embrace. We were talking about a saint that did things “outside of the box” and in many ways against the norm! Well, there just happens to be such an Orthodox Saint that completely fits the “bill”. Now, I come to all of you who are Eastern tradition monastics with our idea to see what you think. St. Maria Skobtsova is known as a “fool for Christ” who was a nun in the Orthodox Church but was not the usual nun! She did not live within a monastery. She was very socially active in Paris. She was very human to a point that she did not allow it to stop her ministry. And there is so much more I could tell you about her, but I recommend the following resource for reading about St. Maria Skobtsova –

[http://incommunion.org/?page\\_id=868](http://incommunion.org/?page_id=868)

You will learn very quickly that this was one lady that “bucked the system” and made a great difference in so many lives. Can you imagine the look on a priest/bishop’s face seeing a woman sitting at an outside café drinking a beer and smoking a cigarette all the while wearing a monastic habit! The people loved her for who she was – a “fool for Christ” ministering to anyone and everyone! After you do the reading, let me know what you think about having St. Maria Skobtsova as the patron saint for the Eastern tradition monastics. I am always available via email so feel free to send me your thoughts. It would be really nice, I think, to have a patron saint common to all the Eastern tradition monastics besides our personal patron saint. Just a thought, but maybe something very positive for all of us.

And you western monastics, you can also give your thoughts. It is possible to have one saint to be the patron saint for all OCCA monastics if that is what you want. I leave it all in your hands to tell me what you want. Unity through a patron saint now that is a unique idea!

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***And in Closing this Edition...***  
*by hieroschemamonk Barb*

Abba Zeno said, "If a man wants God to hear his prayer quickly, then before he prays for anything else, even his own soul, when he stands and stretches out his hands towards God, he must pray with all his heart for his enemies. Through this action God will hear everything that he asks." May we learn to pray as Abba Zeno has taught!

Abba Tithoes taught: "The way of humility is this: self-control, prayer, and thinking yourself inferior to all creatures."

**Monastics and their selected tradition:**

*Monastic Superior:*  
*Archbishop Peter – [R.Zahrt@verizon.net](mailto:R.Zahrt@verizon.net)*

*Mentors:*  
*Mother Barb – [bmartzall@earthlink.net](mailto:bmartzall@earthlink.net)*  
*Fr. Francis – [Southbychoice@aol.com](mailto:Southbychoice@aol.com)*

<u>Western</u>	<u>Eastern</u>
Fr. Bill Payne, OSB	Mother Barb Martzall
Bishop Doug Wright	Fr. Craig Dunn
Fr. Jim Wise	Fr. Donn Mielke
Br. Matt Davis, MSSM	Fr. Francis Fontenot
Fr. Michael William Barkhorn, OSF	Bishop Larry Terry
Br. Michael Kierpiec	Bishop Lynn Walker
Br. Richard Lounsbury	Mother MariaAlene VanValkenburg
Fr. Richard Parker, OFM	Br. Michael C. Oboza
	Mother Myrella LeClair II
	Archbishop Peter (Bob Zahrt)

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