



# **STAVROS**©

Contemporary Monasticism  
within the  
Orthodox-Catholic Church of America  
as practiced by the  
Monastics of the Skete at Crosswood Centre  
and  
Holy Apostles Orthodox Monastery

Spring Quarter 2009

## ***From the keyboard of hieroschemamonk Barb:***

Spring at last!!! This winter has really been a miserable one to deal with -- the snow storms, the excessive cold and even the lack of money in the towns to be able to keep the roadways cleared. I am glad it is finally over. Now to enjoy the wonderful warmth of the sun and the healing the sun provides to each and everyone of us.

I want to take a moment and thank Bishop Doug for submitting a writing for this issue of the newsletter. +Doug has said many of the things that I have thought of and/or felt about monasticism. It is heartening to find other like-minded people with whom you can walk the monastic pathway.

Now then, I again reach out and ask all of you to think about your monastic walk and your ministries. Please put your thoughts on paper and submit them to me for inclusion in the newsletter. Each of us has ideas, thoughts, dreams about monasticism and where it will lead us in our ministries. Why not share them and let us see how we can blend them into a strong unified monastic movement within the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America. This movement allows all of us to be able to join together even if only in spirit and through the internet. Through our sharing, we can develop the groundwork that will set the tone of what monasticism will be for the Church. Why not become an active part of this development?

I requested in the last issue of **Stavros** that each of you submit something about yourself and your monastic walk so that it could be featured in the **Stavros** and in the newsletter for the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America. I must admit I was saddened in the lack of submissions. It causes me to wonder why you would not take about an hour out of your life to write something so that all of the rest of us could get to know you better. So, once again I ask those who did not send me

anything to please take the time and send me something. Here is your chance to tell the rest of the monastics -- and even the entire jurisdiction -- about yourself. +Peter will use the articles within *The American Orthodox* as he has space.

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## ***A Good Friend Lost*** ***by: hieroschemamonk Barb***

On March 27, 2009 we within the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America lost a beloved friend and leader. Our Metropolitan Archbishop Skip Carsten was called home to God. His death was sudden and has left a hole in many people's lives.

I can remember a conversation I had with Bishop Skip concerning monasticism within the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America. This conversation occurred after



he had raised me to the rank of hieroschemamonk. I asked him very directly what he was expecting of the monastics as a movement within the jurisdiction. He just gave a little chuckle and then calmly told me that he was letting the monastics form whatever monasticism was going to be within the jurisdiction and that it was our pathway within the church that we were called to. But in that I needed to "step up to the plate" and guide the monastics as the senior ranked monastic. So given that, we needed as a group to form what would be the norm for the monastics. It would be up to us if we wanted formal

rules or to loosely join together as a group.

Someone told me that we should either be Eastern or Western in tradition, that we should all wear the same habit and follow the same daily rule. Well, I found that this was not to be the form of monasticism practiced within the jurisdiction. We come from many religious backgrounds, and it is our uniqueness which brings us together as monastics. We are free to be who we are called to be. Depending on one's spirituality, monastics can be either Eastern or Western in tradition, electing the habit and daily rule to fit their tradition.

Let us continue to follow Bishop Skip's leadership by striving to spread the Gospel to all whom God sends our way. Let's work together so that the monastic movement within our jurisdiction will flourish, becoming a testament to Bishop Skip's vision and faith. Thank you, Bishop Skip for your leadership and guidance. You are greatly missed!

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## ***The Future of the Skete*** ***by: hieroschemamonk Barb***

I suspect that with the death of our Metropolitan, many of you are wondering what will happen with the Skete at Crosswood and how +Skip's death will affect your monasticism. Only time will answer that question completely. Let me explain a few things about Crosswood Centre. The property was purchased in 2005 and is under the leadership of trustee board. The Orthodox-Catholic Church of America has had permission to use the property for religious functions and for its monastics to live in the house (Skete). It will now be up to the trustees and the Community of the Cross to decide what will become of the property that we all know as Crosswood Centre. As most of you are aware, the only monastic presently living at the Skete is Brother Richard, who is the caretaker of the property. It may take several weeks -- possibly months -- for all of those involved with the property of Crosswood Centre to decide what should be done. But no matter what is done with the physical property, that does not mean the "death" of monasticism within the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America!

You may not be aware that the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America as a church is not allowed to own property. It was stipulated that way in the Church's constitution and by-laws. That is why we do not have physical monasteries that are "owned" by the Church.

So, how does that affect us as monastics? Nothing will change in how we function. If the property at Crosswood Centre is sold, then the Skete will become a virtual monastic community. Actually when you think about it, it has always been a virtual community given that we all live in different parts of the country. We were attached to the Skete to give us all a motherhouse, so to speak. Things will continue as they have been for each of us individually and for all of us as a group. We still have a challenge before us to shape what monasticism will be within the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America. That has not changed with the death of our Metropolitan. In fact, I believe that part of our Metropolitan's legacy is that we continue to move forward with our monasticism!

As the senior ranking monastic, I have "stepped up to the plate", taking responsibility for the monastics who are attached to the Skete and to Holy Apostles Monastery. This responsibility involves more than just publishing this newsletter. I will be fielding questions from those seeking information about monasticism when those requests come in. If Bishop Peter gets a request concerning monasticism, he has the person contact me directly. We are getting inquiries from people asking about our monastic life. Unfortunately, many are looking to live within a physical monastic community. At some point, we may have seekers who want to have a monastic life as we presently practice it.

At this point, I do not see any changes for us as monastics within the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America. We will continue to move forward and develop

monasticism within the church. It will take all of us to do this. This means that we need to take the time to share together so as to become a strong and united group! We are a group of people who have chosen to live our personal lives as monastics, but in that, we also are not loners. We are all in this together - walking the pathway, though at a distance from one another, for the betterment of this world. I will also continue to give guidance, when you reach out and ask. I will be consulting with the Bishops as necessary with things that concern us as monastics. It is very important that communications be open. Please let me know what you are doing monastically and what your vision and/or goals are for your monastic life.

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***The State of Monasticism in Maine  
or  
What this place needs  
by: Bishop Doug Wright***

What this place needs is gardeners, woodcutters, berry pickers, and lawn mowers. What this place needs is folks who like to cook, to put up food for the winter, who like to grow things, tend the hens, who like to stop and pray in the middle of the day, what this place needs is family, what this place needs is fellow travelers. What this house needs is fellow believers, folks with enough savvy to grasp the concept of merging one's individuality into the group effort and into a collegiality that supports and fosters the individual and nurtures individuality.

This writers journey from protestant fundamentalism to the Latin church, Thomas Merton and Francis of Assisi, and to the Episcopal Church including the commitments required of a chancel choir singer to perfect attendance for rehearsal and for the liturgy, and the ultimate discovery of American Orthodoxy as taught by Archbishops George and especially Archbishop Alfred, who proclaimed from the pulpit: in the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America everyone is equal. Through it all, there has always been a strong attraction to monasticism as revealed through the extensive writings of Thomas Merton which feeds in me a need never satisfied by protestant asceticism, that of living in community with like minded brothers, sharing in the work, the joy, the hopes, the prayers plus the spiritual benefits of lots of masses and where one will be treated with reverence and respect in one's dotage. The only time in this world that this came even close for me was my time at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. I lived in a dormitory



setting, attended daily Mass, sang in the chapel choir, this was the last gasp of the Tridentine Rite before the Vatican Council wiped out the Latin from the Latin rite church. I participated in lots of activities, ate in the common dining room, only with 300 at a sitting making for a large family with boys, men, priests, Monsignors and tended lovingly by the order of St. Martha, the local diocesan order of women that cared for the priests and boys of St. Francis Xavier as nurses, cooks, housekeepers and family sisters.

This writer has discovered that there have been lots of individuals floating around out there in the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America with similar needs and desires but with few places to gather and focus this special vocation. The all overriding hindrance always seems to be the need to support oneself. If one needs to move to a different part of the country to enter a community will his particular skills be needed there? Which leads to the inevitable: while one tries to assemble a community of like minded individuals there remains the need for everyone involved to support themselves until the group can become self sustaining and supporting. And if everyone has to work outside in the world for income, excepting those who have a retirement income including Social Security, how will the spiritual exercises be possible with many away all day and who come home tired from work?

For this writer, a pronounced individual, living a Catholic life surrounded by protestants, tolerated but not understood, the saving Grace has been the knowledge that despite the immediate evidence, I do belong through the Grace of God to the royal priesthood of a legitimate though not well known Church of Jesus Christ with a genuine Apostolic succession of Holy Orders, where my service is documented and respected. We monastics at heart and soul need to unite in a more definite community within the Archdiocese. Simple things like similarity of monastic habits, titles etc. a commitment to Morning and Evening prayer with the Sacred Liturgy where appropriate can unite us in spirit until we can gather in community at various places around the country.

We are blessed with several monastic institutions already with possibilities for more. I am blessed to live at one of them Holy Apostles American Orthodox Community of Whitefield, Maine. We presently have a monastic residence for one, or two with bunk beds, and our Monastic Church/Cathedral is finished enough to use for worship though the water, baths, kitchens and other rooms await completion. When finished, the living quarters at the church will accommodate two singles, four or more with bunk beds, dormitory style. There will be a full kitchen, a laundry, dining and meeting space as well as office equipped with internet etc. This property could support 6 or more monks year round if they committed to the goal of becoming self supporting and financially independent (no one working outside the enclosure) as soon as possible. It would take planning, cooperation, tolerance of tight family living, and a generous nature to make this possible.

This core community could provide retreats for the larger church, by using tents and the churches dining facilities. The property has river frontage, for canoeing and hiking; there already are extensive flower and vegetable gardens with enlargement possible, the monastery owns outright the small machinery required for small farming. In addition: the monastery is surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of acres of forest with trails and roads for hiking and walking and getting away.

The main ingredient needed here is the patience to suffer the slow process of finishing construction in this economy with donations down or non existent lately. What it does provide however, via deed and easement is a future for monasticism in a particular way in a particular place in our church.

As Abbot, I worry about 'letting into the equation' those who are hiding the fact that they are lazy at heart, religious by convenience, loving and brotherly during fair weather only becoming a deficit rather than an asset to the community turning out to be closet drinkers, etc. just when they are needed the most. That for me is the problem of letting into the fold, and giving life tenancy to the untested, the untried and the unhealthy. Life tenancy as understood in Merton's time happened before the Social Security Administration was founded and the house was obligated to care for its own as they aged and died. Happily, most monks, due to the aerobic work required and the very simple and healthy diet, provided mostly by their own efforts enabled most monks to live long healthy lives.

Part of this dilemma is solved by the fact that the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America clergy get no pay and indeed support themselves in 'the world' paying withholding taxes and earning the right to claim the benefits in their old age, wherever they may be or in what ever situation. As opposed to those orders in the Roman church whose members received Social Security benefits without having paid into the system, I hasten to add.

We are entering a time that is going to test our resolve and our resources and will challenge many of the ideas and things we came to cherish growing up in the post Roosevelt age. We are going to be taxed to our limits to care for ourselves and those who will turn to us for help, shelter, food, a small plot to grow vegetables, who knows what form our gifts and challenges are going to take? That is where persons of faith venture: take the first step, do the right thing, without knowing how it is going to end.... What is your part in this future? Do you have a calling to community life? Do you crave spiritual companions who aren't airy fairy about religion? What do you have to offer to the effort?

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## ***My Monastic Walk*** ***by: hieromonk Myrella***

I was baptized into the Roman Catholic Church, attended an RC elementary school (K-8), and stopped being a “practicing” Roman Catholic around the age of 20. Although I prayed and studied various religions and spiritualities for many years after, I did not embrace returning to any organized religious group until many years later when I was introduced to an independent catholic group. I happily joined this church in which all were welcome at the Lord’s Table and in which women could be ordained to the priesthood. After the murder of my church’s presiding Bishop in December 1996, the Church Board decided to adopt the restrictive beliefs of Roman Catholicism regarding women in the priesthood. Although I no longer felt welcome in this Church, I still believed that I needed to pursue my calling for the priesthood. In early 2007, I found that I could continue my seminary studies with OCCA; I joined OCCA and was ordained to the diaconate in April 1998 and then to the priesthood in August 1999.

Within a year of being ordained to the priesthood, I felt the stirrings of the Holy Spirit urging me to be something other than a secular priest. That’s when I received my call to be a monastic priest. Of course, one does not need to be a priest or deacon to follow the monastic pathway; however, being ordained allows one to celebrate the liturgy and to offer the sacraments as well as to offer pastoral services. For me, monasticism is a spiritual pathway dedicated to serving God’s Will – that is, to living one’s life in full direction from God. My function is to help my brothers and sisters fully realize who they are individually (the beloved children of our Creator) and what they are collectively (the Body of Christ).



I am an Eastern Tradition monastic since it best reflects my spirituality. In Eastern monasticism, there are no religious orders, no formal monastic rules, and no division between the active and contemplative life. The writings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, the Philokalia, and the Holy Bible serve as my spiritual guide.

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## ***Riasaphor Monk Spotlight*** ***by: Br. Michael C. Oboza*** ***(Minister, Straight and Gay Alliance Ministry)***

With my deep understanding of loss and suffrage, I have become comfortable being of Eastern Tradition which is the light in the dark, God-given truth. As I share my prayer, fellowship, and civil activism with countless others, I am humbly and soberly aware that I have found a home in Eastern Tradition, because I feel a special kin to other monks that have left behind priceless insight. Because of

Knights Templar, Saint Bacchus and Saint Serge, I know of a birthright with regards to dedication for the greater good that has been given to me at birth. To become a monk was not a choice, nor an obligation. For me, to become a monk is my calling, to better help serve the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; mystery of God.

As of 2009, I am celebrating a decade of my longest living ministry. I began my Straight and Gay Alliance ministry in 1999, after the death of Matthew Shepard, a beloved gay child of God. Because it was man who murdered him, God brought back Matthew's spirit so all gay children will know of God-given truth that God is all love. My Straight and Gay Alliance ministry is all love with prayer, fellowship and civil activism. By the grace of God, go a decade, now and forever unto ages of ages, amen.

*Testimonial*

*From: Gino J. Skyy*

*Street life for a young gay addict like me goes untold. After I was attacked one night, I was not the same. I yelled for help. No one cared. But, I was proven wrong.*

*On that night, I remember, a concerned stranger told me that "hurt passes." The man looked right through me. I was curious about what he meant. To explain what he meant, we shared Evening prayer on the Blue Line train in Chicago. I was moved. A first time ever for me. I wanted to die and I still was moved. After our fellowship, I became a member of his Straight and Gay Alliance ministry.*

*Everyday after, we shared prayer and fellowship. Br. Michael shared hope with the hopeless like me. He also always reminds me that I am not hopeless, because "God loves me more than I love myself." Today, with the good monk's guidance, I am sober, getting B grades in college, and employed in Management for eight months. I am still moved. I know God works through Br. Michael C. Oboza. He is a gift from God.*

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***Reflection on Monastic Living in OCCA  
by: Bishop Peter***

Most of my life, I have been surrounded by religious—women or men who were members of a religious community. First it was the Sisters of Providence, my grammar school teachers, and then the Franciscan friars and sisters in high school and college.

The Dominican Sisters (of Adrian, Michigan) were the religious I taught with during my teaching years and before I joined a religious order myself. Now,

almost twenty-five years after leaving the order I was a part of, I feel myself to still be a participant in that mysterious dynamic of what we call monasticism or religious life.

When I was younger, the sense of being a religious meant leaving the regular rhythm of life—a secular job, marriage, and so on—and be set apart for both prayer and service. All of the communities I knew where, understandably, teaching communities. And each lived their charm exceptionally well. I have no bad memories of the religious communities I have known over the years. While many still embrace that sense of being apart, a contemporary understanding of being monastic would enlarge that description. Being a monastic is about immersion in the world, wholeheartedly and with love, and doing so in a prayerful, reflective manner.



In our jurisdiction, about 10% of our membership is described as “religious” or “monastic.” (The Synod of Bishops decided that “monastic” is the better descriptor for both women and men in OCCA). Some prefer a western sense of communal life, while others have embraced an eastern one.

It seems to me that monastics in this jurisdiction should see their choice as a decision to live a *reflective* or *contemplative* life, whether alone in a rural setting or active in an urban ministry. Perhaps the most accessible monastic who writes about that part of religious life is Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB. Another is the late Fr. Thomas Merton, OCCO.

In my life, praying is about the divine liturgy celebrated with people, but also about being prayerful doing parts of the day when I’m not wearing vestry or specifically doing monastic things, being prayerful in the unexpected moments and places of any day.

What I miss, though, is the *communal sharing* that is part of monastic living. By and large, our monastics are off on their own, and have restricted interactions with each other. There is no common life. Even the Skete at Crosswood, to which all monastics are affiliated, currently has but one religious living there. Now having said that, I add that I use the internet to create an immediacy in my monastic and other relationships with members of OCCA. It will do, especially when we monastics are separated by hundreds of miles, but it isn’t the ideal, nowhere near an ideal, and electronic communication misses so much in the human exchange of face-to-face communication. Perhaps that is why monastics in OCCA have a hard time of it. Our sense of monasticism is mostly expressed in *active ministry*. In respecting an individual’s call to ministry, and geographical diversity, the quotidian interactions are missing.

My experience of religious life and monasticism has changed enormously over the years. Initially a rather innocent, romantic viewpoint, it has been tested by

living and working with women and men who were religious, by being in a community of monastics, and now, being part of an Eastern monastic tradition. Surely some of the others among us have struggled with changing awareness and expectations, too. That is, sisters and brothers, the working of the Holy Spirit: if you don't find yourself struggling then perhaps monasticism isn't your calling. Monastic life is one where the Spirit is a regular and persistent presence.

Thank you to each of you for choosing to live a reflective, prayerful, deliberate life you lead, walking hand in hand with the Lord of life.

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## ***My Monastic Journey*** ***by: hieroschemamonk Barb***

Monasticism was always a way of life for me even when I was a child. My Dad used to say that I walked to the beat of a different drummer. He was right actually! I grew up loving nature and all that was within it. When I was not in school, my time as a child was spent wandering about the woods, fields and waterways surrounding my home. It was there that I always found my solace. I also found that I truly enjoyed the time spent in Church each week. I felt "whole" there for some reason.

It was not until I graduated out of high school that I met my first "monastic" person. I was touring a nursing school when I was introduced to a woman who I learned was a cousin of mine. She was a Lutheran Deaconess. I immediately felt a connection with Sr. Kathryn. She introduced me to a new world. Over the years I remained in close contact with her even though I had chosen not to attend that school. To say the least, she had a great influence in my spiritual walk. Later I toured a Roman Catholic nursing school and elected to attend there. It was while I was attending nursing school that I converted to Roman Catholicism and then joined the Order of St. Francis. I finally felt I had found a real home – a place where I could be me (or so I thought) and be a part of a community which was focused on God. What a joy for me!

Over time though, I came to realize that something was still missing in my life. Life in many ways was just too rigid for me. I needed to be able to be more spontaneous with my spirituality. I was feeling very stifled; so, I talked with my Mother Superior and took a leave of absence after having lived within the Community for many years. I remained very close with the Community throughout my leave but became aware that I needed to move on spiritually. So, I took my permanent leave from the Community, not knowing at that time what I was going to do. In the process though, I never "gave up" my vows. I continued to live them every day even



though I was no longer had a monastic home. You can take a title away, but you cannot remove that which one is! I knew in my heart that I had always been and would always be monastic.

After many years of wandering from church home to church home, I stumbled upon the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America. Finally, I found a church home that gave me a chance to be just me. I could be both a priest and a monastic. What a blessing it is for me to be a both priest and a monastic.

Why have I chosen the Eastern tradition of monasticism? Well, basically it is the “freedom” that it gives me. I am not caught up in a rigid daily rule as set forth by the Western tradition. I am free to set my basic monastic schedule of prayer, study, and work as needed. I can be very open to the world around me, and I am free to “explore” ideas from many different theologies though I am most at home in the Eastern Orthodox Theology.

Yes, I continue to walk to a different drum beat. I have elected to use old Eastern Orthodox terminology (hieroschemamonk) in my title. Something warm and comfortable for me.... I am truly comfortable out of the limelight just doing whatever I can to help others on their spiritual walk. If I really had my way, I would have a little log cabin in the woods where I could just contemplate God all day long. But, I realize that I must be realistic and thus I live in this crazy world the best way I know how. Knowing that often others see me as very strange, I have learned over the years not to let that bother me since I realize that many monastics are often seen as strange. For me, I like the idea of being a “Fool for Christ”, and I will continue to hear the different drumbeat and walk with it!

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***Monastics and their selected tradition:***

**Skete at Crosswood Centre:**

<b><u>Western</u></b>	<b><u>Eastern</u></b>
Fr. Bill Payne, OSB	Fr. Basil Donadio
Fr. Donn Mielke	Bishop Peter (Bob Zahrt)
Fr. Francis Fontenot, OFMO	Fr. Craig Dunn
Br. Matt Davis, MSSM	Fr. Joshua Winters
Fr. Michael William Barkhorn, OSF	Mother Lynn Walker
Br. Michael Kierpiec	Mother MariaAlene VanValkenburg
Br. Richard Lounsbury	Br. Michael C. Oboza
Fr. Richard Parker, OFM	

**Holy Apostles Orthodox Monastery:**

<b><u>Western</u></b>	<b><u>Eastern</u></b>
Bishop Doug Wright	Mother Barb Martzall
	Mother Myrella LeClair II

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