



STAVROS®



Contemporary Monasticism
within the
Orthodox-Catholic Church of America

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From the keyboard

by: hieroschemamonk Barb

Finally, I can say I am warm and enjoying things. We had such a wet Spring that I was beginning to wonder what was happening with the climate. Summer is here and it is my favorite time of the year. Many people hate the heat, but I love it!

Having grown up in PA (30 minutes southeast of Harrisburg), I enjoyed the change of seasons. Summer meant that there was no school (I hated school actually.). As a child, I would spend a month at Girl Scout camp (south east of Felton, PA) along the Susquehanna River. During those periods of camping, I had the pleasure to canoe out to Lower Bear Island and spend a few nights there learning to "rough it" and learning more how to live with nature as well as how to be a guardian of nature. I was also fortunate to have grown up in a very small town (about 1000 people at that time) that was at the foot of the Blue Mountain (which is part of the Appalachian Mountains). Surrounding my home was an area of natural lands - woods/forests, creeks, fields, etc -- that allowed me to enjoy nature and all of its beauty. I was also able to do more horseback riding in the summers. I rode throughout the year when possible, but the summers really gave me the freedom to be at the stable as much as I wanted.



I find that even today I seek places within nature to sit and enjoy. Fortunately where we live in MA, we are only 20 minutes from the wonderful area known as the Quabbin Reservoir. There are also many other small natural areas near us at which I can “recharge” whenever I feel the need to do so. I was never one who could tolerate city living for very long. If you gave me a choice of where to live, I would pick some place out away from things but within all of God’s glorious nature. But in reality, I live in small towns/cities because I do need to have some conveniences. I have not really gotten to the point where Bishop Doug is of being able to live where one does not have grocery stores close by or even a gas station within a couple of miles of home! However, if I had my way, I probably would live the way he does!!

As usual, there are more articles from some of our monastic family. I have not edited them in any way. They stand as they are written by the author(s). It is great to have writings from the rest of you. Keep them coming please.....

A New Metropolitan has been Elected!

On June 1, 2009 the Synod of Bishops voted to elect Bishop Peter (Bob) Zahrt as the new Metropolitan of the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America. We welcome Bishop Peter’s elevation to Archbishop and Metropolitan. His elevation/enthronement will be September 12, 2009 at Crosswood Centre. I personally want to pledge my support and all of the monastics’ support to our new Metropolitan. May he be guided by the Holy Spirit and continue to move the church forward – spreading the Gospel of Christ to all those who hunger to hear the Good News.

Monastic Life

by: Bishop Lynn Elizabeth

My introduction to the religious life came in first grade: Dominican sisters staffed our grammar school, and Sister Miriam was my teacher. It was these women who helped me to realize the love and magnificence of God, and gave me a taste for prayer, for study, and for the Latin language. In high school, those Dominican sisters introduced me to Thomas Aquinas, and showed me the pleasures of philosophy and theology. Over time, too, I came to be acquainted with the Augustinian priests and brothers at the local monastery. Through them I came to understand that there were varieties of gifts in the church, and I read the *Confessions* and the monastic rule of St Augustine. So, these two magnificent western forms of religious life were the soil in which I was planted, and which provided inexpressible riches for me as an adolescent and young adult.

Fast forward about twenty years, and while teaching at a local Roman high school, I found books in our library about the Benedictines, along with an old Roman Breviary, and I was fascinated. After I found and bought my own copy of a Breviary, I got a copy of the Rule of Benedict, and fell in love with the text, whose wisdom is so genuine, profound, and loving. I started praying formally and regularly, and it was like a breath of fresh air. In grad school at Buffalo I discovered Julian of Norwich, started doing research on medieval monasticism, and determined to find a Benedictine house, to see what monastic life was like now. Within a few months, I entered the community as an Oblate novice, making final oblation several years later in 1987. My pastor at that time, with whom I was studying for ordination, was a monastic himself, having been an Eastern Rite Benedictine in Ohio and Texas for a number of years, and we had frequent discussions about his experiences as a Byzantine monk and his love for the Melkite liturgy.

Fast forward another ten years or so. Still a Benedictine, I had been studying and reading about the forms of monasticism in the Christian East, and I had several conversations with Metropolitan Skip about the possibility of my formal entry into monastic life within the OCCA. One thing led to another, and in 2004, Father Bob (now Metropolitan PETER) and I professed Riassophore vows at the Skete at Crosswood, and two years later, just before the 2006 General Synod, along with Father Craig, we professed Stavrophore vows.

In the last couple of years, +Skip and I had talked about a vision of renewed monasticism that took for its model the lives of St. Maria Skobtsova of Paris, St. Elisabeth the New Martyr, and St. John of Kronstadt. St. John was a married priest, who with his wife Elisabeth (the daughter of a priest), lived a deeply committed religious life that was as close to monasticism as might be possible in those years, given their desire to live and serve God “in the world.” We also considered the emergence of the Companions of New Skete, married couples who are full members, with the nuns and monks, of the New Skete community. As a natural consequence of those conversations, I’ve been privileged to write a few essays for our web sites on the forms and expressions of monastic life within the OCCA.

What enlivens and sustains my own Orthodox Christian monastic identity is not unlike anybody else’s. The Offices of Matins and Vespers are the poles upon which the days revolve, while the Jesus Prayer and *Lectio Divina*, along with daily reading from the Rule of Benedict, and occasional readings from the Desert Fathers and Mothers and the Synaxarion, provide nourishment to the soul. One of the greatest texts for the spirit of monastic life is the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, by John Climacus, and this text is read every year during Great Lent by Orthodox monastics.

My general impression is that Orthodox monastics aren’t holier or better or really very different from anybody else. Asceticism is exercise, and the church is like a gymnasium. Monastics aren’t fussy, but do a few things differently, maybe do a few more exercises, maybe find nourishing and productive ways of observing the great feasts and fasts, maybe do a bit more reading in theology and philosophy.

Fast forward again to today: I’m a Benedictine monastic, with a great love for the history and spirituality of the Benedictine family, and now I’m a monastic bishop in service to the OCCA, with a great love for the history and spirituality of the Christian East and for the monastic life found here and there. Not much has changed: my prayer life has drifted into more Byzantine and Eastern forms, my relationship with our loving Triune God seems to me to have grown deeper and more intimate, and I am enriched by it daily. Unremarkably, I find that my reading habits and musical tastes have changed over the years: more religious now and less secular, more Eastern and less Western. My relationship with my sisters and brothers in the monastic life, and with my larger family in this jurisdiction, continues to nourish and support me. At the same time, I hope to give this church my love, encouragement, support, nourishment, and heart to listen.

The Pilgrim Within Me

by: Br. Michael C. Oboza

During a recent evening on the streets, I met a courageous man named Ming L. While on the train, a young man well battered jumped on the train and shouted, “No body cares. I am dying. No body cares.” I walked up to him and told him I care.

As he talked about his resentments about “being a gay Asian American, invisible and evil,” I

began to feel as if I was being cleansed. As if God was touching me like never before. Yes, the Lord touched me like never before on a recent night during ministry.

The young man spoke of his hate crime attack and about the hate speech he just survived. I was choked up that little has changed in this world. As he began to weep, he reached inside a bag and pulled out a knife “to end his gay tragedy.” To where I began praying without ceasing, the Jesus prayer naturally echoed through my being. I was aware God was breathing for me as I forgot to be breath for myself. I was gently removed from my body. I embraced genuine surrender and complete atonement. At which, I respectfully grabbed his wrist and whispered to him “that it was not his time to go.”

The young man stopped weeping, and began to tremble, and dropped the knife. As he trembled, Ming said “I don’t have to carry my knife anymore.” When he said that, I knew where my unexpected guidance was from, “My help cometh from the LORD,” Psalm 121. Amen!

An ambulance was called. The knife was gotten rid of. And another child of God was saved by grace. A night, I will not forget. A night I became The Jesus Prayer.

A Little Note:

Please keep Br. Michael Oboza in your prayers. He is undergoing some “grave” health issues presently. And as with many of us, funds are a little short when it comes to medial treatment necessary. Br. Michael, continue to share with us as you are able. You constantly remind us through your ministry what being a monastic is all about – The Love of God to be shared with all those we come into contact with.

A Testimonial to Br. Michael Oboza’s Ministry

To Br. Michael’s Superior,

I met a dear man after I was thrown into a random train. You see, I was attacked with a hate crime and speech. Then found myself in a train with no one, except my hero.

I blabbed until I cried, all the while, Br. Michael C. Oboza listened without judgment. As I talked, I wanted to die. I hate being like an invisible evil. The fear, worry and daily threat being a gay Asian American is awful. While I cared less that Br. Michael was listening, I grabbed my knife.

As I was about to finally be open to death, I was stopped. This monk from the streets grabbed my wrist and my knife fell. I will not forget the noise when the knife hit the ground. Clink. I was free. I didn’t need to carry my knife anymore.

The nicest thing was Br. Michael visited me in the hospital, shared Morning Prayer, and Psalm 51 with me. Because of my new hero, Br. Michael, I know today that God does love me. We will keep in touch. What a dear man.

Thank You,
Ming Long

Welcome to a New Monastic & Priest!

Let us welcome Fr. Jim Wise to our monastic family. Fr. Jim is located in Indianapolis, IN. He is forming a local order called Order of Mendicants. Like many of us he has traveled many religious paths on his spiritual journey and now joins us here within OCCA. Fr. Jim, feel free to share with the rest of us as you are lead and are comfortable.

My Monastic Journey

By: Father Francis Fontenot, OFMO

I remember the date like it was yesterday, I was approaching the 27th anniversary of employment with the city as a Police Captain and I was ready to retire but did not know exactly what I wanted to do next, I was only 49. The fact that I wanted to become a hermit was never a doubt for me, only the timing was an issue. I had begun looking for a home that would serve as my hermitage and had space for my chapel, once that was found and I was comfortable with it, I then began the paperwork required to retire, I had found heaven, so I thought. This worked great for a year then I became restless, I felt that something was missing. That is when I contacted the De La Salle Christian Brothers and explained to the provincial that a calling to live in community with other like-minded men was what I was feeling that I needed. I was accepted and began the Novitiate. It didn't take long before I fell into the routine and was feeling comfortable in community.

After several years of living in the retirement community, which is where my novitiate was held, again I became restless, you see I had not planned on being the infirmarian and quickly became unhappy. This is when I contacted +Skip and explained my dilemma to him and told him that I was at my wits end. His answer was short and simple, "Not a problem." This is when we began our dialogue which led me to Fort Wayne in 2008 for my ordination as presbyter. I continue to live as a hermit here at Saint Lazarus Orthodox Monastery where I am able to pray, celebrate liturgy and work. Unfortunately because I must earn a living to supplement my retirement I work as a chaplain for hospice and I thank God daily that I have this quiet place of solitude to return to where I can replenish my energy with prayer. God is good!

Straight and Gay Alliance Ministry

by Br. Michael C. Oboza

A soldier made peace with God. Before he died, he courageously wrote a letter to me. The letter reminds me of why I was chosen a monastic. Thank you God!

Dear Br. Michael,

I stole peace from another American. I called out a gay man to have him removed from the barracks. The gay was found and beaten. The doctors heard his cough of death and saw him hold to his torn and bloody military garb. He was rushed to the clinic. Later he was dishonorably discharged from service.

What kind of soldier was I? Foolish and ignorant. I hid behind a code of honor that has no honor. Don't Ask. Don't Tell is poison. Torture that is out of mind and sight.

Misery was calling me. A death I was not prepared for. Then you began to visit me. You knew my story and listened. The fear in your eyes became humility in mine. Sir, the days we shared

Morning Prayer and Psalms are in my heart. As I die, I carry you with me, Psalm 23. You shared with me God's compassion. And I share the same in prayer for the gay soldier who took his own life with my help. God loves. So, can I. Sir, you are a foot soldier for God.

*Thank You,
J.P. O'Grady*

An Announcement

By: hieroschemamonk Barb

As most of you know from reading the *Orthodox American*, the jurisdictional newsletter, that I and Fr. Francis have been appointed the mentors of the monastics. This move by Metropolitan Peter was to put a little structure to what has already begun without putting in a stringent set of rules. This came about from a discussion of monasticism within OCCA that I and Metropolitan Peter had. I felt that it was important that the monastic freedom continue that is presently happening but also have people that the monastics could turn too for spiritual guidance. I pointed out that the monastics within OCCA actually live as "hermits", at least at this point in our development, but I can see a time were monastics will band together in group living arrangements. I also felt that it was important to maintain the allowance of both Eastern and Western presentation of monasticism within OCCA. That shall continue. Each of us will continue to minister within our monastic lives in a manner that is "comfortable" to us and to those we minister to. This was the dream Archbishop Skip had for the monastics and that dream shall continue. Meanwhile, continue as you have in your spiritual walk. But this I ask of all of you, let us openly share with one another what we are doing and even what areas you could use a little help/guidance with.

I ask Fr. Francis to also think about writing regularly for the *Stavros* as my co-mentor. This newsletter is our newsletter and I would like it to reflect what is happening within our monastic movement. It is only through our sharing that each of us grows. It is also through this newsletter that we just might touch someone out there reading the newsletter and they would say, "I want to be a part of their monastic movement". There are many people who are called to walk the monastic pathway, but cannot find the "right church home". I pray that we can become that home for them. Let us become the light!

A Little Faith

by: hieroschemamonk Barb

The other day I was wondering what I could share when a thought came to me. Myrella and I were out sharing lunch together and talking, and she was sharing a story she had received via email about a dog (named Faith) that was born with two good back legs, one front leg missing and the other front leg was useless and had to be amputated. With the love and dedication of his owner, the dog learned to walk upright on his two back legs. Now that was a true test of faith not only of the dog but also of the owner.

We have a habit of forgetting that God is constantly with us no matter where we are or what we are doing. We love to compartmentalize our lives so that we have "better control". Actually we are removing the best controlling factor in our lives by doing this. We have to instead learn to be open to all sorts of ideas within our lives. We need to be willing to try something new even if it seems to us at the moment to be a "dumb idea". When we start to put God back into our lives as the controlling "factor", then we feel as though we have actually "lost" our control. That is not the

case. God works with us to help us make the correct choices necessary for each one of us. The Holy Spirit is willing and able to guide and direct us if we just take the time to ask and to listen. Remember St. Peter when Jesus called him out to walk on the water? Peter was doing well so long as he kept looking at Jesus and listening to Jesus' voice. When Peter decided to look down at the water, he started to sink. Is that not what happens to us frequently? We ask God for help and then when things start going well, we decide we can do it all on our own. We have to be willing to let go and let God help us guide us – even when following the pathway He has laid out appears to be difficult.

I know that has been a challenge to me. I have had to learn that I don't always have the answer. As I've grown older, I have come to realize that many times I have not made the best decision about something in life. I have had to learn that God is the only one who truly knows who I am and what I need. Yes, there are people within our lives that are very important to us and they can help us along the way. If we are blessed, we find that special person who really becomes the voice of God within our lives. But, in all of this we must have faith to be able to move forward.

What would have happened to the disabled dog if the owner did not have faith in the dog? And what would have happened if the dog did not have faith in his owner? You know the answer. We all are very much like the dog. We all are lacking in something and only through our faith can that lack be filled. It may not be the way we would have hoped, but it is filled. It is our faith then that becomes our "driving force" in life. God, who loves each and every one of us as innocent children, is our constant companion in life. Why not take the time to turn your life over to God and let him become the "driver" so that you can learn how to live a completely faith-filled life? I have to admit that having God driving my life is really so much more fun and really less stressful!

Whitefield Historical Society House and Garden Tour

by: Bishop Doug Wright

On June 20, 2009, the Whitefield Historical Society held their yearly House and Garden Tour. This year they invited me to include my property in the tour. My property was one of 13 properties that were toured this year. Here is the write up that was in the Tour brochure:

625 Head Tide Road, Cathedral Church and Monastery, 2008/1983

Established on land long in the Wright family, the berm house (hermitage), cathedral, amphitheater, pinewood theater, and gardens that make up this complex are intimately integrated into their surroundings and have a minimum impact on the landscape. The earth-fast house (1983) is built into the slope of the bank above the Sheepscot River and only the windmill and skylight are visible from the driveway. A Russian fireplace that absorbs heat from the wood burning stoves, and the surrounding earth keep the temperature in the house from dipping below 52 degrees. A bank of southwest facing windows and two skylights fill this "underground" house with light. The cathedral (2008), designed by Bishop Wright, is also surrounded with earth berms and the roof is covered with sod. The interior features post and beam construction that is both beautiful and inspirational. This complex is "off grid", utilizing wind and solar power for electricity and earth for heating and cooling. In touring the grounds note the beautiful gardens.

---- Bishop Douglas Wright.

Monastics and their selected tradition:

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

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