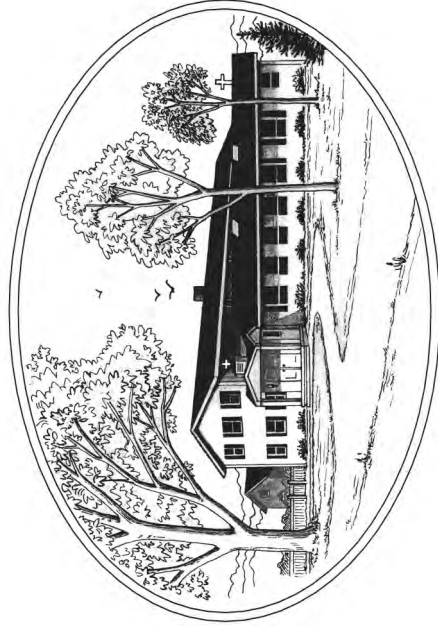


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Essays and Notes

Volume 23, No. 1

Spring 2026



My very 1st ever attempt using oil pastels. 😊
the little lake at Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery May 15 '25

HOLY MYRRHBEARERS MONASTERY
ANNOUNCEMENTS

PATRONAL FEAST
CELEBRATION

*LEAVETAKING OF THE FEAST
OF THE HOLY MYRRHBEARERS*

SATURDAY, MAY 2, 2026

DIVINE LITURGY 10 AM

LUNCH TO FOLLOW



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Spring 2026

Dear Friends, a blessed Lent to you all!

For this issue, we interview Mother Katherine on her unusual farm management approach and share offerings from recent guests.

We and the animals are managing the winter storms and expecting new baby goats and lambs in April. Our news starts page 8.

It's almost time for Pascha cards! A sample of our many hand-drawn cards available for purchase is on page 10. Sending our cards is a great way to introduce your friends to our monastery. The online store is open 24 hours, and we also accept orders by phone, mail and email.

Our annual celebration on the Leavetaking of the Feast of the Holy Myrrhbearers is May 2. We hope that many of you can join us for the Divine Liturgy and fellowship over lunch.

Greetings and prayers for you on our Lenten journey to Pascha.

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

With love in Christ,
The Mothers and Sisters



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Farm Management with Mother Katherine “I know my sheep and my sheep know me” (John 10:24)

Working with animals is a big part of how we “keep this place.” The Shepherdess of Zoar Farms is Mother Katherine. Our novice (who helps in the barn) talked with her about her unusual approach.

Tell me about your policy of limited self-determination for the sheep.

This fall when I tried to bring the big group of ewes over the mountain, they categorically refused to go over. They turned and went down the hill to go to the barn. They didn’t really want to be in the barn, they just didn’t want to go over the hill. So I said, “Well, OK, you girls know more about it than I do, so I’ll believe you.” And a few weeks



later, I thought, “We’ll try it again,” and that time they went. And in the late fall, I found out there had been a bear over the mountain. Well, they knew that, and I had not. That’s what I figured. There was something up there they

didn’t want to run into. A bear. So they had the right – I didn’t make them, I don’t have herding dogs to make them go over the hill. So that was their self-determination, what they wanted to do.

If other farmers rely on herding dogs, what do you do?

Our sheep have a big vocabulary. I can tell them lots of things. Routine and expectation is the biggest thing. They know the routine, to go into the barn by that gate. The girls have a big vocabulary, and I can say what it is we’re going to do. “We’re going to go over the hill. We’re going back to the barn.” Also they know their own names, and they know each other’s names. So [when I am with them in the field], I can talk about somebody that might be in the barn.

Other farmers may not give them names or call them by name, right?

Right. Hobby farmers do, but not commercial farmers. A lot of times they have too many animals, or they are acquisitions. All of these girls I planned [their breeding] and delivered [as lambs].

So the sheep respond to their names?

Yes. I know the voices, and when I hear a voice I will respond to that voice with the name. And so they’ve learned that if I’m looking for somebody and I call out a name, they’ll either come or answer. If one is in trouble, and I don’t know where they are, and they call, I say, “You keep talking, and I’ll find you. Keep talking!”

In the evening, as you leave the house to go to the barn, they are already calling out to you, and you greet each one individually.

Yes! One day when I finished in the barn, I was coming into the house, and one spoke, so I said, “Good night, Goliath” And another one spoke: “Good night, Janie.” I went through the whole flock, and I thought, “I’m on an episode of the Waltons here!” So I got through everybody, and I put my hand on the knob, and somebody spoke, and I said, “We ain’t doing this again! Good night!”

That same winter we were in the field and they started this noise. I said, “Good night, good night,” but they kept it up. And I thought, “What’s going on here?” So I went to them and said,

“Where are all the old people? There’s Janie, there’s Miss Virginia. Where’s Punky?” So we went looking for Punky, and she was down. I went and got her all situated as best I could and watched her for the next couple of days, until she felt better. But that’s why they were talking, to draw my attention to her.

They care about each other. And they trust you, they know you.

If we take them somewhere, I take them. When the doctor comes, I hold them. I’m there.

That reminds me of the Gospel passage about the Good Shepherd.

Of course. Jesus knew what he was talking about.

*But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.
To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice;
and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.
And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them;
and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. (John 10:2-4)*



Monastery Guests

Such a variety of guests at the monastery: college students, retirees, catechumens, couples, wanderers. They come for their own reasons, known only to them and God. Somehow they are drawn to this place in the hills of upstate New York; it must be that God wants to meet them here. While they spend their visits in various ways -- praying in the chapel, quiet reading, helping in the kitchen, walking in the woods, meeting the animals – they all seem to leave in a more peaceful mood than when they arrived. We'd like to share thoughts from some of our visitors, as well as art they created while at the monastery.



The monastery was an amazing opportunity to just get away from all the hustle and bustle of the world and spend more time with Christ. Truly, I cherished the peace and quiet, as well as fellowship with the sisters.

Richelle, Guest Room Visitor, May 2025

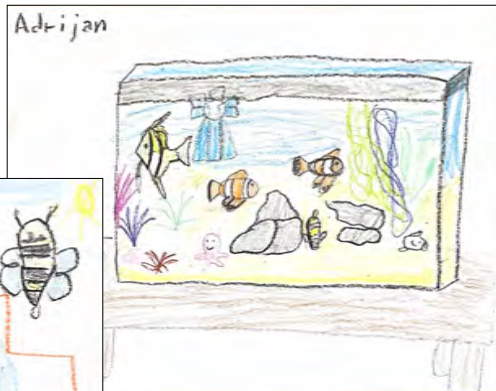


Why visit a monastery? Why on earth not? To be in the company of people who honor God, who live in harmony with each other and all creation, whose inner joy is contagious — there's a few reasons I visit monasteries. I pray that monastics continue forever. I believe they are essential to the perseverance of peace on earth. I want to be a part of it!

Nancy, Guest House Pilgrim, May 2025

Adrijan and Natalija, Guest House Visitors, Feb 2026

Artists pictured on Page 8



Sister Piama's aquarium of knitted objects which won Best in Show at August 2024 Otsego County Fair.

Monastery Math Jokes

Q1: Why did the math teacher move to the monastery?

A: She wanted to live the life of the angles.

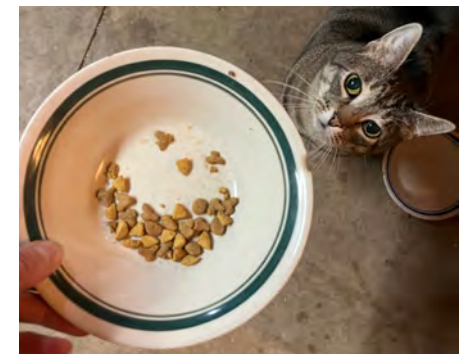
Q2: What do you call a math teacher who joins a monastery?

A: A postulate.

Q3: What was the goal of the math teacher in her first year at the monastery?

A: No vice.

What do cats leave in their food bowl to show you they are happy?



1. Angels 2. Postulant 3. Novice

For our news

It was a blessing on February 2 to be joined for the Meeting of Our Lord in the Temple by two long-time friends from the Binghamton area: Fr. Jim Dutko (Carpatho-Russian) and Fr. Myron Oryhon (Ukrainian). This feast also marked our postulant becoming a novice, when she was blessed by Mother Raphaela to wear the habit. Sister Emily joined us last January from Texas, where she was a school CFO and math teacher. (She offers some jokes on page 7.)

In November in our chapel we celebrated the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple with Fr. Micah Breland and parishioners of St. Innocent Orthodox Mission (OCA) in Oneonta.



Just after Christmas, we said goodbye to Fr. Micah and his family, who have been transferred to New York City (Queens) to St. John Chrysostom Orthodox Church. We appreciate Fr. Nikolay Khalimonov (OCA) who now travels from Binghamton to serve at St. Innocent on Sundays and also brings Holy Communion to our less mobile sisters at the monastery.

In December, Fr. Myron served a Divine Liturgy for St. Herman of Alaska, a special saint for our monastery, whose relics are embedded in the chapel altar. We feel especially close to him when going out in the deep snow to ring the bell for services.

We've enjoyed hosting guests this fall / winter from Idaho, New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, New Jersey, Canada, and Macedonia!

On Dec. 2, we celebrated Mother Michaela's 90th birthday, joined for Vespers and dinner by young people from St. Innocent's Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF).

With help from many of you, we purchased an automatic generator for emergency power. It is a blessing not to worry about heat, light and water for ourselves and the animals if we lose electricity. Thank you to all who helped with this wish list item!



Our sheep and goats haven't seemed to mind the snowstorms and sub-zero temperatures this winter, although they have to drink their water quickly before their buckets freeze over. It's been good weather for spinning, weaving, and crocheting inside. Fortunately the monastery's online store works in all weather. We've appreciated all the orders for Christmas & Pascha cards, prayer books and other items.

Our latest wish list item is a truckload of gravel to replenish driveways for the monastery and barn to minimize mud after the spring thaw!

As winter gradually turns into spring, we look forward to the birth of baby lambs and kid goats, expected in April.

Thank you for your prayers and ongoing support, which mean so much to us. We look forward to greeting you soon:

Christ is risen!

Indeed He is risen!



Pascha
April 12!
Western Easter
April 5!

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KRISHTEL U NCJALL

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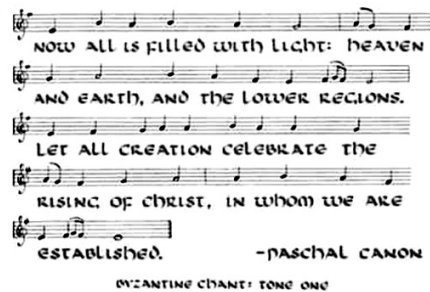
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A Manual of the Hours of the Orthodox Church **No. 901**

A Manual of Communion Prayers, Vol 1 & Vol 2 **No. 902, 904**

A Manual of Prayer and Praise to the Theotokos **No. 903**

And you can order **books by Mother Raphaela**:

Living in Christ: Essays on the Christian Life by an Orthodox Nun

Growing in Christ: Shaped in His Image

Becoming Icons of Christ

And a **book by Mother Cassiana** of Protection of the Holy Virgin Monastery: *Come, Follow Me: Orthodox Monasticism in Moldavia*

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